

Australian military buildup backs US plans for war with China

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A Defence Strategic Review (DSR) released this week outlined the biggest military build-up in Australia since the end of World War II.

Its authors, and the Labor government that commissioned the review, have declared that the country must rapidly acquire “an enhanced long-range strike capability in all domains,” including for the air force, navy and army. That is because the Indo-Pacific has now become the scene of “major power strategic competition” that raises “the prospect of major conflict.”

The document is nothing less than a declaration that Australia is prepared to participate in an aggressive US-led war against China. This program has been driven forward behind the backs of the population by a Labor government that was elected less than a year ago on the slogan of a “better future.” There is no mandate for the war plan, and there is widespread anti-war sentiment among working people.

The Australian buildup is part of a universal phenomenon. Amid the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, all of the imperialist powers are remilitarising. Germany is once again conducting offensive operations against Russia in Ukraine. Japan has doubled its military budget. France and Britain are rekindling their imperial ambitions.

That Australia, a geographically isolated country, is joining this process points to the global character of the eruption of militarism.

The Australian review was not conducted in isolation. It was worked out in the closest collaboration with the Biden administration and the US state.

The US is continuously escalating its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. This has included the provision of more than \$100 billion in aid and the deployment of special forces and other personnel to Ukraine itself. Now, the US and its allies are pushing for Ukraine’s admission into NATO, a move that could trigger direct war with

Russia.

But even as they are pursuing these policies in Eastern Europe, which could lead to a nuclear catastrophe, American imperialism and its allies are opening a new front in what is developing as a global war.

The US is carrying out a full court press against China, including the development of a web of aggressive military alliances, centrally involving India, Japan, South Korea and Australia, as well as smaller countries in the region. The US, meanwhile, is deliberately stoking flashpoints that could lead to a hot war, including by undermining the decades-long status quo over Taiwan.

Australia is earmarked to play a particularly central role. As American imperialism’s most reliable ally in the Indo-Pacific, it is to bully and harass other nations to toe Washington’s line. Australia’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong has been hard at work along these lines, visiting every Pacific island nation in less than a year, and most southeast Asian countries, where she has made plain that no deviation will be tolerated.

Militarily, Australia is to be the “tip of the spear,” in the words of former Trump Navy Secretary Richard Spencer. It is to set the pace for a relentless military buildup in the region, the logic of which is a fully armed encirclement of China.

And it is also to function as a “southern anchor” for the US military itself, with an ever-greater array of top US strike assets, including fighter jets, attack submarines and warships to be stationed on the island continent, which is out of range of most Chinese missiles.

The DSR not only calls for a vast military buildup. It overturns doctrines that have nominally governed Australian defence policy since at least the 1970s and 1980s.

Australia, as an imperialist power, has continuously advanced its predatory interests, especially in the south Pacific. It has also joined every criminal US-led war,

including the sociocidal invasion of Iraq and the twenty-year long occupation of Afghanistan.

But its overriding military policy had been, at least on paper, a defence of the relatively isolated Australian continent and its approaches and preparation for low-level conflict in the immediate vicinity. No longer. The DSR proclaims that now, the military must deploy “impactful projection” across the entire Indo-Pacific and more broadly, because “objectives lie well beyond our borders.”

And the DSR introduces another new doctrine. In phrases repeated 37 times in a 110-page document, it declares that the military effort must be a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-nation” effort. This, the document declares, requires “national unity and cohesion.”

This is nothing less than a declaration that every aspect of society must be subordinated to “national security” and the war effort, from the schools and universities to the economy and all workplaces.

It calls into question civilian oversight and control over the military, inverting the relationship by placing the military above nominally democratic institutions. It also provides the framework for police-state measures, including the illegalisation of strikes by workers and other acts of protest, which could be deemed as undermining “national unity.”

To justify these sweeping changes, the review repeats Washington’s bogus claims that China is carrying out the largest military build-up in the post-World War II period, that it is engaging in “economic coercion” and aggressive operations throughout the region.

All of this is simply projection. The US has ringed the world with military bases, including in the Indo-Pacific and in Australia itself. The Pentagon has carried out a vast military expansion in the Indo-Pacific since the Obama administration proclaimed its “pivot to Asia” from the floor of the Australian parliament in 2011.

Every military asset outlined in the DSR is of an aggressive character. That includes the fleet of nuclear-powered submarines Australia is to acquire, which are dubbed “the apex predator of the sea”; long-range-strike missiles for the army, together with unnamed armed drones; strike missiles for the navy and for the air force.

The entire north of the continent is being transformed into a de facto military hangar, with vast basing and fuelling arrangements, so that it can serve as a launching point for aggressive US and Australian missions throughout the region, including against mainland China

itself.

The real purpose of the war plans, as has been spelt out by senior US figures, is to combat China because its economic growth threatens the preeminence of American imperialism. The confrontations with Russia and China are increasingly viewed as two fronts of a single conflict, aimed at securing US dominance over the geographically crucial Eurasian landmass.

The war drive, involving all of the major powers, stems from the breakdown of the capitalist system. All of these governments are seeking to divert explosive social tensions outwards, while offsetting their own crisis through aggressive military measures directed against their rivals.

The same processes that propel the imperialists to war give the impulse to explosive social struggles by the working class. Already, there is a major growth of the class struggle, with powerful strikes and protests occurring on virtually every continent. These struggles are erupting in opposition to the consequences of war, including soaring inflation and austerity measures aimed at making the working class pay for the vast military buildup.

War can only be ended through the abolition of capitalism and its archaic nation-state system. That means the fight for a socialist movement of the international working class, uniting workers all over the world in a common struggle for social equality, democratic rights and peace.

This perspective will be outlined at the global online rally to celebrate May Day 2023. It will be live-streamed at 5 a.m. Australian Eastern Standard Time on Monday, May 1 (3 p.m Eastern Standard Time in North America on Sunday, April 30). Register here.



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