

Classified Australian defence review discussed US-led war with China over Taiwan

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The classified version of Australia's Defence Strategic Review (DSR) featured a detailed discussion of potential scenarios for war, including the prospect of a US conflict with China over control of Taiwan, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported this morning. This was not passive analysis, it indicated, but active "war gaming."

A declassified copy of the report was released by the federal Labor government on April 24. It called for the largest Australian military build-up since World War II, centring on the acquisition of offensive strike capabilities, including missile systems.

The DSR's recommendations, accepted in full by the Labor government, overturn decades of defence policy, under which the nominal purpose of the military has been the protection of the Australian mainland and its approaches. Instead, the review advocated "impactful projection" throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

The public version of the DSR linked this to "the prospect of major conflict" in the Indo-Pacific. It repeated Washington's lies about Chinese aggression, and noted deepening "strategic competition" between the US and China.

But the public document was remarkably vague on how concretely a war between the US and China would develop. Notably absent from the 110-page document was the word "Taiwan," given that it is a focal point of the US war drive.

It was already known that the classified version featured four chapters that had been excised from the publicly-released document. It had also been reported before that these dealt with "scenarios."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* article is the most direct indication yet of what those "scenarios" consist.

The article, by Matthew Knott, stated: "Sources familiar with the classified version of the government's defence strategic review said former defence chief Angus Houston and former defence minister Stephen Smith commissioned detailed analysis from experts within the Defence Department about specific scenarios that could draw Australia into armed conflict and shatter stability in the Indo-Pacific."

These included "a possible war fought between the United States and China over the self-governing island of Taiwan."

The apparent centrality of Taiwan to the classified review

exposes the fraudulent claims that the US and Australia are engaged in a defensive response to Chinese threats and a military build-up.

China's position on Taiwan is the same that it has held for decades. In reality, it is the US that has transformed the island into a potential flashpoint for war.

Since the 1970s, almost the entire international community, including successive US administrations, adhered to the "One China" policy. Under this doctrine, the Chinese Communist Party government in Beijing was recognised, at least de facto, as the sole legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. In consequence, US governments did not have open diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Over recent years, the US has overturned this policy in all but name. The Biden administration, deepening measures initiated by Obama and Trump, has developed diplomatic ties with Taiwan, while expanding direct weapons sales and stationing troops on the island.

The clear aim is to goad China into an attack on Taiwan, which would be used as the pretext for a full-blown US war against Beijing. Senior American officials have openly foreshadowed a direct conflict, with top US Air Force General Michael Minihan predicting a war between the US and China over control of Taiwan by the end of 2025.

Notably, the public version of the DSR has an "urgent" timeline for some of its military proposals, especially the acquisition of strike capabilities, identical to that put forward by Minihan.

The prominence of Taiwan in the classified document raises several questions. Does the DSR recommend that Australia join a US-led war with China over Taiwan? That issue has repeatedly been sidestepped by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and other senior Labor ministers.

The other obvious question is: What conceivable threat to Australia would be posed by direct Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in Taiwan, an island of 23 million people, 160 kilometres from mainland China and 5,600 kilometres from Australia that has been viewed as a part of China since a Chinese nation existed?

The public DSR desperately tries to present the Australian military build-up as defensive in nature. But the only concrete

threats posed by China that it identifies are cyber-warfare, possible attacks on trade routes and sabotage of undersea cables. How would direct CCP rule in Taiwan affect any of these things?

It is likely that the government would respond that open CCP rule in Taiwan would threaten “human rights” and “democracy.” But if that is the case, why doesn’t Australia prepare for war against Israel, over its oppression of the Palestinians, or Saudi Arabia over its brutal dictatorial governance? What about American imperialism’s “human rights” record over the past 80 years, including in the criminal occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, or Australia’s own for that matter?

Knott raises none of these questions. He skates over the issue of Taiwan, precisely because it demonstrates that there is nothing defensive about the Australian military build-up. Its aim is to prepare for involvement in an aggressive US-led war, aimed at asserting the hegemony of US imperialism over China, which is viewed as a “threat” only because its economic growth challenges an American capitalism in protracted decline.

Instead Knott attempts to bolster the defensive narrative. Another “scenario,” which he dwells on at far greater length, is the prospect of China developing a military base in a Pacific nation, such as the Solomon Islands or Vanuatu.

This, Knott wrote, “would bring the Chinese military within just 2000 kilometres of the Australian mainland and upend the current balance of power in the south Pacific.” His “source” was more blunt. He said the “message” in the classified DSR was that if this occurred, “You’re f**ked.”

Over recent years, a number of Pacific states have sought to balance between the US and China. The attraction of the latter is that it has provided economic aid and financing, when the US and its allies have provided a pittance. But there is no indication that China is seeking to establish a military presence in the Pacific.

Even if it did, this would hardly threaten the US mainland, 12,000 kilometres from the Pacific islands. Nor would it be the basis of some kind of attack on Australia, as Knott implies. The public DSR itself acknowledges that there is almost no prospect of an invasion of Australia at any point in the future.

The real issue is that the Pacific is crucial to American imperialism’s own plans for aggressive conflict with China. Any Chinese presence is viewed as a potential block to the provocations and military operations that Washington is developing against China, including detailed plans, first drawn up by the Pentagon in 2010, for an “Air Sea Battle” throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The fact that these issues are central to the classified DSR exposes the real character of the Australian Labor government’s intense interest in the South Pacific. Since Labor took office last May, its Foreign Minister Penny Wong has been visiting the region almost continuously. She has travelled to all of its 18

nations. Wong has presented this as an expression of Labor’s commitment to the “Pacific family” and “our shared values.”

In reality, as the WWSWS has explained, she has lectured, hectorated and bullied the leaders of these small, impoverished states, warning them that any deviation from alignment with the US and Australia will not be tolerated.

This is a continuation of the US and Australian threats against the Solomon Islands in April, 2022. In that month, it was revealed that China and the Solomons had signed an economic and security agreement. The US, with the backing of Australia, threatened military intervention if this included Chinese military basing on the islands.

In other words, Australia and the US are deeply concerned about “self-determination” and “self-governance” in Taiwan, which has never been deemed an independent country by the international community. But at the very same time, they are trampling on the “self-determination” and “self-governance” of sovereign nations such as the Solomon Islands.

Knott’s article highlights the role of the Australian press corps as state-aligned war propagandists. Since the release of the DSR over a week ago, there has not been one critical commentary in the mainstream press, questioning the plans for a vast military build-up, or exposing the bogus pretexts under which it is being carried out.

The article, moreover, is not based on a “leak” in any traditional sense of the term. Instead, it has all the hallmarks of a controlled release by the military command and the government themselves.

Even still, the article underscores the fact that one of the most sweeping changes in the entire history of Australian imperialism is being carried out based on “scenarios” and “war-gaming” that is being hidden from the population. That again highlights the fact that these war plans are incompatible with democracy.



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