Australian Spy Agencies Central to NSA's "Pivot to Asia"

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Revelations last week that Australian diplomatic missions throughout Asia function as electronic listening posts for the US National Security Agency (NSA) have exposed the extraordinary degree to which the Australian state apparatus is completely integrated into America's vast, illegal global spying operations.

The Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) has established a string of covert facilities inside Australian diplomatic posts designed to harvest phone calls and electronic data, as part of an NSA program codenamed STATEROOM. The countries targeted include China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, East Timor and Papua New Guinea.

Australian electronic surveillance for the NSA has assumed a special importance following the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"—a comprehensive diplomatic offensive and military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region aimed at securing American predominance over its rival China. The NSA spy operations are seamlessly connected to US preparations for cyber-war and military conflict against China.

Just as the Pentagon is increasingly reliant on access to Australian military bases as part of its war planning against China, so ASD facilities are integral to the NSA's surveillance throughout Asia. Australia is a partner in the US-led "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing alliance that also includes Britain, Canada and New Zealand. The ASD has plugged into the undersea cables that carry the huge quantities of electronic data between North America and Asia. Key spy bases such as the US-Australian Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap near Alice Springs, not only gather information, including for drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but are vital for military command and communications.

Australia's centrality was underscored last week when Prime Minister Tony Abbott overruled senior ministers to uphold a ban on any involvement of the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei in the country's national broadband network (NBN). The decision to block Huawei on "security grounds," originally taken by the previous Labor government on the advice of the Australian intelligence agencies, was driven by concerns that the NSA could not have the same easy access to Internet cables and equipment that it enjoys with American companies such as Cisco.

An *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) article last weekend candidly explained that the long-running battle over Huawei's participation in the NBN was "a localised skirmish in a far wider and more complex conflict between the world's two most powerful nations, China and the United States." As part of that struggle, "Washington and Beijing [are] in a fight for control of the digital universe through which most human activity, and many military capabilities,

are increasingly mediated."

Turning to Australia's pivotal importance, the AFR declared: "First, Australia stands as the last genuinely secure Anglo-Western redoubt in the Indo-Pacific, which military planners think will be a crucial staging base for US forces in any future conflict. A second driver was that US spymasters judge Australia to be their most vital intelligence sharing partner. More so than even the UK, which has, much to the United States' irritation, integrated Huawei into their own NBN."

As the US initiated the "pivot to Asia" from mid-2009, the Obama administration could not tolerate any deviation from the government of the country that was regarded as its vital base for operations against China in the Indo-Pacific. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was ousted in June 2010 in an overnight, inner-party coup by Labor and union factional bosses with close ties to the American embassy in Canberra. While Rudd fully supported the US-Australia alliance, he took diplomatic initiatives, without consulting Washington, aimed at easing US-China tensions, right at the point that Obama wanted to ramp up pressure on Beijing.

Rudd's replacement, Julia Gillard, fully committed the Labor government to the US military build-up against China. Underlining Australia's crucial role, President Obama chose to formally announce the "pivot" in the Australian parliament in November 2011. Gillard and Obama signed an agreement to station US Marines in Darwin and provide American forces with greater access to Australian bases. Just as significantly, a month after Obama's visit, the Labor government, which had been holding talks with Huawei representatives, ruled out any, even minimal, NBN involvement by the Chinese corporation.

The entire political establishment is complicit in the integration of Australian intelligence agencies into the NSA global spy network. Except for a handful of articles, the media has maintained a virtual blackout on Edward Snowden's revelations, both generally and those exposing Australian involvement. The Abbott Coalition government, like the previous Greens-backed minority Labor government, has stonewalled when faced with new exposures, refusing to comment on so-called security matters.

The pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, have for the most part remained silent, or dismissed Snowden's disclosures as insignificant. A rare article by Socialist Alternative yesterday entitled, "Australia's role in NSA spying," commented: "While outrageous, these revelations are not surprising." The pseudo-lefts are part of the political establishment's conspiracy of silence surrounding Australian integration into the US preparations for war against China.

The NSA's surveillance operations are an essential component of the US military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Over the past decade, US imperialism has recklessly resorted to militarism and war in the Middle East and Central Asia, in a bid to offset its historic decline. Now as part of the pivot to Asia, the Obama administration is strengthening military alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the region and deliberately inflaming dangerous flashpoints such as the Korean peninsula and maritime disputes in the South China and East China Seas.

Since World War II, Australian imperialism has depended completely on US backing to prosecute its own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific. That is why the entire political

establishment—the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor Party and the Greens—has lined up behind the transformation of Australia into a base of operations for the US military and the NSA in any war against China.

Like their counterparts around the world, workers and youth in Australia have been outraged and angered by the NSA revelations, and are deeply concerned about the growing danger of war. Those sentiments must be directed in a political struggle against all the parties of the Australian establishment, including the pseudo-lefts. What is required is a unified socialist movement of the working class in Australia and throughout the globe, including China and the United States, to put an end to capitalism, which is the root cause of war.

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