

US-Australia plans for war on China

By [James Cogan](#)

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A newly published book by journalist David Uren has revealed that the Australian government's 2009 Defence White Paper contained a "secret chapter" that assessed "Australia's ability to fight an air-sea battle alongside the United States against China."

The chapter was omitted from the public version as it contained references to Australian forces assisting the US military to impose a naval blockade of China's trade routes, and likely Chinese retaliation against targets on Australian soil. The existence of the confidential chapter was prominently reported on the front page of the *Australian* newspaper on Saturday under the headline "Secret 'war' with China uncovered." Labor's Defence Minister Stephen Smith was questioned about the revelation on Sunday. While he attempted to dismiss as "nonsense" the report that Australia had plans for war with China, he confirmed that there were both public and secret versions of the White Paper.

Uren, the economics editor of the *Australian* newspaper, provides no source for his revelation. His book, however, *The Kingdom and the Quarry: China, Australia, Fear and Greed*, has clearly been written in close consultation with figures in the Australian political, military and diplomatic establishment. It is primarily a discussion of the immense dilemma that confronts the Australian ruling elites as the United States—their key strategic and military ally—pursues an ever more aggressive stance toward China, Australia's largest trading partner.

Uren wrote that the White Paper envisaged "a very different world, in which Australian naval operations alongside the United States in, say the South China Sea, could lead to direct Chinese attack on Australia with missiles, mining of ports and cyber-attacks. The capability of China to reach out 5,000 kilometres and touch Australia was a new element of the strategic environment."

The missing chapter, Uren wrote, "assumed that there would be blockades distant from China designed to control its sea routes and stop the flow of natural resources on which its industrial engine depends... Part of the defence thinking is that in the event of a conflict with the United States, China would attempt to destroy Pine Gap, the US-Australia signals facility near Alice Springs, which is crucial for guiding US military operations in Asia."

The war preparations motivated the White Paper's recommendation that more than \$100 billion be spent over the next decade or so to equip the Australian military with new submarines, destroyers, jet fighters and other advanced hardware.

Significantly, Uren notes that while then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had aggressively supported the White Paper—against opposition from his military intelligence advisors—the Obama administration did not support his diplomatic initiatives in the Asian

region. Uren cites the diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks that revealed Washington opposed Rudd's advocacy of a so-called "Asia-Pacific Community" which would seek to mediate tensions between the US and China.

Uren, however, does not comment on the US role in the inner-party coup that ousted Rudd on June 23-24, 2010 and installed Julia Gillard as prime minister. He does not reference other diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks in which Gillard was named by US officials as a potential pro-US alternative to Rudd, and which identified the key Labor conspirators, such as Senator Mark Arbib, as "protected sources" of the US embassy.

In mid-2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton provocatively told a summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN): "I am here to confirm that we [the US] are back and we are here to stay [in Asia]." Her speech at ASEAN was a categorical rejection of calls by figures like Rudd for a US accommodation to China's ambitions for greater regional influence.

Uren observes that the agreements signed last November between the Obama administration and the Gillard government for a greater US military presence in Australia flow from expectations of future conflict with Beijing. He cites the establishment of a "working group" between the US and Australian militaries in late 2010, "to explore greater military cooperation."

While Uren does not refer to it, the US Naval War College published a study in January 2011 which detailed Australia's "numerous advantages" as a base from which the US military could control the vital sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the event of conflict with China. The study's authors, James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, commented that "the Australian government—Washington's most dependable ally in Asia, alongside Tokyo—would likely prove agreeable to such an arrangement."

Under Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the Labor government has unconditionally aligned Australia with the Obama administration's so-called pivot to the Asia-Pacific. Australian ports and airbases are to be upgraded for use by the American military and the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean made available as an airbase for US surveillance drones and, potentially, warplanes.

Uren comments that the small scale of the initial US deployments to Australia—just several hundred marines training for six months near the northern city of Darwin—was intended as "a way of mollifying regional reaction." The announcement over the weekend by US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta that the US Navy will base 60 percent of its fleet in the Asia-Pacific underscores the strategic importance of access to Australian naval bases. Ports in Perth, Darwin and Brisbane will service the US aircraft carrier battle groups and nuclear submarines that threaten China's access to crucial maritime trading routes.

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