

Military Initiative by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) Is Another Major Step in Prospective War on China

Peace groups in all three nations need to rally against provocative alliance that is a pivotal component of war planning.

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Global Research, July 04, 2023

[CovertAction Magazine](#) 29 June 2023

Region: [Asia](#), [Europe](#), [Oceania](#), [USA](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Military](#), [Military and WMD](#)

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The AUKUS pact (military initiative among Australia, the UK and U.S.) came out of nowhere in 2021 when Australia broke a \$A90 billion contract to buy French submarines.

Instead, it signed up with the U.S and UK to form AUKUS, which will build eight nuclear-powered (but not nuclear-armed) submarines for Australia.

The first get-together of AUKUS leaders did not go well for Australia, when President Biden could not remember the name of its then-Prime Minister, **Scott Morrison**.

Morrison went behind the backs of the French in order to do a deal, instead, with the U.S. and UK. It led to the most extraordinary diplomatic bust up between those countries—France recalled its ambassadors from both Australia and the U.S. (it is America's oldest ally, dating back to the American Revolution); President Macron called Morrison a "liar." When Morrison was voted out a few months later, France's outgoing foreign minister said: "I can't stop myself from saying that the defeat of Morrison suits me very well."

Nuclear-free New Zealand was not invited to join AUKUS (nor was fellow Five Eyes member, Canada) but the Ardern government had a FOMO (fear of missing out) reaction and said NZ would like to get involved with other aspects of AUKUS, such as artificial intelligence. AUKUS rapidly went about proving it is about much more than a few nuclear subs—in April 2022 it announced that its three members would work together to develop hypersonic missiles to counter Russia and China, which already have them.

In May 2022 Scott Morrison's government was resoundingly voted out of office, but Anthony

Albanese's Labor government wholeheartedly carried on with his Tory predecessor's foreign policy, including being committed to AUKUS. The last time that an Australian Labor government offered a markedly different foreign policy was the 1972-75 government led by Gough Whitlam, which was overthrown in a CIA-backed coup.^[1]

Both Whitlam and Albanese had themselves sworn in as Prime Minister immediately after their respective election wins, but the contrast could not be starker. Whitlam wanted to get go forward with his radically different foreign policy; Albanese wanted to immediately scurry off to Tokyo to meet Joe Biden and reassure him of Australia's continued loyalty as a good and obedient servant.

The Australian Labor Party has not questioned the American alliance since Whitlam.

The year 2022 came and went but two of the original three AUKUS leaders—Scott Morrison and Boris Johnson—were kicked out of office and AUKUS carried on, building up to its big launch in March 2023, which was hosted by President Biden, alongside Prime Ministers Sunak and Albanese, in front of a massive U.S. nuclear submarine at a San Diego Navy base. Australia will build eight nuclear-powered subs in Adelaide; they will have a British design but American technology.

Eye-watering Cost

The cost is truly eye-watering—anywhere between \$A268 billion and \$A368b, by 2055. Yes, that's right—those eight subs will not be ready for more than 30 years.

The first of these eight subs is unlikely to be ready until the 2040s so, to fill that gap, Australia will buy three existing U.S. subs from the early 2030s, at a cost of up to \$A58b, with an option to buy two more. There has been zero official discussion about the multitude of things that are likely to change over the next 30 years, militarily, let alone in the wider global society. Think about what has changed in the last 30 years. I would put money on these monstrosities being obsolete long before they are built.

MILITARY

Types of submarines

Submarines can either be **diesel-electric or nuclear-powered**, both types can carry nuclear warheads. Here's how they differ.



Diesel powered

- Require more frequent resurfacing making them easier to detect
- Tend to be smaller
- Cheaper to run and maintain

SSK Conventionally-powered attack submarine

SSB Conventionally-powered ballistic missile submarines



Nuclear powered

- Can remain completely submerged for years, limiting detection
- Tend to be larger
- Require more expensive infrastructure and maintenance

SSN Nuclear-powered attack submarine

SSBN Nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines



Source: The Military Balance 2021 International Institute for Strategic Studies | September 21, 2021



Source: 234radio.com

But the politicians and military leaders who commissioned them will be long gone, leaving future taxpayers to shoulder the costs—and the highly likely adverse consequences of such a major push toward war with China. Because that is what AUKUS and its nuclear submarines, and all others, following military technology developments, are aimed at. It has nothing to do with defending Australia, and everything to do with projecting power far from home. That is the point of nuclear-powered subs—they do not need to return to home port to refuel.

“We Are Not at War, But Neither Are We at Peace”

New Zealanders may not have appreciated the degree of militarization in Australia, much more so than here. AUKUS should jolt us out of any complacency about what is going on with our nearest neighbor—it is preparing for war. Australian media commentary at the time of the AUKUS launch made that clear. “The monumental price tag of the AUKUS pact has made it clear. We are not at war, but neither are we at peace...”

“Almost \$A400b, even over three decades, is not peacetime spending in anyone’s book—a fact Government ministers concede privately. Rather, we are navigating a dangerous and unpredictable new grey zone of superpower rivalry between China and the United States. It’s a contest in which we are poised to be a central player despite our geographical isolation and relatively small population.”

“Accepting such a role will require tough spending decisions the nation as a whole is not yet ready to confront. Already, Opposition Leader Peter Dutton is flagging his willingness to support reduced spending on the National Disability Insurance Scheme to pay for the submarine programme. Other unsettling trade-offs will need to be discussed. Even in the short term, before the big bills start arriving, difficult calls will have to be made....This is because...it will cut \$A3b from existing defence programmes...This is likely to anger other branches of the military, such as the Army, while the Navy is lavished with money.”^[2]

Albanese tried to put a positive spin on it, saying that the “scale, complexity and economic significance of this investment is akin to the creation of the Australian automotive industry in the post-war period [ibid.].

This is disingenuous in the extreme—there is no comparison between creating an industry to enable the much touted “Aussie battlers” to buy a Holden and creating an industry to build nuclear submarines to join the U.S. (and its “special relationship” mate, the UK) in confronting China, trying to contain China and, quite possibly, fighting a war with China.

Criticism from Inside the Political Elite

Pleasingly, AUKUS was not unopposed among Australia’s political elite (or, at least, former leading members of it). Paul Keating, who was Labor Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996, really put the boot into the good submarine AUKUS and all who sail in her. He did so in a March 2023 speech, the day after the AUKUS announcement. “Former prime minister Paul Keating has launched an extraordinary attack on the Albanese government over its adoption of the AUKUS pact, accusing it of making the worst foreign policy decision by a Labor government since the attempted introduction of conscription in World War I.”

“He said signing up to AUKUS had broken Labor’s long ‘winning streak’ on foreign policy over the past century and was a ‘deeply pathetic’ moment in the Party’s history. ‘Falling into a major mistake, Anthony Albanese, befuddled by his own small-target election strategy, emerges as prime minister with an American sword to rattle at the neighbourhood to impress upon it the United States’ esteemed view of its untrammelled destiny...’”

“‘Naturally, I should prefer to be singing the praises of the government in all matters, but these issues carry deadly consequences for Australia and I believe it is incumbent on any former prime minister, particularly now, a Labor one, to alert the country to the dangerous and unnecessary journey on which the Government is now embarking.’”

“‘This week, Anthony Albanese screwed into place the last shackle in the long chain the United States has laid out to contain China...I don’t think I suffer from relevance deprivation, but I do suffer concern for Australia as it most unwisely proceeds down this singular and dangerous path,’ he said.”

“Keating presented a largely benign view of China’s rise, saying it was ‘not the old Soviet Union’ and was ‘not seeking to propagate some competing international ideology’ to the

United States. The fact is China is not an outrider,' he said. 'China is a world trading state—it is not about upending the international system,'"

"Keating said: 'Every Labor Party branch member will wince when they realise that the party we all fight for is returning to our former colonial master, Britain, to find our security in Asia—236 years after Europeans first grabbed the continent from its Indigenous people. That of all things, a contemporary Labor government is shunning security in Asia for security in and within the Anglosphere'"^[3]

Nor was Keating alone in his criticism from within the elite. "The Australian National University's Hugh White, an emeritus professor of strategic studies, unleashed a quite extraordinary criticism of Australia's nuclear submarine plan...Professor White, a former deputy secretary of the Defence Department, said Australia was not only going to 'hand over some serious dollars' to the US but also pay with 'a promise' to enter any future conflict with China."

"'This is a very serious transformation of the nature of our alliance with the United States,' White said in an interview recorded for the ANU's politics podcast *Democracy Sausage*. 'The US don't really care about our submarine capability—they care deeply about tying Australia into their containment strategy against China.'"

"White said he couldn't see why the US would sell its own submarines—of which they have fewer than they need—unless it was absolutely sure Australia's submarines would be available to it in the event of a major conflict in Asia. He said a war between America and China over Taiwan would be 'World War III' and have a 'very good chance' of being a nuclear conflict."

"'Australia's experience of war [is] shaped by the fact that we've tended to be on the winning side, but there is no reason to expect America to win in a war with China over Taiwan,' he warned. He suggested there was also a high chance the AUKUS deal could fall over under [sic] a future American administration and a worsening strategic environment."

"White said there were cheaper, quicker, less risky and less demanding ways for Australia to get the submarines it needed, labelling the AUKUS plan a waste of money that 'doesn't make sense. There's going to be no actual net increase in the number of submarines available until well into the 2040s, even if it goes to plan—which it probably won't,' he said."^[4]

Breakneck Militarization

AUKUS is only part, albeit a very big part, of Australia's breakneck militarization. "Flying under the radar of last week's AUKUS submarine announcement was the revelation that the United States had agreed to sell Australia up to 220 Tomahawk cruise missiles."

"This follows Australia's purchase in January [2023] of 'high mobility artillery rocket systems,' known as HIMARS, which have been used by Ukraine on the battlefield in response to Russia's invasion. And in 2020, the US approved the sale of up to 200 long-range anti-shiping missiles (LRASM) to Australia."



HIMARS live-fire training in Australia. [Source: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)]

“[The Tomahawks] will be deployed on three Australian warships, known as Hobart class destroyers. These ships are primarily designed to defend the navy from aerial threats such as aircraft and missiles, but adding Tomahawks would allow them to strike targets on land or sea. What’s more, the Virginia class nuclear-powered submarines Australia is purchasing from the US under the AUKUS agreement are also capable of launching Tomahawks.”



HMAS Hobart [Source: wartime.blog]

“It’s safe to assume Australia’s future AUKUS class nuclear-powered submarines will also be able to deploy Tomahawks. This would provide Australia with a potent deterrent. It would mean Australia could conduct long-range precision strikes against potential adversaries, using a stealthy platform that would be extremely difficult to detect.”

“Australia’s purchase of long-range anti-shipping missiles (LRASM) is intended to increase the strike range of two types of Australia’s fighter jets. This would allow Australia to accurately strike hostile shipping at long range. They will replace Australia’s ageing Harpoon anti-shipping missile. They have a range of about 560km, which is approximately four times greater than the Harpoon. This capability is highly desirable given that, in the event of a regional conflict, the greatest threat to Australia is a blockade of its key trade routes.”



LRASM. [Source: globaldefensecorp.com]

“In particular, the Tomahawks and LRASM allow aircraft and warships to launch the missiles further from potential danger. This is particularly important as countries such as China are heavily investing in military systems designed to prevent access and freedom of operation in contested waters such as the South China Sea, a strategy referred to as Anti-Access/Area Denial, or ‘A2AD.’”

“Crucially, these missiles (within the broader context of other defence procurements) offer Australia two things. Firstly, they provide an increased deterrent in an increasingly turbulent region. If Australia can hold key targets under threat, then a potential adversary is less likely to undertake a hostile action, or at the very least think more carefully before doing so. It also facilitates what’s called ‘interoperability’ with key allies such as the US, so Australian and US forces can operate more easily in a joint manner if need be.”

“Secondly, these platforms allow Australia to have our own ‘A2AD’ capabilities. While an invasion of Australia is extraordinarily unlikely, it’s possible an adversary may try to block shipping routes to prevent our people and/or goods from free navigation (a naval blockade). Or, they may attempt to close strategic chokepoints and navigation routes to Australia’s north, such as the Malacca Strait.”

“Having the ability to strike targets at long range holds those undertaking such actions under threat, increasing the difficulty in sustaining a blockade, or making it unappealing to attempt to do so due to high potential costs. Of course, these systems also come with significant costs. The purchase of approximately 220 Tomahawks will cost \$A1.3 billion, while 20 HIMARS launchers and missiles attracts a bill of \$A558 million. About 200 LRASMs

costs a further \$A1.47 billion.”^[5]



Tomahawk cruise missile after launch from U.S. Navy ship. [Source: newatlas.com]

Shortly after Albanese was elected as prime minister in May 2022, he initiated the Defence Strategic Review. It was classified but a redacted version was publicly released in April 2023. It was billed as Australia’s biggest defence overhaul since World War II. “Australia has said the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, long-range strike capabilities and its northern bases will be among the country’s six priority areas after a major review of its defence strategy found the armed forces were not ‘fully fit for purpose.’”

“Albanese said the government would adopt three other priorities recommended in the review for immediate action: Initiatives to improve the growth and retention of a highly skilled defence workforce, improving Australia’s capacity to rapidly translate new technologies into defence, and a deepening of defence and diplomatic partnerships with ‘key partners’ in the Indo-Pacific.”

“The report stressed the need for Australia to deepen its engagement and collaboration with countries from Southeast Asia to the Pacific, as well as with India and Japan.”^[6]

Former New Zealand Prime Ministers from Rival Parties Dissent

When AUKUS was first announced in 2021, New Zealand, which was not invited to join, simply confined itself to saying that nuclear-powered submarines would not be allowed into New Zealand territorial waters, or ports, because of our nuclear-free law dating back to the 1980s. So, the issue flew below the radar (or sailed under the water, to put it more appropriately). However, once AUKUS really kicked off in March 2023, debate and disquiet started in New Zealand.

Helen Clark was the Labour Prime Minister (1999-2008) who has dined out for 20 years on

having refused to let New Zealand join the U.S., UK and Australia in the illegal and disastrous 2003 invasion of Iraq (in all other aspects Clark was a very loyal servant of the U.S.). She came out quickly and said that New Zealand is better off outside AUKUS (the word she used was “entanglement”).

She was not alone as the only former New Zealand Prime Minister to criticize it. “[F]ormer National prime minister Jim Bolger [1990-97] participated in a forum about New Zealand’s foreign policy in Wellington, in which he is reported by the *Herald’s* Audrey Young to have criticised the Australian submarine buy up as ‘beyond comprehension’ because of the cost and the damage to peace in the Pacific region.”

“Bolger said that New Zealand certainly doesn’t want any such submarines, and challenged proponents of the AUKUS deal to defend it: ‘If you can find any Australian official who can explain why they need nuclear-powered submarines, come and tell me. I’d like to know.’ And Young reported Bolger asking rhetorically, ‘How mad are we getting?’ She says ‘he spoke with despair about the near-daily threats of nuclear war, which had the potential to destroy the planet.’”^[7]

Opposition Across the Political Spectrum

“As part of the AUKUS deal Western Australia will play host to US and UK nuclear submarines from 2027. With nuclear-capable American B52 bombers and thousands of American marines rotating through the Northern Territory, Australia is lining up as a loyal lieutenant to the United States in the Pacific and would be expected to fight should war break out.”

“Would New Zealanders fight in a war between the nuclear superpowers? While we aren’t required by treaty obligations to act if America or Taiwan are attacked we are if Australia is. It is not an exaggeration to say Australia could be a target in a future war and already the country has been threatened with missile attacks in that scenario.”

“The risks of New Zealand being dragged in are real. Unlike in Australia, the conversation in New Zealand has been much more muted with limited discussion on the likelihood of war. Why aren’t we talking about it? New Zealand is in a difficult situation contemplating conflict between our largest trading partner and traditional security partner.”

“We weren’t invited to join AUKUS and Australian nuclear submarines won’t be allowed to berth here under our nuclear-free legislation. That same legislation sees New Zealand as only a friend and not an ally of the United States, but we are increasingly acting like we are an ally. In the years since New Zealand’s principled decision not to join the invasion of Iraq we have become more enmeshed with the United States defence apparatus.”

“Our troops fought together in Afghanistan and later served together in Iraq. Rocket Lab launches US Air Force payloads, and we remain in the intelligence inner circle as a Five Eyes nation. New Zealand Navy vessels took part in exercises off Guam and Okinawa with carrier strike groups including participating in freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea.”

“New Zealand’s military spending as a percentage of GDP [gross domestic product] has increased significantly under the Labour Government and big new spends have been focused on interoperability.”

“This includes the purchase of four new P-8A Poseidon aircraft to replace the decades-old P3 Orions. At [\$NZ]2.3b the Poseidon aircraft were much more expensive than alternatives that could have also undertaken search and rescue and fisheries patrol work because of their ability to work with partners and conduct anti-submarine warfare in a future conflict.”

“Former prime minister Jacinda Arden even received an unprecedented invitation to attend a NATO Leaders Summit in Europe. Today, it’s almost as if the ANZUS split of the 1980s never happened....Just because New Zealand is more closely linked with the United States by history, culture and values doesn’t mean we have to blindly fall into line and follow whatever they do....”



Jacinda Arden speaks at NATO summit. [Source: citizentruth.org]

“New Zealanders need to talk more about the risks, our decision-makers need to explain why New Zealand is aligning more closely with the United States military and as a sovereign country we have to ask are we acting independently or as a cog in a machine? Our role could be focused on reducing tensions, finding solutions and building trust. War is never inevitable.”^[8]

Former politicians across the spectrum have come out against AUKUS. For example, Richard Prebble, one-time Labour Cabinet Minister and later ACT Party founder and Leader.

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