

Albanese's AUSMIN 2022 agreement paints fresh nuclear bullseyes on Australia

13 Dec.—The Albanese Labor government's rhetoric regarding China may be notably less hysterical than was that of Scott Morrison's Liberals, but in practice its strategic policy continues to be every bit as suicidally insane. Far from reversing or even delaying any of Morrison's USdictated plans to militarise Australia for a war with China, Albanese is instead accelerating and expanding them. The sweeping concessions to US strategic imperatives agreed to at the 2022 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN) meeting, held 6 December in Washington DC, amounts in effect to handing over what little sovereign control of Australia's military Canberra had left to the United States, and a blank cheque along with it. There can now be no doubt that our "dangerous allies", as the late former PM Malcolm Fraser called them, intend to make Australia the staging point for a war on China that would almost inevitably escalate to a nuclear exchange. And it is clear that factions of both major political parties are equally eager to help them do it, preferring to risk our nation's and humanity's destruction in a last-ditch bid to preserve AngloAmerican hegemony.



Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles, Foreign Minister Penny Wong, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin give a press conference following the AUSMIN talks 6 Dec. 2022. Photo: AFP/Saul Loeb

Australia and the United States have formally been tied together strategically, with New Zealand, in the ANZUS collective security agreement since 1951, and during the Cold War the USA established several military intelligence bases on Australia's soil—most notably the infamous Pine Gap in the Northern Territory desert near Alice Springs, nominally a "Joint Intelligence Facility" but entirely US-controlled in every way that matters—all of which were understood to be nuclear targets in the event the Cold War turned hot. The so-called "alliance" has seen Australia take part in every ill-advised, immoral and often outright illegal US war from Korea (1950-53) onwards; and since the United States overtly turned its gunsights on China with the Barack Obama administration's military "Pivot to Asia" in November 2011, both major parties have given their blessing to an ever increasing US military presence on our home soil as well, beginning with the "rotational" deployment of US Marines in Darwin starting in April 2012. As the Citizens Party (then Citizens Electoral Council) reported at the time,¹ however, concrete plans for Australia to take part in a US-led war on China had already been afoot for several years. A then recently revealed secret chapter of the Rudd Labor government's 2009 Defence White Paper had envisaged a showdown initiated by the USA and Australia, beginning with Australian submarines blockading China's sea lanes, after which it was expected China would retaliate with missile strikes on targets in Australia, starting with Pine Gap. Somewhat amusingly, Rudd's successor Julia Gillard announced plans to build 12 of the requisite "state-of-the-art" submarines, with a price tag of \$40 billion, in May 2012. Ten years and zero submarines later, the price tag has now blown out to *at least* \$200 billion—according to independent analysts, there being no official costings available—for a mere *eight* nuclear subs of a design yet to be determined, presumably supplied by the Americans (but possibly the British) under the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) defence technology-sharing arrangement. None will hit the water until at least 2040 even by unreasonably optimistic official estimates, and they may well never exist at all.

Occupation force

AUKUS and its someday-maybe submarines hogged the headlines when it was announced 16 September last year, overshadowing the far more immediately consequential outcome of the 2021 AUSMIN, the annual "2+2" meeting of Australia's ministers for defence and foreign affairs with their US counterparts, the following day. According to the joint statement issued at its close, the Australian government agreed, among other things, to allow "the rotational deployment of US aircraft of all types in Australia"; facilitate "increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of US surface and subsurface vessels in Australia"; and "[e]stablish a combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise to support high-end warfighting and combined military operations in the region."² The upshot, as retired senior Australian Defence official Mike Scrafton [wrote](#) 21 September 2021 in the online public policy journal *Pearls and Irritations*, was that Australia had "effectively surrendered its right to say what kinds of [US] military platforms and weapons can be brought on to, or stationed in, its territory",

apparently including US nuclear weapons—or so, at least, China would be forced to assume, and respond accordingly.

The 2022 AUSMIN joint statement, issued 7 December (Australian time) in the names of Defence Minister Richard Marles MP, Foreign Minister Sen. Penny Wong, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, confirms that Australia will indeed play host to at least two “legs” of the US nuclear triad. Already, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) flagship current affairs program Four Corners had revealed 31 October that Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal, near the town of Katherine in the Northern Territory (some 320 km south of Darwin), was to be expanded to accommodate permanently a squadron of US Air Force B52 Stratofortress strategic (i.e. nuclear-capable) bombers. The AUSMIN statement reveals that Tindal is far from the only facility to be so upgraded, affirming that the US will “continue the rotational presence of US capabilities in Australia, across air, land, and maritime domains ... [including] US Bomber Task Force rotations, fighters, and future rotations of US Navy and US Army capabilities.” Echoing the consensus among analysts and unnamed defence and intelligence sources quoted across the mainstream media, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) military analyst Dr Marcus Hellyer told the 8 December *Australian*: “They’re a bit coy about what rotations of US Navy vessels means, but you’d suspect ... that forward basing of US Navy (nuclear boats) in Western Australia will be a key part of that.”

To accommodate all this, the AUSMIN statement says, the Australian and US defence departments will work together to “identify priority locations in Australia to support enhanced US force posture with associated infrastructure, including runway improvements, parking aprons, fuel infrastructure, explosive ordnance storage infrastructure, and facilities to support the workforce.” Australia has also agreed to “pre-position stores, munitions, and fuel in support of US capabilities ... [and] to co-develop agile logistics at nominated airfields—including at bare bases in northern Australia—to support more responsive and resilient rotations of US aircraft. Further, to strengthen US land presence, the principals decided to expand locations for US Army and US Marine Corps forces”, the statement declares. Moreover, they’re bringing some friends along to share in the fun: “the principals decided to enhance trilateral defence cooperation activities”, the statement says, “and invite Japan to increase its participation in Force Posture Initiatives in Australia”. On 10 December, following the Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations in Tokyo the previous day, Marles, Wong and their Japanese counterparts Yasukazu Hamada and Yoshimasa Hayashi elaborated in a joint statement that whilst the details are yet to be worked out, they had committed to “unit exchanges and more complex exercises ... with an eye to future rotational deployment of Japan’s [jet] fighters including F-35s in Australia”. Marles told media in Japan that the two countries’ strategic interests had “never been more aligned”, and that China’s alleged “biggest military build-up since WWII” was to blame. The *Australian Financial Review* reported 9 December that “Highlevel meetings between Australian and Japanese ministers are becoming almost monthly events”, and that the government of PM Fumio Kishida “is finalising a review of the country’s national defence strategy, which may allow the use of pre-emptive strikes against its enemies.” If it is permitted to do so from Australian soil, the consequences are obvious.

AUKUS subs a ‘shiny lure’

Meanwhile the AUKUS nuclear submarines remain out in the never-never, even as the US Navy sets about basing its own here in their stead (which was probably the point all along). Commenting on the results of this year’s AUSMIN, Mike Scrafton wrote 10 December for *Pearls and Irritations*: “the meat for the Americans in the communiqué is the basing concessions; otherwise known as the surrender of sovereignty. The Americans have brilliantly played successive Australian governments by casting the shiny lure of nuclear submarines out somewhere in the distant future and reeling in control of Australia’s defence policy. The long but accelerating breakdown of Australian resistance to becoming an American base, and home to key elements of America’s nuclear war-fighting strategy, continues without controversy. It is tragic and dangerous. Without Parliamentary debate or public consultation, Defence Minister Marles has overseen the further abdication of responsibility for Australia’s defence policy. Which now is reduced to providing a forward base for American forces.”

So far as the AAS is aware, the only prominent mainstream politician to challenge the assumption that we must ready for war with China in defence of the so-called “rulesbased international order” is National Party MP and former Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce. Having just returned from participating in a bipartisan parliamentary delegation to Taiwan, the island which the USA and Australia legally recognise as a province of China even as they encourage its present separatist government with pledges of support should it declare independence (while paradoxically declaring that they oppose any unilateral change to the status quo), Joyce opined in a column for the 13 December *Australian* that whilst he thought a war unlikely unless Beijing’s hand were forced, neither should we expect the USA to be around forever to protect us in any case. And if we are ever to stand on our own feet as a truly sovereign nation, the first thing we need to do is “smarten up”.

The “eye-opener”, Joyce wrote, was witnessing the mindboggling technical precision of Taiwan’s microprocessor industry, which manufactures “highly complex electrical components 0.03 of a micron in depth”. (A micron, or micrometre, is one one-thousandth of a millimetre. Joyce noted by way of comparison that the average human hair is around 100 microns thick.) “[When] we asked whether Australia could be part of this manufacturing process”, Joyce wrote, “[we] were told our role was in the application side. Translated, that means our role is to purchase semiconductors, whether we realise

equipment has them or not.

“There is a huge difference between buying something that is clever and making something that is clever. ... This is why an island half the size of Tasmania supports a population nearly the size of Australia’s with a gross domestic product approaching that of Australia. Our major resources are coal, iron ore, gas and agriculture; theirs is IQ.” In decades past, Joyce recalled, Australian federal agency the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) was at the cutting edge of multiple fields, among other things developing “wi-fi, myxoma virus to get rid of rabbits, [and] the seed intellect for computing or penicillin.” But nowadays, he added, instead of “leading in groundbreaking, world-changing technology such as small modular reactors, or smaller microreactors”, it seems to produce mainly “climate change” research. and “politically guided reports” that have little to do with its chartered functions.

Wrote Joyce: “As I boarded the plane to return home, the thought that ran through my mind was not of the threat to Taiwan from China but the threat to Australia from our unbridled romantic naivety to the economic reality of the world as it is now. This reality underpins the new global power paradigm.” And though he played somewhat into what the AAS has called the China Threat Hypothesis that pervades Canberra at present, Joyce nonetheless declared that “China and Taiwan, I believe, are unlikely to come to a conflict. It is too stupid and they are not stupid.” And whilst Canberra might hope that the USA “has a life and strength of a thousand years”, he added, “I stood before Chinese bronze craftsmanship more than 3,000 years old in Taipei. They play a much longer game.”

That aside, Mr Joyce is correct to state that if Australia is to be truly sovereign—which is to say, free of undue influence by *any* external power—then “The only defence is strength, not just military as that is merely an outcome of economic strength.” National Party sources have told the AAS that whilst he is unlikely to return to the party’s top job, Joyce remains an influential powerbroker whose opinions carry considerable weight, including among the present party leadership. If he can transmit his epiphany to them, then so much the better.

Footnotes:

1. G. Peut, A. Isherwood, A. Douglas, “[Australia prepares for World War: Tragedy, or just plain farce?](#)”, *The New Citizen*, June-July 2012.

2. “[AUSMIN/AUKUS make Australia staging point for WWII](#)”, AAS, 21 Sept. 2021.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 14 December 2022