

All aboard Scott Morrison's AUKUS gravy-train

30 Jan.—Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced 23 January via Facebook that after 16 years in Parliament, he will be retiring from politics at the end of February “to take on new challenges in the global corporate sector and spend more time with [his] family”. Unfortunately for almost everyone else in Australia, this does not mean we get to bid goodbye and good riddance altogether to the worst PM this nation has ever had, nor that he is done destroying the national interest he was ostensibly elected to advance; the difference now will be that instead of doing so in the name of defending “democracy” and the “global rules-based order”, he will henceforth at least admit to be motivated strictly by personal gain. That is because the corporate “challenges” he alluded to all involve cashing in on his role as a progenitor of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) so-called “trilateral security partnership”, by helping corporations—mainly, it would seem, American ones—get in on the looting and pillaging of Australia’s resources and the co-opting of its remaining industrial base that that agreement enables. Simply put: immediately he walks out of Parliament, Morrison will (and indeed to some extent already has) cut straight to the head of a queue of former political heavyweights as they clamber aboard a \$400 billion gravy-train whose tracks Morrison laid himself. And evincing the almost complete dearth of principle among the leadership of both major parties, that queue includes not only Morrison’s Liberal mates but also prominent Labor politicians who previously opposed Morrison and his government’s demonisation of and preparations for a US-led war against China, of which AUKUS is a signature piece.



Scott Morrison (bottom left) speaking at the 2023 Hudson Institute forum “Partnership of Freedom: AUKUS Viewed by Its Architects”, alongside Mike Pompeo (top left) and Boris Johnson (bottom right). Photo: Screenshot

Ever since Morrison, US President Joe Biden and then-UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced AUKUS in September 2021, with Labor’s immediate and unconditional support, both major parties have tried to sell it to the public as necessary to combat a putative looming “threat” from China, on the one hand; and as a nation-building economic development program, on the other. In reality it is merely one in a series of agreements foisted upon Australia by Anglo-American puppet governments—including the 2014 US-Australia Force Posture Agreement (signed off by Liberal PM Tony Abbot, but developed mainly by the preceding Gillard Labor government); current PM Anthony Albanese’s acquiescence in late 2022 to hosting potentially nuclear-armed US bomber aircraft and submarines in Australia;¹ and Albanese’s June 2023 agreement to let Australia be included as a “domestic source” of war materiel² under the US *Defence Production Act*—whose collective effect has been explicitly to cede Australia’s national sovereignty to the USA by letting it dictate our strategic, defence and industrial development policies for its own purposes. Said purposes, of course, being mainly to do with setting Australia up as the base of operations for a war on China. Legalised corruption Also ever since Morrison et al. announced AUKUS, a veritable *Who’s Who* of Australian warmongers and establishment apparatchiks have been setting themselves up to reap fat profits from the drive towards thermonuclear annihilation they have deliberately engendered. As the *Australian Alert Service* has previously observed,³ Canberra has long been notorious for a form of legalised corruption known as the “revolving door”, through which corporate lobbyists, party machine-men and think-tank ideologues walk into policy-making roles in the Parliament and the Public Service, then back into cushy jobs in the private sector, often apparently as payment for services rendered while in office. The advent of AUKUS, however, has elevated this inglorious tradition to an art form; of which the grand master, it would seem, is none other than Morrison himself.

Morrison had in fact already begun to insert himself into the international strategic advisory milieu shortly after losing the prime ministership, potentially in breach of his own government’s legally binding ministerial code of conduct. Whereas that code dictates that former ministers may not take up private sector jobs in areas relevant to their erstwhile portfolios for a minimum of 18 months, in November 2022—a mere six months after his party was voted out of government—Morrison joined the Hudson Institute, an imperialistic Washington, DC think tank, as a member of the strategic advisory

board of its “China Centre”.⁴ The board is chaired by Morrison’s friend, confidante, fellow AUKUS architect and millenarian death-cult “Evangelical Christian” co-religionist, former US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. And by May 2023 (12 months after leaving office) Morrison had also taken up a position on the Board of Advisors of the Centre for New American Security (CNAS), another Washington think tank, which was founded in 2007 by Biden Administration “Asia Czar” Dr Kurt Campbell, the architect of the USA’s 2011 military “pivot to Asia” and now chief overseer of AUKUS. Morrison has not declared any income from these roles via the Parliamentary Register of Interests, as though he had donated his services (such as they might be) out of charity for the greater good. All his colleagues are certainly paid well for theirs, though. And it is worth noting that the Register’s rules of disclosure are far from water-tight, with exemptions for one-off payments such as “speaker’s fees”, for example, as well as the value of flights, “hospitality” and other services. The Australian Citizens Party has formally referred these and related matters for investigation by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (See [1 Feb. Media Release](#)).

Within hours of Morrison’s Facebook announcement his post-retirement plans were revealed by not one but two of his new employers. Both are American firms looking to get their and their clients’ snouts into the AUKUS trough. The first, Boston, Massachusetts-based venture capital firm DYNE Ventures, announced in a press release that Morrison had joined the strategic advisory board of its subsidiary DYNE Maritime, a US\$100 million (~\$160 m) fund established in October 2023 to invest in companies developing “dual use” maritime technologies (i.e. those with both military and civilian applications) relevant to AUKUS. “Mr Morrison, the founding principal in the conceptualisation and formation of AUKUS, will be an invaluable asset to DYNE.... We’re honoured to have Mr Morrison aboard so we can fully capitalise on innovation across geographies”, the release enthused, noting that during Morrison’s stint as PM “Australian defence spending increased to more than 2 per cent of GDP”—a chunk of which, via DYNE, will now make its way into Morrison’s pocket. And into that of Mike Pompeo, whom DYNE also employs as a strategic advisor.

Morrison’s other new gig, also announced via press release later the same day, is as “non-executive Vice-Chairman” of Washington-based international consulting and advisory firm American Global Strategies (AGS). After likewise feting Morrison as the “architect” of AUKUS and praising his “exceptional dedication to the US-Australian alliance”, the AGS release quoted the company’s Chairman Robert O’Brien saying that Morrison “is widely regarded as one of the most consequential world leaders of the last decade, presiding over unprecedented changes to Australia’s foreign and defence policies. ... [He] will bring highlevel relationships and unique geopolitical insights to our clients.” O’Brien was then-US President Donald Trump’s national security advisor in 2019-21 while AUKUS was being formulated, and would presumably have been involved, perhaps heavily. Morrison is quoted that he and O’Brien would “draw on our combined networks and experience in the [so-called Indo-Pacific] region” to help clients navigate the “risks and opportunities” (cha-ching!) of its “highly dynamic geopolitical landscape”. Other Trump Administration alumni at AGS include “senior advisors” John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence in 2020- 21; and notorious anti-China fanatic Eldridge Colby, who as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Strategy and Force Development (in 2017-18) was the lead author of the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defence Strategy which, as his company profile puts it, “shifted the Department of Defence’s focus to the challenges to US military superiority and interests posed by China in particular”, thus setting the stage for AUKUS.

‘Defence Investor Networks’ proliferate

There is certainly no shortage of potential clients lining up for a piece of the action, in either Australia or the USA. Taking the latter first, military technology-focused news site C4ISRNET.com reported 11 January that whilst most of the focus on AUKUS thus far has been on large intergovernmental projects (principally Australia’s planned acquisition from the USA, and subsequent co-development with the UK, of nuclear-powered submarines based on US technology transfers, at an estimated total cost of \$368 billion) and military-to-military cooperation, in the meantime “a group of more than 400 investors is establishing a parallel effort to increase collaboration among the countries’ private sectors”. The article reports that “Innovation advisory firm BMNT”, which is headquartered in the USA and also has a branch in Australia, “announced the AUKUS Defence Investor Network, or DIN, in December and plans to host its first meeting in early February.” An overarching US DIN, of which the AUKUS group is a subset, has in fact existed for several years; it is highly secretive, however, and is almost never mentioned in the press. “The group, which represents about US\$265 billion in venture capital, brings together existing investor networks in the three countries”, C4ISRNET reports. “Heather Richman, who chairs the US DIN and is a co-chair of the AUKUS group, told C4ISRNET the network is designed to give investors a chance to ask questions, share challenges and better understand the technology needs within the national security community. Meetings will also feature discussions with defence officials from the three countries.”

Based in Palo Alto, California (home of principal US technology hub Silicon Valley), the AUKUS DIN was established in response to the call by the security agency chiefs of the “Five Eyes” countries (USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand), issued at a public conference at Stanford University in October, to ramp up domestic spending on research and development of and technical training in emerging technologies, while cutting off all business and academic joint projects with China and other designated “adversaries”.⁵ Co-founder and Chairwoman Ms Richman is a former high-level

Congressional staffer who reputedly maintains close ties with the so-called US Intelligence Community. “The AUKUS DIN doesn’t require membership dues and isn’t incorporated”, C4ISRNET reports. (Probably, one astute American observer noted to AAS, because the USA’s corporate disclosure rules would make it harder to keep its dealings secret.) “Its members range from top-tier venture funds to corporate venture groups attached to defence primes [i.e. large armaments manufacturers, collectively known as the US military-industrial complex] to individuals with little knowledge of national security investing. While its membership is comprised of [*sic*] mostly US firms, there’s a growing contingent from the other two countries. Australia, which started its network about 18 months ago, has 40 members and the UK, whose DIN was created last March, has about 80.”

Meanwhile in Australia...

Mirroring the DIN Down Under, including in terms of secrecy, is a new local outfit reportedly established last August. “Former ministers Joel Fitzgibbon and Arthur Sinodinos have embarked on an adventure together, co-chairing a business organisation aimed at taking advantage of the AUKUS defence pact”, online publication *Crikey* [reported](#) 23 January. “The two are criss-crossing the country at events to promote the organisation, AUKUS Forum, and have events entitled ‘Unleashing the regional power of AUKUS’ planned in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart in Tasmania, and in Bathurst and Broken Hill in NSW.” But whilst both men have been actively plugging the forum via social media, *Crikey* reported, “There is a strict media ban at all events”, with invitations stipulating “no media, no cameras, no mobile phone filming”.

Sinodinos, as *Crikey* notes, is a Liberal Party luminary whose “glittering CV includes roles most recently as Australia’s former ambassador to the US, former Liberal industry minister under PM Malcolm Turnbull and assistant treasurer under Tony Abbott, and before that Prime Minister John Howard’s chief of staff.” His involvement in such an operation as AUKUS Forum is not surprising given that the AAS has reported,⁶ he had in fact already been among the first in Australia to cash in on AUKUS: at the same time Morrison joined the advisory board of CNAS, and just two months after being replaced as ambassador to the USA by former Labor PM Kevin Rudd, he joined US consulting firm The Asia Group (TAG) as a partner and head of its new Australia practice. Like CNAS in 2007, TAG was also founded by Kurt Campbell, in 2013, enabling him to profit personally from the destructive geopolitical agenda he had set in motion. [The Asia Group’s press release on Sinodinos’s appointment](#) made clear he had been hired to help milk the AUKUS cash cow: “[Former] Ambassador Sinodinos’ experience in foreign service, particularly at the forefront of Australian engagement with the United States”, it stated, “provides an invaluable perspective at a time when *multilateral engagements through AUKUS, the Quad, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework are all opening new pathways for commercial engagement.*” (Emphasis added.)

More surprising is Joel Fitzgibbon’s turn. A former Labor minister who at various times held the defence and agriculture portfolios under Rudd, during and after his Parliamentary career (1996-2022) Fitzgibbon was one of the few sitting Labor MPs (let alone front-benchers) to speak out against the political and national security establishments’ post-2017 Sinophobic turn, both for the McCarthyite hysteria it engendered in the public discourse and for the damage it did to Australia’s diplomatic and all-important trade ties with China. For example, in October 2020 at the National Rural Press Club as Shadow Agriculture and Resources Minister, Fitzgibbon accused Morrison of having “started a war with China” that had sent bilateral relations to their lowest ebb in over 30 years, and demanded he include in the federal budget compensation for tariff-hit barley growers and other exporters who had been “directly affected by the poor decisions of their government”. But now that the deal is done and there’s money to be made, he’s all about “maximising Australian industry participation in the AUKUS pact”—with a finder’s fee, of course.

Then again, Fitzgibbon’s change of tune is perhaps not entirely surprising, given he began toning down his public critiques of foreign and defence policy the moment Labor won government and immediately started aping the Liberals in everything. More jarring, however, is the aboutface by former Labor Premier of Western Australia Mark McGowan. Throughout his six years as premier (2017-23), which overlapped almost precisely with the Turnbull/ Morrison government’s turn towards deliberately antagonising China to curry favour with the USA,⁷ McGowan not only lambasted the Liberals for the damage they had done to exporters, but denounced the whole China threat hypothesis as nonsense and mercilessly ridiculed its leading proponents. Memorably, in April 2022 at a trade event hosted by the Australian Chamber of Commerce in Beijing, McGowan dismissed the rantings of WA Liberal MP, now opposition defence spokesman Andrew Hastie as the result of him having “swallowed some sort of Cold War pills back ... when he was born, and he couldn’t get his mindset out of that”. And a month prior, McGowan (himself a former Navy officer) had decried then-Defence Minister, now Opposition Leader Peter Dutton’s assertion that Australia must “prepare for war” with China and would necessarily follow the USA into a conflict over Taiwan— which is to say, *the entire premise of AUKUS*—as “grossly irresponsible” and “frightening”.



Bondi Partners Joe Hockey (top right) and Richard Spencer (bottom right) meeting with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (bottom left). Photo: Bondi Partners

Yet now, McGowan too is cashing in on the drive towards war he once so vocally opposed. In October 2023, four months after he suddenly resigned as premier citing “exhaustion”, the *Australian Financial Review* reported that McGowan had signed up for no less than four private-sector gigs—one of them as an advisor to Bondi Partners, the consulting and lobbying firm of former Liberal Treasurer Joe Hockey, who more recently was Sinodinos’s predecessor as Ambassador to the USA.

Hockey too was one of the early pigs at the AUKUS trough. As investigative journalist David Hardaker reported for *Crikey* in articles published 28 March and 4 April 2023, in order to capitalise on AUKUS Hockey’s Bondi Partners had hired as its “global chairman” one Richard Spencer, formerly US Navy secretary in the Donald Trump administration. “Spencer and Bondi Partners have been early movers when it comes to AUKUS, ready to explain the detail on business opportunities within months of former PM Scott Morrison’s surprise announcement in 2021 of the then uncosted proposition.” In his 4 April article, Hardaker added that Hockey’s wife Melissa Babbage “is also at the centre of an Australian power and influence network entrenching itself in the US. Babbage, who has had an extensive career in senior banking roles, is both a Bondi Partners C-suite executive and a board member of the blue-chip business networking organisation, the American Australian Association. Hockey is on the advisory council of the association.” Bondi’s website describes McGowan’s role as “provid[ing] investment and strategic advice, drawing on his unique insights spanning diverse industries—from defence and national security to critical minerals and the clean energy transition.” Among his new colleagues at Bondi Partners are former US Navy Admiral and Director of the US National Security Agency (NSA) Mike Rogers; Mick Mulvaney, Trump’s one-time White House Chief of Staff; Emma Doyle, Trump’s Principal Deputy Chief of Staff; and Manisha Singh, Trump’s former Assistant Secretary of State in charge of intellectual property protection and sanctions policy, i.e. the handson manager of Trump’s trade war with China.

Footnotes

[1.](#) “B52s, NATO integration: Albanese courts WWII on two fronts”, AAS, 9 Nov. 2022; “[Albanese’s AUSMIN 2022 agreement paints fresh nuclear bullseyes on Australia](#)”, AAS, 14 Dec. 2022.

[2.](#) “[Australia’s designation as ‘domestic source’ for US defence industry foreshadows further erosion of sovereignty](#)”, AAS, 21 June 2023.

[3.](#) “The Canberra war pigs with their snouts in the AUKUS trough”, AAS, 25 Apr. 2023.

[4.](#) “[Morrison, Sinodinos join pigs at the AUKUS trough](#)”, AAS, 10 May 2023.

[5.](#) “Five Eyes revives ‘IP theft’ furphy ahead of Albanese’s China trip”, AAS, 25 Oct. 2023.

[6.](#) *Op. cit.* footnote 4.

[7.](#) “[The China Narrative, Part Five: All roads lead to ASIO](#)”, AAS, 23 Sept. 2020; “Veteran journo confirms ASIO engineered Australia’s China hysteria”, AAS, 26 May 2021.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 31 January 2024