

# Goodbye Australian sovereignty, hello AUKUS ‘division of labour’

As Canberra’s terminally incompetent economic managers admit they can neither afford nor organise a big enough military build-up to be ready for a war with China by their self-imposed 2027 deadline, an agency of the United States Congress has helpfully suggested a solution: A “division of labour” whereby rather than building extra nuclear submarines to sell to Australia, the US Navy would just permanently base its own here instead, while the Australian Defence Force focuses on “performing other tasks” on the USA’s behalf. Meanwhile, as politicians in both capitals continue to proclaim that AUKUS and related US “force posture” initiatives Down Under are about defending Australia, and indeed “democracy”, against putative “authoritarian” would-be aggressors (read: China), senior US Defence officials have candidly, if anonymously, acknowledged that in reality Washington sees Australia purely as a combined forward operating base, logistics hub, and source of materials and labour for its globe-spanning imperial war machine. Which is to say, a colony.

Immediately then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States) “security pact” in September 2021, the Australian Citizens Party along with various defence and strategic policy experts warned that the nuclear-powered submarines Australia was supposed to get—known as “Pillar I” of the agreement— would likely never arrive. Rather, we warned, the USA’s promise to share its vaunted nuclear naval propulsion technology was a Trojan horse for expanding and accelerating the basing concessions, access to resources, and direct influence over the structure and disposition of the Australian Defence Force that the US military had already enjoyed under the rubric of the 2014 Australia-US Force Posture Agreement, whence to “project force” (i.e., wage war) against China. The upshot of which, was that Australia had been made officially the intended staging point for World War III.<sup>1</sup>

The actions of the Albanese Labor government since it took office in May 2022 have borne out both theses, the latter by consenting in December 2022 to cede control of swathes of northern Australia to the US military, and to host strategic (i.e. nuclear-capable) bomber aircraft in Katherine, Northern Territory and nuclear submarines in Perth, Western Australia (and a yet to be determined east coast location);<sup>2</sup> and in May 2023, by agreeing that Australia be designated a US “domestic source” for resources and technologies under the *US Defence Production Act*, thereby effectively ceding control of industrial development policy to the US military-industrial complex.<sup>3</sup> And in August this year the government unveiled a draft treaty it had agreed to with the USA and UK (pending ratification by Parliament), under which Australia would bear the entire cost and all liabilities attached to the submarine project, without being guaranteed anything in return. Not only could the USA and UK deny Australia whatever particular technologies they see fit based on their own assessment that it were “reasonable” to do so, but either or both of them could also pull out of the deal altogether at any time, with one year’s notice—and keep the money—if they judged it in their best interest to do so.

As retired Royal Australian Navy submariner and former Senator Rex Patrick told the *Australian Financial Review* at the time, “We’re [already] injecting \$10 billion of taxpayers’ money to prop up the US and UK submarine enterprises, and yet we’re clearly priority three.” Given both countries’ submarine construction and maintenance programs are years behind and show no real sign of picking up no matter how much money is thrown at them, he added, the most likely result is that we will never get any submarines at all.<sup>4</sup> In the unlikely event that that was not the USA’s plan all along, it is certainly being openly discussed now.

## Racing the (imaginary) clock

From its inception AUKUS has included the continuous “rotational” basing of US (and if they are ever again made seaworthy, UK) nuclear submarines in Australia, as a stop-gap until Australia’s own eight subs—comprising three to five US-built Virginia-class boats, and the balance a new class jointly developed by the UK and Australia—make their eventual appearance, sometime between now and 2040.

Now, after hinting as much in previous reports, the latest paper on AUKUS by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS), written by senior naval analyst Ronald O’Rourke, formally proposes that Australia give up hope of ever having its own submarines at all. In light of the aforementioned production and maintenance backlogs, O’Rourke suggests instead that “An alternative to Pillar 1 as currently structured would be a US-Australia military division of labour under which US SSNs<sup>5</sup> would perform both US and Australian SSN missions.” The “forward rotations” would go ahead as planned, and “up to eight” additional *Virginia*-class subs would be built; but “these additional boats would ... be retained in US Navy service and operated out of Australia along with the five US and UK SSNs that are already planned”. Meanwhile Australia, instead of using the earmarked \$368 billion “to purchase, build, operate, and maintain its own SSNs, would instead invest those funds in other military capabilities—such as, for example, long-range anti-ship missiles, drones, loitering munitions, B-21 long-range bombers, or other long-range strike aircraft”—all, of course, to be built by the US military-

industrial complex.

The CRS proposal “has won the backing of one of Australia’s leading strategic experts, Michael Shoebridge, who said Mr O’Rourke sought to present a ‘better plan that achieves the deterrence outcomes of AUKUS but does so in a faster and more cost-effective way’”, the *Australian* reported 17 October. A co-founder and director of private consultancy Strategic Analysis Australia (SAA), Shoebridge was previously a senior analyst for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), the Defence Department-funded Canberra think tank that had to register as an agent of US influence after producing war propaganda falsely painting China as a military threat on behalf of the US government. After all, he said, “AUKUS is not actually about submarines—AUKUS is about deterring war with China by having increased military power that keeps making [President] Xi Jinping think today is not the right day.” (The right day for *what*, he did not specify.)

Shoebridge did at least backhandedly admit that Australia would never really have been in control of the AUKUS submarines anyway, by stating that “The alternative force Ronald O’Rourke sketches out with the B-21 bombers and new generation weapons and autonomous systems would be a more sovereign force than the current plan.” Then again, his praise is hardly surprising given the fact (which the *Australian* did not mention) that O’Rourke credits the proposal in large part to Shoebridge himself, in an article he published in war industry online rag/networking site *Defence Connect* in Nov. 2023. One so-called “leading strategic thinker” who is *not* happy with the proposal, however, is disgraced former Secretary for Home Affairs, previous Deputy Defence Secretary for Strategy and career warmonger Michael Pezzullo, whom the *Australian* reported “rejected Mr O’Rourke’s ‘model of keeping all of the SSNs for the US navy’”. Pezzullo’s concern however is not the complete abrogation of sovereignty that having a foreign power in control of our keystone naval capability would entail, but apparently only that we should proudly start WWII under our own flag, and as soon as possible—an issue he complained would never have arisen had we simply promised the Americans we would go to war with China alongside them at the outset, since everyone always knew that was the only point of AUKUS anyway. “Mr Pezzullo said selling SSNs to Canberra was a ‘significant strategic risk for the US, and would only continue to be supported by a president who was confident Australia would support the US in any war in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean’”, the *Australian* reported. “‘That is why AUKUS Pillar I could be suspended or terminated at any time if military necessity required it’, he said.” The “only solution”, Pezzullo declared, “is to dramatically lift production capacity and production to a rate of effort that would typically only be seen as an urgent wartime measure.... This would require US and Australian defence [per] GDP spending to lift into the 4-5 per cent range” from the current 2-3 per cent.

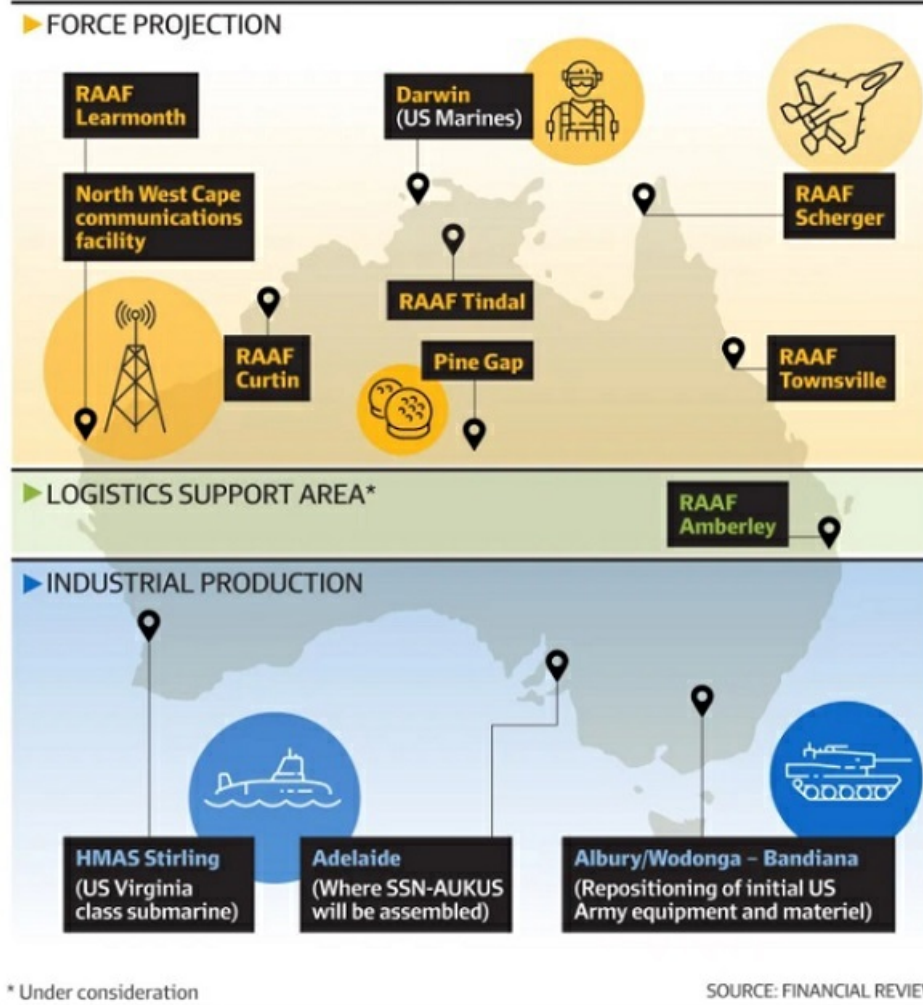
What *none* of the warhawks are happy about, is that the war materiel production they actually *are* trying in earnest to establish here, the so-called Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise (GWEO) to build various types of missiles for US and Australian use, is likewise behind schedule. They have also dropped any pretence that the project has anything to do with defending Australia. “Defence experts warn that plans to spend more than \$300 million of taxpayers’ money on a factory capable of churning out 4,000 missiles a year risks coming two years too late *for a potential showdown with China over Taiwan*”, mourned the *AFR*’s resident war cheerleader Andrew Tillett on 30 October (emphasis added). Said “experts” being current ASPI senior analyst Dr Malcolm Davis; his former boss Peter Jennings (ASPI executive director in 2011-21, now of SAA); and Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, a former Special Air Service officer and fellow professional Sinophobe.

The original GWEO plan, per the Albanese government’s US-authored 2023 *Defence Strategic Review*, was to spend \$4.1 billion supposedly to “enable Defence to acquire more long-range strike systems and manufacture longer-range munitions in Australia”. However as the *AFR* reported, the aforementioned 4,000 missiles, for a US-made “guided multiple-launch rocket system”, would comprise “roughly a quarter of global production [and] be ten times the [ADF’s] need”, and are intended primarily for American use. The factory to make them, however, will not be fully up and running until at least 2029—two years after Xi’s supposed deadline (actually invented by US military theorists as a pretext to expand their own provocations against China) to re-unify Taiwan with the rest of China by force if need be, in time for the centennial of the People’s Liberation Army. But never fear, Australia’s contribution to starting WWII is nonetheless secure: according to Defence Industry Minister Sen. Pat Conroy, “the government [has] brought forward the acquisition of other missiles and [will] build another missile factory to make Norwegian-designed naval strike missiles from 2027 near Newcastle.”

## **Brisbane Line redux**

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

How Australia's geography is indispensable to US war strategy



How the USA views Australia, according to Pentagon plans. Photo: Screenshot/AFR coverage

Meanwhile *AFR* international editor James Curran, to his great credit, gave what to this author's knowledge was the first mainstream report of what AUKUS and its related initiatives are really about on 27 October, under the headline "Three key zones: how the Pentagon sees Australia". Defence planners in Washington, wrote Curran, "now divide their strategic map of the Australian continent into three distinct, though interconnected, segments. According to a senior US military officer, Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific Affairs Ely Ratner reportedly consults this map for convenient reference to newly provided and traditional Australian resources."

Zone 1, Curran reported, "is the north of Australia, primarily in Washington's eye the site for US 'force projection'." It extends from the far northern reaches, to just south of the Tropic of Capricorn. "In this zone, Darwin and Katherine are key. In the territory capital, 2,000 US marines rotate on six-month deployments. US aircraft, eventually including B52 bombers, are stationed at the Tindal airbase near Katherine. But it would also include the coming upgrades to airfields across northern Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, at RAAF Scherger, Curtin and Learmonth bases. The intelligence facilities at Pine Gap and North West Cape, so central to US war planning and the defence of the US itself, are also critical in this northern segment." In the second zone, comprising a narrow strip across the middle of the country, "the US sees the potential for logistics hubs", wrote Curran. "While southern Australia, stretching from Perth across to south of Sydney, is the so-called 'soft underbelly', as some in the Pentagon apparently refer to it. This is for industrial production, comprising major population centres such as Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide that will support planned AUKUS submarine, frigate and munitions manufacture." Yes, you read that right: as Washington sees it, the "newly provided ... Australian resources" include the population itself—you, your friends and family, everybody you know, all mere cogs in the war machine, working like ants to provide the means of your own destruction.

## Footnotes:

[1.](#) "AUSMIN/AUKUS make Australia staging point for WWII", *AAS*, 22 Sept. 2021.

[2.](#) "Albanese's AUSMIN 2022 agreement paints fresh nuclear bullseyes on Australia", *AAS*, 14 Dec. 2022; see also "B52s, NATO integration: Albanese courts WWII on two fronts", *AAS*, 9 Nov. 2022.

[3.](#) "Australia's designation as 'domestic source' for US defence industry foreshadows further erosion of sovereignty", AAS, 23 June 2023.

[4.](#) "AUKUS and AUSMIN 'updates' accelerate countdown to war", AAS, 21 Aug. 2024.

[5.](#) The standard US/NATO abbreviation for nuclear-powered attack submarines, short for "Ship, Submersible, Nuclear".

*By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 6 November 2024*

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