

Australian government has given secret “commitments” over AUKUS pact

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9 August 2024

Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) in Washington last Wednesday had the character of a progress report on the transformation of Australia into a major hub for a US-led war against China. While crowing over the vast militarisation, including expanded US basing across all domains, the Labor government and Biden administration officials made clear more was to come.

On Thursday, the day after the AUSMIN talks, President Joe Biden sent a letter to the American Congress, revealing that a hitherto secret agreement had been reached under the militarist AUKUS pact involving the US, Britain and Australia.

The deal, Biden indicated, finalises arrangements for the transfer of sensitive “naval nuclear propulsion information” required for Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS.

Most significantly, Biden declared that the agreement, which he termed an “understanding,” included “additional related political commitments.” What they are, he and the Australian government have refused to reveal. That underscores the character of AUKUS, a cockpit for US plans for conflict with China, as a conspiracy against the most basic democratic rights and the population itself.

Critics of AUKUS have suggested that the commitments may include for Australia to act as a dumping ground for nuclear waste from the US and Britain, something previously floated in think tanks and official circles. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles has denied that is the case.

Another possibility has been raised. Condemning the secrecy surrounding the “understandings” as “outrageous” in an article this morning, leading Australian Broadcasting Corporation commentator Laura Tingle raised the possibility that they “could include how and where these vessels [the nuclear-powered submarines] are used. That is, what conflicts Australia would be expected to show up for, and how.”

In other words, even in the establishment press, the question is being raised: Has the Labor government formally committed to joining a US-led war against China?

Under Biden, the US has ratcheted up a now 14-year militarisation of the Indo-Pacific, and has deliberately inflamed specific flashpoints that could serve as a *casus belli* for war.

The Biden administration has effectively overturned the

status quo in relation to Taiwan, legitimising moves for it to declare independence, a move Beijing has stated it would be compelled to reply to militarily. Senior US generals have forecast that a war with China will be fought over Taiwan this decade. Has Labor given an undertaking to participate?

The same question could be raised over the US-instigated conflicts between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea and other potential flash points for war.

A related possibility is suggested by an article in the lead-up to the AUSMIN talks by the international editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hartcher, an ardent anti-China war hawk with the closest ties to the US and Australian national-security establishments.

Hartcher asserted that Australia had “lived under the protection of the US ‘nuclear umbrella’ since the 1960s,” i.e., US military dominance and America’s possession of a vast nuclear arsenal had protected the continent from any military threat.

But now, Hartcher claimed, the “umbrella” has “developed big holes. Behind the scenes, Australian and US officials quietly have started talking about the problem, and should again next week when Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles meet their US counterparts for the annual Ausmin consultations.”

Hartcher’s presentation of the situation turned reality on its head. Under conditions where the US has conducted a vast military build-up and is explicitly preparing for war against China because it is viewed as an economic challenge to the dominance of American capitalism, Hartcher depicted Beijing as the aggressor and warned of the dangers of Washington retreating into “isolationism.”

That was window dressing to justify what Hartcher was floating, and what he implied Australian and US officials had “started talking about.” That is the possibility of Australia acquiring its own arsenal of nuclear weapons directed against China, or, what is more likely in the short term, “‘sharing’—hosting—American nuclear weapons.”

Hartcher favorably cited Elbridge Colby, the lead author of the US National Defence Strategy of 2018, which declared that “great power competition,” primarily with Russia and China, had supplanted terrorism as the primary threat to US “national

security.” He cited Colby as saying: “We should put all the options on the table to preserve these vital Asian alliances... Non-proliferation is fantastic, but it’s not working.”

Whether the Labor government has given such commitments, in relation to joining a US war or hosting American nuclear weapons, it would only formalise the already existing facts on the ground.

The only conceivable purpose of Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, beginning with three US Virginia class vessels in the early 2030s, is to conduct offensive operations in the Indo-Pacific, up to the waters off China’s coastline. Everything said by Australian and US officials, moreover, has made clear that whatever their nominal flag, the submarines will operate as joint US-Australian assets.

And, under Labor, Australia is already hosting US strike assets that are capable of carrying nuclear weapons. That includes America’s own fleet of nuclear-powered and capable submarines, as well as plans for stationing its B-52 strategic bombers in northern Australia.

Because the US has a policy of never confirming or denying which of its nuclear-capable assets is actually carrying the weapons of mass destruction, there is every possibility that American nuclear weapons have already been “rotated” through Australia.

In the AUSMIN press conference, Defence Minister Marles highlighted the growth of the US Marine force in the northern city of Darwin to 2,500 and plans for the transformation of Perth Stirling Naval base, into a hub for US and British nuclear-powered submarines by 2027. He declared, “But in fact, that force posture lay down of the United States in Australia is across all domains.” That is military jargon to indicate that de facto US basing is underway involving fighter jets, bombers, warships and land forces.

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin noted that it was the third annual AUSMIN talks under the current Labor government, “and each time we’ve made historic strides and strengthened our alliance.” In his remarks after the meeting, Austin declared that the US would expand its presence of “rotational” forces in Australia even further. “This will mean more maritime patrol aircraft and reconnaissance aircraft operating from bases across northern Australia. It will also mean more frequent rotational bomber deployments.”

Among the announcements from the meeting was that Australia is testing a Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile (HACM) with the United States, which it will consider fielding as its first hypersonic weapon for fighter jets. That underscores the fact that AUKUS entails much more than nuclear-powered submarines, but includes other advanced weaponry that would be integral to a large-scale modern war.

The AUSMIN statement declared that Australia and the US will begin co-manufacturing guided missiles next year, including the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) used in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in

Ukraine.

The statement was the first AUSMIN document to mention the Cocos Islands, an Australian territory in the Indian Ocean, whose airfield is being expanded to accommodate major military aircraft in a move hailed by the US.

Further steps were taken in meshing the alliance with the broader US network of aggressive arrangements, all directed at Beijing. Japanese forces will increasingly exercise with US Marines in Darwin.

Perhaps most provocatively, the statement declared that Australia and the US would hold regular exercises in the Philippines exclusive economic zone. Under conditions where the aggressive actions of the Philippines, encouraged by Washington, have resulted in actual clashes with Chinese forces over disputed territory in the South China Sea, such exercises threaten war.

The AUSMIN document brought forward the full gamut of US accusations and denunciations of China, all of them fraudulently presenting Beijing as the aggressor and thus providing the pretext for the hostile actions of Washington and its allies. Previous diplomatic and military protocols of not referring to a potential adversary by name have now been dispensed with.

This barrage of denunciation against China was linked to the broader US war drive globally, including condemnations of Iran in the Middle East, against whom Washington and the fascistic Israeli regime are threatening conflict, and Russia, with whom America is already in a de facto war in Ukraine.

The AUSMIN talks were another warning that this program threatens a world war that would inevitably involve nuclear weapons, threatening the very existence of humanity. That danger can only be halted by the development of an international anti-war movement of the working class, directed against the source of conflict, the outmoded capitalist system itself, and all the governments that defend it, including the Labor government in Australia.



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