

AUKUS documents underscore advanced plans for war against China

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Previously undisclosed documents were tabled in the Australian parliament on Monday, revealing a new AUKUS military treaty signed by the governments of the US, UK and Australia in Washington on August 5 to prepare for war against China.

Drafted in secrecy, behind the backs of each of their populations, the AUKUS “Agreement” and associated “Understanding” mark another step toward a potentially catastrophic nuclear conflict, with Australia as a crucial war-fighting base.

There had been no mention of the new treaty by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles, Foreign Minister Penny Wong, or their US counterparts Lloyd Austin and Antony Blinken, after their latest annual Australia-US Ministerial Consultation talks in Maryland on August 4.

Nevertheless, the Albanese Labor government hailed the agreement in parliament. Marles, who is also deputy prime minister, said it was a major AUKUS milestone and came on top of “significant progress,” including the passage of enabling legislation in the US.

The 37 pages of agreements and attachments primarily cover the transfer of US and UK nuclear-powered submarines and technology to Australia. They constitute only one part of the AUKUS alliance. But they establish what is described as a “legally-binding framework” for the “enhanced trilateral security partnership.”

The overall AUKUS pact also involves the basing of US and UK nuclear-armed submarines in Australia, the acquisition of hypersonic long-range missiles and other weaponry, and ever-wider US military access to bases and facilities across the continent.

Although the documents relate directly to just the submarine aspect of AUKUS, they have a wider military and political significance. First, their details shed further light on the preparations for a war against China, long before the initial US and UK submarines and/or technology are scheduled to be delivered in the 2030s.

For example, clauses permit the US and UK to halt or suspend their transfers of submarines or submarine-building capacity to Australia, if that would “adversely affect the ability of the United States and the United Kingdom to meet their

respective military requirements” or “constitute an unreasonable risk” to their “defense and security.”

Corporate media commentary has sought to link these provisions to concerns about delays in the submarine construction projects in the US and UK. But they evidently allude to the likelihood of war being instigated against China before the 2030s. Military commanders in both the US and UK have emphasised the necessity to be ready for such a war.

China is not specifically mentioned in the documents tabled in the Australian parliament, but it is obviously the target. The AUKUS arrangements not only provide the US with a strategic platform for a war throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region. They also facilitate the return of the military forces of British imperialism to the region, further encircling and seeking to subjugate China.

Second, the documents underscore the escalating commitment of the Labor government to the US-led offensive against China which Washington, under both the Trump and Biden-Harris administrations, has designated as the existential threat to the global power that the US assumed through World War II.

By signing this latest agreement, Labor has gone beyond the previous Morrison Liberal-National Coalition government that first entered into the AUKUS pact in 2021 with the assured bipartisan backing of then Labor opposition.

Marles boasted that Labor was delivering AUKUS, which had been “not much more than a thought bubble” under the Morrison government.

Two provisions, in particular, show how far the Albanese government is prepared to go to ensure that Australia has a frontline role in trying to maintain the global and regional hegemony of US imperialism, on which the Australian ruling class has relied since the last world war.

One clause shields the US and UK from any liability for damage or injury caused by the “nuclear risks” produced by the agreement, including any linked to the three second-hand Virginia-class submarines to be supplied by the US.

Specifically it “requires Australia to indemnify the UK and the US against any liability, loss, costs, damage, or injury (including third-party claims) arising out of, related to, or resulting from Nuclear Risks (risks attributable to the

radioactive, toxic, explosive or other hazardous properties of materials) connected with the design, manufacture, assembly, transfer, or utilisation of any material or equipment, including naval nuclear propulsion plants, parts thereof, or spare parts transferred or to be transferred pursuant to the Agreement.”

Another clause makes Australia responsible for dealing with all the toxic waste generated by the AUKUS submarines.

This covers “the management, disposition, storage, and disposal of any spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste resulting from the operation of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Plants transferred pursuant to this Article, including radioactive waste generated through submarine operations, maintenance, decommissioning, and disposal.”

Immense secrecy will continue to shroud all these arrangements. Last week, US President Joe Biden partially revealed the existence of the new agreement in a letter to the US Congress. He referred to a non-legally binding “understanding” that provided “additional related political commitments.”

Clearly the documents tabled on Monday do not contain all these unspecified “political commitments.” On the contrary, they insist that every aspect of the agreement must be covered by secrecy laws to protect “classified information” and “TOP SECRET” material.

The agreement insists on “the sensitivity of naval nuclear propulsion information, the associated nuclear material and equipment, and the restrictions on use and dissemination of nuclear information, material and equipment under US law.”

This secrecy extends all the way down to “every contract, sub-contract, consultant agreement, or other arrangement entered into by any Party or government agency or government corporation,” relating to the submarines.

In the name of “national security,” these stipulations seek to keep the details hidden from public scrutiny. Mindful of the widespread opposition to AUKUS, to which the Labor government has allocated \$368 billion for the submarines alone over the coming decades, the agreement notes, with approval, that there has been no “public consultation” on the pact.

However, the state and territory governments, all Labor except for one, had been “consulted.”

The agreement also specifies that no “legislation, regulations, or legislative instruments” are required to activate the agreement. That avoids even parliamentary review as much as possible. As is customary for treaties, this one will need to be ratified by parliament, but that is guaranteed by the bipartisan lineup.

The agreement is also contingent on Australia and the US remaining in the post-World War II ANZUS alliance, and on the US and UK staying in NATO. Any departure from these US-led alliances, which are integral to the US offensive against both Russia and China, is highly unlikely, but the treaty makes this allegiance a formal prerequisite.

Like the Coalition, the Labor government is seeking to

mislead the public on every feature of AUKUS. Marles said the new agreement “expressly rules out enriching uranium or reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in Australia” and prevents AUKUS partners from any activity that would contravene the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

While the agreement pays lip service to abiding by the NPT and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) protocols to verify that there is no diversion of nuclear material for the production of nuclear weapons, it states that such diversion could occur if “decided in writing by the Parties.”

The documents leave the program’s costs unspecified, to be “mutually decided” at a later time. That raises the prospect of the costs blowing out beyond the allocated \$368 billion, which includes spending \$10 billion or more to subsidise submarine production in the US and UK.

The Australian Greens’ spokesperson for defence, David Shoebridge, criticised the agreement from a reactionary nationalist perspective. He said he had “never seen such an irresponsible one-sided international agreement signed by an Australian government... Every aspect of this agreement is a blow to Australian sovereignty.”

While seeking to exploit anti-war sentiment, the Greens have no opposition to a US war against China. Their only proviso is that it should be conducted, if at all possible, in a manner that protects and boosts the interests of Australian imperialism, which has its own predatory record of plunder in the Indo-Pacific.

Regardless of their differences with the Labor government, the Greens are looking to prop up a likely minority Labor government after the impending federal election, as they did with the Gillard government from 2010 to 2013. They applauded when Gillard signed up to US President Barack Obama’s “pivot” to Asia, a vast military build-up in the region directed against China.

Above all, as a capitalist party, the Greens are hostile to the only way that the plunge into a third world war can be halted—the independent mobilisation of the international working class on a socialist program against all the governments and the root cause of war—the capitalist profit system itself.



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