

Australia announces \$7 billion missile purchase for war against China

Oscar Grenfell
23 October 2024

The Australian Labor government suddenly announced on Tuesday that it will purchase \$7 billion worth of sophisticated missiles from the US. The acquisition is the latest in a series of measures involving the transformation of Australia and its military into a frontline force for a US-led war against China.

That purpose was underscored by the venue for the announcement. Labor's defence industry minister Pat Conroy revealed the purchase at a press conference in Washington. As with every plank of the military build-up, there was not even the semblance of a public discussion or a mandate before the spend was revealed.

The missiles are of a plainly offensive character. They are the Standard Missile 2 Block IIC and Standard Missile 6, which will be fitted to the Australian navy's existing Hobart class destroyers and subsequently its Hunter class frigates.

The missiles are manufactured by the US weapons company Raytheon. Conroy indicated, however, that the sale had received "Congressional approval," in the last of what he described as a series of US government approvals.

Under conditions of warnings from the US national-security establishment over inadequate American missile production, the sale underscores the importance the American government has assigned to the expansion of the Australian military amid the escalating confrontation with China.

The Standard Missile 2 Block IIC are medium-range, surface-to-air missiles.

Raytheon describes the newly-developed SM 6 as "three missiles in one. It's the only weapon that can perform anti-air warfare, anti-surface warfare and ballistic missile defense or sea-based terminal missions." The company boasts that "because it offers navies more flexibility in limited ship space, it's enabling the U.S. and its allies to cost-effectively increase the offensive might

of surface forces."

In his press conference, Conroy made similar statements, touting the missiles as "the best in the world." He described the SM 6 as "long-range," and hailed the fact that it had an "offensive" capability."

Those comments prompted one reporter to ask why Australia was in need of such "long range" capabilities. In reply, Conroy declared: "we live in a missile age. We live in the greatest arms race in our region since 1945 with a high degree of strategic uncertainty."

The reference to 1945, i.e., the end of World War II, underscores that the imperialist powers are once again preparing for a major war. It is they who are conducting the vast military build-up, globally, and in the Indo-Pacific.

The target of the announcement was so obvious that one journalist asked Conroy how China would react to the deal. He essentially refused to answer. Another reporter asked for scenarios in which such missiles would be used. Conroy nervously said that he would "need to be careful about hypotheticals," before vaguely attempting to present the acquisitions as largely defensive in nature.

In reality, the missile purchase dovetails with offensive plans for conflict with China, sketched out by the US and its allies including Australia over the past decade. That includes the imposition of "area denial" in Indo-Pacific waterways, including to block the vast flows of Chinese trade that pass through narrow shipping lanes north of Australia.

The US, moreover, has systematically inflamed major flashpoints. That includes its promotion of Taiwanese separatism and its stoking of territorial disputes between China and its South East Asian neighbours in the South China Sea. Actual clashes have broken out between Chinese and Philippine forces over the past year.

As Conroy repeatedly stated in his announcement, the missile purchase is in line with Australia's Defence

Strategic Review (DSR) of 2023, and the 2024 National Defence Strategy, which formally adopted its recommendations. The DSR insisted that the Australian military had to be restructured with capabilities for “impactful projection” throughout the Indo-Pacific. It highlighted the likelihood of regional conflict, and also advocated preparations for “area denial,” littoral and maritime conflict.

While all branches of the military are being equipped with missile capabilities, a particular source of concern in strategic circles has been warnings that the navy is not prepared for such a war.

In February, Labor announced that Australia’s fleet of warships will increase from 11 currently to 26. The overhaul will increase the number of planned vertical missile cells from 432 to 702. In addition to the latest missile purchase, Labor has previously announced purchases of Tomahawk and Naval Strike Missiles.

This is part of a full-scale military build-up. It includes the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact with the US and UK, as well as a vast expansion of bases in the country, particularly in the north and west. These are increasingly hosting the most potent US strike capabilities, such as nuclear-weapons capable B-52 bombers.

The costs involved are vast. The AUKUS nuclear submarine program is earmarked at \$368 billion alone. Some \$16 billion to \$21 billion have been allocated to domestic military manufacturing, including missiles, while another \$30 billion are for off-the-shelf acquisitions, such as the Raytheon missiles.

Labor has boosted defence spending to more than \$50 billion annually, a figure that it has said will increase by a cumulative \$50 billion over the decade. But with many of the programs not yet budgeted, it is inevitable that the true sums will be far greater, meaning a stepped-up offensive against essential social services such as health and education to pay for war.

Conroy’s international trip underscored Australia’s increasing involvement in all fronts of the developing US-led global war. The missile purchase was in line with its central role in the confrontation with China. But Conroy noted that such missiles had also been used against Houthi rebel forces from Yemen in the Red Sea, an operation, in which Australia has also participated, in support of the Israeli genocide.

Prior to his visit to Washington, Conroy was in Britain, where he promoted the deepening of trilateral military ties with Britain and the US under AUKUS, a cockpit for

militarisation and war planning.

On October 17 and 18, Conroy participated in an expanded NATO Defence Ministers’ Meeting in Belgium, which plotted a further escalation of the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. A particular focus of the gathering was to involve Indo-Pacific powers, including Australia, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand in the conflict with Moscow.

In hailing their participation, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte proclaimed: “The war in Ukraine has shown that instability in Europe can have far reaching consequences across the world, and that countries thousands of miles away—as far away as Iran, China and even North Korea—can become security spoilers in our own backyard. Our world is closely linked—and so is our security.”

Rutte’s comments turned reality upside down, depicting the targets of US and NATO aggression as its instigators. But they underscored the way in which the strategists of imperialism are increasingly linking the different theaters of global war, in the Middle East, Europe and the Indo-Pacific, into a single world conflict.

In Europe, Conroy announced that Australia would donate 49 Abrams tanks to Ukraine. At a value of \$245 million, that is Australia’s largest single contribution to the Ukrainian war effort yet, bringing the total to \$1.3 billion. Under conditions where the fascistic Ukrainian regime has been given the greenlight by the US and NATO to conduct offensive operations into Russia, a previous redline that could trigger nuclear war, the Labor government is contributing to the threat of a catastrophe throughout Europe, at the same time as it is involved in preparing another in the Indo-Pacific.

The announcements again show that the fight against war means a political struggle against the Labor government, as part of building an international anti-war movement of the working class directed against the source of surging imperialist militarism, the capitalist system itself.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact