

Australian government announces missile building program as US steps up war drive against China

Oscar Grenfell
31 March 2021

Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday announced that his government would begin a \$1 billion program to build missiles in Australia, for the first time since the 1960s, in close collaboration with the US administration of President Joseph Biden.

The project was foreshadowed last June, when Morrison's government unveiled a massive \$270 billion spend on military hardware over this decade, taking total military expenditure to \$575 billion in the next 10 years. At the time, emphasis was placed on the acquisition of missiles and other strike capabilities from abroad, including the purchase last year of 200 long-range, anti-ship missiles from the US.

Yesterday, however, the government declared that it would "accelerate" the creation of a "Sovereign Guided Weapons Enterprise." This would encompass the establishment of a missile production facility and other military hardware development, spelt out in a "Defence National Manufacturing Priority roadmap," which also calls for the construction of unmanned drones.

A government press release, detailing the plans, pointed to the dangers of supply chain disruptions, stemming from events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and escalating trade war conflicts as motivating factors for the haste of the project, as well as what was vaguely described as a "changing global environment."

Defence Minister Peter Dutton, who was only installed in the post this week, as part of a broader Cabinet reshuffle, was more explicit. "The manufacturing and supply of weapons in Australia will not only benefit and enhance our ADF operational capacity, but will ensure we have adequate supply of weapon stock holdings to sustain combat operations if global supply chains are disrupted," he stated.

In other words, the project is part of preparations for a major war, and not in the distant future. The clear target is China.

In the first two months of his presidency, Biden has ratcheted up a conflict with Beijing, which was initiated by Obama and further accelerated under the Trump administration. Biden is inflaming regional flashpoints, especially Taiwan, waging a hypocritical campaign over Chinese human rights violations

and engaging in "alliance building" aimed at furthering the encirclement of China.

Over recent weeks, this has included a push by the US for the stationing of offensive missiles, previously banned by the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, within striking distance of China, including in Japan and Taiwan. Biden officials have also hailed Taiwan's initiation of its own missile building program, at the same time as they have forecast a possible war between China and the island state within the next five years.

Dutton's comments made clear that the Australian missile build is part and parcel of this broader offensive.

The latest announcement, he said, flowed out of AUSMIN talks last July, between Australian government ministers and top US representatives, including Trump's anti-China hawk Mike Pompeo, who was then secretary of state. And now, Dutton stated, "We will work closely with the United States on this important initiative to ensure that we understand how our enterprise can best support both Australia's needs and the growing needs of our most important military partner."

Morrison formally launched the program at US arms manufacturer Raytheon's Joint Centre for Integration in Adelaide. He also announced a \$111 million "sustainment" fund for the US company, which is preparing to produce its own National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System in Australia, as part of a separate project.

To signal the speed of the missile build, Morrison declared, "we are bringing 2045 forward to now."

Those corporate journalists present did not ask a single question about the purpose of the project or the danger of war, but focused entirely on repeatedly demanding to know where the new facility would be located. This was in line with the government's attempts to present the planned missile facility as a driver of "job creation," even though ministers have stated that a maximum of 2,000 people, most with expertise in the weapons sector, will be given employment.

Morrison, however, volunteered the broader agenda, declaring, "we have augmented what our broader strategic outlook is, and that involved bringing forward the capability for

longer-range strike and that's what this capability is about." This was part of a "coordinated and comprehensive plan" that "meshes together with our alliance partners as well, particularly the United States..."

The PM placed the missile project in the context of recent steps towards formalising the "Quad," a de facto alliance of the most powerful militaries in the Pacific, the US, Japan, India and Australia, directed against China. In US and Australian think-tanks, the consolidation of the alliance is presented as a key step towards preparing for conflict.

Arms companies, including Raytheon and BAE will now bid for a government contract for the facility, which is slated to produce long and medium-range missiles, and could transition to the next generation of weapons in the sector. Australia has already partnered with the US to test and develop air-launched hypersonic cruise missiles, that fly eight times faster than the speed of sound.

The missile project and its implications have received scant attention in the official press. This is all the more striking, given the description of the plan by Greg Sheridan, the foreign editor of the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, who has extensive connections to the US and Australian military and intelligence establishments.

Sheridan this morning insisted that, "The Morrison government's decision to establish a missile manufacturing industry is one of our nation's most important strategic decisions in decades." It was necessary to be "watchful of the distance between announcement and delivery," but for the first time in fifteen years, the defence ministry was proceeding with "real urgency."

The project, Sheridan stated, increases Australia's "ability to hit any potential enemy and to keep it at a distance, and our ability to support the US militarily if necessary in this region."

Sheridan called for the government to press ahead with its crisis-ridden project of building 12 Attack Class submarines, but made clear that he was forecasting conflict far-sooner than 2034, when they are slated to be operational. "Bureaucrats and certain types of military planners are always dreaming of technology two generations away, because they have no sense at all that they could face a crisis tomorrow," Sheridan wrote.

In an article a week ago, which was clearly part of the discussion leading up to the announcement, Sheridan advocated a rapid build-up of military capabilities for imminent war. "[L]ast year the government announced we were going to buy from the 200 US long-range anti-ship missiles. That's a good purchase. But it's a tiny number. If a conflict starts at 9am on a Monday, 200 missiles should get us through to morning tea on Thursday. After that we're stuffed."

Representatives of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a hawkish think-tank funded by the Australian and American governments and arms manufacturers, also welcomed the announcement. One was asked on 3AW Radio whether there would be a war between China and Taiwan within five years,

responding that this was probable, adding: "If the United States then intervenes to assist Taiwan, it would be highly likely that Australia would assist the United States in that scenario."

The Labor Party opposition fully supports these plans for a catastrophic war, with its leader Anthony Albanese declaring yesterday: "Australia does need to be more resilient when it comes to our defence, and this announcement is part of that. This is a bipartisan issue." At its just concluded national conference, Labor passed a series of resolutions, denouncing China and promoting the pretexts for US-led aggression against it.

It was the Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who, in 2011, placed Australia on the frontline of the US war drive against China. Gillard hosted Obama, as he announced the "pivot to Asia," which included a massive US military build-up in the Asia-Pacific, from the floor of the Australian parliament. She signed a series of agreements, including for the establishment of a new US military base in the northern city of Darwin.

Australia is to play a crucial role in a US conflict with China, centring on cutting off Chinese supply lines that pass through the sea lanes of South East Asia and the Pacific, and operating as a "southern anchor" for US offensive operations against the Chinese mainland. The missile program is part of those strategic plans.

These preparations, which have the support of the entire political and media establishment, are being conducted behind the backs of the population.

For the past six weeks, official Australian politics has centred on diversionary sexual misconduct scandals, involving the Morrison government. Corporate journalists have poured over the details and sharply condemned the response of the government to the various allegations. Not one of them has voiced a word of opposition, or even criticism, over the increasingly evident preparations for war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact