Australian PM touts sweeping character of AUKUS pact aimed at preparing war with China

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In a speech on Wednesday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison touted the AUKUS alliance, unveiled by the United States, Britain and Australia last September, as a comprehensive agreement that would see stepped-up military and intelligence cooperation across the board between the three countries. While he did not mention the words "China" or "Beijing," nobody is in doubt as to the target of the new initiative, which is explicitly focused on the Indo-Pacific region.

The forum for Morrison's address was itself significant. He was speaking at the Sydney Dialogue of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), billed as a "world-first summit for emerging, critical and cyber technologies."

ASPI, a think tank funded by the US and Australian governments, along with major arms dealers, has been one of the most hawkish voices in official discussions regarding the mounting US-led confrontation with China. Its representatives are frequently featured in the corporate media, where they make dire warnings about supposed Chinese aggression and "foreign interference," without any reference to ASPI's sources of funding.

Morrison's speech, which included effusive thanks to the think tank and its directors, underscored its character as an adjunct of the government and the intelligence agencies.

While the address focused on government initiatives relating to advanced technologies, its most significant sections were those which framed the purpose of this expenditure and outlined the nature of the AUKUS pact.

Morrison stressed that the agreement was "about much more than nuclear submarines." As AUKUS was announced, the Australian government declared that it was scrapping a $90 billion contract with France for the construction of a new fleet of diesel-powered submarines, and would instead construct nuclear-fuelled vessels, using technology shared by the US.

The abrupt scuttling of the previous submarine contract has provoked a sharp diplomatic clash between Australia and France, which has been the subject of substantial coverage in the Australian press.

But Morrison emphasised that the turn to nuclear-powered subs was only one component of a far-broader "partnership where, guided by our enduring ideals and shared commitment to the international rules-based order, for democratic freedoms, we have resolved to deepen our diplomatic, security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific."

The reference to a "rules-based order" is code for ensuring Washington's continued hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region, while the defence of "democratic freedoms" against "authoritarian China" is among the chief pretexts for the US-led aggression targeting Beijing.

The turn to nuclear submarines was bound up with the role that Australia would play in a US war with China, as a southern anchor and a strike force aimed at securing control of key Indo-Pacific shipping lanes that Beijing depends upon for its trade. The nuclear vessels are superior to their diesel counterparts in stealth, speed, endurance and range.

In addition to the arms build-up, Morrison said AUKUS would "see Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States promote deeper information sharing; foster greater integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases and supply chains; and strengthen our cooperation in advanced and critical technologies and capabilities."

This will be on top of the already extensive military-intelligence collaboration between the three nations, as longstanding military allies and members of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network. AUKUS circumvents and stands above those broader multilateral bodies, with Five Eyes partners New Zealand and Canada excluded.

AUKUS, Morrison said, "will involve exchanges of information, personnel, and advanced technologies and capabilities; joint planning, capability development and acquisitions; joint collaboration in science and technology; and developing common and complementary security and defence-related science and industrial bases. It's a big agenda."

Previously touted initiatives have included an expansion of US access to existing Australian bases, and the possibility of a greater number of US troops being stationed on the continent. Morrison said there would be reports back to the respective governments on the collaboration under way, 90 days after the

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AUKUS announcement was made, meaning sometime in late December.

In line with the focus of the ASPI conference, Morrison dwelt on initiatives relating to advanced technologies, especially in the quantum field. These have significance for the waging of a physical war in the 21st century, as well as cyber-conflict. The Australian government has claimed that the country is already under sustained cyber attack from entities in China, without providing any evidence.

Documents published by US whistleblower Edward Snowden and Julian Assange of WikiLeaks have demonstrated that Washington and its allies are engaged in the largest spying campaigns, and are also the chief global purveyors of Malware and other offensive cyber operations.

Morrison outlined a $70 million spend on a new Quantum Commercialisation Hub in Australia, to be operated jointly with the US. The prime minister touted the commercial opportunities that this would supposedly provide, including in sectors such as mining and finance.

But the program has a clear military-intelligence thrust. Morrison noted that talks with the US in September had focused on "Detailed horizon scanning and mapping, with an immediate focus on supply chain security for semiconductors and their vital components, as well as exploring opportunities for cooperation on advanced bio-technologies."

The majority of the world's semiconductor chips, crucial to most modern technologies, including mobile phones, computers and a host of appliances, are produced in Taiwan, still formally a part of China. That is one factor in the increasing US provocations Washington is carrying out against Beijing, in collaboration with Taipei. More broadly, the quantum program will focus on "supply chain threats," one of which would be war.

Morrison outlined nine critical technologies, which would be designated for increased national security scrutiny and review, including artificial intelligence, 5G and 6G technology and quantum computing. In addition to subjecting the work of scientists and academic researchers to intrusive and anti-democratic state scrutiny, the listing recalls the 2017 Australian government intervention, banning the Chinese-based Huawei company from operating the country's 5G network. Under a blueprint, released alongside Morrison's speech, Australia would seek out technology providers that "best align with our needs."

The day after Morrison's speech, the US and Australia released a joint agreement on collaboration in advanced technologies, which further emphasised the aggressive character of the initiatives, both in terms of military preparations and trade war measures. The two countries would "protect sensitive technologies for which there are national security implications" while seeking to develop a "trusted global quantum marketplace and the necessary secure supply chain through the engagement of the private sector and industry consortia," i.e., a "marketplace" dominated by the US and its allies.

In his speech, Morrison also touted the Quad, a de facto military alliance between the four largest armed powers of the Indo-Pacific, Australia, the US, Japan and India, unmistakably directed against China. Indian President Narendra Modi was also a featured speaker at the ASPI event.

Morrison's speech was delivered in the midst of a controversy touched off by the National Press Club address of former Prime Minister Paul Keating earlier this month. He warned that AUKUS was creating the conditions for a catastrophic military conflict, exposed some of the pretexts used to justify Washington's aggression against China, and insisted that Australia would have no interest in a war over control of Taiwan.

Keating was speaking for a section of the ruling elite, fearful of the economic consequences of war with China, Australia's major trading partner, and the mass popular opposition that such a conflict would provoke. His only answer was to plead for the US to reach a modus vivendi with Beijing, by making concessions to its growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Keating had no analysis of the drumbeat to war, which has escalated under every US administration over the past decade. In reality, the threat of conflict is driven by the historic decline of American capitalism, which the US ruling elite is seeking to offset with its military might, and the underlying contradictions of the global profit system, accelerated dramatically by the pandemic.

The response to Keating's speech has underscored the unreality of his perspective and the imminent threat of a conflict. Defence Minister Peter Dutton declared it was "inconceivable" that Australia would not join a US-led war with China over Taiwan.

Senior Labor Party representatives rushed to disavow Keating, and to stress their full-throated commitment to AUKUS and the preparations for war. Labor leader Anthony Albanese declared that his party's first principle of foreign policy was the alliance with the US.

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