

Australian government announces largest military expansion since Vietnam War

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Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced Thursday a plan to increase the size of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) by 30 percent over the next 18 years.

When implemented, the country's permanent military ranks would swell from 59,000 to almost 80,000, with a further 21,000 otherwise employed by the Department of Defence. This would be the largest increase in the size of the armed forces since the Vietnam War. It is a major stepping up of the growth already set down in the 2020 Force Structure Plan.

The announcement shows that the government is preparing for large-scale conflict in the Indo-Pacific region, effectively placing the country on a war footing.

The personnel expansion is expected to cost "at least" \$38 billion, on top of existing plans to increase military spending to \$578 billion over ten years, including \$270 billion on new military hardware.

Morrison said "we need a bigger ADF with more soldiers, sailors and airmen to operate the cutting-edge capabilities we're getting to protect Australia." This was necessary because "our world is becoming increasingly uncertain."

In fact, there is nothing defensive about the rapid expansion of the country's military, which is aimed at deepening Australia's integration into the war plans of US imperialism. Growing "uncertainty" in the region is the result of US-led preparations for war with China. Washington sees the very growth in the Chinese economy as the main threat to its dominance in Asia and globally.

Since the Obama administration announced its "pivot to Asia" in November 2011, the US has dramatically stepped up its presence in the region, expanding bases in Guam, Australia and the Philippines, strengthening alliances and conducting provocative military exercises

in the South China Sea.

The ramping up of Australian military expenditure is to prepare for a major role in conflicts with China, in order to assist the US drive for global hegemony and bolster the strategic and economic interests of Australian imperialism.

Morrison's announcement came within hours of the US House of Representatives passing a budget containing a record \$US782 billion for the military.

Like the Biden administration, Morrison's Liberal-National Coalition government has seized upon the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an opportunity to escalate a planned military buildup. On Monday, the prime minister announced plans to build a \$10 billion base for US, UK and Australian nuclear-powered submarines on Australia's east coast.

While the primary focus of the military expansion is China, Morrison was quick to commit \$105 million to the war against Russia, including \$70 million for lethal weapons, confirming Australia is ready to play a critical role in US-led wars anywhere on the globe.

Morrison said the expansion would centre around "building the capabilities associated with our trilateral security partnership between Australia, United Kingdom and United States (AUKUS)."

The AUKUS alliance, announced last September, will allow the US greater access to Australian military facilities, further transforming the country into a base for US operations. The pact includes equipping Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, the only purpose of which would be long-range operations off the coast of China.

AUKUS was condemned by Beijing as a serious threat to "regional peace and stability." A "senior Chinese military expert" warned in the *Global Times* the deal made "Australia a potential target for a nuclear

strike.”

While every announcement of greater defence spending is couched in terms of “national security” and “protecting our people,” the reality is every additional dollar expended edges closer to the brink of war between nuclear-armed powers.

The latest announcement is part of a push to increase Australia’s capacity for high-tech warfare. Defence Minister Peter Dutton told the press conference: “It will mean we can build warfighting capabilities in the domains of space, and information and cyber.”

There is not a hair’s breadth between the Coalition and Labor. Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese has rushed to assure the Australian and US ruling elite that a government he leads would be even more hawkish than the Coalition.

The *Australian’s* columnist Greg Sheridan noted this week: “The Opposition Leader makes no criticism of the government from the left.”

Albanese used a speech at the Lowy Institute on Thursday to chastise the Morrison government for “an enduring focus on announcements but not on the delivery of them.” The Labor leader pledged to commit more than 2 percent of Australia’s gross domestic product to the military and ensure the ADF “has the resources it needs to defend Australia and deter potential aggressors.”

While Albanese criticised the Coalition for being too slow to build military capacity, Labor’s primary thrust on “national security” is the need for “maximum bipartisan consensus.” All Morrison’s initiatives to boost the military have Labor’s full support.

While ever-increasing billions are committed to finance militarism and war, victims of recent floods in Queensland and New South Wales have been abandoned.

The federal government has offered a pittance—\$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child—to people who have lost everything in the floods. Having received no advance warning of the impending floods, thousands of people waited hours, even days, for help that never came. Were it not for the self-sacrificing actions of ordinary people, hundreds, if not thousands, would have died.

Days after the floodwaters receded, “help” finally arrived, in the form of thousands of military personnel, who, according to local accounts, have done little to aid the clean-up effort. The real purpose of this deployment

is to normalise the presence of the military in civilian life, amid mounting social unrest.

In one crisis after another, including the catastrophic 2019–20 bushfires, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the floods, the clear message from government to the working class is “you’re on your own.”

The logic of this was spelled out in an *Australian Financial Review* editorial this week, calling for the doubling of military spending and an end to the “addiction” of the political system to “promising more money for endless worthy causes.”

As always, the working class will not only be the casualties of war they will be forced to pay for it.

Wracked with domestic social, economic and political crises, and threatened by the rise of China as a global economic power, American imperialism is determined to assert its dominance through war. Labor, the Coalition and the Greens are all committed to the US-led war drive, both as a loyal ally, and as a means to further the interests of Australian capitalism.

Australian capitalism is beset with the similar internal crises. Class tensions are mounting as cost-of-living increases outstrip wages and governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, demonstrate in an endless string of disasters that they will not protect the health and lives of the population.

The working class has no interest in being dragged into the barbarism of imperialist war. Instead, workers and youth should join their class brothers and sisters around the world to build a unified anti-war movement of the working class.

Opposition to the relentless expansion of military forces and the drive to war must be based on a socialist perspective and a struggle against capitalism, the root cause of war.



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