

# AUKUS pact expanded to base hypersonic missiles in Australia

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On the eve of calling a federal election, Prime Minister Scott Morrison this week took another critical step to placing Australia on the frontline of US preparations for war against China.

Morrison heralded a major expansion of last September's AUKUS military pact, an agreement that has bipartisan support from the opposition Labor Party, which is equally committed to the intensifying US military alliance.

In a joint statement, Morrison, US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared that the AUKUS treaty between the three governments would be extended to include the development of "advanced hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities" and electronic warfare technologies.

Land-based hypersonic missiles, which would have a range of more than 2,000 kilometres, would be stationed in Australia, while air and sea versions could be deployed on the country's jet fighters and warships.

This would make Australia an even more crucial base for the US, from which to launch a potential nuclear war against China, which is regarded by Washington as the chief threat to US global dominance.

Hypersonic missiles are capable of travelling at least five times the speed of sound, dramatically reducing the warning time. Coupled with their manoeuvrability, this makes them virtually impossible to intercept. They can carry nuclear warheads.

No price tag was mentioned. But these programs would require the spending of billions more dollars, on top of the near \$600 billion already allocated for Australian military weaponry over the current decade.

Bloomberg reported last November, based on internal Pentagon estimates, that the missiles would cost more than \$100 million each, adding about \$30 billion to spending to develop some 300 missiles, starting this

year.

CNN revealed on Wednesday morning that the American military had secretly tested hypersonic missiles last month.

The full extent of the AUKUS partnership, directed against China, is becoming increasingly apparent. The treaty was initially headlined by the provision of long-range nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia. That was itself a major step toward confrontation with China, against which the submarines would be deployed.

The latest announcement said the allies would also work together to overhaul their military innovation systems, and deepen information-sharing on the development of advanced military capabilities. AUKUS covers a wide range of weaponry and intelligence collaboration, including cyber warfare, artificial intelligence, quantum technology and undersea drone systems.

The announcement referred vaguely to work progressing on "other critical defense and security capabilities" as well. These would include agreements struck over the past two years to expand the US use of air, naval and land bases in Australia.

In addition, the announcement revealed a series of top-level government and military meetings between the three allies to advance their war plans. Senior national security advisers from each country met on March 10 to review the partnership's "pleasing" progress, and multiple steering group meetings have occurred.

According to the *Australian Financial Review*, 17 trilateral working groups are working under the AUKUS banner, with nine focused on the submarines, and eight relating to other advanced military capabilities.

In February, officials from the three countries

inspected locations across Australia, reportedly to review sites to build and operate the submarines. Shortly after that, Morrison said \$10 billion would be spent building a submarine base and another \$5 billion expanding a repair and maintenance shipyard.

While not naming China as the target, the announcement showed how the US and its allies are exploiting the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which the US and NATO deliberately provoked, to prepare for a similar conflict with China. The three leaders said action was needed to combat “coercion” in the light of Russia’s invasion. That allegation that has been levelled increasingly against Beijing, with unsubstantiated claims that it could invade Taiwan.

US Democratic Party congressman Joe Courtney, who co-chairs the Friends of Australia Congressional Caucus, which has its own “AUKUS Caucus” taskforce, underscored the importance attached by the Biden administration to Australia as a base for war.

Courtney told the *Australian Financial Review*: “It’s blindingly obvious that when you look at the aggression and the size of the Chinese navy, the US clearly has to pivot into the region, and the region is so vast that we need allies like Australia ready.”

Morrison is planning a “khaki election,” based on beating the drums of war in order to divert from the intense political and social crisis produced by the deadly “live with the virus” policies that have intensified the COVID-19 pandemic, soaring levels of social inequality and the devastating impact of climate-related floods and bushfires.

The Liberal-National Coalition prime minister trumpeted AUKUS as “the most significant defence agreement this country has entered into since the ANZUS Treaty 70 years ago” and said he had achieved what “no other prime minister has been able to secure”—a US commitment to share its nuclear technology.

A day earlier, Morrison and Defence Minister Peter Dutton declared that Australian fighter jets and warships would be armed with long-range strike missiles by 2024, three years earlier than promised, as part of another \$3.5 billion military upgrade.

US military industry giants Raytheon and Lockheed Martin would work to “rapidly increase” Australia’s ability to maintain and manufacture guided weapons. This would further integrate Australia into US military

operations.

Dutton, who is vying to replace the increasingly discredited Morrison, stepped up his aggressive accusations against China. He told the Nine Network that China was “on course” to take over Taiwan, Chinese President Xi Jinping was an “autocrat” and “China is arming herself with more nuclear weapons.”

The AUKUS expansion is part of a series of escalating military commitments. Last month Morrison’s government said it would spend \$1 billion to build missiles and guided weapons in Australia.

However, led by Anthony Albanese, Labor is just as ready to conduct a “khaki election.” Labor has insisted it has no difference with the anti-China offensive. In fact, Albanese has sought to outdo the Coalition, boasting that Labor initiated the US alliance during World War II.

Moreover, Albanese has criticised the government for leaving “gaps” in military capabilities until the submarines are delivered over the next two decades.

This week, Albanese told an April 5 Canberra doorstep media conference he was concerned about “government cuts to our important Defence Budget.” That dovetails with the criticisms being made in key ruling circles, such as by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a pro-US thinktank that has pushed for an even more aggressive anti-China stance.

Likewise, *Australian* foreign editor Greg Sheridan yesterday accused the government of making “self-congratulatory artificial timing announcements.” He said there was a “fundamental mismatch” between its “rhetoric of national security and its astonishing lack of action.”

Labor’s response is a warning. Like the current Coalition government, a Labor-led government would only increase the vast military build-up, and seek to impose its burden on working people through deeper cuts to public health, education, housing and other essential social programs.



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