

Australian defence minister cajoles India over Russia and China

Mike Head
24 June 2022

Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles was in India for four days this week, shortly after visiting Japan and backing aggressive US accusations against China at the recent Shangri-la security forum in Singapore.

Marles's trips are part of a frenetic series of overseas missions by the recently-elected Australian Labor government, to assist the Biden administration to escalate its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and to confront China in the Indo-Pacific.

While insisting that he was not "lecturing" India, Marles called on the Indian government of Narendra Modi to align against Moscow as well as Beijing. He issued numbers of inflammatory statements, not only accusing China of aggressive behaviour, but bracketing it with Russia.

In office since 2014, Modi's Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party government has increasingly committed itself to a military alliance with the US against China. That has included agreeing to the reactivation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) coalition of the US, India, Japan and Australia against China. But Marles said the Ukraine war made it essential for India to go further.

China was the "largest security anxiety" for Australia and India, and this made greater cooperation between Canberra and New Delhi "absolutely imperative," Marles declared in briefing journalists on Thursday. He had met with Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

In a speech to the National Defence College in New Delhi, Marles pointedly warned the Indian government over its refusal, so far, to align itself behind the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, with which India retains major economic and military ties.

"I do not come here to lecture India on how it should

respond to this conflict, or how it should manage its relationship with Russia," Marles said. Every country needs to make its own choices.

"But Russia's war on Ukraine does teach us that we cannot just rely on economic interdependence to deter conflict; and that deterrence can fail when one country's determined military build-up creates an imbalance of military power."

While once again denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Marles did his utmost to draw India further into the similar US-led provocations against China throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region.

Marles underscored the Labor government's total support for last September's AUKUS military pact between the US, UK and Australia, saying it was an essential response to China's "assertiveness" and suggested a similar "partnership" with India.

Marles emphasised that the AUKUS treaty went beyond the provision of long-range nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. It extended to advanced military capabilities with the "most impact, such as quantum technology, artificial intelligence, undersea warfare, hypersonics and counter-hypersonics."

Marles added: "But AUKUS is just one partnership. And when I look out at the world, India stands out." He proposed a major role for India in US-supported military activity in both the Indian and Pacific oceans.

First, he unilaterally declared that Australia and India were "stewards of the Indian Ocean region" which "accounts for about half the world's container traffic and is a crucial conduit for global trade."

Second, reflecting the Biden administration's demand for Australia to step up its US-backed military and diplomatic activity against China, Marles said the Labor government would "place India at the heart of Australia's approach to the Indo-Pacific and beyond."

Marles specifically spoke of India playing a greater role in Fiji and across the Pacific. He claimed the recent vague security agreement between China and Solomon Islands was a cause of concern for Australia, as any move to establish a Chinese military base in the region “would greatly change Australia’s national security landscape.”

Provocatively, Marles invoked the Ukraine war to accuse China of “appalling behaviour” during border clashes between India and China. His comments cut across efforts by Beijing and New Delhi to settle their border disputes.

“The assault on Indian forces along the Line of Actual Control in 2020 was a warning we should all heed. Australia stood up for India’s sovereignty then and continues to do so now.”

Marles said Australia was also “anxious about the growing relationship between China and Russia,” including joint military exercises in the Pacific. In this context, it was important for democracies to protect the “rules-based order” that had ensured “stability and prosperity” since World War II.

The supposed “rules-based order” is that maintained by the US and its allies since the last world war, which established US hegemony over the Indo-Pacific.

Marles called for intensified military exercises, cooperation and “interoperability” between India and Australia, and suggested a reciprocal military access agreement, allow planes and ships from both countries to use each other’s facilities. That would elevate the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” struck between Modi and former Australian Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison in 2020.

In a joint statement, Marles and Singh, the Indian defence minister, welcomed the “growing diversity and frequency of defence exercise and exchanges” between India and Australia. They pledged to boost “supply chain resilience” and ties between the defence “industrial bases” in both countries. They “looked forward to India’s participation in Australia’s Indo Pacific Endeavour exercise in October 2022.”

Despite Marles’ efforts, however, the joint statement made no mention of China or Russia. The Indian ruling class has long relied on Russia for military hardware and has growing trade volumes with China, as do many Asian countries.

On the same day that Marles concluded his trip to

India, Modi participated in the 14th summit of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), joining the leaders of the other members, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, who hosted the virtual event.

The summit issued a declaration that said the leaders supported talks between Russia and Ukraine, effectively cutting across the US-NATO escalation of the war against Russia.

Marles’s visit was one of many pro-US missions undertaken rapidly by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and senior ministers since the government was sworn in less than five weeks ago, on May 23. These have included trips to the Quad summit in Tokyo, the Shangri-la forum, Japan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Pacific island states.

Marles’s allegations against China, while not new, put paid to media claims that a brief meeting he had with China’s defence minister on the sidelines of the Shangri-la event represented a breakthrough in the diplomatic freeze between the two countries over the past three years.

Far from seeking a “reset” of relations with China, Australian capitalism’s largest export market, the Albanese government is demonstrating its commitment to a potentially catastrophic US-led war against China to reassert Washington’s global dominance.

This week, Albanese will attend the NATO summit, which will focus on expanding the military alliance’s operations from the war against Russia and into confrontations with China in the Indo-Pacific. Albanese will also travel to Paris to shore up relations with France, a major nuclear-armed power that retains colonies across the Pacific. In addition, he has been invited to visit Ukraine to underscore his Labor government’s involvement in the moves against Russia and China.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact