

During US visit, Australian defence minister outlines massive military build-up

Oscar Grenfell**12 July 2022**

Australian Defence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles is currently conducting a four-day visit to Washington. The trip is the first by a senior member of the Labor government to the US since it scraped into office in the May 21 federal election.

Marles has used the tour to proclaim Labor's unshakeable commitment to the US-Australia military alliance and Washington's militarist aggression against Russia and China, which threatens a nuclear world war.

He has emphasised that Labor will oversee an even greater build-up of the Australian military, on top of record spending, despite an unprecedented national debt. As a consequence, it is already implementing the first stages of an austerity agenda aimed at slashing essential social spending.

Marles' first engagement typified the pro-war line of the new government. He delivered a keynote address to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), one of the most hawkish think-tanks in Washington, which has been at the forefront of the US-led campaign against Moscow and Beijing.

The warmongers turned out the red carpet for Marles, who was the subject of effusive tributes before he had said a word. CSIS president and CEO John Hamre, who has been in the top levels of the American military-intelligence apparatus since the 1970s, hailed the Labor minister for "taking on remarkable responsibilities."

This was a reference to the central focus of the Labor government on foreign policy. In the space of less than two months, it has been on a frenetic campaign as a regional attack dog for the Biden administration, with senior ministers continuously in Asian and Pacific countries demanding that the region's leaders align with the US against China.

Hamre insisted, however, this was only the beginning. Words would need to be matched by actions. "There's been a lot of momentum that's been created, but... now we're getting really serious," he declared. "Announcing something is one thing, and really implementing it is where the hard work of government comes in. Fortunately, we have such a

talented man who has accepted the assignment on behalf of Australia to lead the way in this new, crucial phase."

Marles received two more glowing introductions, including one from Anthony Pratt, an Australian businessman. The right-wing billionaire, who was a close associate of former fascistic President Donald Trump, also heaped praise on the new Labor government.

"Marles is a true friend of the United States and I believe he will be the greatest defence minister Australia has ever had," Pratt declared. He said that the new government was operating within the tradition laid down by John Curtin, the Labor prime minister who oversaw Australia's entry into World War Two and the beginning of its alliance with the US.

Pratt particularly hailed Labor's diplomatic offensive against China in the Pacific region. Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had "done more to engage the Pacific Island nations in that period [two-month] than any government in recent history."

Marles' address was a frothing, bellicose and militarist diatribe. No doubt seeking to live up to the plaudits, his remarks included bloodcurdling references to military power and unalloyed backing for US aggression.

Marles solidarised the Labor government fully with the strategy adopted by NATO at its Madrid conference last month, which explicitly labelled Russia and China as "threats" and called for member states to prepare "for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors."

The US-Australia alliance, he proclaimed, had been forged through war. "In 1941, when Australian Prime Minister John Curtin looked out across a Pacific Ocean in which war breathed its bloody steam, the United States wrote itself into Australian history in indelible ink," he declared.

Over the ensuing years, that alliance had "surpassed its origins." It had become "a cornerstone of Australia's foreign and security policy."

The alliance was not constrained by geography, he insisted. That was why Labor was participating in the US-

NATO proxy war against Russia, including by dispatching \$100 million in military material this month. Covering up the role of the US in stoking the Ukraine conflict, Marles said that Russia was seeking to “roll back the post-Soviet order,” i.e., the one dominated by American imperialism.

“This can’t be allowed to succeed,” Marles declared. “Only by ensuring such tactics fail can we deter their future employment in Europe, in the Indo-Pacific, or elsewhere.” He hailed the “leadership of the Biden administration...the United States is proving the pivotal power.”

This segued into an angry denunciation of those who branded NATO and other US-led military alliances, including in its partnership with Australia, as “Cold War relics.”

Marles said: “Critics of alliances need to answer why countries like Australia would be better served going it alone, why doing so would not, in fact, constrain national sovereignty rather than enhance it. Because in reality, the alliance with the United States affords Australia capability, technology, and intelligence advantages we could not acquire or develop on our own.”

In other words, Labor is all the way with the USA. Marles denounced China, falsely accusing it of “a military buildup occurring at a rate unseen since World War II.” In reality, it is the US and its allies, including Australia, which have militarised the Indo-Pacific over the past decade as part of the preparations for open conflict with Beijing.

Marles’ unsubstantiated accusations against China were a means of legitimising a further intensification of this US-led military build-up. “We will make the investment necessary to increase the range and lethality of the Australian Defence Force so that it is able to hold a potential adversary...further from Australia,” he declared.

The Labor government had “committed to ensuring funding certainty for this pathway,” had already commissioned a “force posture review,” and would ensure that the expansion of the army would focus on “how we best integrate and operate with the United States and other key partners.”

At the centre of this project, he said, was AUKUS, the military pact with Britain and the US unveiled last September and openly aimed at preparing for war with China. Labor would ensure Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and would fill any “capacity gap” in the interim. It was also “looking at greater missile capability and looking at new technologies; hypersonic, cyber, and as I said area-denial capabilities.”

Australian military spending is already more than \$600 billion over the decade, the highest level ever. Hypersonic missiles would likely cost \$100 million each, while the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines will cost an

estimated \$121 billion or more. In other words, Labor is preparing the largest military build-up in Australian history, in open preparation for offensive conflict. The cost will be borne by working people.

Marles pledged, moreover, that Australia’s diplomatic offensive against China throughout the Indo-Pacific would proceed and deepen. “The Pacific is the part of the world where the United States rightly looks to Australia to lead, and we will,” he promised.

Marles concluded: “The Albanese government will ensure that Australia plays its part in the success of the alliance in the years ahead... We will make the alliance even stronger...”

Marles is meeting with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday US time, where they will reportedly discuss the accelerated sharing of military technology under AUKUS. Australia is also coordinating closely with the US during the current Pacific Islands Forum of leaders from the region. US Vice-President Kamala Harris announced a major “Pacific push,” during Marles’ trip, aimed at reasserting American dominance in the Pacific.

Marles’ visit, and his speech, are proof that Labor leads a right-wing, militarist administration that is fully-committed to US-led war plans, whatever the consequences. For workers and young people, the fight against war is a fight against the Labor government.

Marles’ statements, and the fawning reception he was accorded by the military-intelligence establishment, demonstrate again why the Labor government refuses to defend Julian Assange. As it engages in new wars, the Biden administration, to which Marles has pledged his fealty, is determined to extradite the Australian citizen and journalist from Britain and imprison him for 175 years for having exposed American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.



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