Australian defence minister hails “unbreakable alliance” with the US in Washington

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On Thursday, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles met with US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin for their second face-to-face discussion since the Labor government was elected last May.

The Albanese government used the meeting, and Marles’ four-day tour of Washington, to reiterate its full-throated support for the militarist US-Australian alliance and American imperialism’s confrontations with Russia and China.

Marles’ first engagement, on Tuesday, was at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, one of the most hawkish US think tanks. There he was given a hero’s welcome, because of Labor’s role in aggressively campaigning for the US anti-China line throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Marles is also deputy prime minister. His speech included denunciations of Moscow and Beijing and the outline of a massive military build-up in preparation for direct hostilities in the Asian region.

The meeting with Austin was held behind closed doors, but their public statements were along the same lines.

Each declared that the US-Australia alliance was “unbreakable.” They presented it, not only as an Indo-Pacific pact but a global partnership aimed at aggressively prosecuting the interests of US and Australian imperialism. *Department of Defence (DOD) News* described the meeting as “more of a family reunion than a strategic summit.”

Austin particularly hailed Australia’s contribution to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. “I’m grateful for Australia’s leadership in supporting the Ukrainian people as they fight for their lives, and our freedom and our democracy,” he said.

In reality, the US deliberately provoked the reactionary Russian invasion, and has used it to prosecute longstanding plans for a direct confrontation with Moscow. Austin is at the centre of this militarist conspiracy. He is chair of the US-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which has funneled more than $50 billion in weaponry and aid to the Kiev regime from the US alone since the Biden administration took office.

Australia is a member of that group and Marles boasted it was “the largest non-NATO contributor to their assistance.” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese pledged $100 million in military aid earlier this month, during a visit to Kiev, taking the country’s total dispatchments to the equivalent of $390 million, the overwhelming majority in arms and military materiel.

Austin and Marles stressed that the Ukraine conflict was one prong of a global confrontation, again linking aggression with Russia with the US-led campaign against China.

According to DOD News: “Marles said the global rules-based order is being put under a pressure not seen since the end of World War II.” That is the “global order” dominated by US imperialism and its junior partners such as Australia.

Marles warned that China “seeks to shape the world around it in a way that we’ve not seen before.” He accused the Beijing regime of orchestrating a “massive military build-up… That is a very significant phenomenon, which presents enormous challenges to both of us.”

As has always been the case, such assertions are being used to justify the far greater military expansion of the US and its allies such as Australia.

In the lead-up to the meeting with Austin, Marles said

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a particular focus would be on the roll-out of AUKUS, the military pact unveiled with the US and Britain last September. Marles said they would discuss expediting the processing of US export controls covering military technologies.

No details of that discussion were released. But the day after meeting Austin, Marles declared there would be an announcement at the beginning of next year on Australia's acquisition of nuclear-armed submarines. The vessels, being procured under AUKUS, have greater stealth, long distance and payload capabilities, and are viewed as crucial to the waging of a maritime war.

Marles confirmed that such submarines would be purchased off the shelf, all but dispensing with previous claims that they may be built in Australia. They would either be procured from the US or from Britain.

Last month, former Liberal-National Defence Minister Peter Dutton disclosed that a plan had been in place, prior to the May 21 Australian federal election, for the purchase of two Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines from the US by 2030. At the time, Marles denounced Dutton for supposedly revealing national security information, but did not differ with the substance of the report.

The timing of Marles' latest statement on the submarines strongly suggests that a deal was agreed upon or finalised in the meeting with Austin. As with every aspect of the war drive, the plans to acquire highly-dangerous weapons systems, including the submarines and hypersonic missiles, costing tens of billions of dollars, are proceeding entirely behind the backs of the population.

The resulting dangers were underscored in an article published by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on Tuesday. Based on anonymous Australian defence sources, it claimed that Australia's HMAS Parramatta warship was "tracked" by a Chinese attack submarine and military vessels as it recently traversed the East and South China Seas.

The article indicated the scope of Australian military activities in the contested waters, which have been transformed into a key flashpoint for potential conflict, by US provocations and the stoking of longstanding regional disputes.

In the space of a month, the HMAS Parramatta had travelled from Vietnam to South Korea and then Japan, travelling near Taiwan. This was part of a US-led "regional presence deployment." The anonymous defence official stated: "Formal challenges have occurred, such as telling us that we're entering 'China's territorial waters.'"

This suggests that while they may not have formally conducted a "freedom of navigation" operation, Australian forces have come close to it. "Freedom of navigation" is the duplicitous banner for provocative US incursions into waters claimed by China. As with previous murky incidents of Australian and Chinese military aircraft coming near one another in May, the limited information provided in the ABC report brands Australia as the aggressor.

A further ABC article stated: "Military observers believe the tempo of ADF [Australian Defence Force] activity in the region is high." It specifically referenced the South China Sea.

That article featured warnings from Professor Don Rothwell, an international law expert at the Australian National University. Rothwell stated: "I think it's becoming increasingly difficult because it is clear that there is a pattern associated with Australia's activities now [that is] very much aligned with the way in which the United States conducts similar activities."

Rothwell said "the risk of miscalculation is one that is very live." In other words, any one of the Australian military operations in the region could trigger a direct clash with Chinese forces, threatening a potentially catastrophic conflict.

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