Australia, India deepen military ties against China

Oscar Grenfell, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council
12 March 2023

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has arrived in the US, where he will shortly announce a deal with the American and British governments for Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The purchase, expected to cost far more than $200 billion, is the centerpiece of a vast military build-up in Australia, explicitly directed towards preparing for war in the Indo-Pacific.

The aggressive character of this program was underscored by Albanese's tour of India immediately preceding his trip to the US. There the Australian prime minister met with his counterpart Narendra Modi and proclaimed India to be a "top-tier strategic partner." It was the first time an Australian leader has used that designation in relation to India.

The clear target is China. Modi's government has deepened India's partnership with Washington, as the Biden administration escalates more than a decade of US threats and provocations against Beijing, which is viewed as the chief threat to the global domination of American imperialism.

India, with its massive population, geo-strategically critical positioning and historic conflicts with China is viewed as a crucial component of this war drive. Together with Japan, Australia and the US, it is part of the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (Quad), a de facto alliance of the region's biggest military powers directed against China.

Since its election last year, the Labor government has had a particular focus on the development of the Quad as it functions as a key attack dog of the US confrontation with China. Albanese's first action as prime minister was to attend a Quad meeting in Tokyo.

At the beginning of the month, the Quad held a foreign ministers meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi. Its communique did not directly reference China, but included thinly-veiled denunciations of Beijing.

The communique proclaimed that the Quad would seek to enforce the "rules-based international order," code for US dominance over the region. It expressed "serious concern at the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia, and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore resource exploitation activities."

That is a clear reference to Chinese activities in the South and East China Seas, which have been provoked by the US and used by it to justify Washington's military build-up in the region.

In addition, the Labor government has sought to develop the various bilateral relationships that comprise the Quad. The aim is to forge an interwoven network of military ties and activities, all directed against China. This included a strategic agreement with Japan last year that went far in developing military cooperation and integration between the two countries.

Now, the Labor government is doing the same with India. In a particularly crass display of militarism, Albanese made his declaration about India being a "top-tier partner" while aboard the INS Vikrant. It is India's first domestically built aircraft carrier. Albanese climbed into the cockpit of a fighter jet, before speaking with Indian naval commanders.

A war in the Indo-Pacific would centre on naval and air conflict. While Australia could be involved in imposing a blockade of key shipping lanes near the Pacific and south-east Asia, India would focus on operations in the Indian Ocean. Australia and India held their first ever joint naval exercises in 2014.

Aboard the warship, Albanese declared that the Indian Ocean was "central to both countries' security and prosperity." He stated: "There has never been a point in both of our countries' histories where we've had such a strong strategic alignment." Albanese boasted that under his Labor government, Australia and India had "conducted more exercises, operations and dialogues than ever before."

This is to be escalated further. Albanese and Modi announced that Malabar naval exercises, originally US-Indian drills, will be held off the coast of Australia for the first time in the history of those war games. The exercises will involve all of the Quad powers.

India has also been invited to participate in this year's

© World Socialist Web Site

Talisman Saber exercises. Held in Northern Australia, the biannual operations have expanded each time they have been held. They are now among the preeminent war games simulating a conflict with China.

Aside from these concrete initiatives, Modi and Albanese announced a more general commitment to greater military and strategic collaboration between the two countries.

The content and implications of the visit were noted in the US press. The *Wall Street Journal*, hailing Albanese's visit, bluntly headlined its article: "Australia, India Seek Closer Cooperation as China Threat Looms."

The article cited Ian Hall of the Griffith Asia Institute, who stated in relation to Talisman Saber: "Involving India is going to send some signals to others in the region, and it's also going to build some Indian capacity in amphibious operations, which at the moment they don't really have."

Albanese and Modi also unveiled various economic deals, building upon a tariff-free trade agreement last year. In addition to the commercial interests of big business, the deepening ties are aimed at undermining Chinese economic influence and heightening Indian dependence on trade and other economic ties with US allies.

That is of particular importance given India's ongoing economic ties with Russia. The Modi government, while backing US-led aggression against China, has sought to walk a tightrope amid the escalating US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Albanese was asked by the media if he had sought to press India on the Ukraine conflict, but he declined to answer.

Throughout his trip, Albanese identified himself closely with Modi. This included, not only the joint visit to the aircraft carrier, but also a bizarre display in which the Australian and Indian prime ministers rode around a cricket field in a car decked out as a chariot.

The heavy promotion of the Indian leader underscores the fraudulent character of claims that the confrontation with China is a defence of "democracy" against "authoritarianism." A far-right nationalist, Modi has the closest of ties to fascistic Hindu-supremacist groups. His government has intensified its assault on civil liberties.

Last month, Modi ordered a raid on the New Delhi headquarters of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The police operation was payback for a BBC program which had documented his role in inciting an anti-Muslim pogrom in the Gujarat in 2002. Around 2,000 people were killed in the communal violence.

In reality, Modi's authoritarianism is fully in line with Washington's war aims. The prosecution of aggressive wars against nuclear-armed powers such as Russia and China is incompatible with democratic rights.

That war program will be further advanced over the coming days, as Albanese, together with Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, announce the plan for Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The vessels are among the most important assets in modern maritime warfare.

According to press reports, based on US and Australian leaks, Australia will acquire a fleet of US Virginia Class submarines in the early 2030s. It will then receive British Astute submarines, which are being repurposed with the latest US military technology. The purchases are expected to cost well over $200 billion, on top of existing Australian military spending, which is already far above half a trillion dollars this decade.

The most hawkish sections of the Australian ruling elite are hailing the subs deal. Nine Media publications, for instance, have salivated over the prospect of the country no longer being a "middle-order power," but one capable of enforcing its dictates far from Australian shores. The Murdoch media has insisted that once the deal is announced, there can be no deviation from its implementation.

The same publications, however, are insisting that a war will likely be fought with China within the next three years, i.e., long before any of the nuclear-powered submarines arrive in Australia. The logic of this contradiction, already hinted at by some of those publications, is that American nuclear submarines and other naval assets will be based in Australia. The country, increasingly, will become a giant aircraft carrier for the US-led preparations for war.

Contact the SEP:
Phone: (02) 8218 3222
Email: sep@sep.org.au
Facebook: SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia
Twitter: @SEP_Australia
Instagram: socialistequalityparty_au
TikTok: @sep_australia

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site