

Australian PM boosts involvement in Ukraine war and hails arms export deal with Germany

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During a two-day visit to Berlin on his way to the NATO summit in Lithuania this week, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese joined in escalating the US-NATO war against Russia and eagerly promoted increased military links with Germany, including the export of “Boxer” armed vehicles to Germany.

Albanese announced that his government would send a hi-tech Wedgetail military surveillance plane and 100 personnel to protect the NATO arms deliveries pouring into Ukraine via Poland. This marks a shift from supplying increasing amounts of weaponry to Ukraine, to involving Australia forces in the conflict, albeit from a German military base. Although the aircraft will not fly in Ukrainian airspace, and initially will stay for about six months, its role could expand. It has an “ability to co-ordinate a joint air, sea and land battle in real time,” according to the Australian air force.

At a joint media conference, Albanese and his German counterpart, Social Democrat Chancellor Olaf Scholz, both refused pointblank to comment on the Biden administration’s decision to send barbaric and internationally-banned cluster bombs to Ukraine. That clearly indicates their readiness to back the US-NATO in stopping at nothing, including direct involvement in a potential nuclear war, to defeat Russia.

Albanese’s two-hour meeting with Scholz coincided with the announcement of the deployment of 240 German paratroopers and marines, plus an airlifter and naval amphibious forces, to Australia for Exercise Talisman Sabre, Australia’s largest military war games, which involves forces from the US and 10 other countries.

This follows a visit by a German frigate in 2021 and Luftwaffe Eurofighters taking part for the first time in the Australian air force’s multinational Exercise Pitch Black last year.

Alongside the participation of Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, as “Indo-Pacific Four partners” at the NATO summit, this war-gaming highlights the growing participation of Germany and the other European powers in

the preparations for a US-led war against China.

Albanese’s visit to Berlin further points to the development of a war economy, closely linked to those of the US and its allies, all of which are militarising rapidly. Albanese boasted that the Boxer deal would be one of Australia’s largest ever military export contracts. He claimed it would guarantee 1,000 jobs in the state of Queensland and would be worth more than \$1 billion for the Australian economy. “This will boost our sovereignty,” he stated. “This will increase our defence capability and boost our economy. This is a great outcome.”

While dressed up in terms of providing jobs, this contract signals an expansion of Australia’s role as a weapons manufacturer and exporter. As of 2020, Australia was ranked 11th in the world as an arms exporter, with Australian-based companies selling weapons worth some \$500 million a year.

Albanese’s Labor government announced in March that Rheinmetall, one of Germany’s and Europe’s largest armoured vehicle manufacturers, had won a contract to sell Boxers made at the company’s Australian plant to the German military. At that time, the government said it was a \$3 billion deal.

Although the Rheinmetall deal is a corporate one, it requires governments to grant export permissions because of the military technology involved, some of which comes from the US. The eight-wheeled, heavily-armoured Boxers are fitted with 30mm cannons and some have the capacity for anti-tank guided missiles. Carrying up to seven soldiers each, they can operate in a variety of war zones, including urbanised environments.

By hailing the deal so prominently, Albanese echoed his vision of basing the country’s economy on militarism and war. He outlined that conception in March at the US naval base in San Diego, speaking alongside US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to unveil details of the AUKUS plan to supply Australia with nuclear-powered long-range submarines designed for attacking China.

On that occasion, Albanese called for a “whole-of-nation effort” to build AUKUS-related industrial capacity, equating this to the establishment of a car industry in Australia by the US transnational corporations General Motors and Ford after World War II. He spoke of “creating jobs and growing businesses” and “educating young Australians today for the opportunities of tomorrow.”

In fact, relatively few new jobs will be generated, and those workers and youth will be trained to produce and use weapons capable of killing countless people.

All such jobs are based on extracting super-profits from the exploitation of low-paid workers under onerous conditions. Rheinmetall’s plant is deliberately located in an area of high unemployment, at Redland, near Ipswich, in the western working-class suburbs of Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, where tens of thousands of jobs have been eliminated in recent decades.

That included the destruction of around 1,000 jobs at meat processing facilities in 2017—18, which the trade unions refused to fight, while touting a future for workers based on military industries. In the same period, the then Turnbull Liberal-National government awarded Rheinmetall a lucrative \$4.3 billion contract to assemble and supply Boxer armoured vehicles for the Australian military.

Financially assisted and supported by the federal and state governments, as part of that contract Rheinmetall established a factory and testing ground at Redbank, officially named the Military Vehicle Centre of Excellence, or MILVEHCOE.

Workers at the facility are required to undergo strict security vetting, including checks on their citizenship status, ethnicity and links with “proscribed” countries. For that purpose, Rheinmetall was granted an exemption from anti-discrimination laws last November by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

Rheinmetall AG is an arms and automotive manufacturer, headquartered in Dusseldorf. Today employing some 28,000 employees, it was heavily involved in making weapons for the German military in both the world wars of last century. Under the Nazi regime, it used concentration camp labour.

The company’s connections to the US military were most recently underscored by a July 7 media statement announcing plans, with its American partners Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin, for a factory in Germany to produce fuselage sections for the F-35A Lightning II warplanes, “opening a new chapter in German-American defence technology cooperation.”

As highlighted by a June 27 media release, Rheinmetall is also a major contractor for “state-of-the-art” NATO arms supplies to Ukraine, including upgraded Leopard tanks, medium- and large-calibre ammunition, infantry fighting vehicles, military trucks, air defence systems and mobile

reconnaissance systems.

According to the *Australian Financial Review*, the Rheinmetall contract to export Boxers to Germany places it in the “box seat” to win the contract for the Australian army’s planned new infantry fighting vehicle, known as Land 400 Phase 3, for which Rheinmetall has been bidding against a South Korean rival, Hanwha.

The Rheinmetall operation is heavily backed by Queensland state Labor government, which has supported school tours of the facility and organised TAFE courses to meet the company’s recruitment and training requirements. Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has made repeated publicity visits to the Redbank plant, on one occasion taking her entire cabinet with her to promote Queensland as a site for military industries.

Welcoming the Rheinmetall-Germany contract in March, Deputy Premier Steven Miles said the Palaszczuk government had worked hard to attract Rheinmetall to the state. “Having Australia’s most advanced military manufacturing facility call Queensland home means big deals and more jobs,” he said.

This enthusiasm for war industries is shared by the trade union bureaucrats. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union officials have hailed Rheinmetall’s plant for supposedly creating “good, secure jobs that support the local economy.”

While presented by the Labor and union leaders as responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and alleged Chinese aggression, the US is stoking the conflicts on both sides of the Eurasian landmass in order to assert its global hegemony over any rivals, even at the risk of provoking a catastrophic new world war. Workers in plants such as Rheinmetall’s are being placed on the frontline of this war offensive.



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