

Australian Labor government hosts massive naval conference to plot war against China

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From Tuesday to Thursday last week, Sydney was host to the biannual Indo-Pacific International Maritime Exposition, which is billed as the “region’s premier commercial maritime and naval defence exposition, connecting Australian and international defence, industry, government, academia and technology leaders, in the national interest.”

That is one way of describing it. Another would be a massive festival of reaction, bringing together militarist generals, hawkish government ministers, arms dealers and spies to network, trade secrets and plot various warmongering operations.

The exposition is heavily funded by the Department of Defence and the New South Wales government, both currently under the direction of Labor administrations at the federal and state level, respectively.

While the red carpet was rolled out for the conga line of militarists, protesters were not welcome. They were subjected to extremely aggressive policing, attacks and punitive penalties aimed at suppressing any opposition to the gathering.

The exposition is part arms bazaar, part strategic forum, symbolising the ever-greater nexus between governments, national militaries and private defence companies.

A favourable preview in the *Australian* last weekend explained: “Indo Pacific 2023 will also host more than 170 defence, industry, government and academic delegations, from 46 nations. This includes 25 international chiefs of navy or their counterparts and 21 representatives.”

The conference included “800 participating exhibitor companies” from every Australian state and territory, as well as the major imperialist countries such as the US, Britain and Japan. The *Australian* noted that organisers predicted this year’s exposition to be the largest maritime event in the country’s history and to outstrip the previous record of 25,000 participants.

While occurring in the heart of Sydney, the public was kept entirely in the dark. The exposition has received little coverage outside of defence industry publications and the single report in the *Australian*. A compliant media

increasingly relays government and military press releases verbatim while concealing from the population those events and developments that underscore the advanced preparations for war.

Even from the limited coverage, it is clear enough that the exposition was essentially a massive gathering to plot the next stages in American imperialism’s preparations for a war against China, which is viewed as the chief threat to its global economic dominance.

The *Australian* opined: “[T]he exposition has never been more timely. Australia’s Navy is acquiring or planning to introduce major new platforms, including a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS partnership with the US and the UK, plus a new family of Hunter-class frigates and new offshore patrol vessels.

“This is in addition to planned upgrades to existing platforms, including an enhanced long-range strike capability, along with associated electronics and communications systems, sensors and munitions.”

Indeed, the Labor government is overseeing the completion of Australia’s transformation into a frontline state of the US war drive against China. This includes the stationing of nuclear-capable US bombers in Northern Australia and the creation of an American command post there; a vast expansion of other basing arrangements; and a frenetic scramble to obtain strike capabilities centred on a major program of missile acquisitions.

The maritime domain, together with aerial combat, would be at the heart of a war with China. The field is of particular attention, under conditions of complaints in strategic and intelligence circles that Australia’s navy is not fit for purpose for such a conflict and needs a massive upgrade.

Again, the Australian population was unaware of his presence, but in attendance at the conference was US Admiral Samuel J. Paparo. He is the commander of the entire US Pacific Fleet, and thus would be one of the key figures if a war in the region were to breakout.

A US government statement explained that Paparo arrived in Sydney prior to the conference to “attend the culminating

event of the Integrated Battle Problem 23.3 exercise alongside senior defence officials from Australia and the United Kingdom in support of AUKUS Pillar 2.”

The highly secretive exercise has been described previously as a series of “experiments” involving the integration of new and unspecified manned and unmanned US defence assets into the operations of its 7th fleet in the Pacific. The title clearly indicates that such “experiments” will hinge on how the defence capabilities can be marshaled for a major conflict in the region, involving the integrated forces of the US and its allies including Australia.

At the exposition, Paparo then “joined senior leaders from the United Kingdom, France, Canada, India, Japan, and Australia in a panel discussion on ‘What does Fleet 2035 Look Like,’ in which they emphasized the need for innovation, creativity, ingenuity, interoperability in developing future naval capabilities, and the unceasing importance of partnerships and relationships between navies.

“During the conference, he met with senior Government of Australia, RAN, and ally and partner military officials to discuss the importance of maritime security and interoperability between naval forces in the Indo-Pacific.”

Paparo held separate meetings with the Labor government’s deputy prime minister and defence minister Richard Marles, Angus Campbell, the Chief of Defence Force, as well as top naval officials from Britain, Japan, New Zealand, and smaller countries throughout the region. Significantly, the German chief of navy also met Paparo in Sydney. That underscores the increasing integration of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, in which the European powers play a key role, and the developing confrontation with China.

The target of the event was also underscored by announcements made during the exposition of new capabilities developed by leading weapons companies. The *Australian Defence Magazine*, an industry publication, featured some of the highlights. Among them:

- “EOS has showcased the integration of their laser Dazzler, a non-ballistic countermeasure against uncrewed aerial and seaborne threats, with their R800 remote weapon system at Indo-Pac 23.”

- “Australian veteran-owned maritime company, The Whiskey Project Group (TWPG), and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems (Rafael), has unveiled a collaborative reconnaissance and strike watercraft prototype; the Whiskey Bravo - Strike.”

- “Saab Australia has partnered with United States autonomous maritime and undersea surveillance company, ThayerMahan, with an aim to strengthen Australia’s sovereign undersea warfare capabilities.”

- “Aerojet Rocketdyne and NIOA have announced a strategic agreement to explore the manufacturing of critical guided weapons components in Australia.”

A striking number of the new capabilities being unveiled are of a plainly aggressive character. That is in keeping with the entire character of the US-Australian military build-up throughout the region, aimed at encircling China, through weapons deployments and the cultivation of an anti-Beijing alliance.

The conference program advertised a dizzying array of some 90 sessions and events, covering virtually all aspects of maritime warfare. Its website listed the hundreds of arms companies selling their wares, many of them with benign names and exceedingly vague descriptions of what they actually do.

Significantly, among the exhibitors was Elbit Systems, one of the largest Israeli weapons companies. It directly supplies the Israeli Defence Force, which is currently reigning down mass death and destruction on the oppressed population of Gaza, in one of the worst war crimes of the past 80 years.

Elbit was welcome. Protesters and opponents of war were not. On Thursday evening, Legal Observers NSW issued a statement, declaring, “We are deeply concerned by the biased and intimidatory policing of these gatherings and the charges that have followed.”

They explained: “Police used aggressive tactics while policing a peaceful protest at Darling Harbour. They took no action to protect protestors who were attacked by expo attendees... Protestors have been charged with a criminal offence for holding a banner and chanting. Imprisonment should not be an available penalty for participating in democratic political action.” Police had imposed “non-association orders” on those arrested and had even expelled some who came from interstate out of NSW.

Such is the contemporary Labor Party, which oversees the defence buildup at the federal level and police repression in the states. It is a reactionary party of big business, the banks and the military-intelligence agencies, committed to militarism and the suppression of growing anti-war opposition.



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