

Australia and UK ratchet up AUKUS war preparations against China

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The Australian Labor government and the UK Conservative government this week ramped up their two countries' military alliance against China as part of the trilateral AUKUS pact with the US.

With the backing of the Biden administration, the defence and foreign affairs ministers of the two governments signed new military and intelligence agreements in the Australian city of Adelaide on Friday. These include a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that commits them to respond jointly if supposedly threatened militarily.

The ministers directly linked the escalating conflict with China with the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. In the opening words of their joint declaration, they proclaimed that the “security and prosperity” of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific were “inseparable.”

This underlines the connection between the US-led aggression against both Russia and China, which are regarded by Washington as the primary threats to its post-World War II hegemony. These are two fronts in a developing third world war.

The UK-Australia joint declaration was accompanied by a “AUKUS trilateral statement” initialled by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. It “reaffirmed” the AUKUS plan for the joint production of nuclear-powered long-range attack submarines designed for use against China.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government pledged to spend at least \$18 billion over the next decade to erect basing facilities for visiting US and UK nuclear submarines, as well to develop submarine construction capacity, while giving the UK government nearly \$5 billion and the US government about \$4.5 billion to accelerate their submarine-building programs.

These huge sums—immediate instalments of the allocation of up to \$368 billion for the AUKUS

subs—are a measure of the Labor government's stepped-up commitment to the war plans.

In this context, the UK-Australia SOFA, which also provides access to each other's military bases and facilities, marks a new stage in the US-led preparations for war against China. Significantly, it is the first signed by the UK with a non-NATO country.

That fact underscores British imperialism's intent to be in the forefront of the conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific, where the British Empire once prevailed. The ministers “welcomed the UK's enduring Indo-Pacific strategic engagement.” This will include a UK aircraft carrier battle group sailing through the region next year and participating in the Talisman Sabre war games in northern Australia next year as part of the UK's “flagship 2025 Indo-Pacific deployment.”

To facilitate that “engagement,” the SOFA also elevates the Australian-UK military partnership to the same as the 1950s ANZUS Treaty between the US, Australia and New Zealand, which includes a mutual pledge to joint action against any alleged military threat.

Provocatively, this year's Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations (AUKMIN) were staged in Australia just two days after a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The AUKMIN meeting issued a lengthy declaration committing the two countries to closely integrate their military, strategic and intelligence operations. By contrast, Yi's visit resulted in no joint declaration, despite the claims of a “reset” in Chinese-Australian relations.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles hosted their counterparts, ex-Prime Minister Lord David Cameron and UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps. At their media conference, they were flanked by Caroline

Kennedy, the high-profile US ambassador to Australia.

Speaking on behalf of the beleaguered UK Tory government of Rishi Sunak, Cameron was particularly bellicose, saying that Western allies had to work together on “mutual security” to navigate a “dangerous and uncertain world.” He reasserted Britain’s intent to be a power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Cameron joined the other ministers in accusing China of “destabilising behaviour” in the South China Sea and “systemic erosion” of human rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong.

These charges were part of a long list of allegations against Russia and China. The UK-Australia declaration began by emphasising the joint commitment to the Ukraine war, condemning Russia’s “illegal and immoral invasion” and welcoming each other’s stepped up participation in training Ukrainian forces and supplying drones and other weaponry.

In a threatening tone, the document warned China to “refrain” from helping Russia. It further goaded the Chinese regime, which regards Taiwan as a breakaway province, by supporting Taiwan’s “meaningful participation in international organisations” and reiterating the ministers’ “will to continue deepening relations with Taiwan in the economic, scientific, trade, technological and cultural fields.”

On the Middle East front, by accusing Hamas of conducting a “heinous” attack on Israel, the declaration justified Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza, while echoing the Biden administration in shedding crocodile tears over the “catastrophic humanitarian crisis.” It backed the fraudulent US call for a temporary ceasefire, which is a cover for greenlighting the planned Israeli onslaught on Rafah, where at least 1.5 million Gazans are trapped.

The declaration also backed the US-UK operations, joined by Australia, against the Houthis in Yemen, and condemned Iran “in the strongest terms” for allegedly conducting “destabilising activities in the region,” thus endorsing the US pretext for a wider war.

Among the many prongs of the intensified partnership with the UK, Australia’s former colonial ruler, the declaration said the two governments would:

- Increase war-related intelligence-sharing, including by strengthening the “Five Eyes” network with the US, Canada and New Zealand, and incorporating the UK into the “Combined Intelligence Centre-Australia

within Australia’s Defence Intelligence Organisation.”

- Expand cooperation and coordination on cyber security, particularly in the name of “combatting foreign information manipulation.”

- Protect allied access to military-related critical minerals and “diversify supply chains” to cut reliance on Chinese processing.

- Bolster the anti-China Indian Ocean Rim Association, which includes India.

- Insist on the UK’s accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), essentially an anti-China economic bloc, before the end of 2024.

All this was justified as “ministers reaffirmed their enduring commitment to the AUKUS partnership, which is strengthening security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.” In reality, this week’s AUKMIN declaration and the AUKUS trilateral statement represent an acceleration of the US-led drive to encircle China militarily and economically.

Combined with heightened US military ties throughout the Indo-Pacific, notably with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and India, this is an offensive to push China into a war, as with Russia, with incalculable consequences.

Despite widespread anti-war opposition, fuelled by its support for the Gaza genocide, the Albanese government has already gone well beyond the previous Liberal-National government of Scott Morrison, which first signed the AUKUS pact in 2021, in placing Australia on the frontline of what would be a potentially disastrous nuclear war for dominance over the region and the globe.



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