

Australian Greens outline program for military build-up and war

Oscar Grenfell**24 March 2025**

Amid mounting geopolitical conflicts and uncertainty, and with an Australian federal election looming, the Greens have dropped their vague mask of pacifism, outlining a program for a major military build-up in preparation for war.

The Greens unveiled the policy in an exclusive given to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) defence correspondent Andrew Green. He noted that it was "the first time in the party's history" that it had released "a formally costed policy to fund new military programs."

That fact, and even the manner of revealing the program, were intended to send a signal to the ruling class that the Greens' are "serious" on matters of "national security" and "defence" and are not merely a protest party.

The message was reinforced by the fact that the policy was outlined by David Shoebridge, a "left," who is frequently a speaker at demonstrations opposing the genocide in Gaza, environmental degradation and various social issues. For the exclusive, he had dropped the rally placards and chants, donning a suit and spruiking his party's commitment to the development of a "sovereign military capacity."

The Greens, he stated, would initiate a \$4 billion program for the construction of missiles in Australia, as well as uncrewed marine and aerial vehicles. This would be paid for by abandoning current government plans to purchase M1A2 Abrams tanks and Black Hawk helicopters from the US. The Greens would also annul the \$368 billion program for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact with the US and the UK.

Shoebridge sought to cover the Greens' embrace of militarism by declaring that its weapons program would be "for strictly defensive purposes only." But that is threadbare. The most rapacious predatory powers in history, from Nazi Germany to the American war machine, have always sought to present their military build-ups as guarantors of "defence" and "freedom."

The assets that the Greens are talking about acquiring have plainly offensive capabilities. They have stated that the missiles should be medium range, which typically reach between 1,000 and 3,000 kilometres and intermediate, which generally have a range somewhere between 3,000 and 5,500 kilometres.

The Greens' missiles, which would presumably be stationed

on the northern approaches to the continent, on a "defensive" pretext, could thus fire far into the Indo-Pacific.

The party's proposal for a focus on rapid missile production dovetails with plans already underway by the Labor government and the national-security establishment. A 2023 Defence Strategic Review (DSR), adopted in full by Labor, recommended an immediate focus on equipping all branches of the armed forces with missiles, to ensure "impactful projection" in the context of "geopolitical conflicts" and the prospect of war.

Whatever Shoebridge's obfuscations, he is essentially proposing the same.

The other capabilities promoted by the Greens, "uncrewed marine and aerial vehicles," i.e., drones, were also prominent in the DSR and in the broader official discussion around bolstering military capability.

Significantly, Shoebridge has invoked the experience of the Ukraine war, where drones have played a central role in the carnage that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The Greens have been among the most aggressive parliamentary parties in their support of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Two factors seem to account for the Greens' more open embrace of militarism.

The first is the crisis character of the upcoming federal election. All polling indicates that neither of the major parties, Labor nor the Liberal-National Coalition, are likely to be able to form a majority government.

For several months, the Greens have been agitating for a formal alliance with Labor, in the event that the election produces a minority Labor government. Given that Labor's central policy for the past three years has been a massive expansion of the military, in preparation for war with China, Shoebridge's announcement is a clear signal that the Greens would not hinder a further military build-up if they were to enter into some form of coalition government.

The other factor is the uncertainty produced by Trump's election. Trump's willingness to engage in conflict with traditional US partners, particularly the European powers, and his ostentatious rejection of Australia's pleadings for an exemption to tariffs on steel and aluminium exports, have

raised sharp questions in ruling circles over the reliability of the US-Australian alliance.

Shoebridge was clearly pitching to those concerns. He denounced the AUKUS submarine program, as well as plans to purchase M1A2 Abrams tanks and Black Hawks, not primarily on the grounds that these were weapons of war. Instead, Shoebridge warned that they were “expensive” and “outdated,” and would not be operational for many years to come.

Shoebridge spoke vaguely about the need to “decouple” the Australian military from its US counterpart, and the dangers of completely hewing to the unpredictable Trump administration.

But significantly, he said nothing about the underlying purpose of AUKUS, or the much larger US and Australian military build-up of which it is a part. That aim, outlined both in US government and Australian government documents, is to prepare for an offensive war against China, which is viewed as the chief threat to the global dominance of American imperialism.

By not mentioning this fundamental fact, as he was proposing a military build-up partially cribbed from the DSR and other national-security plans, Shoebridge was indicating the support of the Greens for confrontation with China.

The very manner of the Greens’ presentation, of the need to defend the Australian continent, feeds into the bogus claims that China would be the aggressor, and that the US and allied military operations against it are of a “defensive” character.

The ABC’s Andrew Green noted that at the last election, the Greens proposed a cap of defence spending at 1.5 percent of gross domestic product. Even that would have meant an annual military spending of more than \$25 billion. But now, the Greens have dropped even that. Instead, Shoebridge described the missile program as only the “beginning” of a broader military expansion.

The program is an exposure of both the Greens, and of the “anti-AUKUS” movement that has developed in Australia. The latter has brought together right-wing Labor Party figures, such as former Prime Minister Paul Keating and former Foreign Minister Bob Carr, with the Greens, sections of the union bureaucracy and pacifist activists.

The fake-left groups such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance have presented the anti-AUKUS movement as an anti-war movement, as part of their broader attempts to chain growing opposition to militarism among workers and youth to Labor, the Greens and the corporatist unions.

The WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party alone have warned from the outset that the anti-AUKUS movement is a nationalist trap for such discontent. Defining its class character, we warned that it represented, not an initial expression of anti-war sentiment among ordinary people, but tactical divisions within the ruling class.

Figures such as Keating and Carr were speaking for a minority that feared the implications of complete Australian integration into the US war drive against China. Their calls for

a more “independent foreign policy,” we warned, meant a slightly alternative version of the military build-up that is already underway.

Whatever their tactical quibbles, given Australia’s character as a middle order imperialist power that has always advanced its own predatory interests under the umbrella of the dominant power of the day, they would ultimately fall in behind a US war against China if it broke out. In any event, the “sovereign” military assets demanded by the anti-AUKUS movement could be deployed against the peoples of the South Pacific, the historic stamping ground of Australian imperialism.

We noted that the calls for “independent” foreign policy and “sovereign military capability” hinted at an even more aggressive and assertive Australian militarism. That warning, too, has been confirmed.

The Greens announcement expresses a confluence between the “anti-AUKUS” movement and the most hawkish layers of the national-security establishment, who have traditionally promoted the US alliance and have been most aggressive in their calls for a confrontation with China.

That confluence was given a nod by Shoebridge, who described the Greens policy as the beginning of a “plan B” for the Australian military. He took the phrase from comments made by Admiral Chris Barrie, former head of the Australian Defence Force. Barrie had warned last week that the US had become an “unreliable ally” under Trump, that the AUKUS submarines may never eventuate and that it was urgent for Australia to acquire new capabilities, a “plan B.”

Similar statements, accompanied by calls for missile and drone capabilities, have been made by the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s international editor Peter Hartcher and the *Australian*’s Greg Sheridan. They are the media commentators with some of the closest ties to the military-intelligence establishment. Whatever their occasional rhetoric, that is the constituency to which Shoebridge and the Greens are now pitching.



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