

Labor government announces naval hub in Western Australia aimed against China

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On Sunday, the Labor government announced an initial \$12 billion commitment to construct a major naval facility in Henderson, south of Perth, the state capital of Western Australia. The facility will be used to build naval vessels, as well as to dock and maintain nuclear-powered submarines.

The facility, together with other military infrastructure around Perth, including the Stirling naval base, has been described by the government as a “hub.” That is a euphemism for what is effectively a massive US military base on the Indian Ocean coast, which will play a central role in Washington’s preparations for an aggressive war against China.

The facility has been depicted as an important step in the implementation of the AUKUS agreement with the US and the UK, under which Australia is supposed to acquire several nuclear-powered submarines from America early in the 2030s.

But, well in advance of that, Washington’s own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines will be docking in Western Australia. There have already been several visits by US submarines over the past two years, and by 2027 they are set to “rotate” through Western Australia on a semi-permanent basis, in what is in all but name a basing arrangement.

In making their announcement, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Defence Minister Richard Marles presented the facility as the basis for continuous naval ship-building in Australia as well as the preparation for receiving the nuclear-powered subs from the US.

Both sought to talk up the supposed boon to the Western Australian economy that the facility would result in and the jobs that it would create. However, given the nature of highly advanced naval production techniques, it is likely that the workforce will be small

and highly skilled.

Marles was more explicit on the immediate purpose of the facility in comments on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) “Insiders” program on Sunday morning.

“There is the opportunity here ... of seeing much greater sea days for the American fleet occur by virtue of the use of Australia, by virtue of the cohort of people that we are building up right now to work on nuclear-powered submarines.” Marles added: “That is of enormous advantage in terms of getting more US Virginia-class submarines out to sea for the US Navy.”

The \$12 billion commitment is only the first tranche of a spend that the government estimates at \$25 billion over the decade on the Henderson facility. And it is only one element of a broader military build-up around Perth.

Speaking to the ABC on Friday, Australian Submarine Agency chief Jonathan Mead revealed advanced plans for the stationing and housing of up to 1,200 US and UK naval and military personnel, who will “soon” live in Perth on a permanent basis. The vast majority, over 1,000, will be American.

The Defence Force was rapidly expanding its property portfolio in the southern suburbs of Perth, to provide the US and UK forces with dwellings. The ABC noted the unusual character of the arrangement, which is different to the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base and an annual “rotation” of US Marines through Darwin, in that the US forces will not be segregated at a military base but will be present in the community.

“The massive works will deeply embed United States military personnel and hardware into the West Australian community, in a way that will be difficult to unpick,” the ABC noted.

The focus of the deployment is the Stirling naval base. For years, Washington has sought greater access as part of the build-up against China. In US think-tanks, Stirling is presented not merely as an important sphere of US-Australian military collaboration, but as one of the central facilities for launching aggressive operations against China throughout the Indo-Pacific.

In a report on AUKUS last month, for instance, the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies declared that “Stirling will quickly provide the United States access to an operational base” for its nuclear-powered subs “in a critical location: west of the international dateline, astride the Indian Ocean, and close to the South China Sea.”

It went on: “From this location, U.S., UK, and eventually Australian submarines will be able to reach critical areas of potential crisis and conflict undetected, creating a far more complex and challenging operational environment for Beijing.”

Days before the Henderson announcement, Labor unveiled a plan to develop a fleet of “ghost shark” amphibious drones. The craft, which are being constructed in Sydney at a cost of \$1.7 billion, can be launched from a vessel or from land.

Few details were provided, except that their capabilities not only include reconnaissance and surveillance, but also the launching of strikes against targets. Marles did not say how many “ghost sharks” were being constructed, but indicated that there would be “dozens,” with the first to be operational next January.

The two announcements are the first major military commitments by the Labor government since it was reelected in May.

In its first term of office, Labor went a substantial way to completing Australia’s transformation into a frontline state for war against China. That included a vast expansion of US access to Australian military facilities, including providing Washington with permission to station some of its most potent offensive strike capabilities, such as B-52 bombers which can carry nuclear weapons, in the country.

Labor also began the largest build-up of the Australian military in decades. It is equipping all branches of the military with missiles and took military spending to an annual record of more than \$50 billion

for the first time.

Since its reelection, however, Labor has been under intense pressure from the US to go even further. In the context of his frothing denunciations of China and declarations that military conflict may be “imminent,” US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has publicly demanded that allies throughout the Indo-Pacific dramatically increase their defence budgets.

Hegseth has said that the figure must approach 5 percent of gross domestic product, and gave an immediate target for Australia of 3.5 percent of GDP, well above the current allocation of just over 2 percent.

At the same time, Hegseth and Washington have demanded that Australia and Japan commit their military assets, in advance, to participate in a war with China.

The public campaign has gone hand in hand with a “review” of the AUKUS pact by the Trump administration, which has dragged on for more than two months, despite having been initially set at 30 days.

Labor’s announcements are a clear attempt to assuage the concerns of the Trump administration that it is not doing enough to prepare for a conflict with China. The timing is likely related to an upcoming trip by Albanese to the US, under conditions where he has been unable to secure a meeting with Trump since winning the May election.

In the campaign for that election, Labor and the entire political and media establishment buried the issues of militarism and war. Labor did not once mention the plans for the transformation of Perth into the premier naval hub for US-led aggression on the Indian Ocean. That again underscores the reality that the descent into war by the imperialist powers will inevitably provoke widespread opposition and is incompatible with basic democratic rights.



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