

# US, Australia, UK pledge “full steam ahead” on AUKUS preparations for war against China

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At meetings in Washington last week, the Trump administration and representatives of the UK and Australia declared that they would proceed at “full steam” with their AUKUS pact that is militarising the Indo-Pacific in preparation for war against China.

The meetings were held just days after the Trump administration finalised a review into AUKUS. The review, which had been scheduled for 30 days, dragged on for several months. In that period, the Trump administration publicly demanded massive increases to military spending by the Australian government, while it leaked doubts to the media about the viability of AUKUS.

The review has been provided to the Australian and UK governments, but not to the media so the outcome of the protracted backroom wrangling is entirely opaque. But the governments have declared their confidence in AUKUS and determination to proceed with it, including the plan for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines from the US at the beginning of the next decade.

While in Washington, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and Foreign Minister Penny Wong hailed the outcome. They touted the deepening of US-Australian military ties, including Washington’s ever greater military footprint on the Australian continent.

That was the thrust of Marles remarks at the press conference of the first meeting, an Australia–United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN), on Monday. The meeting, he stated, had continued the theme of previous consultations, which had focussed on “the growth of American Force Posture in Australia.”

Marles rattled off various projects. That includes the transformation of Perth into a naval hub that will service and host America’s own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. In September, Labor announced an initial \$12 billion for the development of a naval facility at

Henderson, south of Perth, which will be integrated with the city’s Stirling naval base.

Some 1,000 US military forces will be stationed in Perth, while regular “rotations” of US nuclear-submarines are scheduled to begin in 2027. That is a US base in all but name, adjacent to the strategically-crucial Indian Ocean.

Marles emphasised that even before the formal establishment of the “rotation,” it has effectively begun. “In the last six weeks, we’ve had the USS Vermont undertake the most extensive maintenance on a United States nuclear-powered submarine outside of the United States ever,” he boasted.

While Western Australia is being transformed into a launching point for US nuclear-powered submarines, the north of the continent is becoming a central stationing ground for American imperialism’s aerial forces.

Marles bragged that his government is carrying out “infrastructure investments at RAAF base Darwin, RAAF Base Tindal and RAAF Base Amberley, which will support increased rotations of American military aircraft, that includes fighter planes, bombers and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft.”

The US bombers to be stationed in the north include B-52s, which can carry nuclear weapons.

Notably, both Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth also spoke in specific detail about the naval and aerial deployments, emphasising their central role in US operations throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The two other issues raised were the importance of the US-Australian critical minerals framework, signed by Trump and Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese last month. The deal, providing for accelerated mining of Australia’s vast deposits of critical minerals that are

crucial to modern technologies including for the military, is aimed at countering China's domination of the sector.

References were also made to a plan for joint missile production over the next two years, including the construction of hypersonic missiles.

On Wednesday, Marles and Hegseth were joined by UK Defence Secretary John Healey for an AUKUS meeting. In brief remarks, the three trotted out the "full steam ahead" line.

At the press conferences following both the AUSMIN and AUKUS meetings, references were made to increased geopolitical competition.

The AUSMIN statement, in addition to outlining increased US basing in Australia and joint weapons production, called for a deepening of the various US-led anti-China alliances, of which Australia is a part. Though China is not mentioned, the usual litany of US denunciations of Beijing are there, including bogus claims that it is engaged in "coercion" and aggression against regional states.

For all of the declarations of "full steam ahead," the meetings raised a host of questions for which no answers were provided.

Less than a week before the gatherings, prior to the finalisation of the review, there was a prospect of the Trump administration terminating AUKUS, or elements of it. Despite that, the statement from the AUKUS meeting is perfunctory and contains virtually no details as to how it will proceed.

According to accounts provided to the press, the review emphasises the need for "deadlines" to be met if AUKUS is to continue as a viable project. However, it is openly acknowledged by some senior US figures that America does not have the shipbuilding capacity to sustain demands for the expansion of its own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, let alone to sell subs to Australia within several years.

There have reportedly also been concerns raised by the Pentagon that Australia does not have the workforce or military personnel required to crew and maintain its own fleet.

As the review was dragged on, two issues were raised by the Trump administration.

The first was a demand, made publicly by Hegseth and other US leaders, that Australia immediately increase its defence spending from a little over 2 percent of gross domestic product, to 3.5 percent and eventually 5 percent. That would boost annual military spending from the current record of \$59 billion, to over \$100 billion.

The other was an insistence, also leaked to the press, that Australia commit in advance to deploying the nuclear-powered subs and other military assets to a war against China if it were to break out.

In Washington, Marles was repeatedly asked by the press if demands had been raised for increased Australian military spending. He dodged the question. The ongoing concerns over US shipbuilding capacity also raise the issue of whether further subsidies to the sector are being requested from Australia. Already, Labor has committed to providing \$4.5 billion in handouts, half of which has been transferred.

The questions are compounded by the Trump administration's National Security Strategy, also released days before the meetings in Washington. The document, based upon the "America First" nationalism and militarism of the Trump regime, places emphasis on geopolitical and economic confrontation in the Indo-Pacific, i.e., against China. It demands greater military spending from allies in the region.

A comment by Dr Lavina Lee, a hawkish Australian academic at the Washington-funded US Studies Centre in Sydney, was bluntly headlined "Trump's new security strategy demands Australia step up or step aside." Lee wrote: "AUKUS will be used to increase the pressure on Australia to do and spend more rather than allow us to breathe a sigh of relief or rest on our laurels."

Under conditions where the Labor government is already completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state for war with China and has committed to spending \$368 billion on AUKUS over the lifetime of the agreement, far more is being demanded.

In that context, the AUSMIN and AUKUS meetings had the character of a conspiracy against the population. While they publicly touted their commitment to militarism, there is little doubt that far-reaching proposals, including for an even greater diversion of public resources to the war machine, were discussed behind closed doors.

The ever accelerating military build-up underscores the reality that amid a breakdown of capitalism, the major powers, including Australia, are preparing for a war that would dwarf even the horrors of the 20th century.



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