

# AUKUS, Congress and Cold Feet

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Global Research, May 31, 2023

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

\*\*\*

*The undertakings made by Australia regarding the AUKUS security pact promise to be monumental. Much of this is negative: increased militarisation on the home front; the co-opting of the university sector for war making industries and defence contractors; and the capitulation and total subordination of the Australian Defence Force to the Pentagon.*

There are also other, neglected dimensions at work here: the failure, as yet, for the Commonwealth to establish a viable, acceptable site for the long term storage of high-grade nuclear waste; the uncertainty about where the submarines will be located; the absence of skills in the construction and operational level in Australia regarding nuclear-powered submarines; and, fundamentally, whether a nuclear-powered Australian-UK-US submarine (AUKUS SSN) will ever see the light of day.

One obstacle, habitually ignored in the Australian dialogue on AUKUS, are the rumbling concerns in the US itself about transferring submarines from the US Navy in the first place. These concerns are summarised in the Congressional Research Service [report](#) released on May 22, outlining the background and issues for US politicians regarding the procurement of the Virginia (SSN-774) submarine. "One issue for Congress is whether to approve, reject, or modify DOD's AUKUS-related legislative package for the FY2024 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] sent to Congress on May 2, 2023". This includes requested authorisation for the transfer of "up to two Virginia-class SSNs to the government of Australia in the form of sale, with the costs of the transfer to be covered by the government of Australia."

A laundry list of concerns and potentially grave issues are suggested, and the report is clear that these are not exhaustive. They are also bound to send shivers down the spine of the adulatory Canberra planning establishment, so keen to keep Washington interested. There is, for instance, the question as to whether the transfer of the Virginia-class boats should be authorised as part of the 2024 financial year, or deferred "until a future NDAA."

There is also the matter about how many submarines should be part of the request, whether it remains up to two as per the current request, or larger numbers. With those numbers also

comes the dilemma as to what vintage they will be: those with less than 33 years of expected service life, or newly minted ones with the full 33-year period of operational service. (We can already hazard a guess on that one.)

The issue of cost also looms large. What will Australia, for instance, pay for the Virginia-class vessels, and furthermore, the amount that would be needed as “a proportionate financial investment” in Washington’s own “submarine construction industrial base.” Such a potentially delicious state of affairs for US shipbuilders, who will be receiving funds from the Australian purse to accelerate ship-building efforts.

Other issues suggest questions on operational worth. What would, for instance, be the “net impact on collective allied deterrence and warfighting capabilities of transferring three to five Virginia-class boats to Australia while pursuing the construction of three to five replacement SSNs for the US Navy”. The transfer of US naval nuclear propulsion technology would come with its “benefits and risks” and should also be cognisant of broader implications to US relations with countries in the Indo-Pacific, not to mention “the overall political and security situation in” in the region.

The report takes note of sceptics who claim this “could weaken deterrence of potential Chinese aggression if China were to find reason to believe, correctly or not, that Australia might use the transferred Virginia-class boats less effectively than the US Navy would”. This is a rather damning suspicion. Will Australian sailors either have the full capacity and skills not only to use the weaponry in their possession, but actually comply with US wishes in any deployment, even in a future conflict?

The report is particularly interesting from the perspective of assuming that Australia will retain sovereign decision-making capacity over the use of the vessels, something that can only induce much scoffing. “Australia might not involve its military, including its Virginia-class boats, in US-China crises or conflicts that Australia viewed as not engaging important Australian interests.” On that score, the report notes remarks by Australia’s Defence Minister Richard Marles made in March 2023 that are specifically underlined to concern Congress. Of specific interest was the claim that “no promises” had been made by Australia to the United States “that Australia would support the United States in a future conflict over Taiwan.”

This is a charming admission that members of the US Congress may well be pushing for a quid pro quo: we authorise the boat transfer; you duly affirm your commitment to shed blood with us in the next grandly idiotic battle.

There is also a notable pointer in the direction of whether an individual SSN AUKUS should even be built. Sceptics, it follows, could argue that it would be preferable that US nuclear submarines “perform both US and Australian SSN missions while Australia invests in other types of military forces, as to create a capacity for performing other military missions for both Australia and the United States.”

This is exactly the kind of rationale that will confirm the holing of Australian sovereignty, not that there was much to begin with. But those voices marshalled against AUKUS will be able to take heart that Congress may, whatever its selfish reasons, be a formidable agent of obstruction. President Joe Biden, his successors, and the otherwise fractious electoral chambers certainly agree on one thing: America First, followed by a gaggle of allies foolishly holding the rear.

\*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He currently lectures at RMIT University. He is a regular contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: [bkampmark@gmail.com](mailto:bkampmark@gmail.com)*

*Featured image is from [InfoBrics](#)*

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#), Global Research, 2023

---

**[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)**

**[Become a Member of Global Research](#)**

Articles by: [Dr. Binoy  
Kampmark](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)