

AUKUS Submarines: Beasts of Nuclear Proliferation

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When faced with the option of acquiring nuclear technology, states have rarely refused. Since the splitting of the atom and the deployment of atomic weapons in war, the acquisition of a nuclear capacity has been a dream. Those who did acquire it, in turn, tried to restrict others from joining what has become, over the years, an exclusive club guarded by self-justified psychosis.

Members of the nuclear club engage in an elaborate ceremonial in claiming that their nuclear weapons inventory will eventually be emptied. Non-nuclear weapons states allied to such powers go along with appearances, taking comfort that nuclear weapons states will offer them an umbrella of security.

This insane hypocrisy underlines such arrangements as the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#). Central to the document is the discouragement of non-nuclear weapons states from weaponizing nuclear technology as long as members of the nuclear club pursue “good-faith” disarmament negotiations. While it is true to say that the NPT probably prevented a speedier, less infectious spread of the nuclear virus, it remains a constipated regime of imperfections that has merely delayed proliferation.

Most tellingly of all, most non-nuclear weapon states have complied with their undertakings. Nuclear weapons states have not, disregarding serious multilateral nuclear disarmament. Nor do they have an incentive to alter current arrangements, [given that any changes](#) to the NPT can only take place with the unanimous support of the three treaty depositories: Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The NPT supporters pour scorn at alternative approaches to nuclear weapons, such as the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (TPNW), which had its first meeting of state parties in Vienna from June 21 to 23. While the Albanese government did [send](#) Susan Templeman MP to the meeting as an observer, Canberra has remained consistently opposed to the TPNW as a threat to the accepted disarmament and NPT framework. Dated and spurious concepts such as extended nuclear deterrence and the interoperability of

Australian and US military systems tend to be common justifications.

The AUKUS security partnership that was announced in September 2021 by Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, has muddied the pool of non-proliferation. A central component of the agreement is a promise to share nuclear propulsion technology with Australia, enabling it to acquire eight nuclear submarines to be supposedly built in Adelaide, South Australia. While much of this is wishful thinking (Australia has no expertise in the field, and will have to rely wholeheartedly on expertise from the other two), the glaring problem in the arrangement is what it does to non-proliferation arrangements.

While the previous Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was ignorantly confident that the agreement would comply with Australia's own non-proliferation commitments, such confidence is misplaced. For one thing, [Article III](#) of the NPT exempts naval reactors from nuclear safeguards, which [threatens](#) a pillar of the regime, namely, limiting the production and use of highly enriched uranium (HEU) which can be used, in turn, to make nuclear weapons.

Non-proliferation experts have not been enthusiastic with these promised new beasts for the Royal Australian Navy. Daryl G. Kimball, director of the Arms Control Association, [notes](#) the salient difference between deepening defence cooperation on the one hand with allies and proliferating "sensitive HEU nuclear propulsion tech in contravention of US and global nonpro principles."

Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, [greeted](#) AUKUS with much gloom when it was announced. Its provisions on nuclear technology would "further intensify the arms race in the region and the dynamics that fuel military competition."

The International Atomic Energy Agency's Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi is visiting Australia to discuss the issue of safeguards regarding nuclear material used for naval propulsion. This is nothing short of problematic, given that IAEA inspectors are unable to inspect such material for extended periods of time when the vessel is at sea.

Grossi, in mild understatement, [calls](#) this "quite complex", though is keen to accommodate Australian commitments to non-proliferation alongside the acquisition of nuclear technology. "There is a period of 18 months which was given by the three partners - the United States, United Kingdom and Australia - to define how the project is going to be implemented but, already we have started this interaction, this joint work of technical levels so that we can reconcile both things."

In a [statement](#) made prior to Grossi's visit, Foreign Minister Penny Wong reiterated Australia's "longstanding" support of the "IAEA's mission to harness the peaceful use of nuclear technology in areas like medicine, industrial processes and environmental monitoring, as well as upholding the international nuclear non-proliferation regime."

This world as described by Senator Wong is distinctly pre-AUKUS. Despite promises of "open and transparent engagement with the IAEA on nuclear safeguards", the whinnying horse of proliferation has bolted from the stable. Assurances to avoid the future development of an Australian nuclear weapons capability or a national nuclear fuel cycle also ring hollow.

The precedent of permitting Australia to be the only non-nuclear weapons state with HEU-propelled technology is also seismic on another level. There will be nothing stopping China and Russia doing what the United States and the UK promise to do: proliferate naval reactor technology and long-range missiles with a nuclear capability.

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[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

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Reviews

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Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world's only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

-Ellen Brown, author of 'Web of Debt' and president of the Public Banking Institute

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