

The Warring Peace: The AUKUS Submarine Announcement

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History is filled with failed planners and plans, threats thought of that did not eventuate, and threats unthought of that found their way into the books. The AUKUS agreement is an attempt to inflate a threat by developing a number of fictional capabilities in an effort to combat an inflated adversary.

The checklist of imminent failure for this security pact between the United States, the UK and Australia is impressive and comically grotesque. In terms of the nuclear-powered submarine component, there are issues of expertise, infrastructure, hurdles of technology transfer, the hobbling feature of domestic politics, and national considerations. There are also matters of irresponsible costs, of the exhaustion of public money best spent elsewhere.

To put it bluntly, Australia and all its resources spanning across a number of industries will be co-opted in this enterprise against a phantom enemy, subjugating an already subordinate state to the US war-making enterprise.

All of this was laid bare at San Diego's Point Loma Naval Base on March 13, where the US imperium, backed up by a number of lickspittles from Australia and the United Kingdom, betrayed the cause of peace and announced to the world that war with China was not only a possibility but distinctly probable.

Central to the project is [a staggering outlay](#) of A\$368 billion for up to thirteen vessels over three decades. Canberra will purchase at least three US-manufactured nuclear submarines while contributing “significant additional resources” to US shipyards. (Bully for the US builders.) Given that the United States is unable to make up its own inventory of Virginia class nuclear submarines at this stage, the purchase will be second hand, a point which is bound to niggle members of Congress. Two more vessels are also being thrown in as a possibility, should the “need” arise.

During this time, design and construction will take place on a new submarine dubbed the

SSN-AUKUS, exploiting the work already undertaken by the UK on replacing the Astute-class submarines. It will be, [according](#) to the White House, “based upon the United Kingdom’s next generation SSN design while incorporating cutting edge US submarine technologies, and will be built and deployed by both Australia and the United Kingdom.”

This point was [also reiterated](#) by the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak. “The Royal Navy will operate the same submarines as the Australian Navy and we’ll share components and parts with the US Navy.” Five of these are intended for the Royal Australian Navy by the middle of the 2050s, with one submarine being produced every two years from the early 2040s.

The speech by the Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, was more than a touch embarrassing. It certainly did its bit to bury conventional understandings of sovereignty. “This will be an Australian sovereign capability, commanded by the Royal Australian Navy and sustained by Australians in Australian shipyards, with construction to begin within the decade.” The lexically challenged are truly in charge.

And what about the submarine personnel themselves? Australian submariners as yet unacquainted with nuclear technology would be trained in the US. “I am proud to confirm that they are in the top 30 per cent of their class.” Can the Australians do a bit better than that?

The US President could only express satisfaction at such displays of unflagging, wobbly free obedience. “Today, as we stand at the inflection point of history, where the hard work of announcing deterrence and enhancing stability is going to reflect peace and stability for decades to come, the United States can ask for no better partners in the Indo-Pacific where so much of our shared future will be written.”

As the White House [statement](#) promises, visits by US nuclear submarines to Australia will begin this year, with Australian personnel joining US crews for “training and development”. The UK will take its turn at the start of 2026.

Australia promises to become even busier on that front, with a US-UK rotational presence commencing in 2027 which will be named the “Submarine Rotational Force-West” (SRF-West). One UK Astute class submarine, and as many as four Virginia class submarines will find themselves at HMAS Stirling near Perth.

The effusive punditry on the Australian morning proved indigestible. For those inclined towards peace, this must have seemed like a chance to initiate a few citizen arrests. Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, who also holds the defence portfolio, was a quivering sight. He remarked about the scale of the enterprise, justifying it against “the biggest conventional military build-up” in the region – those sneaky authoritarians in Beijing again – in an environment hostile to the “international rules-based order”. Failure to do so would see Australia “condemned”. (No mention here that the US military budget remains the largest on the planet.)

As for the issue of budgetary costs, Marles bizarrely and brazenly suggested that these would be “neutral” in the context of defence, despite the likelihood that cuts will have to be made, and various policy priorities jettisoned.

For morning viewers already fearing for their lives, there was a beaming South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas thrilled that his state would eventually be producing the SSN-

AUKUS at the as yet non-existent Submarine Construction Yard in Adelaide. The fact that his state has neither the resources, infrastructure nor the personnel for such a task, was hardly reason to spoil the flag fluttering show. "There are smiles all around," he beamed to the hosts of the ABC Breakfast show.

US commentators, notably Charles Edel of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, emphasised that Australian defence was being vastly improved, or "augmented", along with its military industrial base. Blame China, suggested Edel, for exploiting a "permissive security environment" and exciting such urges on the part of the three countries. The US Ambassador to Australia, Caroline Kennedy, even thought that this colossal waste of resources would add to the quotient of regional prosperity.

The opposite is very much the case: a profligate exercise that serves to turn Australia into a multi-generational garrison state at the beckon call of Washington's war machine that will host, at stages, nuclear weapons. The latter aspect is bound to fly in the face of the Treaty of Rarotonga, otherwise known as the [South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty](#). But the Alice in Wonderland quality to the AUKUS agreement is bound to paper over that inconvenience. For a warring peace is exactly what awaits.

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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

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