

Submission 6  
“AUKUS”

**Introduction.**

Since the announcement, that we first heard on September 16, that Australia was to join the new AUKUS arrangement, there has been a deluge of articles on the topic by people with much greater expertise than I. Three former Prime Ministers, Paul Keating, Malcolm Turnbull and Kevin Rudd, have written on the topic – all indicating serious concerns about this new development. Personally, I have recorded the details of published material every day except one, over fourteen days since the announcement. I have never seen such media interest in a defence-related topic. I am doubtful that I can add anything new to the debate. Having said that, I am overwhelmingly convinced by what has been written that AUKUS was a bad decision for the nation.

My main concern is that AUKUS takes Australia another step on the path that has war at its end-point. One, particular aspect of this is the gradual and ongoing process under which Australia's military resources are being swallowed up within the USA's military machine. I should add that, based on its recorded actions, I consider the USA to be an aggressive and violent nation and a dangerous threat to international peace.

In 2001, I was taken aback at Australia's willingness (even eagerness) to become engaged in the US-led Afghanistan campaign.

In 2003, I watched in disbelief as Australia joined the invasion of Iraq, against all informed opinion at the time and despite the massive, international, popular protests about going to war. It was absolutely clear that Iraq posed no threat to Australia (or the USA, for that matter) and apparent that the main reason for Australia's participation was to re-affirm this nation's loyalty to the USA.

In 2011, I was outraged at the decision to allow (or was it 'invite'?) US marines to be stationed in Darwin<sup>i</sup>. To me, this was a strategic blunder of huge significance. In following years, I followed the statements issued from AUSMIN meetings and formed the impression that each, successive meeting marked a slightly closer integration of the ADF within the USA's military structure. 'Interoperability' became a self-reinforcing and sufficient reason for further enmeshment.

In 2014 I was excited to read Malcolm Fraser's book 'Dangerous Allies'<sup>ii</sup>, which echoed my own thoughts about the real nature of Australia's relationship with the USA, encapsulated in the idea that Australia only needs US forces to protect it because their presence makes it a possible target for attack.

However, the presence of US marines on a routine basis has not been and is not the end of the gradual and relentless process, under which Australia's military is disappearing down the throat of the USA's Military Industrial Complex.

The latest development, AUKUS, takes the nation one more, giant stride towards the total integration of Australia's forces with the USA's. The loss of autonomy that this represents is the saddest and most significant feature of this development.

At the risk of repeating ideas that have been written in abundance by others, I offer a number of arguments against AUKUS and the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. These arguments will be outlined in brief.

### **1. Regional Stability**

The announcement of September 16 included this absurd statement:-

“The endeavor we launch today will help sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>iii</sup>

There is just no way that increasing the extent and sophistication of weaponry in our region will make it more stable. The AUKUS arrangement clearly ‘ups the ante’ in terms of tension between China and USA/Australia. Anyone can see this. China is, without doubt, acutely aware of it and will be responding accordingly. AUKUS represents a major escalation of tensions, increasing and not decreasing the likelihood of future hostilities.

One immediate consequence of AUKUS is that Australia now (officially) has ‘adversaries’<sup>iv</sup>. This is an extraordinary and regrettable development. Australia is an island continent, with no land borders, a resourceful population and abundant natural resources. As such it is extremely safe and in no danger. Consequently, it need have and should have no enemies.

The creation of adversaries where none previously existed is hard to comprehend. It can, though, be understood in the light of the USA’s deep concern about China emerging as a potential competitor and rival in economic power. America’s position on China was openly displayed by John Mearsheimer in debate with Hugh White in 2019<sup>v</sup>. The USA is openly antagonistic to China and is, through AUKUS, enticing Australia further into its camp.

### **2. War Powers**

A feature of all the developments outlined in my opening paragraphs is that they were all taken without any debate in the Australian parliament. In every case, the decision (to invade Iraq; to host US marines; to obtain nuclear submarines) has been delivered to the Australian population as *fait accompli*. That such significant steps have been, and are being, taken in this manner is an outright denial of what should be accepted as necessary procedure in a democracy. There are no more important decisions of government than those that relate to military security, yet Australia maintains a routine tradition of keeping such decisions hidden from public scrutiny. This, in itself, is a good enough reason for doubting their wisdom. Our leaders are very quick to claim the superiority of democratic systems of government, but their actions display a high level of the very autocracy they decry in others.

As time goes by, there is less and less public input into important defence decisions. For example, where there were once public events at which people could raise issues in connection with an impending Defence White Paper, there is no longer any such a general, public consultation process.

AUKUS is but the latest manifestation of this way of conducting government business. The unfortunate point is that this particular decision has had, is having and will have, such far-reaching consequences. It throws into a very clear light the need for ‘War Powers Reform’.

### 3. Strategy for the Future

Hugh White has pointed out the lack, or absence, of wisdom in Australia committing itself to deep, military enmeshment with the USA in an attempt to 'contain' China. He writes:-

"We in Australia simply cannot plan our future on the assumption that the USA will always be there, no matter how many submarines we buy. And if the US, by miscalculation, does find itself at war with China, we absolutely cannot assume that it would win.

...confronting and containing China won't work.

...

(Morrison) has tied Australia to a deal that undermines our sovereign capabilities, overspends on hardware we can barely be confident of operating, and drags us closer to the front line of a war we may have no interest in fighting." <sup>vi</sup>

Paul Keating explains that AUKUS is "locking the country and its military forces into the force strategy of the United States by acquiring US submarines." In the same article he points out that the so-called 'threat' from China "in fact, has never been made and has never materialised." <sup>vii</sup>

### 4. "Cui bono" in the AUKUS.

An important consideration in looking at AUKUS is the question of who benefits from the new arrangement.

'Moon of Alabama' (MoA) is in no doubt that the main beneficiary is the USA. "This is a huge but short term win for the U.S. with an also-ran booby price for Britain and a strategic loss of sovereignty and budget control for Australia." <sup>viii</sup>

MoA points out that the UK may offer its 'Astute' class submarine and the USA its 'Virginia' class, and that Australia, lacking the expertise and workforce to build and/or maintain such vessels, will be beholden to either country, whatever deal is finally struck. Australia is burdening itself with a long-term commitment of unknown dollar value, for vessels that may need to travel across the Pacific or around the globe to be kept in service.

There are also strategic question to be asked in connection with 'benefits' of AUKUS.

Allan Behm suggests "Australia's decision to join with the United States and the United Kingdom to build Australian long-range nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) has little to do with the defence of Australia. The aim is to make possible an Australian contribution to US battle plans against China which that country will view as profoundly threatening with implications also for war planning by Russia, North Korea and other nuclear-armed states." <sup>ix</sup>

Nuclear submarines, by their nature, are long-range vessels. This makes them of strategic value because they can threaten a distant adversary. They are not intended for local, short-range, defensive operations. Bearing in mind Australia's repeatedly displayed willingness to join the USA in wars of the USA's choosing, the likelihood is that the submarines would join the US fleet off the coast of China, if hostilities between the USA

and China break out. The submarines would thus serve to benefit the USA's military objectives and may well have been offered to Australia with that in mind.

Other aspects of the AUKUS arrangements, beyond the matter of the submarines, give cause for concern. According to the Joint Statement issued on September 17, the following have been endorsed:-

- *Enhanced air cooperation through the rotational deployment of U.S. aircraft of all types in Australia and appropriate aircraft training and exercises.*
- *Enhanced maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of U.S. surface and subsurface vessels in Australia.*
- *Enhanced land cooperation by conducting more complex and more integrated exercises and greater combined engagement with Allies and Partners in the region.*
- *Establish a combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise to support high end warfighting and combined military operations in the region.<sup>x</sup>*

Reading between the lines of these dot-points, Australia can expect more visits from US aircraft of all types, including bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons; more visits from US warships, which might include nuclear-powered vessels and, again, those capable of carrying nuclear weapons; the storage of US military materiel on Australian territory; more exercises, involving greater numbers of troops, and the possibility of engagement in 'high end conflict'. Most of these developments had been foreshadowed in a 2013 CSBA report.<sup>xi</sup>

As far as I can tell, this indicates that the ADF is moving closer to the USA in every way, to the extent that it will be impossible for Australia to escape the enmity of China, should the USA provoke a conflict. As President Obama boasted in 2011, addressing ADF personnel in Darwin, "You can't tell where our guys end and you guys begin..."<sup>xii</sup>

Mike Scafton has written:-

"According to *Foreign Policy*, the day before the AUKUS and AUSMIN announcements, Biden administration officials briefed that the "deal to build nuclear-powered submarines with Britain and Australia" was designed "to secure more US military basing rights in the region". In particular, the plan was "to bring rotations of US fighters and bombers to northern Australia" and potentially "acquire more rotational basing for its submarines in Perth, Western Australia".<sup>xiii</sup>

This suggests that the USA is making use of Australia as a strategic base, for its own military purposes. In other words, this was the AUKUS 'deal':- "*You give us basing rights and we'll give you nuclear-powered submarines (so long as we maintain a significant level of control over how they are used and maintained...)*"

The USA has long regarded Australia as a safe haven from which to launch military actions. For example, a 2012 report states "Southeast Asia, the South China Sea in particular, is becoming more central to U.S. interests, and Australia's geostrategic location remains vital in this context, as it was during World War II."<sup>xiv</sup> Another American report describes Australia as a "Supportive Sanctuary: Capitalizing on its advantageous geographical position, strategic depth and highly developed infrastructure, Australia can play an indispensable role providing access, training opportunities, logistics and repair facilities to support Allied (*read USA*) military forces"<sup>xv</sup>

For the USA there are business and, more importantly, strategic benefits. For Australia there is a very large financial cost and the strong likelihood of being dragged into a war we may have no interest in fighting.

### **5. Nuclear options**

Ex-PM Malcolm Turnbull has pointed out the lack of expertise in nuclear propulsion, and indeed in any form of nuclear power, in Australia. He argues that there is no way that Australia could support nuclear-powered submarines without a nuclear industry:- “Australia will be the first country without any civil nuclear industry to operate a nuclear submarine and the first non-nuclear weapon state to use HEU in a naval reactor. So, if we are not going to develop nuclear facilities of our own (as Mr Morrison has promised) then we will no more be sharing nuclear technology with the US than the owner of an iPhone is sharing smartphone technology with Apple.”<sup>xvi</sup>

In similar vein, Marcus Hellyer has pointed out “ You can’t have an effective military capability if you need to return it to the US any time there’s a defect.”<sup>xvii</sup> However, he would probably support the establishment of a domestic nuclear industry, as, no doubt, would the Sir William Tyree Foundation, which may have sensed a new business opportunity<sup>xviii</sup>.

All of which raises the question of how far down the nuclear path is Australia actually preparing to go. Are the submarines the thin end of a wedge that will bring us into the ‘nuclear club’, with eventual acquisition of our own nuclear weapons? After all, every other country in possession of nuclear-powered submarines is also in possession of such weapons. Where does this leave Australia with regard to ‘nuclear proliferation’? Allan Behm writes “This capability has everything to do with nuclear weapons and the risk of nuclear war.”<sup>xix</sup>

### **6. Domestic Considerations**

Allan Behm describes the AUKUS announcement as “...a gigantic, nuclear election stunt that in the long run may increase the risk of nuclear war while drawing Chinese return fire on our vulnerable export sectors, including iron ore.”

Marcus Rubenstein puts it this way “Last week’s AUKUS announcement was nothing more than PR stunt in Australia, with the government merely committing to spend the next 18 months deciding what to buy—which conveniently kicks any actual the decision far enough down the road to avoid the next federal election.”<sup>xx</sup>

The timing of the announcement, when Mr Morrison needs to draw attention away from matters like Covid19, Climate change and CO2 emissions etc., may have been significant factors in coming to the AUKUS agreement.

As Alison Broinowski has noted, AUKUS is not a treaty, it is nothing more than a statement of intention. As yet there is no indication of where, when or by whom the promised submarines will be built. All there is is an open-ended promise to purchase submarines and allow the USA greatly increased military access to Australian assets.

## 7. Relations with France

A by-product of AUKUS has been a dreadful deterioration of relations between Australia and France. This most regrettable. France is a nuclear power, with its own nuclear-powered submarines and is a significant presence in the Pacific. To have incurred its anger in such a clumsy manner is indicative of the lack of forethought that characterises this entire episode.

### Summary/Conclusion

- The AUKUS agreement is just the latest iteration of a process that has been going on for many years. Under it, and with the mantra of ‘interoperability’, Australia is gradually handing control over major military initiatives to the USA. It is becoming steadily more difficult for the ADF to operate independently, i.e. without the consent of military commanders in Washington.
- The decision to purchase nuclear-powered submarines may place Australia in a situation where the vessels cannot be maintained domestically, because the industry and expertise for this is lacking. It thus increases Australia’s dependence on the USA (and UK) to maintain its forces. This is strategic foolishness. Proper defence demands that the nation be capable of maintaining its own assets, on its own, if necessary. The nuclear submarine proposal removes that capability.
- The long-range nature of the vessels and the need for US expertise to operate them indicate that their likely use and intention might be to join with US forces off the coast of China, in the event of conflict. It is of no special advantage in guarding Australia’s coastline.
- As an island continent, Australia need have no enemy and need fear no other nation. However, the acquisition of submarines is indicative of Australia’s complicity in the USA’s hostile intentions towards China. It makes China Australia’s ‘adversary’.
- AUKUS further damages Australia’s already poor relationship with China and has severely damaged its relationship with France.
- The major benefits, both commercial and strategic, accrue to the USA, not to Australia.
- Despite all protestation to the contrary, this development contributes nothing to peace and stability in our region or the wider world. On the contrary, it brings the possibility of war, even nuclear war, closer.

Nick Deane  
September 30, 2021.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/27/us-troops-are-now-in-darwin-but-questions-remain-as-to-why>

<sup>ii</sup> Fraser M., “Dangerous Allies”. Melbourne University Press, 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aukus/>

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- <sup>iv</sup> <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/statements/australia-us-ministerial-consultations-joint-statement-unbreakable>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRlt1vbnXhQ>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2021/09/18/the-submarine-the-ridiculous/163188720012499>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/morrison-is-making-an-enemy-of-china-and-labor-is-helping-him-20210921-p58tek.html>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.moonofalabama.org/2021/09/to-protect-itself-from-us-hostility-australia-decides-to-buy-us-submarines.html#more>
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.apln.network/analysis/commentaries/scott-morrisons-giant-nuclear-election-ploy>
- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/statements/australia-us-ministerial-consultations-joint-statement-unbreakable>
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/gateway-to-the-indo-pacific-australian-defense-strategy-and-the-future-of-t/publication/1>
- <sup>xii</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-us-and-australian-service-members> (no longer found)
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://johnmenadue.com/distracted-by-the-submarine-bauble-labor-and-the-media-miss-the-point/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/120814\\_FINAL\\_PACOM\\_optimized.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf) (page 31)
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/gateway-to-the-indo-pacific-australian-defense-strategy-and-the-future-of-t/publication/1> (page 2)
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/address-to-the-national-press-club-september-2021>
- <sup>xvii</sup> <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-nuclear-submarine-decision-leaves-more-questions-than-answers/>
- <sup>xviii</sup> [https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/8803-1-million-donation-expands-australia-s-only-nuclear-engineering-program?utm\\_source=DefenceConnect&utm\\_campaign=24\\_09\\_21&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=1&utm\\_emailID=5e0379b3dca63fa606073f3c07d9a7e7dfded0c23feb8105b4561196107bc290](https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/8803-1-million-donation-expands-australia-s-only-nuclear-engineering-program?utm_source=DefenceConnect&utm_campaign=24_09_21&utm_medium=email&utm_content=1&utm_emailID=5e0379b3dca63fa606073f3c07d9a7e7dfded0c23feb8105b4561196107bc290)
- <sup>xix</sup> <https://www.apln.network/analysis/commentaries/scott-morrisons-giant-nuclear-election-ploy>
- <sup>xx</sup> <https://www.michaelwest.com.au/has-pm-put-australia-on-the-hook-to-finance-struggling-uk-us-submarine-projects/>