

Supplementary Submission by the **Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region** to the IPAN Inquiry consequent upon the AUKUS/AUSMIN Agreement

5 October 2021

The Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region (retired trade unionists) wish to express our gravest concerns with the decision to commit Australia to the acquisition of nuclear powered submarines (AUKUS) and the associated agreement under AUSMIN to turn Australia into a vast but indeterminate American military garrison and base.

We agree wholeheartedly with Paul Keating that these decisions by Scott Morrison and a handful of people degrade our sovereignty and independence and put us at significant risk of death and destruction on a massive scale in the event of war.

We are deeply concerned that the agreement was foisted upon the nation in the lead-up up to a Federal election and is clearly intended to “wedge” the Opposition in a way that seeks to impose party political advantage at the expense of the national interest.

It is apparent that the most outspoken critics of the enhanced war preparations are principally older Australians, wise men and women, informed political leaders, diplomats and academics, who (knowing the horrors of full scale war between great powers either through personal experience or that of their families and friends), also enthusiastically embraced the opportunities for peace, understanding and prosperity in post colonial Asia.

Why do we seem to forget the lessons of history within two generations of lived experience? The decisions we contest were made without the sustained public and parliamentary debate that is warranted, indeed essential – especially given the grave, existential consequences of error and miscalculation.

We call for a moratorium on any further government action on war preparations to allow an extensive public debate on all aspects of our independence, sovereignty, military arrangements, nuclear engagement, relationship with Asia and commitment to the peaceful resolution of international problems through diplomacy, engagement, trust building and demilitarization.

AUKUS

We understand there is agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) to negotiate the details of acquisition of eight (or more) nuclear powered submarines with reactors that use highly enriched, almost weapons grade, uranium.

The purchase alone is expected to exceed \$100 billion.

As a consequence there are already calls for the development of a nuclear power industry as a direct flow-on from this military acquisition.

The purpose of the nuclear submarines is to participate in long exercises with the US naval forces in proximity to China with (non nuclear) missiles having a range of 1000 kilometres.

If war breaks out it would be expected that attacks would be made on ships and mainland China itself - several thousand kilometres from our shores.

Or if tensions rise, short of war, to choke off Chinese trade by sea.

We would operate as an integrated part of US forces and exercise no independent strategic role.

As the delay in acquisition is lengthy there is discussion of “leasing” American submarines and joint crews to facilitate training.

It is doubtful that we would be able to adhere to international treaties governing fissile materials.

AUSMIN

“An unbreakable alliance”

“Enhanced Force Posture Cooperation and Alliance Integration

Acknowledging it had been 10 years since the establishment of the United States Force Posture Initiatives (USFPI) in Australia and that the strategic challenges of our time centre in the Indo-Pacific region, the Secretaries and Ministers committed to significantly advance Australia-United States force posture cooperation.

Re established at AUSMIN 2020, the bilateral Force Posture Working Group convened in May 2021 to develop recommendations to promote a secure and stable Indo-Pacific region and deter our adversaries. The Secretaries and Ministers endorsed the following areas of force posture cooperation:

- 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.” (our emphasis)

If the long term submarine acquisition is the tip of the iceberg, these sweeping terms are the iceberg itself, which turns Australia into a vast US military garrison and base

It would appear to be an open ended arrangement that provides ports for US nuclear ships, submarines and long range bombers etc. Quite open ended.

The US has a long term policy of not stating whether their vessels hold nuclear weapons

We question whether the agreement includes the storage of nuclear bombs and missiles on our soil?

It is expected that the “sustainment” facilities will involve significant development of ports and airfields etc. at great expense.

Presumably, these “high end war fighting” facilities will also become military targets. So presumably, what follows is “high end” defences, and a massive escalation of the militarization of northern Australia and ports around the continent.

DANGER OF NUCLEAR WAR

If Pine Gap was not already a target for its critical role in targeting ballistic missiles much more of our landmass becomes so now, and Chinese commentators have suggested that we now risk becoming nuclear targets if war escalates to that level.

The US has several thousand nuclear bombs and missiles. Just one of the twelve US nuclear powered submarines has missiles and multiple warheads to destroy scores of cities.

The nuclear arms race between Russia, the USA, and more recently China, is out of control. China has several hundred nuclear weapons but is currently building many more silos to house ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear bombs.

The US has a policy that it does not rule out the first strike with nuclear bombs.

All three countries are building early detection and anti missile systems which puts calculations on a hair trigger and promotes risk taking.

We call on the Australian Government to –

1. State that there is an absolute imperative that urgent and top priority international efforts be made to limit the danger of nuclear war and to rid the planet once and for all of weapons of mass destruction.
2. Use all available and necessary diplomatic resources to facilitate this objective.
3. State that under no circumstances will nuclear weapons be permitted on or in Australian territory.

COST AND CONSEQUENCES

Australia's military budget currently exceeds 2% of GDP.

It is expected that this will more than double to exceed 4% (or more) to meet the anticipated costs. We can expect that some taxes will increase significantly (probably regressive taxes). The burden is likely to fall on wage and salary earners who pay as you go tax - not on the wealthy who are able to employ accountants to minimise tax liabilities, or indeed, the corporate behemoths who are able to utilise tax loophole and tax havens and therefore pay little or no tax.

We can expect that reduction in spending on the areas of social welfare, health and education will be unprecedented.

The ongoing project of nation building on fair and equitable terms is unlikely to ever be realized. Our social democracy and social security net is imperilled.

If the downward spiral in relationships continues it is not inconceivable that our two way trade is savaged, at a truly crippling cost to our society.

CHINA ,THE USA & AUSTRALIA

The essence of antagonism between the USA and China is essentially about economic power and wealth.

If it were truly about anything else the type and level of engagement since 1972 would not have happened.

It is simply wrongheaded to assert that China poses any real threat to the USA (or indeed Australia) given the overwhelming military superiority of the US on a global scale.

The heightened tensions and military build-up, accompanied by the combination of alliances in the region to encircle China (NATO, AUKUS and QUAD) are eerily reminiscent of the WWI conflict between Britain (and its Empire) and the rising industrial power of Germany.

Tit for tat trade barriers and cultural interaction strictures show no signs of resolution. There are now influential calls in the US to restrict investment into China.

Insofar as Australia is concerned, the wantonly party partisan tactic effectively neuters any sovereign effort by Australia to pursue and to contribute to any diplomacy let alone a relentless one. We have consigned ourselves to only the armed response which may follow any failure of diplomacy. We have become the one armed figure in Asia, fittingly reflecting our standing as the ventriloquist's doll. Our geographic location is fixed to the south of Asia and our long term interests are best secured by cultivating close and harmonious relationships with all our neighbours. The United States are a long way away and are currently riven by serious internal political dissention on a scale not seen since the Civil War. Several informed commentators have warned that the social, political, racial, class and cultural divides may lead to the end of American democracy, and the rise of a form of fascist government and extensive civil strife. We believe we are on firmer ground to look after our own interests and distance ourselves from an unreliable and unstable ally.

It is apparent that there are several territorial issues. It is a vexed situation especially because Taiwan was historically a province of China, was a military dictatorship, but is now a vibrant democracy.

It seems obvious that to relieve political tensions and defuse the current situation the military build-up by all parties needs to be frozen.

There needs to be a disengagement, a pull back by all concerned to allow time for intense discussions focused on resolutions without resort to war.

Fear begets fear. And trust gives rise to trust.

The real issues need to be identified and disentangled. Military might should not be exercised where there are economic and trade difficulties.

Truth should be spoken and heard above the "drums of war".

The military/industrial complex needs to be sidelined.

The mass media needs to be a whole lot less inflammatory, scrupulously honest and constructive.

The world cannot afford to be diverted into a new Cold War and arms race when the climate is at stake. We need unprecedented international co-operation.

The cultural, racial, political and economic “fissures” must be bridged.

If they cannot, we face a very, very bleak future in which we are armed to the teeth, occupied by a foreign military force and impoverished in a burning landscape.

We call upon the Australian Government to adopt the only proper and responsible role at this critical juncture –

1. To disengage from military alliances

2. To carve out a fully fledged diplomatic role as an “honest broker” between our largest trading partner and our “best friend”

3. To leave no stone unturned in exploring peace, sustainable and equitable prosperity and disarmament.

PAX MUNDI