

IPAN Inquiry – AUKUS Supplementary Submission

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1. Governance

The AUKUS agreement committing Australia to buy nuclear submarines and to align its defence with the nuclear powers, the United States and the United Kingdom, was announced without documentation, and without consultation or debate within civil society or indeed Parliament. This critical decision, taken without consultation, serves to reinforce the need for a democratic framework for the exercise of War Powers, including preparations for defence and military escalations of force. This huge decision affects not only our defence posture but is very expensive at a time when we need to pay for the pandemic and restore health, education and environmental services and rebuild the economy.

2. Social Psychology

- Australia's history is based on an invasion against the Indigenous peoples. This has left a deep psychological fear that such an event could happen to the present occupiers of Australia.
- This fear has been heightened by Australia's geographical remoteness from the people and culture of the European 'mother country'. The settlers failed to reconcile with the First Nations peoples.
- There is also another racist element to this fear, the fear of Asians. The settlers entered into a region of Asian lands and cultures, but also failed to reconcile with these neighbours and accept their cultures and aspirations.
- This feeling of vulnerability led Australia to seek the protection of a 'Great and Powerful Friend', which in the first case was Britain. This fear and racism led the newly federated Australia to adopt the White Australia Policy.
- This fear was heightened during World War II when Britain was unable to provide the protection that Australia wanted, and John Curtin sought the prime protection of the United States (1).
- This protection comes at the cost of loss of sovereignty and is not guaranteed. It only would be provided in cases where the self-interest of the United States coincided with that of Australia. On issues like *Konfrontasi*, this did not happen; the US chose to

support Indonesia rather than Australia. Australian policymakers have been recognised as being anxious about the occurrence of such situations and hold a 'fear of abandonment' (2).

- Australia's embrace of the AUKUS military agreement harks back nostalgically to the Anglocentric, Cold War worldview of the Menzies' era rather than looking forward to a diplomatic and shared security that is based in confident, egalitarian, multilateral regional relationships.

3. Geopolitical and Sovereignty Considerations

- It seems that the intended role of the nuclear submarines is for Australia to provide support for the US military in the China Sea, thousands of kilometres beyond our economic zone. This ties Australia more deeply to the USA military strategy and entails a further loss of sovereignty. Any incident could involve Australia in an unwanted and unintended war which quickly could escalate into nuclear war.
- Australia needs to accept the fact that China's economic and geopolitical power is growing. Rather than trying to control China militarily as the United States is attempting to do, (a strategy which also has implications for US battle plans against other nuclear-armed states such as Russia and North Korea), Australia should seek ways to strengthen diplomatic and economic relationships with China and cooperate with our neighbours to resolve conflicts and extend trust.
- The nuclear-powered submarines are only part of the AUKUS agreement. The Australian government has agreed to permit 'the rotational deployment of US aircraft of all types in Australia and appropriate aircraft training and exercises'. The government has agreed to facilitate 'increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of US surface and subsurface vessels in Australia'. In addition, Australia has agreed to '[E]stablish a combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise to support high end warfighting and combined military operations in the region'. All of these actions which are euphemisms for establishing US bases in Australia, further undermine Australia's sovereignty (3).

4. Treaty and Proliferation Risks

- The proposed nuclear submarines require highly enriched uranium fuel, where U-235 has been enriched to 93 – 97% (i.e. sufficient for use in nuclear weapons; natural occurring uranium contains only 0.72% U-235). Australia's involvement would weaken IAEA safeguards and open up the possibility of diversion of nuclear fuel into nuclear weapons. Tariq Rauf, former head of verification and security policy coordination, office reporting to the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, declares, ' the claim by AUKUS states that a critical objective of this cooperation will be to maintain "the strength of both the nuclear non-proliferation regime and Australia's exemplary non-proliferation credentials" and that they will be "engaging with the IAEA throughout the coming months" is at best an oxymoron.' (4).
- Will Australia embark on a nuclear enrichment program with large centrifuges? Will Australia introduce a nuclear industry? (Iran possesses a small nuclear reactor for medical purposes which requires uranium fuel enriched to 20%. The United States objects to this program. A military nuclear enrichment program by Australia would justify Iran's civilian nuclear enrichment program.)
- The AUKUS submarine plans will place pressure on nuclear-threshold states, Japan and the Republic of Korea, to demand equal treatment and pressure would build within their countries to acquire nuclear weapons. Other countries, e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, may also wish to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.
- The impact of AUKUS locally will be to de-stabilise the region and could lead to a local arms race.
- Regional countries are concerned about Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. Both Indonesia and Malaysia have come out strongly against Australia's plan and Singapore has expressed concern. They fear the AUKUS agreement will lead the West to take a more aggressive stance against China and that Australia joining AUKUS will lead to it acquiring nuclear weapons in the future.
- Countries throughout Europe and the Pacific Islands are stunned by the secrecy in which this agreement was negotiated which has led to a loss of trust and respect for Australia.

5. Relations to Indigenous Peoples

- Acquiring and possessing nuclear technologies has tended to impose injustices on First Nations peoples, where governments approve mining, conduct nuclear tests, and then choose “remote” nuclear waste sites on the lands of First Nations peoples. None of the nuclear waste sites have capacity to remain robust and secure for 12,000 - 26,000 years.

6. Technical Limitations of Nuclear-Powered Submarines

- Nuclear-powered submarines are very complex, and maintenance and operational activity will require Australia to rely on and become more deeply embedded in the USA and UK technical support systems. The consequence is loss of sovereignty and the ability to act independently. As stated bluntly by former ministerial adviser to the minister for defence, Mike Scrafton, ‘Australia has effectively surrendered its right to say what kinds of military platforms and weapons can be brought on to, or stationed in, its territory.’ (5)
- Longer term, however, acquiring these skills in Australia creates a professional group with skills that can be surreptitiously diverted to proliferation (our very objection to Iran’s nuclearisation)
- Diesel engines can be switched off – nuclear-powered craft cannot be switched off and so can be detected by sensitive sonar.

7. Environmental Impacts

- There is a risk of irradiation from a maritime nuclear-power accident.
- No solution has been found for nuclear waste issue for nuclear-powered submarines.
- By nuclearising, Australia brings us closer to the “one hundred seconds to midnight” (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists) that would have a cataclysmic effect on our global environment

8. Opportunity Costs

- If the role of the new submarines were to defend the coast of Australia and environs, then conventionally powered diesel–electric submarines are quieter and more cost-effective.
- Nuclear powered submarines are hugely expensive. Such expenditures cannot be justified. Australia could better spend this money on the climate crisis, bushfire, biodiversity and environmental protection, obtaining food and water security, providing effective pandemic protection, improving the health and education systems, etc.
- Vast expenditures on nuclear submarines militarises the economy, drawing industry into manufacturing non-productive (and very destructive) arms rather than sustainable production.

9. Conclusions

- In short, the AUKUS and nuclear submarine agreement, created opaquely outside Australia's democratic processes, lurches us into dangerous territory, diminishes our sovereignty, and risks our country stumbling into an unimaginable conflict with devastating consequences for many nations.
- Australia's misplaced dependency concentrates on military approaches to international relations
- Rather, Australia should renovate its approach to incorporate integrated diplomatic and foreign aid approaches, and multilateral regional and global governance, based on cooperation and shared security.
- The money that is being spent on militarising our economy should be reinvested in sustainable production and services to address human and environmental needs, especially existential requirements of the climate emergency, the pandemic, biodiversity loss, economic injustices, and food and water security.

10. References

- (1) Malcolm Fraser with Cain Roberts. *Dangerous Allies*, Melbourne University Press, 2014

- (2) Donald Greenlees. ANZUS at 70: Konfrontasi and East Timor - America's Indonesia balancing act. *The Strategist*. 23 August 2021. Australian Strategic Policy Institute.
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/anzus-at-70-konfrontasi-and-east-timor-americas-indonesian-balancing-act/>
- (3) Mike Scrafton. AUSMIN and AUKUS: It's even worse than you think. *Pearls and Irritations: John Menadue's Public Policy Journal*. 21 September 2021. Accessed at <https://johnmenadue.com/ausmin-and-aukus-its-even-worse-than-you-think/>
- (4) Tariq Rauf. Australia's nuclear-powered submarines will risk opening a Pandora's box of proliferation. *Pearls and Irritations: John Menadue's Public Policy Journal*. 22 September 2021. Accessed at <https://johnmenadue.com/australias-nuclear-powered-submarines-will-risk-opening-a-pandoras-box-of-proliferation/>
- (5) Mike Scrafton. AUSMIN and AUKUS: It's even worse than you think. *Pearls and Irritations: John Menadue's Public Policy Journal*. 21 September 2021. Accessed at <https://johnmenadue.com/ausmin-and-aukus-its-even-worse-than-you-think/>