

Nostalgia at the AUKMIN Talks: Britain's Forces Eye Australia

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Asia-Pacific Research, January 24, 2022

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Defence](#)

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*Give the man credit where it's due. Few could possibly be congratulated for selling the sovereignty of a country in full view of its citizenry, but **Peter Dutton**, former Queensland copper turned sadistic Home Affairs minister turned Defence Minister, is very capable of it. Australia promises to become a throbbing bordello for the strategic affairs of other states (to a large extent, it already is), awaiting submarine insertions, naval manoeuvres, and more troop rotations.*

With the AUKUS arrangements being firmed up, US and UK sailors, personnel and miscellaneous staff are being readied for more time Down Under, ensuring that Australia becomes a staging ground for future forward military operations. Canberra has relinquished much say in this; the song sheets and blueprints are coming from elsewhere.

The UK, reprising its long history of using Australia for its own military adventurism, is keen to massage the recently minted AUKUS agreement. Last week, the UK **Secretary of Defence Ben Wallace** and **Foreign Secretary Liz Truss** met Dutton and Australian **Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne** in Sydney for annual AUKMIN talks. The meeting had a distinctly nostalgic note to it: maternal Britannia, dropping in to see its rather (territorially) large offspring.

The [joint media release](#) prior to the meeting was prosaic but had all the signs of greater UK military involvement in the region, though much of it is likely to be modest. Discussions promised to “focus on strategic challenges and identify areas in which Australia and the United Kingdom can work to support an open, inclusive and resilient Indo-Pacific region where the sovereignty of all nations is respected.” Pity that Australian sovereignty is being whittled away in this transaction.

While plans to place British “defence assets” in Australia were not inked at the meeting, the

idea has received much interest. After ministerial discussions Dutton [told reporters](#) that he was not averse to the idea. “In terms of basing [assets in Australia], there’s no proposal on the table to provide additional basing [but] it could be something that we discuss at the appropriate time if it’s suitable to both parties.”

Payne got into the spirit of “shared values” between the countries, [noting](#) “an interest in maintaining the international rule-based order underpinning stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and globally.”

The most commonly used word used in that regard, notably in Australian strategic lingo, is “complex”. The world has become more complex, as if it was somehow simpler before. The region has also evolved into components of complexity, necessitating more defence expenditure for the next war. And if there was conflict, the countries of the Anglosphere would not be aggressors, nor endorsers of it.

Payne’s wittering kept the theme alive. “The international environment is becoming more complex and challenging. AUKMIN 2022 will consider ways to strengthen our partnership in order to meet new and emerging threats and seize the many opportunities that this era presents.”

Dutton similarly looked “forward to discussing how we can work together in support of a safe and secure Indo-Pacific region.” This promises greater militarisation. In the words of the [statement](#), the meeting “will consider ways to strengthen collaboration in defence capability, cyber security, critical technology, deterrence and sustainable investment in infrastructure.”

What could be expected, stated Dutton was “a greater regularity of visits [of UK ships and submarines], in training, in people being embedded in both services, and certainly a greater cooperation in exercises.”

Showing his usual wooden spoon understanding of history, the defence minister saw parallels in current strategic developments in the Indo-Pacific to the dangerous world of the 1930s and 1940s. “We know as a world today that we would be in a very different situation if [...] the United Kingdom had not stood up to malign forces and had not represented the values that they adhere to even to this day.”

Were these the values of predatory colonisation and understanding of international rules that received such excoriation from Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal? Pal, as a member of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East established by the Allied powers to try Japan’s leaders for war crimes in 1946, acquitted the high-ranking parties of all charges. In doing so, he trained his judicial mind on Western imperialism, claiming that Japan had been subject to a “sham employment of legal process for the satisfaction of a thirst for revenge.” The United Kingdom, he noted, had seized Burma and India; the Netherlands, Indonesia; the United States, the Philippines.

You do not have to agree with the entire stretch of Pal’s dissenting judgment of 1,235 pages to appreciate his puncturing of the canard that has come to be known as the rule-based international order. Behind such neat declarations are not so much legal briefs as guns and gunboats.

After the meeting, Wallace [promised](#) that the countries would “lay foundations for training”

between Australian and British forces, stressing that “nothing was off the table”. The defence secretary had an eye towards the submarine element of the security arrangement. Britain would “certainly make sure that submarines, when we have availability or we wish to deploy in conjunction with Australia” would do so.

The Australian defence minister [was more forthcoming](#) with the details. “In terms of additional visits we will see greater rotation, as we’ve already seen from the strike carrier group and from the nuclear sub visit out of the UK.”

As for Australia’s promised nuclear-powered submarines, which will only see the light of day, if at all, in two decades, Wallace was ceremonial [in promise](#) and encouraging to swollen heads in Canberra. “What is absolutely clear is that the United States, Britain and Australia are joined at the hip on delivering this program, that the strategic capability that Australia wishes is a step change that will absolutely set them apart as a leader in their field in this part of the world.”

This statement is accurate on one level. Australia will certainly be set apart as a leader in the field of poor defence acquisitions of suspect military value and in permitting countries such as the US and UK to treat it as both client state and butler. How richly jarring to then hear that the countries of AUKUS are all very keen to defend the sovereign sanctity of such states as Ukraine.

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