

Australia's New Anti-China Alliance

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Prime Minister Scott Morrison's surprise September 16 announcement that Australia was in a new security alliance with the United States, Britain and Australia — AUKUS — formalises its war drive against China.

The intensification of Australia's long alliance with these two big imperialist powers cements its role as part of a US push to block China's economic development, by force if necessary.

At a still unknown cost, Australia is to be given US and British technology to build nuclear-powered submarines in Adelaide. The two nuclear armed and powered countries will exploit a loophole in the international non-proliferation treaty: [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) safeguards allow for nuclear material to be used for “non-proscribed military activity”.

Australia is now setting a precedent for other non-nuclear weapons' states to do the same.

We now know that discussions have been underway between the three governments for months, yet Morrison didn't bother to inform the Australian public.

Thanks to the organising efforts of the anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s and early 1980s (a large part in Labor's ranks), Labor held the line against uranium mining and nuclear weapons. Huge annual marches against nuclear weapons and nuclear ships visiting Australian ports also stopped the uranium industry from gaining a bigger foothold.

However, before taking office in 1983 Labor ditched its anti-uranium and anti-nuclear policies. Not surprisingly, [Anthony Albanese](#) said Labor “welcomes” the agreement to “maximise the interoperability of our defence and security arrangements”. He said a “calm and measured approach” is needed.

“A US alliance is our most important. And the UK, of course, is our old friend”, Albanese said. “So, it makes sense in terms of efficiency and in terms of maximising the positive output that we engage across our three nations to make sure that there is maximum

interoperability available.”

Albanese said the conditions for Labor to support the nuclear-powered submarines were: no requirement for a domestic civil nuclear industry; no acquisition of nuclear weapons; and that the agreement would be compatible with the non-proliferation treaty.

However, as critics (and even some supporters) have said, the submarine deal is likely to become the launching pad for the pro-nuclear lobby to renew its push to open up uranium mining. After all, Australia has the third largest reserves of the mineral in the world.

Australia signed [the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty in 1973](#) and the [Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#) in 1998 when the anti-nuclear movement was still a force. The Morrison government has refused to sign the [United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), which came into force in January and now has 55 signatories, although none with nuclear capability.

Australia is, however, a party to the [South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone](#) Treaty of Rarotonga, which established a nuclear weapon-free zone in the South Pacific. The new submarines will also not be welcome in New Zealand, which has maintained a ban on such potentially hazardous vessels entering its ports.

Even former submariner [Rex Patrick](#), now an independent Senator who supports Australia acquiring submarines, expressed concern at the government’s secretive decision. He called for parliamentary scrutiny before the next election.

Given the secrecy surrounding this announcement, along with the anti-China red scare campaign, it is perhaps not too surprising that [Roy Morgan’s snap poll](#) on September 16 had 57% agreeing with the purchase of nuclear submarines.

Patrick agreed it would be “difficult” for Australia to have nuclear-powered submarines “without a domestic nuclear power capability”. “Acquiring, operating and maintaining a nuclear submarine fleet without a domestic nuclear power industry is a challenge that must not be underestimated.”

Dr Vince Scappatura, spokesperson for the [Independent and Peaceful Australia Network](#), said AUKUS would “undermine Australia’s sovereign defence capabilities” and will contribute to the greater militarisation of the region.

Adam Bandt MP said the Greens would oppose the nuclear submarine deal, and called on the Labor Party to follow [Paul Keating’s](#) lead against “locking in” Australia’s military equipment “and thereby force” with those of the US.

Sam Wainwright, a national co-convenor of the Socialist Alliance, told *Green Left* the new military pact was about formalising an old alliance to put the heat on China.

“Australia may be a junior player in terms of scale, but it’s an energetic one”, he said. “Defence Minister Peter Dutton has been keen to go to war and he has decided to raise the stakes against China. He and Morrison went to Washington earlier this year and asked for help: they have long wanted a nuclear industry here to cash in on Australia’s big uranium reserves.”

Australia is the only G20 country with a ban on nuclear energy, leaving uranium as an

export-only commodity. The [value of uranium sales](#) last year was estimated at \$2.5 billion.

Meanwhile, the French government has withdrawn its ambassadors from the US and Australia over being “stabbed in the back”. “This is not just sour grapes over losing ‘the deal of the century’”, Wainwright said.

“It also reflects European powers’ unease over a post-Brexit tightening of the alliance between the Anglo-imperialist powers at their expense. France and Germany were already smarting over NATO’s hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan and amplifying calls for the [formation of a European military force](#) that can act independently of the US.”

Wainwright said Australia should not have signed up for either the French or the US submarines. Nor, he said, should Australia be a partner of US or European military interventions, “because their only purpose is to maintain the current violent, unjust and exploitative world order. Every cent allocated to the submarines is money that should be spent on projects that forge a more just and sustainable world for all.”

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Featured image: A nuclear-powered fast attack submarine USS Houston in Apra Harbour in the US territory of Guam. Photo: Wikimedia

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