

A Merry AUKUS Surprise, Western Australia!

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The secretive Australian government just cannot help itself. Clamouring and hectoring of other countries and their secret arrangements (who can forget the criticism of the Solomon Islands over its security pact with China for that reason?) the Albanese government is a bit too keen on keeping a lid on things regarding the withering away of Australian independence before a powerful and spoiling friend.

A degree of this may be put down to basic lack of sensibility or competence. But there may also be an inadvertent confession in the works here: Australians may not be too keen on such arrangements once the proof gets out of the dense, floury pudding.

It took, as usual, those terrier-like efforts from Rex Patrick, Australia's foremost transparency knight, forever tilting at the windmill of government secrecy, to discover that Western Australians are in for a real treat. The US imperium, it transpires from material produced by the Australian Department of Defence, will be deploying some 700 personnel, with their families, to the state. And to make matters more interesting, Western Australia will also host a site for low-level radioactive waste produced by US and UK submarines doing their rotational rounds under the AUKUS arrangements.

The [briefing notes](#) from the recently created Australian Submarine Agency reveal that the Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) will host as many as four US nuclear submarines of the US Navy Virginia-class at HMAS Stirling and one UK nuclear-powered boat from 2027. As part of what is designated the first phase of AUKUS, an Australian workforce of some 500-700 maintenance and support personnel is projected to grow in response to the program before Australia owns and operates its own US-made nuclear-powered boats. Once established and blooded by experience, "This workforce will then move to support our enduring nuclear-powered submarine program and will be a key enabler for SRF-West."

The ASA documents go on to project that "over 700 United States Personnel could be living and working in Western Australia to support SRF-West, with some also bringing families."

The UK will not be getting the same treatment, largely because the contingent from the Royal Navy will be moving through on shorter rotations.

The stationing of the personnel in question finally puts to rest those contemptible apologetics that Australia is not a garrison for the US armed forces. At long last Australians can be reassured, if rather grimly, that these are not fleeting visits from great defenders, but the constant, and lingering presence of an imperial power jealously guarding its interests.

The issue of storing waste will have piqued some interest, given Australia's current and reliably consistent failure to establish any long-term storage facility for any sort of nuclear waste, be it low, medium or high grade. But never fear, the doltish poseurs of the Defence Department are always willing to please and, as the department documents show, learn in their servile role.

As Patrick [reveals](#), the documents released under FOI tell us that "operational waste" arising from the Submarine Rotational Force operation at HMAS Stirling will include the storage of low to intermediate level radioactive waste on Australian defence sites. One document [notes](#) that, "The rotational presence of United Kingdom and United States SSNs in Western Australia as part of the Submarine Rotational Force - West (SRF-West) will provide an opportunity to learn how these vessels operate, including the management of low-level radioactive waste from routine sustainment."

The ASA also confirms with bold foolhardiness that, "All low and intermediate radioactive waste will be safely stored at Defence sites in Australia." The storage facility in question is "being planned as part of the infrastructure works proposed for HMAS Stirling to support SRF-West."

The Australian **Defence Minister Richard Marles** has retained a consultant, Steve Grzeskowiak, to the remunerative value of AU\$396,000 from February to December this year to identify a suitable site on land owned by the Commonwealth. Absurdly, the same consultant, when Deputy Secretary of Defence Estates, [conducted an analysis](#) of over 200 Defence sites in terms of suitability for low-level waste management, finding none to pass muster.

In a troubling development, Patrick [also notes](#) that the *Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill 2023*, in its current form, would permit the managing, storing or disposing of radioactive waste from an AUKUS submarine, which would include UK or US submarines. Importantly, that waste could well be of a high-level nature. "While the Albanese Government has made a commitment that it will not do so, the Bill leaves the legal door open for possible future agreement from the Australian Government to store high-level nuclear waste generated from US or UK nuclear-powered submarines."

To round matters off, Australia's citizenry was enlightened to the fact that they will be adding some \$US3 billion (AU\$4.45 billion) to the US submarine industrial base. In the words of the ASA, "Australia's commitment to invest in the US submarine industrial base recognises the lift the United States is making to supporting Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines." This will entail the pre-purchase of "submarine components and materials, so they are on hand at the start of the maintenance period" thereby "saving time" and "outsourcing less complex sustainment and expanding planning efforts for private sector overhauls, to reduce backlog".

Decoding such naval, middle-management gibberish is a painful task, but nothing as painful as the implications for a country that has not only surrendered itself wholly and without qualification to Washington but is all too happy to subsidise it.

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