

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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*From his own redoubt of critical inquiry, the **former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating** has made fighting the imperialising leprosy of the AUKUS security pact between Australia, the UK and the United States a matter of solemn duty.*

In March 15, 2023, he [excoriated](#) a Canberra press gallery seduced and tantalised by the prospect of nuclear-powered submarines, calling the Albanese government's complicit arrangements with the US and UK to acquire such a capability "the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government since the former Labor leader, **Billy Hughes**, sought to introduce conscription to augment Australian forces in World War one."

His latest spray was launched in the aftermath of a touched-up AUKUS, much of it discussed in a [letter](#) by US **President Joe Biden** to the US House Speaker and President of the Senate. The revised agreement between the three powers for Cooperation Related to Naval Nuclear Propulsion is intended to supersede the November 22, 2021 agreement between the three powers on the Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information (ENNPIA).

The new agreement permits "the continued communication and exchange of NNPI, including certain RD, and would also expand the cooperation between the governments by enabling the transfer of naval nuclear propulsion plants of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines, including component parts and spare parts thereof, and other related equipment." The new arrangements will also permit the sale of special nuclear material in the welded power units, along with other relevant "material as needed for such naval propulsion plants."

The contents of Biden's letter irked Keating less than the spectacular show of servility shown by Australia's **Defence Minister Richard Marles**, and **Foreign Minister Penny Wong** on their visit to Annapolis for the latest AUSMIN talks. In what has become a pattern of increasing subordination of Australian interests to the US Imperium, US **Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III** and US **Secretary of State Antony Blinken** played happy hosts and must have been delighted by what they heard.

The [details that emerged](#) from the conversations held between the four - details which rendered Keating passionately apoplectic - can only make those wishing for an independent Australian defence policy weep. Words such as "Enhanced Force Posture Cooperation" were used to describe the intrusion of the US armed forces into every sphere of Australian defence: the domains of land, maritime, air, and space.

Ongoing infrastructure investments at such Royal Australian Air Force Bases as Darwin and Tindal continue to take place, not to bolster Australian defence but fortify the country as a

US forward defensive position. To these can be added, as the Pentagon [fact sheet reveals](#), “site surveys for potential upgrades at RAAF Bases Curtin, Learmonth, and Scherger.”

The degree of subservience Canberra affords is guaranteed by increased numbers of US personnel to take place in rotational deployments. These will include “frequent rotations of bombers, fighter aircraft, and Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft”. Secret arrangements have also been made involving the disposal of nuclear propulsion plants that will feature in Australia’s nuclear powered submarine fleet, though it is unclear how broad that commitment is.

The venomous icing on the cake – at least for AUKUS critics – comes in the form of an undisclosed “Understanding” that involves “additional related political commitments”. The Australian Greens spokesperson on Defence, Senator David Shoebridge, rightly [wonders](#) “what has to be kept secret from the Australian public? There are real concerns the secret understanding includes commitments binding us to the US in the event they go to war with China in return for getting nuclear submarines.”

Marles has been stumbingly unforthcoming in that regard. When asked what such “additional political commitments” were, he [coldly replied](#) that the agreement was “as we’ve done it.” The rest was “misinformation” being spread by detractors of the alliance.

It is precisely the nature of these undertakings, and what was made public at Annapolis, that paved the way for Keating’s [hefty salvo](#) on ABC’s 7.30. The slavishness of the whole affair had made Keating “cringe”. “This government has sold out to the United States. They’ve fallen for the dinner on the White House lawn.”

He proved unsparing about Washington’s intentions. “What AUKUS is about in the American mind is turning [Australia into suckers], locking us up for 40 years with American bases all around ... not Australian bases.” It meant, quite simply, “in American terms, the military control of Australia. I mean, what’s happened ... is likely to turn Australia into the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the United States.”

Having the US as an ally was itself problematic, largely because of its belligerent intentions. “If we didn’t have an aggressive ally like the United States – aggressive to others in the region – there’d be nobody attacking Australia. We are better left alone than we are being ‘protected’ by an aggressive power like the United States.”

As for what Australian obligations to the US entailed, the former PM was in little doubt. “What this is all about is the Chinese laying claim to Taiwan, and the Americans are going to say ‘no, no, we’re going to keep these Taiwanese people protected’, even though they’re sitting on Chinese real estate.” Were Australia to intervene, the picture would rapidly change: an initial confrontation between Beijing and Washington over the island would eventually lead to the realisation that catastrophic loss would simply not be worth it, leaving Australia “the ones who have done all the offence.”

As for Australia’s own means of self-defence against any adversary or enemy, Keating uttered the fundamental heresy long stomped on by the country’s political and intelligence establishment: Canberra could, if needed, go it alone.

“Australia is capable of defending itself. There’s no way another state can invade a country like Australia with an armada of ships without it all failing.”

Australia did not “need to be basically a pair of shoes hanging out of Americans’ backside.” With Keating’s savage rhetoric, and the possibility that AUKUS may collapse before the implosions of US domestic politics, improbable peace may break out.

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Featured image: Paul Keating speaking on a panel at the Lowy Institute in April 2017. (Licensed under CC BY 3.0)

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