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US, Britain, Australia announce major military pact against China

In a major escalation of the US-led war drive against China, President Biden together with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a new military alliance focussed on the Indo-Pacific region. While not mentioned by name, China was obviously the primary target of the new AUKUS pact.

A top US official briefing the media described the agreement as “a fundamental decision, that binds decisively Australia to the United States and Great Britain for generations.” It marks a reforging of the wartime alliance during World War II in the Pacific in which Australia was a major base of operations for both the US and Britain—at that time against Japan.



Boris Johnson, Scott Morrison and Joe Biden at G7 meeting in June 2021 [Source: Australian Government]

For British imperialism, the pact signifies the return of a military presence to Asia that it relinquished over fifty years ago when it withdrew its bases in South East Asia and the Persian Gulf. In April, the British navy despatched an aircraft carrier strike group for exercises in the Indian Ocean and sensitive South China Sea—its largest force since the Falklands War in the southern Atlantic in 1982.

The fault lines of a disastrous new world war are rapidly emerging as the Biden administration forges alliances in the Indo-Pacific against China which the US regards as the greatest threat to its global hegemony. Far from easing tensions with Beijing, Biden has ramped up the US confrontation with China on every front—from its hypocritical denunciations of “human rights” and the Wuhan Lab lie to trade war measures, naval provocations in the South China and East China Seas and unfounded accusations of Chinese threats against Taiwan.

The AUKUS announcement comes ahead of the first-ever, in-person leaders meeting next week of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or “Quad”—a quasi-military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia. It follows a virtual meeting of the leaders—also a first—convened by Biden in March that pledged allegiance to “a free, open rules-based order.” This stock phrase signifies a commitment to the post-World War II imperialist order dominated by the US in which it set the global rules.

The announcement comes in the immediate aftermath of Washington’s debacle in Afghanistan after two decades of a criminal and bloody neo-colonial occupation ended in the ignominious collapse of its puppet regime in Kabul. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was part of a broad strategic shift set out in Pentagon documents away from “the war on terror” to focus on “great-power rivalry”—chiefly against China.

The aggressive and militarist character of the new alliance is underscored by the associated decision to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines that will greatly extend the capabilities of its navy’s submarine fleet. Nuclear-powered submarines, as oppose to the diesel-powered submarines that Australia had contracted to buy from

France, can operate at far greater distances and remain submerged for extended periods of time, enabling them to be deployed to the strategic South China and East China Seas.

The US has only ever shared its nuclear submarine technology with one other country—Britain—some 70 years ago. Only six countries currently have nuclear-powered submarines. Prime Minister Morrison was at pains to insist that Australia would not acquire nuclear weapons, which would be a breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, nor would it establish a civilian nuclear industry.

There is, however, a logic to the decision: without a nuclear industry, Australia, which has among the largest uranium reserves in the world, would be completely dependent on the US or UK for nuclear fuel for its submarines. Once a nuclear industry is developed, fuel can also be used to build nuclear weapons—a move proposed in recent years amid rising US-China tensions by several Australian strategic analysts.

A top Biden administration official told the media that the formation of AUKUS was the “the biggest strategic step Australia has taken in generations.” The alliance and the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines is the culmination of the closer and closer integration of Australia into the US war plans against China that began with the Obama administration and accelerated under Trump.

President Obama chose to announce his “pivot to Asia,” which set course for an all-embracing conflict with China, in a speech to the Australian parliament in November 2011. The visit to Australia followed the ousting of Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in an inner-party coup by “protected sources” of the US embassy in Canberra. Rudd’s “crime” was not that he opposed the US-Australian alliance but that he advocated US compromise with China as Obama was preparing for confrontation.

Rudd’s replacement Julia Gillard signed an agreement with Obama to open US military bases to US Marines, warships and warplanes. The Australian foreign minister and defence minister are currently in Washington for talks with their American counterparts in the annual AUSMIN talks which are expected to outline an even closer integration of the Australian armed forces and military bases with the US war machine.

The negotiations between the US, Britain and Australia to conclude the AUKUS alliance have been underway behind closed doors for months according to unnamed sources. The complete secrecy is not only aimed at keeping China in the dark, but reflects the fear in ruling circles in Washington, London and Canberra that the widespread, but latent, anti-war sentiment among workers and youth will erupt.

The latest announcement makes clear that the US imperialism's preparations for war against China are well advanced. If it cannot subordinate Beijing to US interests by other means, the American ruling class will not hesitate to go to war to prevent being eclipsed by China.

The only means for halting this catastrophic drive towards conflict between nuclear-armed powers is to forge an international anti-war movement of the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective to put an end to the capitalist system and its reactionary division of the world into rival nation states.

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