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## ***On Australia's "National Defence Strategy":***

*Does the country remain in a "stretch" position between the US and the PRC?*



Someone is persistently creating a situation of general insanity in the world political and information space, in which similar format "impulses" are thrown in from seemingly opposing sides, thereby deepening the line of division between them. A notable contribution to this negative process is made by propaganda, with its regular paranoia sessions by panic-stricken "experts on all issues". In the cosy atmosphere of the TV studios, they easily solve problems of any complexity in a matter of minutes, as well as the level of competence of the Supreme State Administration and the General Staff.

Nevertheless, the role of propaganda in this process is auxiliary in relation to its real beneficiaries, who, on the basis of the created environment of all-encompassing fear, forge money, as they call it, "without leaving the cash register". It should be noted that it is state-owned.

However, it is often possible to “take” it in a relatively calm environment, taking advantage of one or another weakness of the responsible government officials. For example, at the beginning of the last decade, in cloudless and prosperous Australia, someone drew attention to the fact that in the country’s ports there was a long outdated submarine junk. It would be necessary to renew them with the help of skilled foreigners. There is plenty of money in the country, so there will be no problems with those willing to carry out such an order.

A tender was announced, in which Japanese and French companies participated. The second company won the bid. The winner then set a “price for the (general) issue”, which turned out to be in the region of \$60 billion. Far from embarrassing the client, this raised the eyebrows of Australia’s big brothers: “To give such a lump sum to the French. You’ve gone mad on welfare. Break your agreement with them and do it with us. We will build you not diesel-electric submarines, but much more powerful nuclear submarines. You can well imagine the short dialogue that followed. And what do we need them for?” – “They’ll be useful. You’re completely blind. You can’t see how the situation in the Indo-Pacific is escalating”.

Be that as it may, Paris was kicked out of this order and Washington and London took its place. The implementation of the whole project has so far become the main preoccupation of the specially created tripartite AUKUS configuration of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, at a recent meeting of the **defence ministers** of the participating countries, it was announced that the range of “technological-military” tasks would be expanded and that Japan would be involved in solving these latter tasks.

Thus, one of the possible components of the future “Asian NATO” was born out of the initially relatively innocuous problem of replacing Australia’s fleet of diesel-electric submarines. The need for such a fleet was already being discussed in the United States in the early 1990s.

Australia itself, from its de facto relatively neutral position, which is extremely favourable for it in the field of contradictions formed by the two leading world powers, is gradually being drawn into the pole led by the United States and opposed by China. This is despite the fact that the development of trade and economic cooperation with the latter is one of the main components of the whole phenomenon of the Australian “economic miracle”.

During his **recent visit** to Australia, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi posed a general question to the leaders of his host country: “Guys, why do you need all these games with nuclear submarines and AUKUS? Nothing particularly alarming seems to have happened in our relations with you”. In response, the guest mumbled something not very intelligible about

freedom of navigation, peacekeeping in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, and human rights.

However, a month after the foreign minister of Australia's most important, let us repeat, trade and economic partner left the country, the scattered thoughts about the need for both AUKUS and the nuclear submarine were finally systematised and put on paper. More precisely, into two, which became the National Defence Strategy (NDS) and the closely related Integrated Investment Programme (IIP), which is actually part of the former.

At the same time, it is assumed that the accelerating transformation of the world order may require a new version of these programmes as early as 2026. In the meantime, it is planned to gradually increase the level of financial support for defence measures (from the current 2% to 2.4% of GDP).

The documents under discussion draw on the findings of the Defence Strategic Review (DSR), the open part of which was published a year ago. However, in launching the NDS-2024, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence **Richard Marles** described it as “the first” of its kind in the country's history, “setting out a fundamentally new approach to Australia's defence and the protection of its interests”.

It is this last word that accounts for the “ground-breaking novelty” of NDS-2024, as the “interests” in question will now extend far beyond the country's borders. **“Strategy of Denial”**

The armed forces are to be reformatted and, according to the Defence Minister, will have five core missions. Two of these are: “protecting Australia's economic interests in the region and globally” and “ensuring collective security in IT with our partners”.

In the process of fulfilling these missions, Australia's future nuclear submarines should find a use for themselves, for which a job has been found. The task, it is said, will be to prevent the blocking of international trade routes, which is indeed vital for Australia. As it is for China. So, it is to cut off the lines of communication with the same Australia that is critical to itself? It is precisely the absurdity of the document's initial positions on this (entirely rhetorical) question that its most **vehement critics** point out. Let us add that if China (suddenly and for some reason) wanted to hurt Australia, it would not be necessary to ‘block’ its maritime communications with the outside world. It could simply stop buying our iron ore, coal, livestock and other agricultural products. Of course, it will not be fun for him, but we are talking about irrational extremes of bilateral relations.

Incidentally, China recently gave a small indication in this regard by halting (albeit for a relatively short period) the purchase of large quantities of wine produced in Australia. This

came at a time when, from Beijing's point of view, it was behaving rather defiantly. Then there was the problem of where to put the product intended for one and a half billion Chinese. It was even offered to the Vatican for famous ceremonies. But the Vatican has very different needs, and Italy, with its wine oceans, is right next door. California, one of the leading states of "big brother" Australia, immediately came to the rescue, offering its wine to the "source of geopolitical challenges".

And here we inevitably return to the subject of "taking from the public purse". Not only the Ministry of Defence, but also other government departments and private companies are involved in this battle. And the goals and interests of the former and all the others are usually in direct conflict.

In the case of Australia, this reflects the country's contradictory positioning in the above area of political tension. If the US is a military and political ally, while China is the most important trade and economic partner, the maintenance of the relationship with which Australia's well-being depends to a large extent. This determines the political-strategic position of the "stretch" in which the country has found itself over the past two or three decades.

At the same time, the Ministry of Defence has been the main proponent of the trend towards rapprochement with Washington and its allies, and in its struggle for a slice of the national cake it has painted a fanciful picture of the "challenges" posed by China. Especially through the documents mentioned above. But most other ministries and departments, as well as private companies, are very keen not only to maintain but also to develop highly favourable relations with China.

Nevertheless, the very fact that Australia (the "first", we repeat) has adopted a "National Defence Strategy" with the above-mentioned purpose of this document confirms the trend in recent years to increase the importance of the component in the political position of "stretch", which provides for strengthening Canberra's ties with Washington and its allies.

This does not mean that Australia has completely abandoned its position of balancing the forces of the two leading world powers in the region. The aforementioned visit of the Chinese foreign minister to Australia is evidence of this.

In other words, despite all the negativity that has emerged in bilateral relations in recent years, Beijing and Canberra are still trying to avoid the prospect of falling into the maelstrom of propaganda paranoia that is spreading around the world.

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