



Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

WATCHING BRIEF WB21-9: AUSTRALIA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES (AUKUS) TRILATERAL SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

On Thursday 16 September 2021, the heads of government of Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA announced a new trilateral security partnership, AUKUS (Australia, UK, US).

In this Watching Brief QPLC will summarise what we currently understand about the AUKUS partnership and what actions Friends may wish to take. We will continue to monitor this matter and provide updates.

Some reasons why Friends may be angry over this partnership

By telling our regional allies and neighbours about the new AUKUS partnership just prior to the joint public announcement, Australia has emphasized a stronger commitment to British and American alliances than our regional agreements. AUKUS binds Australia even more closely to future US military incursions

By excluding its regional neighbours from any form of discussions on a possible AUKUS partnership, Australia has decided to take-on the role of a local bully who forms partnerships in its own best interest.

By ignoring the various nuclear-free zones in the Pacific, especially our closest regional ally, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia has demonstrated a lack of commitment to a peaceful region and a world free of nuclear threats.

By deciding to fund the building of eight nuclear-powered submarines, while also paying out the French-based Naval Group, the Government is putting weapons before economic recovery and public health planning post-COVID.

By circumventing Parliament, Australia has turned its back on representational democracy.

By circumventing civil society, including subject matter experts, the Government acknowledges that public opinion on such matters is mixed. According to the Lowy Institute Poll June 2021: 57% of Australians say that in a military conflict between China and the US Australia should remain neutral, and 72% said it was possible for Australia to have good relations with both the US and China at the same time.

The Government consistently states that the submarines will not carry nuclear weapons and that Australia remains committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, ICAN warns that building nuclear-powered submarines is a 'foot in the door' towards weapon development. The Government must be held accountable

for all nuclear-related activity including the initial transport of fuel from the US and the UK.

This partnership shifts Australia's military posture from defensive to offensive, and is most likely to be seen by China as a pre-emptive threat to its sovereign rights.

QPLC ENCOURAGES FRIENDS TO TAKE ACTION

Write your local MP and Senator as soon as you can. Parliament is not due to resume until 18 October, so if you want to send a letter rather than **an email** use the local address, and if you want to phone their office use the local number. Contact details can be found at https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members

You may wish to:

1. Express your disagreement with the strategic military path the Government has mandated without Parliamentary engagement.
2. Question the future of Australia's role in the region
3. Demand more that rhetoric in managing the safety for the environment and Australians in the transportation of, and building around, nuclear fuel reactors.
4. Ask how, in the light of Australian life lost in Afghanistan and the aftermath of withdrawing from the country, the Government can commit to blindly following the United States into military activity in our own backyard.
5. Call on your Parliamentarian to demand their right to debate the future of the AUKUS partnership when Parliament resumes.

Information about writing letters and engaging with politicians and other influencers can be found on the Peace in Action page on the AYM website at <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/peace-action-resources>

Reach out to your networks and encourage them to engage with others on this matter

There are many petitions circulating including: Friends of the Earth <https://www.foe.org.au/nonuclearsubs>, [IPAN is calling for people to sign the petition at Change.org](https://www.change.org/p/ipan-is-calling-for-people-to-sign-the-petition-at-change-org)

Use social media

Soundbites

- New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has already stated that nuclear powered submarines, built in Australia, would not be allowed in New Zealand waters.

- The primary purpose of the partnership is to send a clear message to China about the future of the Indo-Pacific. 'This really shows that all three nations are drawing a line in the sand to start and counter [China's] aggressive moves' (Guy Boekenstein, Asia Society Australia, BBC News 17 September 2021)
- It is expected that the building of the first submarine will commence this year and be in the water before the end of the next decade. There have been suggestions that until Australia's own nuclear-powered submarine was in the water, the US may be planning to operate some of its Virginia class nuclear-powered submarines from Perth's naval base, HMAS Stirling.
- The National Security Committee, Ministers of Defence, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Home Affairs were consulted. The Leader and other senior members of the Opposition were briefed prior to the public announcement.
- China has accused the three countries of having a 'cold war mentality' and 'warned they would harm their own interests unless it was dropped'. (The Guardian)
- Publicly released costs: \$6.4 billion to maintain and extend life of the Collins fleet, including 1300 jobs in SA, \$5.1 billion in upgrades to Hobart Class destroyer combat management systems (300 more jobs in Adelaide), \$1b for a sovereign guided weapons manufacturing enterprise, terminating the French based Naval Group contract may cost taxpayers up to \$400m (Tillett below).
- Given the close proximity to major cities and critical water systems, it is essential that the Government put in place rigorous, accountable and transparent environmental monitoring and protection measures. Civil society must be engaged on these processes and the EPA South Australia needs to be sufficiently resourced to engage in this work with federal government agencies. Such legally binding measures should cover the bioregion, including Australia's commitments under the Law of the Sea to protect coastal and nearby ocean environments.

Key planks of AUKUS

- The US and UK will share nuclear technology knowledge with Australia and within 18 months have plans underway to **build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines in Adelaide**. The nuclear reactors will be brought from the US or UK, transportation of which will need to be carefully monitored. As a result of this decision, the Government has ended its \$90b contract with French-based Naval Group to build 12 conventionally-powered submarines. It's generally felt that this project had gone over budget and is behind schedule. Significantly, the submarines will have 'interoperability, commonality, joint capability and serve mutual purposes' – generally this means that military equipment or groups will have shared features be able to operate in conjunction with each other. Facilities in Adelaide would be able to provide support for other AUKUS submarines. This could increase the capacity of British and American submarine (and possibly other naval vessels) to operate in the region.
- **Military intelligence** will be shared, including cyber security and artificial intelligence, which will be enhanced through partners' expertise in quantum technologies and undersea capabilities. Quantum technologies are critical for data transmission, fine measurements and imaging.

- **Foster deeper integration of security and defense-related science technology, industrial bases and supply chains.** These points may not be getting the headlines of building nuclear-powered submarines, but are critical in long-distance tactical warfare.
- In his media release, the Prime Minister states that the Government will work to ensure that people and skills developed under the existing submarine building program will not be lost, including through a **new Sovereign Shipbuilding Talent Pool.**

As is often the case in media statements, the details at the end also matter.

The Prime Minister stated that the Government will acquire additional long-range strike capabilities through the coming decade to deliver 'strike effects across our air, land and maritime domains', including:

- Tomahawk Cruise Missiles
- Joint Air-to-surface Standoff Missiles with an extended range of 900km
- Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles , also extended range
- Continuing collaboration with US to develop hypersonic missiles which can use either conventional or nuclear warheads, travel at more than Mach 5 or 1.7 kilometers per second (Sydney to Melbourne in seven minutes). Their speed and maneuverability make them very difficult to detect, track, target and engage – or even to confirm the intended target. More concerns are listed below.
- Precision strike guided missiles for land forces, capable of destroying, neutralizing and suppressing diverse targets from over 400km
- Accelerating \$1 billion for a sovereign guided weapons manufacturing enterprise to build weapons in Australia.

Resources

Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS, 16 September 2021

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-leaders-statement-aucus>

Australia PM Media Statement 16 September 2021

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-pursue-nuclear-powered-submarines-through-new-trilateral-enhanced-security>

Australia PM Press Conference 16 September 2021

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/press-conference-canberra-act-24>

Aucus: China denounces US-UK- Australia pact as irresponsible. BBC News 17 September 2021

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58582573>

Australian Government Department of Defence Twitter.

Australian Government Minister of Defence media release 16 September 2021, 'Key naval projects confirmed for South Australia.

<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/media-releases/key-naval-projects-confirmed-south-australia>

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Borger, Julian and Dan Sabbagh, 'UK, US and Australia forge military alliance to counter China, The Guardian, 16 September 2021

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/15/australia-nuclear-powered-submarines-us-uk-security-partnership-aucus>

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Tewari, Suranjana. 'Aucus: UK, US and Australia pact signals Asia-Pacific power shift. BBC News 17 September 2021

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58540808>

Tillett, Andrew and Matthew Cranston. Going nuclear: PM to announce \$90b French submarine deal is dead. Financial Review, 15 September 2021

<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/speculation-pm-will-announce-90b-french-submarine-deal-is-dead-20210915-p58rzo>