Non multa, sed multum

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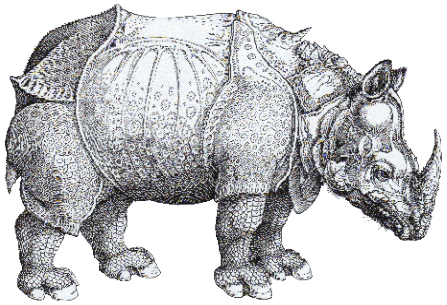

Vladimir Ladanov

AUKUS AND AUSTRALIA'S DEFENCE STRATEGY

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This research paper takes a look at the recent AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) nuclear-powered submarines announcement and tries to put it in the context of Australia's defence strategy. It does so in three steps. First, it summarises a promulgated optimal pathway to deliver nuclear-powered general-purpose attack submarine (SSN as the US Navy hull classification symbol) capability to the Royal Australian Navy. Secondly, it notes several thought-provoking reactions by Australian public figures and analysts. Thirdly, it discusses how AUKUS fits into Australia's defence strategy and planning. The paper concludes by examining the feasibility of Australia's self-sufficient defence posture.

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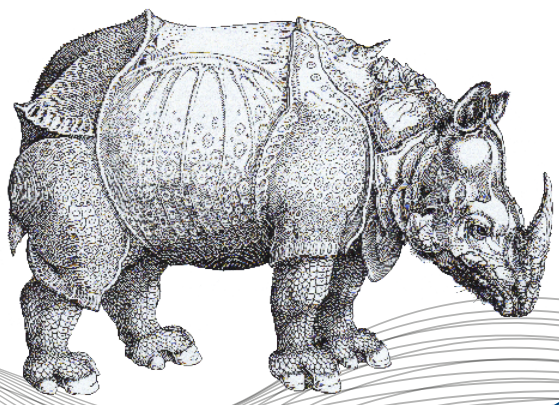

Highlights

- Australia's establishment is prepared to go to great lengths to ensure the US will remain the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific and as such will prevent any major challenge to Australia's security.

- The problem with that approach is that although it had worked so well in the past it is not guaranteed to work in the future.

- AUKUS should be seen in this context of not only integrating Australia even closer with US Indo-Pacific posture but also strengthening America's reassurance to Australia and its commitment to ultimately underwriting its security.

- The prospect of being abandoned unnerves the establishment because throughout its history Australia has always been protected by a friendly superpower of the day.

- As an alternative to overreliance on US security umbrella, Australia is capable of creating and sustaining an independent self-sufficient defence posture.

- If AUKUS, along with other American strategies, fails to deter China it may well contribute to Australia finding itself on a battlefront fighting to preserve US preponderance in East Asia.

- It is difficult to see how allowing itself to be part of a looming US-led military action against China over Taiwan fraught with risk of nuclear escalation is in Australia's best interest.

AUKUS and Australia's Defence Strategy[1]

Vladimir Ladanov

The announced agreement between the United States, Britain and Australia for Australia to move to a fleet of US supplied nuclear submarines, will amount to a lock-in of Australian military equipment and thereby forces, with those of the United States with only one underlying objective: the ability to act collectively in any military engagement by the United States against China.

Former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, September 2021[2]

This research paper takes a look at the recent AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) nuclear-powered submarines announcement and tries to put it in the context of Australia's defence strategy. It does so in three steps. First, it summarises a promulgated optimal pathway to deliver SSN capability to the Royal Australian Navy. Secondly, it notes several thought-provoking reactions by Australian public figures and analysts. Thirdly, it discusses how AUKUS fits into Australia's defence posture and planning. Pillar 2 of AUKUS, namely, co-operation on advanced military technologies such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence, hypersonic missiles, and cyber belong to a separate topic and are not considered here.

On 13 March 2023, in San Diego the leaders of the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom unveiled a plan – first foreshadowed in their earlier announcement in September 2021 – whose implementation will see Australia acquiring a fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines. It envisages several stages to achieve that[3].

Beginning this year, RAN's Fleet Base West in Perth, HMAS Stirling, will see increased visits by US and later British submarines. From 2027, they will be forward deployed there as Submarine Rotational Force – West. Its task is to equip the RAN with the necessary skills to operate SSNs.

In approximately 10 years from now, Australia is expected to

[1] This paper is based on the information in the public domain. Some of the theses were in the talk given on 6 April 2023 in Moscow at the session of the *Trialogue* Club International "The Thucydides Trap: AUKUS and Risks of Military Conflict in the Asia-Pacific". The views expressed are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.

[2] Comments by PJ Keating on the announced agreement between the United States, Britain and Australia - 16 September 2021 // Official Website for the Honourable Paul Keating. URL: http://www.paulkeating.net.au/shop/item/comments-by-pj-keating-on-the-announced-agreement-between-the-united-states-britain-and-australia

[3] AUKUS Nuclear-Powered Submarine Pathway // Australian Government Defence. URL: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/taskforces/aukus

Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS, March 13, 2023

Source: www.reuters.com

begin taking delivery of three (and have an option for two more) *Virginia-class* submarines from the US to undertake patrols until a more permanent arrangement can be implemented. The first of them will be provided by the US Navy with a remaining life span of about 20 years while other two will be newly built. Their role will be to plug the capability gap of the RAN between the retirement of its current *Collins-class* SSGs in the 2030s and the acquisition of home built SSNs.

The latter will involve Australia's buying into the UK's programme to build the Royal Navy's next generation of submarines hitherto known as Submersible Ship Nuclear-Replacement and henceforth named as SSN AUKUS. In essence it will be a British design, claimed to be 70 per cent mature, powered by Rolls-Royce nuclear reactors and at Australia's request fitted out with US combat management system, Mk.48 ADCAP heavyweight torpedoes and a vertical launch system for current and future strike weapons and unmanned underwater vehicles[4]. Britain will build the first vessels for the Royal Navy in Cumbria at its Barrow-in-Furness site sometime in the late 2030s. Australian boats are projected to be in the water by the early 2040s being assembled in Adelaide at a new Submarine Construction Yard. A fleet of at least eight SSNs will be acquired under the plan.

Speaking to the ABC about why Australia will acquire a British boat instead of continuing the purchase of American *Virginia-class*, Australian Vice-Admiral Jonathan Mead explained that the US intended to stop building *Virginia-class* and transition to a new generation submarine in the early 2040s, i.e. at around the same time that Australia planned to begin receiving its home built SSNs[5]. That would have put Australia in a position of building for decades to come a vessel that no one else was building with resulting problems in sustainment and supply chain. Instead, synchronised building sequence with Britain presents Australia with a number of advantages including benefiting from economies of scale, reduced sustainment costs, joint training and basing opportunities, etc. When in the early 2070s SSN-AUKUS will begin completing its life cycle of about 30 years, Australia and the UK in lockstep with one another will have an opportunity to jointly develop and acquire its replacement.

Presenting the rationale for AUKUS to the public, Australian leadership referred to the country's deteriorating strategic environment and worsening regional security and stability. That, as

[4] Nuclear submarines needed due to China's military expansion, AUKUS task force head says // ABC News Australia. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzeDk-ogeR8&t=110s

[5] Nuclear submarines needed due to China's military expansion, AUKUS task force head says // ABC News Australia. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzeDk-ogeR8&t=110s

the official narrative goes, required enhanced defence capabilities to make Australia and its partners better able to deter conflict, and help ensure stability and strategic balance were maintained in the Indo-Pacific. Explaining Australia's strategic landscape, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Richard Marles, pointed out that while in 2000 China had 6 nuclear powered submarines by the end of this decade it would have 21, at the same time the number of its surface ships would increase from 57 to 200. He emphasised the importance of protecting Australia's long sea lines of communication which carry nearly all external trade representing 45 per cent of GDP and vital supplies such as oil products[6]. What Mr Marles did not mention in his exposé was that one third of Australia's foreign trade totalling AUD 267 billion was with China which in case of a military conflict between the two would be lost instantly regardless of the deployment of SSN capability[7]. Also, his explanation was a bit underwhelming since submarines' role has traditionally been to disrupt enemy communications as part of a sea denial strategy. Conversely, protection of trade or supply routes in war time has historically been accomplished by implementing a system of convoys whereby merchant ships or troop transports would be guarded by surface escorts; that has been known in Australia at least since the report on its naval defence by Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe in 1919[8].

Collins-class submarine

Source: www.navy.gov.au

Indeed, Australia's current *Collins-class* submarines were envisaged in the 1980s by the Keating government as part of a Defence of Australia strategy which focused on guarding the sea-air gap to the north of the continent, a protective moat that separates it from the Indonesian archipelago. In an interview with Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Kim Beazley, Defence Minister in the Keating cabinet, said that *Collins-class* was introduced to protect four maritime chokepoints (straits areas) in the archipelago that a potential adversary would have to navigate through in order to attempt a landing of an invasion force on Australia's shores.[9] Due to the submarines availability rates, the essential number to accomplish that task according to Mr Beazley was 8 vessels, ideally 12, but budgetary restrictions cut the purchase to only 6 hulls. As it stands now, a 6-vessel fleet provides 2 submarines available for patrol at any given time, with 2 others undergoing training or short-term maintenance, and the remaining 2 in long-term refit or repair.[10]

[6] Marles: Australia hasn't promised U.S. support in a Taiwan conflict // ABC News Australia. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rHZYGz4Muk
[7] China country brief // Australian Government. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. URL: https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china-country-brief
[8] Report of the Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa on Naval Mission to the Commonwealth of Australia (May-August 1919), Volume III. URL: https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/reports-adml-jellicoe
[9] Lessons in Leadership: The Honourable Kim Beazley AC // ASPI Canberra. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEM4t7PqFMU&t=1408s
[10] Study Into the Business of Sustaining Australia's Strategic Collins-class Submarine

Concept art of SSN AUKUS design

Source: www.defence.gov.au

In this light it is unsurprising that the Rudd government Defence White Paper in 2009 identified a requirement for 12 submarines as the *Collins-class* replacement. After a competitive evaluation a French-design Attack-class was selected by Australia. Attack-class was cancelled in favour of AUKUS by the Morrison government in 2021 because of a perceived risk of becoming vulnerable to detection and thus not serving the criteria of being *regionally superior*.

While conventionally powered submarines have an established role in the Defence of Australia concept, an impending introduction of SSN capability caused observers to question whether that reflected a paradigm change in underlying strategy. When Defence Minister Marles was probed for a more realistic explanation of the AUKUS arrangement he emphatically denied that the transfer of American submarines was conditioned upon Australia providing military assistance to the US should it come to blows with China over Taiwan. At the same time, he did not say that Australia would abandon the US in such a scenario stressing that a relevant decision would be made by the *government of the day* in Canberra[11].

One of Australia's outstanding strategists, Professor Hugh White, who in the past served as Deputy Secretary of Defence, could not disagree more. In an article published by the Lowy Institute he expresses his concerns in the following terms[12]:

(...) AUKUS commits Australia to fight China if America does, simply because the AUKUS deal will be off if we don't.

That is because America will only sell us Virginia-class boats if absolutely certain that those boats would join US operations in any war with China. They will come straight out of the US Navy's order of battle, because no extra Virginia-class boats are to be built to meet Australian needs. So every boat that joins the RAN is one less in the US fleet, and the US Navy is already desperately short of submarines. It is simply inconceivable that Washington would agree to a significant diminution of its submarine capability in this way as its military rivalry with China escalates. So the Americans must be very sure that any Virginia-class subs they pass to Australia will be available to them when war comes.

Nor will Washington provide the systems and technologies essential to the Anglo-Australian AUKUS-class subs unless our commitment to support America in a war with China is clear. Why else would they take this extraordinary step? Unless Australia is willing to go to war with China, the whole AUKUS deal will not be in America's interests. So the Americans must believe that there is, at least, a clear implicit

Capability, Progress Review -March 2014, Issued by Mr John Coles. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, 2014. URL: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Coles_Progress_Review_2016-1.pdf

[11] Marles: Australia hasn't promised U.S. support in a Taiwan conflict // ABC News Australia. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rHZYGz4Muk

[12] AUKUS commits Australia to fight China if America does, simple // The Interpreter. URL: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/aukus-commits-australia-fight-china-if-america-does-simple

commitment. That commitment will probably have to be made fairly explicit sometime soon if the deal is to proceed. It is hard to imagine that Congress would authorise the transfer of the Virginia-class without firm undertakings.

Indeed, AUKUS has only got this far because Washington already takes our commitment for granted.

So AUKUS is only going to work if the Albanese government plainly acknowledges Australia's willingness to join America in a war with China. But that is a war that America has no clear way to win, and which may well become a nuclear war. That is one of the many reasons why AUKUS is a dumb idea.

Likewise, former Australian Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, speaking at the National Press Club in 2021 and again in 2023 offered a powerful public rebuff to AUKUS amid concerns about Australia's drift towards integrating with US's offensive strategy vis-à-vis China[13]:

(…) The whole point of these hunter-killer submarines is to round up the Chinese nuclear submarines and keep them in the shallow waters of the Chinese continental shelf before they get to the Mariana Trench and become invisible. In other words, to stop the Chinese having a second strike nuclear capability against the United States. This is the game we're now in. In the Collins game, we were in the defence of Australia. In the Virginia-class game, we are hunter-killing Chinese submarines. This changes our whole relationship.

(…) The Albanese Government's complicity in joining with Britain and the United States in a tripartite build of a nuclear submarine for Australia under the AUKUS arrangements represents the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government (…) a contemporary Labor government is shunning security in Asia for security in and within the Anglosphere. Australia is locking in its next half century in Asia as subordinate to the United States. And that approach was to have the United States supply nuclear submarines for deep and joint operations against China which supported the United States dominating East Asia (…)

No mealy-mouthed talk of 'stabilisation' in our China relationship or resort to softer or polite language will disguise from the Chinese the extent and intent of our commitment to United States's strategic hegemony in East Asia with all its deadly portents.

In several respects, Mr Keating appeared to echo the warnings of a former Liberal Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, who in 2014

[13] 'It would make a cat laugh': key moments from Paul Keating's National Press Club appearance // The Guardian. 10 November 2021. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/10/it-would-make-a-cat-laugh-key-moments-from-paul-keatings-national-press-club-appearance; AUKUS Statement by PJ Keating, The National Press Club, Wednesday 15 March 2023 // Official Website for the Honourable Paul Keating. URL: http://www.paulkeating.net.au/shop/item/aukus-statement-by-pj-keating-the-national-press-club-wednesday-15-march-2023

advised of the risks of continued alliance with the US and argued in favour of Australia's armed neutrality and its full Asian future[14]:

We need to make our own decisions. We live in the Western Pacific, our priority should be to carve out better and secure relationships with countries of our immediate region, East and South East Asia. Instead of showing some degree of strategic independence in our policies, we chose quite deliberately to ally ourselves, and to tie ourselves, much more closely to America's coat-tails, than ever. This was a major strategic error; a betrayal of Australia's national interest.

The (...) reason I believe strategic dependence should end is that I do not want Australia to follow America into a fourth war [after Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq], blindly, unthinkingly, with little regard for Australia's national interest, and little regard for our security. A fourth war would be in the Western Pacific. It would likely involve China.

We have interest in a peaceful world, and it is time we begin to cut ourselves off America's coat-tails. We do not want to be caught between the United States and China. There would be no real winners in such a war. Everyone would lose.

Another former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, voiced his own apprehension of growing dependence on the US limiting Australia's freedom of action. Speaking on AUKUS at the Australian Defence College he said[15]:

(...) While this will, in time, enhance our naval capabilities it will be seen as making us even more dependent on the United States and now the United Kingdom.

Australian sovereignty will be perceived to have been diminished.

Will this make us safer? Will it help stabilise the region? Will it deter coercive, even kinetic, actions by China? We must hope so. Certainly the delivery of submarines decades into the future is hardly likely to impact on Xi Jinping's plans for Taiwan today.

To allay some of the concerns of technological dependency, the Albanese government was touting the point that future SSNs would have advanced reactors not requiring refuelling over their lifetime and thus obviating the need for them to travel either to the US or the UK for refuelling. Generally speaking, it is true that the more sustainment Australia can do on its future SSN fleet domestically the greater will its sovereign control be. For instance, sustainment of the current fleet of *Collins-class* submarines originally developed by Sweden's Kockums has been highly localised and 92 per cent of it is done by domestic supply chain. Still, 8 per cent of the content has

[14] Fraser, R.H.M. (2014), Australia's Role in the Pacific. Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies, 1: 431-437. URL: https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.18
[15] Address to the Australian Defence College // Malcolm Turnbull. URL: https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/address-to-the-australian-defence-college

to be sourced from abroad posing a potential risk of disruption[16]. It is realistic to assume that while the Australian government will be trying hard to localise the sustainment of SSN-AUKUS it will unlikely achieve anything approaching self-sufficiency. And this does not even apply to its weapons (torpedoes and missiles) all of which are expected to be provided by the US.

Australian Strategic Policy Institute presenting a national security establishment take on AUKUS characterised it as follows[17]:

(…) For Australia, the stated purpose is to respond to China's rise, Beijing's increased aggression and the revelation of Australia's strategic deficit in a tough neighbourhood. But fundamentally, to achieve security, Australia has historically 'bandwagoned' with one of the region's great powers in support of a regional and global order balanced in Australia's favour. (…) the AUKUS program will deter China from pursuing aggressive military options against Australia and will contribute to regional stability by helping to generate a balance of military power.

It is true that since the time of Federation in 1901, Australia's defence strategy has been centered around seeking protection of a *great and powerful friend*; first, the British Empire and after its defeat in Singapore in 1942 and withdrawal from the Pacific, the United States. This appears to reflect a deeply entrenched anxiety of Australia's foreign policy elites viewing their country as a small European outpost conceived by invasion in 1788 and surrounded by an alien Asian world. When the region had been affected by colonialism and kept economically backward, that concern had been somewhat dormant. In the 1940s, however, Australia's survival was put in danger by an Oriental power, Imperial Japan, that Australia was not capable of repulsing on its own without recourse to an alliance with the US. That was a dramatic lesson learned. Until this very day it impacts Australia's perceptions by instilling them with what former head of Australia's Office of National Assessments, Allan Gyngell, called the *fear of abandonment* by the US – in the region becoming a focal point of great power competition and populated by rapidly rising Asian nations whose capabilities cannot be matched by Australia[18]. As a former Defence Minister Beazley put it, 'I have always thought that survival is very difficult for Australia as the world turns. History has a way of correcting anomalies, and in many ways, we are an anomaly'[19].

[16] Collins Class Submarines: Facts and Features // ASC. URL: https://www.asc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Collins-Class-Facts-and-Features.pdf
[17] AUKUS is underway, but key challenges remain. 16 March 2023 | Gregory Brown, Bronte Munro and Iain MacGillivray // ASPI. URL: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/aukus-is underway-but-key-challenges-remain/
[18] From the bookshelf: 'Fear of abandonment: Australia in the world since 1942' // The Strategist. URL: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/from-the-bookshelf-fear-of-abandonment-australia-in-the-world-since-1942/
[19] Lessons in Leadership: The Honourable Kim Beazley AC // ASPI Canberra. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEM4t7PqFMU&t=1408s

Thus, Australia's establishment is prepared to go to great lengths to ensure the US will remain the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific and as such will prevent any major challenge to Australia's security. And if deterrence fails and Australia faces a threat from a major power then the US will defend Australia. AUKUS should be seen in this context of not only integrating Australia even closer with US Indo-Pacific posture but also strengthening America's reassurance to Australia and its commitment to ultimately underwriting its security.

The problem with that approach is that although it had worked so well in the past it is not guaranteed to work in the future. As the rivalry between the US and China ramps up, some observers such as Professor Hugh White believe that due to the changing balance of forces a US victory in a military conflict with China over Taiwan may not be assured and such a confrontation runs a risk of escalating to a nuclear war with catastrophic consequences for all involved including Australia if it steps into it on the American side. But if it does not, that would likely result in the rupture of the alliance with the US and Australia being left to its own devices to fend off as best it can.

117th Spring Session of the *Trialogue* Club International dedicated to the topic "The Thucydides Trap: AUKUS and Risks of Military Conflict in the Asia-Pacific Region", April 6, 2023

Source: nonproliferation.world

The prospect of being abandoned unnerves the establishment because throughout its history Australia has always been protected by a friendly superpower of the day. The prevailing orthodox view is that given its geopolitical surroundings Australia cannot achieve self-sufficiency in defence. That assumption is being challenged, though, by a minority opinion such as Hugh White who in 2019 published a book entitled *How to Defend Australia*. He questioned conventional wisdom with his analysis of strategies and capabilities. It should be noted that in his view a discussion of Australia's independent posture not relying on US extended nuclear deterrence leads to the contemplation of Australia acquiring nuclear weapons of its own to deter against threat of use and use of nuclear weapons[20].

In examining a feasibility of Australia being self-sufficient in defence it may be worthwhile to put things in perspective and provide some relevant comparisons. Australia has a 26 million population, a G20 size economy with a very high GDP per capita and USD 34 billion defence budget. Australian Defence Force, an all-volunteer organisation, numbers 60,000 active uniformed personnel and 29,750 reserves and is smaller in size than the *land forces at* 80,000 *fighting troops* recommended for the defence of Australia by Field Marshal Lord Kitchener in 1910[21]. Australian military analysts such

[20] How to defend Australia // The Strategist. URL: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-to-defend-australia/

[21] Defence of Australia. Memorandum by Field Marshal Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum // The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. URL: https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1746277683/view?partId=nla.obj-1753037538#page/n4/mode/1up

as Professor John Blaxland of the Australian National University, a retired Army senior intelligence officer, describe it as a *boutique force*, i.e. high quality and well trained but brittle and not suited to engaging in attritional warfare with a serious adversary[22]. Likewise, the late Senator and retired Army Major-General, Jim Molan, who was Chief of Operations for the Coalition Forces in Iraq expressed concern about the ADF's casualty-averse approach should it become involved in a high-intensity conflict[23].

In contrast, two other relatively small developed countries with comparable levels of per capita income and modern armed forces have a very different posture. With a population of 9 million people, Israel has 169,500 active military personnel and 465,000 reserves. Though smaller than most of its regional rivals Israel can certainly defend itself. Another example is Singapore Armed Forces raised with Israel's assistance and in some respects modeled after the Israel Defense Forces. With a population of 6 million people, Singapore has 51,000 active military personnel and 252,000 reserves. Both Israel and Singapore rely upon a mixed (volunteer and conscription) manning approach giving them an advantage of fielding much larger forces that can stay in the fight longer than the size of their populations could otherwise suggest. For instance, Singapore's Army has four divisional headquarters while Australia's has two[24].

During the Vietnam war period, Australia maintained a National Service obligation which was a selective conscription scheme allowing it to reinforce its volunteer Army with a drafted contingent. National Service was abolished in 1972 and an all-volunteer force has been maintained since then.

In 1999, when the country's population was 6 million people less than it is now, Australian Parliament's Research Service produced a paper calculating that re-introduction of a two-year male-only universal conscription would have provided at least 97,000 uniformed personnel boost to the ground forces.[25] Conscription of women was not considered in the study because at that time the Army was not allowing their recruitment for Direct Combat positions (infantry, armour, artillery and combat engineers). i.e. its core roles. However, since 2013 all such positions have been made available to women provided they satisfy physical fitness requirements. Therefore, there are no impediments to applying a National Service scheme to women too as is the case in Israel.

Even a male-only National Service intake combined with

The prospect of being abandoned unnerves the establishment because throughout its history Australia has always been protected by a friendly superpower of the day; the prevailing orthodox view is that given its geopolitical surroundings Australia cannot achieve self-sufficiency in defence

[22] Hard Lessons from Afghanistan, John Blaxland, 30 October 2021 // The Australian. URL: https://www.theaustralian.com.au/special-reports/hard-lessons-from-afghanistan campaign/news-story/ba0b8fcf639688867bcb92d27641e06c

[23] 'Woefully unprepared for war': Jim Molan's critical warning in final must-watch interview, Sky News Australia. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4fMHyOvtzg

[24] All data taken from the Military Balance 2023, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2023.

[25] Military Conscription: Issues for Australia, Gary Brown, 12 October 1999 // Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group. URL: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=Military%20Conscription%3A%20Issues%20for%20Australia;rec=0;resCount=Default

the volunteer part of the ADF, which was set by the Morrison government to increase by some 20,000 by 2040, would have grown the Army much closer to 180,000 active personnel (and hundreds of thousands in Reserve) - a number given by the military chiefs to Defence Minister Kim Beazley in the 1980s as required for a self-sufficient posture[26].

Historical data also appears to confirm a view that Australia is capable of a meaningful and sustained war effort. In the First World War when Australia's population was around 4 million people, 416,809 Australians served in the Army representing 38.7 per cent of the total male population aged between 18 and 44. In the Second World War with a population of around 7 million people, that had risen to 727,703. For example, by the spring of 1943 the Australian Military Forces totalled nearly 500,000 men and comprised of two field armies and twelve divisions with a combined strength amounting to about 7 per cent of the country's entire population; the number of divisions was greater in proportion to population than was being maintained at that time by Britain or the United States[27].

Since the end of the Cold War Australia has been enjoying a peace dividend and a US *unipolar moment* allowing itself to go below 2 per cent GDP spent on defence as compared to above 3 per cent in the 1960s. The strength of the ADF as a percentage of population has also shrunk significantly to 0.23 per cent compared to 0.40 per cent in 1991[28]. However, while the US-led coalition is entering a great power competition posture in the Asia-Pacific as unequivocally recognised by the Chief of the ADF, General Angus Campbell, it is notable that the Morrison government in its Defence Strategic Update in 2020 advised that Australia could no longer assume a 10-year warning time for a major conventional attack as a basis for defence planning.[29] Kim Beazley expressed the same idea more colloquially in an interview with ASPI, *we have to be not so laid-back*[30].

As we have seen, evidence appears to support a notion that Australia is capable of creating and sustaining an independent self-sufficient defence posture. But adopting it is without a doubt a difficult policy choice and a clear break with the past which at the moment does not have majority support or even close to it; people like Paul Keating and Hugh White are a small minority. The option clearly favoured by both Labor and Liberal-National coalition is

[26] Lessons in Leadership: The Honourable Kim Beazley AC // ASPI. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEM4t7PqFMU&t=1408s
[27] Australian War Memorial, Second World War Official Histories, Volume VI – The New Guinea Offensives, Volume VII - The Final Campaigns, Appendix 7 - Some Statistics. URL: https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1417281, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1417416
[28] The Cost of Defence, ASPI Defence Budget Brief 2022-2023. URL: https://www.aspi.org.au/report/cost-defence-aspi-defence-budget-brief-2022-2023
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to double down on the alliance with the US and use AUKUS as a means of cementing it further. If AUKUS, along with other American strategies, fails to deter China it may well contribute to Australia finding itself on a battlefront fighting to preserve US preponderance in East Asia. Professor John Mearsheimer of the Chicago University speaking at Sydney's Centre for Independent Studies stressed that "survival is the highest goal any state can have"[31]. Measured by this yardstick, it is difficult to see how allowing itself to be part of a looming US-led military action against China over Taiwan fraught with risk of nuclear escalation is in Australia's best interest. ■

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ARMS CONTROL AND SCENARIOS OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

This occasional paper was made within the framework of the project *Arms Control and Scenarios of Nuclear Disarmament*, which is part of the *Nuclear Nonproliferation & Russia* Program.

The project is aimed on monitoring of the situation around the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, START, capacity development and modernization of the US nuclear forces, the possibilities of the P5 dialogue on arms control issues and confidence-building measures in the nuclear field in case of the collapse of the arms control architecture.