



Australia May Rent or Buy Nuclear Subs From US, UK Until Its Own Fleet is Built Under AUKUS Deal

Description

AUSTRALIA: Australia announced its new security alliance with the US and the UK, called AUKUS, on Wednesday, which would allow the country to acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. France, which found itself pushed out of a \$66 billion defence contract with Canberra, branded the agreement “a stab in the back”.

Australia may opt to lease or buy submarines from the United States or United Kingdom for an interim period as it waits for its own nuclear-powered fleet to be built, according to the country’s Defence Minister Peter Dutton.

Dutton [was interviewed](#) by Sky News’ Sunday Agenda program in the wake of the recent announcement of a new regional [security pact](#) that Australia had entered with the US and the UK, known as AUKUS. The deal presupposes developing an Australian nuclear-powered submarine fleet, which, however, may not be ready until the late 2030s.

When questioned whether leasing nuclear submarines was a possibility for Canberra, the Defence Minister said: “The short answer is yes.”

He underscored that relevant discussions would take place in the next 12 to 18 months, adding:

“The talk that you can just buy a nuclear-powered submarine off the shelf, of course, is just not accurate or correct... Already, I’ve met with a number of my counterparts here from the secretary down in terms of those that are making decisions and we will have further discussions with the Brits as well.”

‘National Interests’ a Driving Concern

Australia's Defence Minister responded to the severe backlash the surprise deal has triggered from France. French company DCNS (now known as Naval Group) had been on course to build 12 conventionally-powered submarines for Australia, based on France's Barracuda nuclear-powered subs, in a contract worth around 50 billion Australian dollars (€31 billion, \$36.5 billion) when announced in 2016.

However, on Wednesday, US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the new security alliance – dubbed AUKUS –between their countries, that has been condemned by France as “a stab in the back”.

According to Dutton, the rate at which China was developing submarines, frigates and aircraft carriers prompted other countries to step up their own production. Australia, too, had to act in its national interest. “That unfortunately is the dynamic we are operating in at the moment,” said the minister.

“Given the changing circumstances in the Indo-Pacific, not just now but over the coming years, we had to make a decision that was in our national interest, and that's exactly what we have done,” he said.

‘Unacceptable Behavior’

On Friday, [France branded](#) the AUKUS agreement “unacceptable behavior between allies and partners”, as French President Emmanuel Macron recalled the country's ambassadors from Washington and Canberra.

“It's really a stab in the back. We had established a relationship of trust with Australia, this trust has been betrayed... I'm very angry today, and bitter... This is not something allies do to each other,” said Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, speaking on France Info radio.

In response to the criticism, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he had warned President Emmanuel Macron in June that there were “very real issues about whether a conventional submarine capability” would be enough to tackle Canberra's strategic security needs in the Indo-Pacific region.

“They've been good partners. This is about our strategic interest, our strategic capability requirements and a changed strategic environment and we've had to take that decision,” Morrison said.

The European Union has also regretted being [blindsided](#) by the new alliance. “We regret not having being informed, not having been part of these talks... I understand how disappointed the French government will be,” said the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, on Thursday.

The [#AUKUS](#) security partnership further demonstrates the need for a common EU

approach in a region of strategic interest.

A strong EU Indo-Pacific strategy is needed more than ever

I welcome today's presentation of [@JosepBorrellF](#) strategy

On the agenda of the October [#EUCO](#)

— Charles Michel (@eucopresident) [September 16, 2021](#)

European Council chief Charles Michel went on Twitter to point out that the AUKUS deal showed how important it was to hammer out “a common EU approach in a region of strategic interest.”

Beijing responded to the announced new alliance by warning that it would result in an arms escalation in the region. The US, UK and Australia were “severely damaging regional peace and stability, intensifying an arms race, and damaging international nuclear non-proliferation efforts,” said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian at a briefing. He added:

“China always believes that any regional mechanism should conform to the trend of peace and development of the times and help enhance mutual trust and cooperation ... It should not target any third party or undermine its interests.”

by Svetlana Ekimenko

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