

Britain and Australia Forge 50-Year AUKUS Pact to Shape Indo-Pacific Power Balance

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Australia and Britain have cemented a landmark defence agreement, signing a 50-year treaty to deepen cooperation under the AUKUS nuclear submarine partnership. The pact, formalised on Saturday in Geelong, Victoria, marks a significant step in bolstering Australia's naval capabilities to address strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in response to China's growing influence.

The AUKUS agreement, established in 2021 between Australia, Britain, and the United States, is designed to equip Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines by the 2030s. The treaty, signed by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and British Defence Secretary John Healey, underscores a long-term commitment to collaboration on submarine design, construction, operation, maintenance, and eventual disposal. “The Geelong Treaty will enable comprehensive cooperation on our SSN-AUKUS submarines,” Marles stated, emphasising its role in strengthening bilateral defence ties over the next five decades.

This agreement builds on the trilateral AUKUS framework, which has been described as Australia’s most ambitious defence initiative to date, with Canberra allocating A\$368 billion over 30 years to the programme. The treaty is expected to deliver significant economic benefits for Britain, with the UK Ministry of Defence projecting up to £20 billion (\$27.1 billion) in export revenue over the next 25 years. The partnership also includes substantial Australian investment in the US, with a recent A\$800 million payment marking the second instalment to support American production capabilities.

The signing coincides with heightened defence cooperation between the two nations, as evidenced by their ministerial talks in Sydney on Friday. Discussions focused on enhancing joint efforts, aligning with Australia’s largest military exercise, Talisman Sabre, running from 13 July to 4 August. Involving 40,000 troops from 19 nations, the exercise serves as a rehearsal for joint warfare to ensure stability in the Indo-Pacific. Britain has notably increased its involvement this year, deploying the aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales, a move that underscores its commitment to the region.

Concerns have been raised about the pact’s future, particularly following the US administration’s announcement of a formal review under President Donald Trump. However, Australian officials remain confident in the programme’s continuity. In a recent interview with *The Australian*, Defence Minister Marles reiterated, “We are fully committed to AUKUS, and we have every confidence it will proceed as planned.” The treaty’s long-term vision signals a robust partnership, though critics, particularly those wary of the current UK Labour government’s defence priorities, question whether domestic political shifts could impact implementation.

The Geelong Treaty represents a bold stride towards securing Australia’s strategic interests while reinforcing historic ties with Britain. As the Indo-Pacific faces evolving challenges, this

agreement positions both nations to play a pivotal role in maintaining regional stability through cutting-edge defence capabilities.