



## PREVIEWING 2024 AUSMIN

BY ADIL CADER

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*Photo: Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Defence, Richard Marles participate in the 33rd annual Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) in Brisbane, Australia, July 29, 2023. Credit: Chad J. McNeeley*

The Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN) is the primary forum for bilateral consultations between Australia and the U.S. It is usually held annually, alternating between Australia and the United States. AUSMIN brings together the Australian Foreign and Defense Ministers with their American counterparts, and sometimes senior officials from both portfolios.

This week, the 34th AUSMIN consultations will occur in Annapolis, Maryland. Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Richard Marles, Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and the U.S.

Secretaries of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will attend.

Pacific Forum Young Leader Adil Cader, attending a press briefing on the consultations hosted by CSIS, previews the key themes ahead of the meeting.

### Multifaceted Changing Nature of the Relationship

As Charles Edel from CSIS notes, "the unbreakable alliance," as stated by Secretary Lloyd Austin, is becoming an increasingly multifaceted one. During Prime Minister Albanese's visit to Washington last October, leaders agreed to expand cooperation beyond the traditional fields of defense and trade to include climate and clean energy. This broader cooperation is also reflected in the inclusion of climate change and clean energy in AUKUS.

### Security Cooperation

Given the worsening global security situation in Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific, both Australia and the United States are expected to stress the need for cooperation. They will address challenges to regional and global stability.

Following commitments from the Prime Minister's state visit to Washington, AUSMIN will discuss implementing previous initiatives. This includes critical minerals, undersea cables, space, and cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Island region.

### Pacific Islands Region

A critical focus will likely be on the Pacific Islands region. It has recently become a significant area for strategic competition and cooperation for the U.S. and Australia, driven by the escalating influence of China. The Solomon Islands' security agreement with China in 2022 highlighted the need for both countries to ensure like-minded partners counteract opposing influences in the region.

The region faces threats from climate change, maritime security, and development needs. Both Australia and the U.S. will seek a coordinated approach to tackle these issues. Despite the

challenges, there are new opportunities for the U.S. to engage with the Solomon Islands, including the new U.S. embassy in Honiara and the launch of the Pacific Connect partnership with Google. This partnership aims to improve connectivity for remote islands and address critical needs like maritime law enforcement and cybersecurity. Additionally, the U.S.-Australia commitment to helping Pacific banking, announced in early July, is another example.

Papua New Guinea is another potential area of focus. Australia recently completed a bilateral policing agreement, and the U.S. implemented a Defense Cooperation Agreement signed last year. Both countries share an interest in ensuring these agreements support PNG's law enforcement and defense capabilities.

### **France and New Caledonia**

With the world focusing on France for the ongoing Summer Olympics, this attention might spill over into AUSMIN. Kathryn Paik, a CSIS Fellow, pointed out that while it might not make the readout, the situation in the French territory of New Caledonia and the domestic turmoil due to perceived attempts by the French government to hinder independence efforts could be raised.

This issue concerns AUSMIN due to the pressure from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) for another referendum. As a PIF member, Australia is in a sensitive position. While Australia has not supported a new referendum, New Zealand has.

### **Defense and Industrial Cooperation**

Another key topic will be Defense Industrial Cooperation, highlighting the growing partnership between both countries. A significant theme will be recognizing China's vast manufacturing base and the continued efforts to counter it. The U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment emphasized that production is deterrence, and to counter China, there needs to be an emphasis on production with allies and partners such as Australia.

Commentator Cynthia Cook notes that the U.S. Defense Innovation Board released a report titled "Optimizing Innovation Cooperation with Allies and Partners." One identified risk was the failure to properly integrate and align with other nations' military systems. AUSMIN should focus on addressing challenges and overcoming administrative, regulatory, legal, and cultural barriers to collaboration.