

Australia shrugs off China anger on nuclear subs

We are interested in ensuring that international waters are always international waters, says PM

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Australia on Friday shrugged off Chinese anger over its decision to acquire U.S. nuclear-powered submarines, while vowing to defend the rule of law in airspace and waters where Beijing has staked hotly contested claims.

U.S. President Joe Biden announced the new Australia-U.S.-Britain defence alliance on Wednesday, extending U.S. nuclear submarine technology to Australia as well as cyber defence, applied artificial intelligence and undersea capabilities.

Beijing described the new alliance as an “extremely irresponsible” threat to regional stability, questioning Australia’s commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and warning the Western allies that they risked “shooting themselves in the foot”.

China has its own “very substantive programme of nuclear submarine building”, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison argued on Friday in an interview with radio station 2GB.

“They have every right to take decisions in their national interests for their defence arrangements and of course so does Australia and



A file photo of an Australian Navy submarine during a drill in Darwin. ■ GETTY IMAGES

all other countries,” he said.

In a series of media interviews, the Australian leader said his government was reacting to changing dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region where territory is increasingly contested and competi-

tion is rising.

Australia is “very aware” of China’s nuclear submarine capabilities and growing military investment, he told Channel Seven television.

“We are interested in ensuring that international waters are always international waters and international skies are international skies, and that the rule of law applies equally in all of these places,” he said.

Australia wanted to ensure that there were no “no-go zones” in areas governed by international law, the Prime Minister said.

“That’s very important whether it is for trade,

whether it is for things like undersea cables, for planes and where they can fly. I mean that is the order that we need to preserve. That is what peace and stability provides for and that is what we are seeking to achieve.”

‘Stab in the back’

The move also infuriated France, aghast at losing a contract to supply conventional submarines to Australia that was worth \$36.5 billion when signed in 2016. Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said it was a “stab in the back” from Australia. But the main backdrop to the alliance is China’s rise.