

Australia agrees to buy 200 Tomahawk missiles from US

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Royal Australian Navy guided-missile frigate HMAS Parramatta (FFH 154) (L) sails with U.S. Navy Amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6), Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill (CG 52) and Arleigh-Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG 52) in the South China Sea, April 18, 2020. - AFP PIC

SYDNEY: Australia has locked in a deal to buy potent long-range weapons from the United States, officials said Monday, as the country looks to counter China's rising military power.

The cache of more than 200 Tomahawk cruise missiles – costing US\$830 million – would be some of the "most powerful and technologically advanced" weapons in Australia's arsenal, the country's defence department said.

Australia is embarking on a major military overhaul, pivoting towards long-range strike capabilities in an effort to keep would-be foes such as China at arms length.

"We are investing in the capabilities our Defence Force needs to hold our adversaries at risk further from our shores and keep Australians safe in the complex and uncertain world in which we live today," Defence Minister Richard Marles said in a statement.

The Tomahawk cruise missiles have a strike range of more than 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) and will be carried by the Australian navy's Hobart Class destroyers.

They will eventually be used by the roving nuclear-powered submarines acquired by Australia under the landmark AUKUS pact.

Australia's AUKUS allies – the UK and the United States – are the only other countries with significant stockpiles of Tomahawk missiles.

"As we enter what many are calling the missile age, these will be vital tools for the Australian Defence Force to do its job of defending Australians," Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy said.

Canberra said in January that it had snapped up a US offer to also obtain HIMARS rockets – the mobile artillery system used by the Ukrainian army to devastating effect.

Washington recently announced that it would help Australia build its own domestic missile manufacturing industry, with an eye to shoring-up supply chains disrupted by the war in Ukraine.

"We are buying these weapons now to deliver capability quickly," Conroy added.

"But we are also considering options to manufacture missiles domestically because of the importance of building sovereign Australian defence manufacturing capabilities."

The US Army has in recent years tested prototype hypersonic cruise missiles at the Australian Defence Force weapons range in remote South Australia. --AFP