

# Australian government embraces security pact with India

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Following last weekend's G20 summit in Brisbane, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remained in Australia for a formal state visit that marked strengthening economic and strategic ties between the two countries.

Like the summit itself, Modi's trip, the first by an Indian prime minister in 28 years, reflected sharpening geo-political tensions. Both Australia and India are key partners in the US "pivot to Asia" and its military build-up throughout the region against China. In a speech during the G20 meeting, President Obama reaffirmed his determination to maintain US domination in the Asia Pacific.

Addressing the Australian parliament on Tuesday, Modi was effusive about the prospects of greater collaboration between Canberra and New Delhi. "There are few countries in the world where we see so much synergy as we do in Australia. India [is] a nation of more than a billion seeking development; Australia [is] a developed country of a few million people and vast resources."

On the economic front, India is looking to Australia for investment, services and raw materials, particularly coal and uranium ore. The Australian export of uranium is bound up with India's closer strategic integration with the US and its allies. The previous Australian Labor government lifted a ban on uranium sales to India—a move that will free India's own limited deposits to be used to expand its nuclear weapons arsenal.

Modi signed a raft of agreements while in Australia and foreshadowed a future free trade deal. The most important agreement was a new security pact that sets the framework for much closer military and intelligence cooperation. The Framework for Security Cooperation will increase military exchanges and joint exercises, the

sharing of defence technology and collaboration across a range of areas.

In his speech, Modi called for greater cooperation on maritime security, saying: "We should work together on the seas and collaborate in international forums." In line with US accusations against China, he declared that "all nations, small and big, abide by international laws and norms, even when they have bitter disputes."

The US has deliberately inflamed maritime disputes between China and its neighbours in the South China and East China Seas as a means of justifying its own heavy naval presence in waters near the Chinese mainland and encouraging its allies, especially Australia, Japan and India, to do the same. Naval dominance in the Indo-Pacific region is a key aspect of the Pentagon's war-planning against China, which features a blockade of Indian Ocean shipping routes for Chinese energy and mineral imports from Africa and the Middle East.

The sensitivity of the new security agreement was underscored when the Australian government attempted to keep it under wraps while Chinese President Xi Jinping was still in the country. Xi addressed the Australian parliament on Monday and signed off on a lucrative free trade agreement that will boost Australian business, which Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott was keen not to upset.

Standing alongside Modi on Tuesday, Abbott omitted to mention the new security agreement with India. Details were only provided later by the Indian foreign ministry and noted in an official joint statement. The two leaders, it explained, "agreed to hold regular meetings at the level of defence minister, conduct regular maritime exercises and convene regular navy to navy, air force to air force and army to army staff talks." By that time, Xi had left Canberra to visit the

Australian state of Tasmania.

*Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent John Garnaut yesterday likened this manoeuvring to the Great Game—a reference to the imperialist intrigues in Asia before World War I. “It’s great because the stakes are,” he wrote. “The world’s fastest growing economies are accumulating weapons and repositioning themselves like we haven’t seen since the aftermath of the Cold War.” It was a game, he explained, because it was being done “discretely, with defence planners tip-toeing around each other’s headquarters” and avoiding public references to China.

In his address to the Australian parliament, Modi underscored the ideological thrust of New Delhi’s partnership with Canberra, declaring that “above all, we are united by the ideals of democracy.” The phony banner of “democracy” is central to efforts to bring the four Asian “democracies”—the US, Japan, India and Australia—into an alliance directed against “autocratic” China.

The hypocrisy involved is breathtaking. Under the banner of the “war on terror,” all four countries are adopting police-state measures and preparing to suppress opposition to the agenda of war and austerity. The Australian government used the G20 summit as a training ground for a massive security lockdown of a city, involving thousands of police and soldiers backed by military aircraft and ships and an armoury of anti-democratic laws and regulations designed to prevent working people coming anywhere near the meetings.

In line with Canberra’s efforts to secure closer ties with India, the Australian media has been completely uncritical of Modi—the leader of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP). No mention has been made of his role as Gujarat chief minister in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom across the state, when Hindu chauvinist thugs killed hundreds of people. His involvement was so obvious the US refused to grant Modi a visa until this year, when he was embraced as a US partner.

In 2006-07, the four “democracies” moved toward a quadrilateral security arrangement, which China denounced as “an Asian NATO.” Known as the “quad,” this arrangement fell apart after the Australian government under Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pulled out in 2008. Rudd was ousted in mid-2010 by factional Labor Party heavyweights closely linked to

the US embassy, and replaced by Julia Gillard, who immediately brought Australia into close alignment with preparations for the US pivot.

Moves toward a renewal of the “quad” are evident in multiple trilateral meetings and military exercises already underway—such as those between the US, Japan and Australia, or India, the US and Japan. In effect, a de facto strategic partnership between the four countries now exists and discussions are underway to formalise it.

In comments reported in the *Australian* before the G20, India’s Foreign Secretary (East) Anil Wadhwa said the issue “had been raised earlier as well and I think it will come up for discussion again” in Australia. While he indicated that further discussion was needed before any decision could be made on a formal alliance, Wadhwa’s comments are another indication of the advanced nature of preparations being made for conflict with China.



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