

# Trump and Australian PM Turnbull stage mutual embrace in New York

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US President Donald Trump and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull conducted an effusive and chilling display of unity on board a former World War II aircraft carrier in New York harbour on Thursday night.

A ceremonial dinner to highlight the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea against Japan became a platform for vows that Australia would unconditionally support America in its present wars in the Middle East and future wars.

Turnbull was so intent on consummating a bond with Trump that he flew to the other side of the world for what turned out to be a 40-minute face-to-face meeting aboard the USS Intrepid, followed by gushing speeches of mutual gratitude.

In what was meant to be an intensely symbolic event, in front of a tuxedo-wearing audience featuring Australian billionaires with major investments in the US, Trump declared that the US had “no better friend than Australia,” extolling ties that “were sealed with the blood of our fathers and grandfathers.”

Turnbull reciprocated by making clear that his government is committed to Washington both militarily and economically. Invoking every war over the past century from World War I to the present, Turnbull pledged: “From the mud of Hamel to the waters of the Coral Sea to the sands of the Middle East today, Australians and Americans stand shoulder to shoulder defending our freedoms.”

Against a backdrop of escalating US militarism in Syria and Afghanistan and threats of military action against North Korea, Trump said he would look to Australia for continued support on “security threats” in Asia and the Middle East. “Security also requires friends that you can truly count on, that is why I was pleased to meet with Prime Minister Turnbull and why I am so glad to be here with you tonight and we had a great meeting just a little while ago.”

In his speech, Turnbull left no room for doubt of his willingness to join any US military action. “Fiercely competitive, we always want to win, but we know we are always more assured of winning when we are fighting together,” he stated. “Today together we condemn and resist North Korea’s reckless provocation. We fight together in Iraq and Afghanistan to defeat and destroy the terrorists who threaten our way of life.”

It was a disgusting spectacle. Outside, thousands of protesters denounced Trump. Inside, Turnbull identified himself completely with a hated US administration that is hell-bent on using military might and aggressive “America First” protectionism to pursue the interests of Wall Street and the entire US corporate elite.

As if to make plain the Australian ruling class’s dependence on the US alliance, Trump kept Turnbull waiting for three hours while Trump celebrated in Washington the initial passage by the US House of Representatives of his draconian health care legislation.

Undeterred by the delay, Turnbull eagerly took the opportunity to congratulate Trump on his victory, underscoring his alignment with Trump’s reactionary domestic agenda as well.

The pair’s back-slapping media conference began as follows:

Turnbull: Congratulations on your vote today.

Trump: Thank you very much. It was great. Big day.

Turnbull: Big day. Every vote counts.

Trump: You got it. We had a couple left over and we wanted them, we didn’t need them. It was a very big day. Really—I appreciate your waiting.

Turnbull: Well, I know the feeling. We have challenges with our parliament too. We have only 29 seats in a Senate of 76 so you need a lot of

work to get legislation through.

Trump: That means you're doing a good job.

Asked by reporters about his terse phone call with Turnbull in January, the US president claimed that reports of the call, while “testy,” had been exaggerated by the media as “a little bit of fake news.” In reality, by berating Turnbull, then abruptly ending the call, Trump sent an unmistakable message that US policies would be implemented at the expense of its enemies and allies alike.

Exactly what Trump and Turnbull discussed at their meeting was not revealed, but there is no doubt that war plans were at the top of the agenda. According to the White House “readout” of the meeting:

The President and Prime Minister Turnbull discussed the enduring bonds, deep friendship, and close alliance between the United States and Australia that have been critically important to the maintenance of regional and global peace and security. Together, the United States and Australia are building a more secure and stable world. This involves cooperating to fight ISIS and other terrorist groups, and shaping a more peaceful Asia-Pacific, including by addressing the threat posed by North Korea.

Earlier in the day, Turnbull met with Admiral Harry Harris, commander of US Pacific Command, who would lead any attack on North Korea. Expressing the view of the Pentagon, Harris provocatively told a Congressional hearing last week there was “no doubt” that the North Korean regime would acquire nuclear weapons capable of striking the US within a few years unless stopped.

Significantly, Thursday's event on board the *Intrepid* underscored the intensifying investment ties between the US and Australian ruling classes. Turnbull stated: “We are confident and we trust each other—that is why the United States is the largest foreign investor in Australia and the United States is our largest overseas investment destination.”

Along with various celebrities, and a handful of Coral Sea veterans, the event showcased prominent Australian corporate figures with major operations in the US, including media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, shopping mall

magnate Frank Lowy, Dow Chemical chief Andrew Liveris and packaging empire boss Anthony Pratt. Trump ostentatiously gave Pratt a standing ovation for saying he would invest \$US2 billion over the next decade on new packaging plants in the US Midwest.

Assigned the role of introducing Trump to speak, Murdoch summed up the coming together of the military, economic and domestic agendas of the US and Australian financial elites. He insisted on the need for political leaders to be “intrepid” in today's “dangerous times.” They had to be “bold and unafraid to think differently,” he said.

Turnbull's obsequious performance was not simply an individual act. It reflected the conclusions drawn by the dominant sections of the Australian capitalist class that their interests are inextricably tied to those of their US counterparts, despite concerns about the implications for their profit-making in China, their biggest export market.

Back in 2011, when in opposition, Turnbull voiced reservations about the Gillard Labor government's “doe-eyed fascination with the leader of the free world” and openly speculated that China would displace the US as the hegemonic power in East Asia within a few decades because of “a massive realignment” of economic power.

Today, however, despite ongoing debate and nervousness in Australian ruling circles over the bellicose “America First” trade and military policies of the Trump administration, Turnbull and the political and media establishment have decided they have no choice but to intensify the military and strategic relationship with the US, as the best means for defending Australian capitalism's economic interests.

Today's editorial in Murdoch's *Australian* hailed as a “resounding success” Turnbull's “mission” to establish a “mutual embrace” with Trump. It concluded: “It is still too early to judge the trajectory of the Trump presidency but, regardless of the challenges or his ultimate place in history, there is no doubt Australia's interests are best served by having an intimate and frank rapport with the leader of a nation that will long endure as our strategic and economic partner.”



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