

Australian PM aligns with Trump administration against “globalism” and China

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In the wake of his eight-day state visit to the United States, Prime Minister Scott Morrison delivered a speech at the Lowy Institute strategic think tank on October 3 that further aligned his government with the nationalist and militarist agenda of the Trump administration.

Morrison began with a *realpolitik* assessment from the standpoint of the Australian ruling class and its interests. He repeatedly used formulations drawn directly from the vocabulary of US strategic think tanks and Trump himself.

“We are living in a world in transition... a new economic and political order is still taking shape. We have entered a new era of strategic competition,” he stated. It was an era of “polarisation within and between societies” and of “insiders and outsiders, threatening social cohesion, provoking discontent and distrust.”

In this context, Morrison identified what his government views as the primary threats to Australian capitalism. He denounced a “new variant of globalism that seeks to elevate global institutions above the authority of nation-states,” “negative globalism that seek to impose a mandate from an often ill-defined borderless global community” and “unaccountable internationalist bureaucracy.”

“Australia’s international engagement,” he blustered, “will be squarely driven by Australia’s national interests.” His government, he announced, intended to carry out “a comprehensive audit of global institutions and rule-making processes.”

The meaning of such proclamations is no mystery. In his recent speech at the UN, Trump repeatedly denounced “globalism.” Spearheaded by the US, governments are rejecting the decisions and underlying authority of bodies such as the UN and World Trade Organisation (WTO) as incompatible with their “national interest.” These institutions were established to mitigate against the type of conflicts between rival capitalist powers in the 1930s

that led to the outbreak of World War II.

The Trump administration, for example, has withdrawn from the UN’s Paris Accord on lowering carbon emissions. It is also threatening to leave the WTO if global trade rules are not changed to suit American demands, especially by ending the designation of China as a “developing nation.” This entitles China to protect sectors of its economy from international competition.

At the beginning of 2018, the US National Defense Strategy adopted by the Trump administration declared: “Great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of US national security.” It defined China as a “strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbours.”

A trade report issued at the same time denounced the WTO rules for allowing China to become a “dominant player” in world trade by using a “wide array of continually evolving interventionist policies and practices aimed at limiting market access for imported goods and services.”

The security and trade policy documents were followed in short order by the launch of open trade war by the US against China that now involves sweeping tariffs on some \$362 billion of Chinese exports into the American market.

In July this year, the Trump administration gave the WTO until later this month to take steps toward changing the status of China and other countries. Or, it threatened, the US would unilaterally “no longer treat [it] as a developing country.”

Morrison endorsed the economic offensive against China during his US visit last month. He used a speech in Chicago to align Australia with Trump’s demand that China’s WTO status be changed from “developing” to “developed.”

Analysts differ over the impact such a change would have. What is clear, however, is that regardless of whether China agrees or rejects the US demand, Washington will

use it as a *casus belli* for further tariffs and other trade war measures on the grounds that there is not a “level playing field.”

In his speech, Morrison reviewed the sweeping steps that have already been taken by previous Australian governments, and will be taken, to assist the US in its “strategic competition” against China.

Morrison emphasised that Australia was an “Indo-Pacific nation.” The term “Indo-Pacific” came into regular use in 2011 under the Obama administration as part of its “pivot to Asia” and the build-up in the region of at least 60 percent of the US Air Force and Navy for a military confrontation with China.

The previous Labor government unconditionally aligned Australia with the “pivot.” A US Marine base was established in the northern city of Darwin and Australian ports and airfields made available for an increased American military presence in the region.

Over the following years, Australia’s role in the anti-China build-up has continued to grow. Military spending has been ramped up to finance the acquisition of an array of war-fighting assets, from F-35 fighters and frigates to a fleet of new conventional submarines. Australia is currently the second-largest importer of military hardware in the world.

Across the Asian region, Australia has functioned as a US diplomatic point man, encouraging larger countries and cajoling and bullying smaller ones to distance themselves from political relations with Beijing and collaborate with Washington.

In his speech, Morrison spelt out various ways in which Australia’s military and diplomatic contribution to the US will expand in the next period. It would continue its so-called “Pacific Step,” which is a concerted push to keep the small but strategic Pacific Island nations firmly under the thumb of Canberra and Washington. Australia will seek to strengthen relations with Indonesia, which, to this point, is still attempting to balance between the US and China.

Morrison boasted of his recent state visit to Vietnam, which has ever more closely aligned with Washington in order to its assert its territorial claims in the South China Sea against Chinese counterclaims. Australian-Vietnamese relations, he noted, had been “elevated... to a strategic partnership.”

Most notably, however, Morrison highlighted the anti-China alliance that is being developed between the so-called Quad countries—the US, Japan, India and Australia. He announced a major state visit to New Delhi in January,

which would be “another step in cementing India in the top tier of Australia’s partnerships.” He also announced he had been invited to Tokyo next year. Japan, he stated, “is our Special Strategic Partner, our second-largest trading partner and a fellow ally of the United States.”

The US, predictably, was lauded by Morrison in the most sycophantic terms.

He told his audience of Australian business, political and diplomatic leaders: “Our alliance with the United States is our past, our present and our future. It is the bedrock of our security.”

After he outlined Australia’s complete alignment with the Trump administration, Morrison offered Beijing a comforting lie that nobody believes. “Even during an era of great power competition, Australia does not have to choose between the United States and China,” he said.

He concluded his speech by making crystal clear that his government backs Washington in all its diplomatic, economic and military attacks on Beijing. He once again declared that the definition of China had to “reflect its greater power status” and be changed to “newly developed economy.”

Just days away from the US deadline over China’s WTO classification, Morrison added: “The rule and institutions that support global cooperation must reflect the modern world. It can’t be set and forget.”

Morrison’s speech was generally downplayed in the establishment media. Some commentators, however, drew attention to its significance.

In an opinion-piece published today by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, academic Tony Walker observed: “Why the Prime Minister felt the need to embrace Trump’s most controversial UN remarks is not clear, unless he was intent on signalling a closer alignment with the United States, not simply on the issue of China but more broadly in contradiction to international institutions like the world body and its agencies.”

The “era of great power competition” that Morrison spoke of is in fact a descent back into the dog-eat-dog protectionism, nationalism and war preparations that characterised the decade preceding the outbreak of World War II.



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