

Australian political elite rushes to salute Biden and re-affirm US alliance

Mike Head

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Both the Liberal-National government and the Labor Party opposition were quick to congratulate Joe Biden on his assumed ascendancy to the US presidency and to reassert their commitment to the US military alliance, knowing that this means an intensified conflict with China.

On Sunday, as soon as the major US media networks called the presidential election for Biden, Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued a statement welcoming a Biden presidency. Like many of his counterparts in US-aligned governments, Morrison did not wait for any concession of defeat by President Donald Trump.

Morrison's statement was in sync with similar pronouncements by the other US-led "Five Eyes" global surveillance partners—the UK, Canada and New Zealand. That common response underscores the close military and intelligence ties that bind these governments to Washington and their support for the US ruling class in its fight to reassert the Asia-Pacific hegemony it cemented in World War II.

After wishing Biden "every success for his term of office," Morrison's statement declared: "The President-elect has been a great friend of Australia over many years, including when he visited Australia in 2016."

Morrison insisted that "American leadership is indispensable" for the world's "many challenges," including the COVID-19 pandemic, "ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific region," and "upholding the rules, norms and standards of our international community."

These are code words for an unequivocal alignment with Washington's escalating confrontation with China, which was launched by the military and strategic "pivot to Asia" undertaken by the Obama administration, in which Biden was vice president.

Morrison doubled down on this message at his press conference. "There is no more important, no deeper, no broader, no closer relationship, no relationship more critical to Australia's strategic interests than the one that we enjoy with the United States," he said.

Morrison said he hoped Biden would visit Australia next

year to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the ANZUS military treaty, saying it was the "bedrock of our security foundations." This treaty was signed in 1951 at the height of the US-led neo-colonial war in Korea—one of the constant series of such US wars to which Australian soldiers have been deployed.

At the same time, Morrison praised Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for "their contribution to the Australia-US relationship." In recent months, Pompeo has spearheaded the Trump administration's threats against China, accusing Beijing of "aggression" in the Asia-Pacific and of deliberately letting loose the COVID-19 virus on the world.

Asked by a journalist to nominate Trump's "legacy in the Indo-Pacific," Morrison identified the re-establishment of the "Quad" between the US, Japan, India and Australia, which is aimed strengthening military ties against China, and the recent Malabar naval exercises between the four partners off India's eastern coast.

The Labor Party echoed this line-up against China. Labor leader Anthony Albanese welcomed Biden's victory, saying: "The US alliance has been our most important partnership since WWII and your commitment to leadership will see this strengthened into the future."

Albanese issued a joint statement with Labor's shadow foreign affairs minister Penny Wong and shadow defence minister Richard Marles, saying the US alliance "remains a cornerstone of Labor policy." Albanese later told reporters that Biden was "a friend of Australia."

Morrison's repeated references to Biden's July 2016 visit to Australia are revealing. On that trip, Biden restated in bullying terms the determination of American imperialism to maintain its economic and strategic dominance in Asia through every means, including war if necessary.

"Anyone who questions America's dedication and staying power in the Asia Pacific is not paying attention," he declared in a Sydney speech, boasting of America's "unparalleled" military strength.

"And we've committed to put over 60 percent of our fleet

and our most advanced military capabilities in the Pacific by 2020,” Biden added. Referring to Obama, he said: “As the president said, we are all in. We are not going anywhere.”

Biden’s tour, which included New Zealand, was not just a menacing warning to China. It was directed at laying down the law to Canberra and other regional allies that Washington would not tolerate any prevarication in backing the US as Washington’s war preparations in the Indo-Pacific accelerated.

In the first place, Biden delivered a threatening message to then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Before taking office in September 2015, Turnbull had expressed concerns about the US conflict with China, reflecting the interests of key sections of the Australian corporate elite over the impact on exports to China, their largest market.

In November 2015, Obama had personally reproached Turnbull for failing to provide Washington with advance notice that a Chinese corporation was to be awarded a 99-year lease to operate the commercial port in the northern strategic city of Darwin.

Although Turnbull heeded the warnings, and later sought to also appease Trump, Washington’s doubts about his reliability helped trigger his removal as prime minister in August 2018, to be replaced by Morrison, who tied himself closely to Trump, even to the extent of unsuccessfully inviting the widely detested president to visit Australia.

The Morrison government’s intensifying actions against China include police raids on political figures accused of supposed “foreign interference” on behalf of China, and the tabling of a bill, supported by Labor, allowing it to ban universities, and state and local governments from making trade or exchange agreements with Chinese institutions.

Biden’s 2016 intervention was not only aimed at Turnbull, however. It was directed against anyone in the political establishment who showed any signs of deviating from unconditional support for Washington. The vice president combined militarism with threats of economic reprisals.

In his Sydney speech, Biden declared: “If I had to bet on which country is going to lead economically in the 21st century... I’d bet on the United States. But I’d put it another way: It’s never a good bet to bet against the United States.”

In reality, while the US remains the largest source of foreign investment in Australia, it is in historic decline as the dominant global power and has resorted to military might repeatedly over the past 30 years in desperate efforts to shore up its position. Biden’s speech made clear that US imperialism was redoubling its efforts to maintain its hegemony by seeking to subjugate China, even it means a catastrophic war.

Four years on, the demands of the US for a frontline Australian role in the aggression toward China have only

intensified during the Trump administration, and will be further ramped up under Biden.

On November 3, on the morning of the presidential election, the US ambassador in Canberra, Arthur Culvahouse, said as much. Whatever the election outcome, he told reporters, there was “bipartisan” agreement in the US on the challenge presented by China. “I see it continuing regardless of the outcome,” he said.

While acknowledging the lack of support for the US alliance among younger Australians, Culvahouse insisted that it would “remain strong and vibrant and forward-leaning,” adding: “The alliance never sleeps.”

Culvahouse, appointed by Trump, is a highly-connected member of the political-intelligence establishment, with a long track record of involvement in the acute political crises of successive governments.

In their praise of Biden, both Morrison and Albanese hypocritically spoke in terms of the two countries having common values, such as “democracy,” “respect for human rights and equality” and a quest for “peace and stability.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since World War II, Australian governments have backed every military and anti-democratic US intervention to maintain Washington’s dominance in the Asia-Pacific, including the Korean and Vietnam wars and the 1965-66 CIA-backed coup in Indonesia, all at the cost of millions of lives.

Today, on both sides of the Pacific, there is a mounting gap between the wealthy elites and the majority of the population, a growing lurch toward authoritarian rule and a heightening economic and military confrontation with China that could trigger another world war, this time fought with nuclear weapons.



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