# Australian Labor leader hails US alliance as Biden is inaugurated

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In a policy speech on Wednesday, Labor leader Anthony Albanese trumpeted his party's commitment to the US-Australia military alliance and its support for Washington's escalating confrontation with China.

Timed to occur the same day as Joseph Biden's inauguration as president, the speech had the character of a pitch to the US and Australian ruling elites. Albanese's line was that a Labor government would be best placed to deepen the alliance under the new Democratic Party administration, as it seeks to ensure American hegemony in the Asia-Pacific and undermine China's growing influence in the region.

The venue at which Albanese spoke was intended to drive home this message. His speech was delivered to the USAsia Centre in Perth, a think tank funded by the US State Department.

Established in 2012 on the initiative of Barack Obama's administration, in which Biden was vice-president, it was opened with a speech by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The centre was set-up as an ideological and political beachhead of the anti-China campaign in Perth, which is located on the coast of the geo-strategically critical Indian Ocean and hosts Australia's important HMAS Stirling Naval Base.

Albanese hailed Biden's presidency as a "new chapter in international relations" and American democracy that would "radiate throughout the world." He made reference to the January 6 coup attempt, in which Donald Trump sought to overturn the presidential election result by inciting a fascist mob to attack the Capitol. US democracy had been "brought to the brink," Albanese said, but it had "shown its resilience. Attempts to undermine it have failed."

The Labor leader's paen to American democracy had a delusional character.

Biden assumes office after a section of the ruling elite sought to overthrow his presidency and establish a dictatorship. He has responded by appealing for "unity" with his "Republican colleagues," including those involved in the coup plot, in a bid to paper over divisions within the state apparatus that threaten the political structures of American capitalism. Biden will do nothing to seriously address the pandemic and his pro-business policies will intensify the deep social inequality that underlies the breakdown of democratic norms.

Albanese's Panglossian optimism reflected fears within the ruling elite over the international implications of the crisis in the US. "The great tragedy of the recent past is the power of America's example has been diminished from within," Albanese said, weakening US "international leadership" and its "rules-based order," codewords for the dominance of American imperialism.

In a related argument, Albanese condemned Prime Minister Scott Morrison for too closely identifying his government with Trump. Albanese noted that Morrison had addressed what was effectively a Trump campaign rally in 2019 and had refused to criticise Trump's role in the January 6 coup. Morrison had also tolerated Liberal and National backbenchers, who openly promoted the Republican Party's lies about a "stolen election."

This, Albanese warned, could create complications in Australia's relationship with the new administration. "Scott Morrison will have his work cut out given his attendance at partisan events with Donald Trump and his failure to build any connections with the Democrats," he said.

Albanese's own condemnations of Trump have a decidedly latter-day character. He largely refrained from criticising the then US president after being installed as Labor leader in May 2019, until Trump's election defeat last November. Throughout, Albanese has been at pains to stress his commitment to the alliance and has marched in lockstep with the government on foreign policy and "national security" questions.

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Even in his speech, Albanese noted that he and his Labor colleagues had held private meetings with Trump's Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Mark Esper, during their visits to Australia, all of which were aimed at ratcheting up the campaign against China.

The US diplomatic, economic and military confrontation with Beijing was initiated by the Obama administration, deepened under Trump and will be further expanded by Biden, who pitched himself as the most hawkish candidate on China during the presidential election.

To the extent that Albanese criticised Trump's foreign policy during the speech, it was not for his administration's many anti-China provocations. The Labor leader's retrospective complaint was that Trump's America First program, involving trade sanctions, not only on China, but also nominal allies in Europe, and attacks on multilateral organisations, had weakened the US-led alliance network.

Albanese also bemoaned the blowback of Chinese trade sanctions on some Australian exporters, and declared that Trump had largely been indifferent to this. The Chinese measures have been in retaliation for Australian tariffs and restrictions on investment directed against Beijing, as well as its McCarthyite campaign over supposed Chinese "foreign interference."

The Labor leader forecast that "the bipartisan shift in Washington towards strategic competition with China is likely to endure." But he declared that under Biden, this would involve greater collaboration with alliance partners and the strengthening of "international institutions," which have entrenched US geo-strategic dominance since the end of World War II.

"Labor sees the need for a US regional strategy that strengthens the international rules, provides credible offers of support to regional countries, and boosts prosperity," he stated.

Albanese favourably sketched out an all-sided escalation of the US confrontation with China by the Biden administration. "From promoting human rights and the rule of law, investing in defence and broader technological capability, defending against threats—physical and grey-zone—and identifying areas of cooperation, Biden's approach to the China relationship will have global and local implications."

The reference to "cooperation" notwithstanding, Albanese was speaking of bogus US human rights campaigns, aimed at ramping up the pressure on China, aggressive attempts to undermine Beijing's influence in the region based on hypocritical invocations of the "rule of law," military provocations in the South China and East China Seas and outright preparations for military conflict.

This would receive Labor's full support. "Australia's interests call for greater, more strategic effort from the US in Southeast Asia," Albanese declared. "It has been reassuring to see the extent to which the Biden team has already acknowledged the imperative of strategic engagement and leadership in the Indo-Pacific region."

At the same time, Labor would advocate a greater Australian orientation to South East Asian nations. Australia will need to "lift its game in the region," Albanese declared, accusing Morrison of having failed to pay sufficient attention to nations such as Indonesia.

Albanese was effectively sketching out a return, at a higher level, to the US pivot to Asia, as it was pursued under the Obama administration, with the full support of the then Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Rather than unilateral trade measures and other "America First" policies associated with Trump, this would involve a greater focus on mobilising countries throughout the region against China, carrying out diplomatic provocations through institutions such as the United Nations, and further building-up military capabilities.

Albanese's speech again underscored that Labor is a party of imperialist aggression and militarism. Having placed Australia on the frontlines of the US war drive against China, it is now calling for even greater involvement in an escalation of hostilities with Beijing that will be carried out by the Biden administration.

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