

Australian government hails US confrontation with China amid rising war danger

Mike Head
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Australia's Liberal-National government joined US President Joe Biden in praising provocative public denunciation of China by the two top US foreign policy officials at last Friday's opening session of the Washington-Beijing meeting in Anchorage, Alaska. Biden declared he was "very proud" of US Secretary of State Tony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan for their aggressive stance.

Canberra responded by reinforcing its commitment to Washington. In particular, the government welcomed the fact that Blinken and Sullivan featured China's alleged "economic coercion" toward Australia in their list of charges against Beijing. The pair echoed similar comments by Biden himself at this month's first-ever leaders' summit of the renewed Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad—a quasi-military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia against China.

Trade Minister Dan Tehan said: "All Australians should be reassured by the fact the Americans have come out and said they've got our back, and they won't leave us alone on the playing field."

Far from reassuring, US bellicosity places the Australian population even more on the frontline of what would be a catastrophic war to prevent China from challenging the global hegemony that Washington asserted after its victories in World War II.

In reality, the US, backed by Australia, is waging economic and strategic warfare against China. The Biden administration has not lifted any of the trade war tariffs and other penalties imposed under Trump on Chinese exports, investment and corporations, and continued US naval provocations close to the Chinese mainland in the South and East China Seas.

Chinese steel mills continue to buy Australian iron ore at massive levels and high prices, further inflating the fortunes of mining magnates like Gina Rinehart,

Andrew Forrest and Clive Palmer. But Australian governments have banned Huawei and other Chinese telecommunications companies from 5G and other major infrastructure projects, blocked almost all Chinese investment proposals and imposed punitive tariffs on some Chinese imports, such as steel, on the pretext of combating "dumping."

Australia's corporate media outlets and think tanks also have lined up behind the Biden administration, despite some apparent nervousness about the implications of a US-led war for the interests of Australian capitalism.

Yesterday's editorial in the Murdoch media's *Australian* praised "the commendable firmness and determination shown by the Biden administration in Anchorage" and insisted that "the concerns raised at the summit must be pursued relentlessly."

The editorial cited a featured article last Saturday by the newspaper's US-connected foreign editor Greg Sheridan, in which he openly canvassed the increased likelihood of a nuclear war. "The defining question of our time is the US-China relationship and, in short, whether there is going to be a war," Sheridan wrote.

Sheridan referred to the prediction made last week by Admiral Philip Davidson, the chief of the US Indo-Pacific command, that the US would face a war with China over Taiwan within six years. "The six-year time frame is important, and realistic," Sheridan stated.

"The US, at last, is seized of the urgent challenge posed by China and in turn is starting to move in directions that will make Beijing's military planning more complicated."

Sheridan declared that the US had to threaten China with the risk of "nuclear annihilation" to prevent it seeking to reclaim Taiwan, which was part of China before it was taken by Japan in 1895 as a result of the

First Sino-Japanese war.

In Australia's think tanks there is a discussion of the fact—as signalled by the Quad summit and the Alaska confrontation—that the Biden administration, with the backing of the Republican Party, is escalating the US offensive against China that was initiated by Obama's "pivot to Asia" and intensified by Trump's trade war measures.

On March 16, the US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney issued a report on the "swift evolution in Australia's alliance with the United States—far and away Australia's most important strategic relationship."

A key factor driving this shift was that "strategic competition with an increasingly capable, assertive and authoritarian China is now widely accepted as the single most pressing challenge for the United States and its allies. This change in the US strategic mindset finds no meaningful partisan opposition in Washington."

The report further asserted: "Across the US strategic affairs community, Australia's credentials as an ally of substance are impeccable. Australia is rightly seen as on the 'frontlines' with respect to the China challenge and being willing and able to respond credibly."

Similarly, on March 17, the *Interpreter*, published by the Lowy Institute, drew attention to Biden's Interim National Security Guidance that branded China "the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system," that is, the US-dominated economic order.

It noted Biden's declaration that "we will ensure that America, not China, sets the international agenda." The Lowy Institute's only concern was that the US had not yet demonstrated that it had the "means" to achieve that "end."

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a government-funded body that has close links with the US, published an article on March 17 that said "the arrival of the Quad leaders meeting" showed a "consensus" had emerged on the necessity to quickly boost Australia's military spending and acquisition of weapons.

An earlier US Studies Centre report, issued on March 3, observed that both the US and Australian

governments were already accelerating their preparations for war with China by urgently reviewing their "supply chains," which was one of the main items on the Quad summit agenda.

The Biden administration was initially examining "supply-chain risks in four key industries"—computer chips, large-capacity batteries, pharmaceuticals and critical minerals—with all relevant federal agencies required to report on risks within 100 days.

Following that lead, the Morrison government had asked the country's Productivity Commission to identify supply chains "vulnerable to the risk of disruption and also critical to the functioning of the economy, national security and Australians' well-being." The government gave the commission, which typically takes three or four months to prepare an interim report, just one month to deliver its initial findings.

The US Studies Centre report voiced concern that Australia depended heavily on China not just for exports of iron ore and other commodities, but also for nearly 600 "strategic" imports, ranging from semi-conductors, generators and computers to ordinary hinges, padlocks and gaskets.

It referenced a UK think tank study into the dependence on China by the members of the US-led "Five Eyes" intelligence network—the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—which found that Australia was by far the most exposed.

The US Studies Centre report noted anxiously: "The Productivity Commission will find that the spread of goods on which Australia is dependent on China is so broad that it's impossible to conceive of any realistic replacement or supply-line duplication strategy."

In Australia, as in the US, the government, the intelligence agencies, and the media are seeking to poison public opinion by demonising China. At the same time, behind the backs of the population, an intense discussion is underway in ruling circles about the preparations being made for war.



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