

Australian PM confirms attendance at NATO summit

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced yesterday that he will definitely attend the July 11–12 annual NATO leaders’ summit in the Baltic state of Lithuania, on Russia’s border, refuting some previous suggestions he might decline the invitation.

Earlier in the week, the Labor Party leader had already said he would be “very pleased” to join the gathering of the US-led military alliance. He will participate as one of four US allies designated last year as NATO’s Asia-Pacific partners. That underscores NATO’s expansion of its escalating military interventions, from the war against Russia in Ukraine to preparations for war against China.

Reports had emerged in recent weeks that Albanese would not attend this year’s summit, in part because of a number of other travel commitments, including King Charles III’s coronation in London next month.

But Albanese’s spokesperson said he would attend the meeting because “Australia shares with NATO members a commitment to supporting democracy, peace and security, and upholding the rule of law.” It would “be an important opportunity to reinforce Australia’s support for these global norms” and “demonstrate solidarity in response to Russia’s illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine.”

These are well-worn code words for upholding the global order imposed by Washington on the back of the defeat of German and Japanese imperialism in World War II, while exploiting the US-NATO Ukraine war to back US imperialism’s offensive to extend its hegemony to the entire Eurasian landmass, from Russia to China.

In recent weeks, corporate media outlets and US-linked military-intelligence figures had warned Albanese in no uncertain terms against declining this year’s NATO invitation. An *Australian* editorial on April 10 declared that going to Lithuania was “a priority dictated by the times in which we live,” despite the Labor government facing “no shortage of domestic issues.”

The editorial did not elaborate on the pressing “domestic issues,” but the government and its trade union partners are acutely conscious of brewing unrest among workers and youth over the soaring cost of living, falling real wages and a worsening housing crisis driven by mortgage interest rate hikes and sky-rocketing rents.

On April 14, a regular *Australian* contributor, Peter Jennings, an ex-top defence official and a senior fellow and former executive director of the government-subsidised and US-connected Australian Strategic Policy Institute, relayed an even more blunt message. “It would be a major strategic mistake not to attend,” he wrote in the newspaper.

Last year in Madrid, Albanese became the first Australian prime minister ever to join a NATO summit. He was invited alongside his Japanese, South Korean and New Zealand counterparts, collectively dubbed the “Asia-Pacific Four” or AP4.

The AP4 has become a pivot of the unprecedented expansion of NATO’s operations from Europe to target China, on the other side of the strategically critical and resource-rich Eurasian super-continent. The Madrid summit was a key turning point, with NATO leaders designating China as a “strategic threat” for the first time.

This is under conditions in which the Biden administration has ramped-up US ties with Taiwan, undermining the 50-year-old One China policy of recognising Beijing as the government of all of China, including Taiwan. President Biden has at least four times publicly declared that the US would defend the island militarily if China sought to reunify it with the Chinese mainland.

Albanese’s Madrid trip, which included a visit to meet Zelensky in Ukraine, came just over a month after Labor formed a government. That was on top of Albanese’s dash, on his first full day in office, to a Quad summit in Tokyo to join Biden and the prime ministers of Japan and

India to discuss intensifying the confrontation with China.

In Madrid, Albanese himself explicitly drew the connection between the offensives against Russia and China. He told a NATO gathering: “Just as Russia seeks to recreate a Russian or Soviet empire, the Chinese government is seeking friends, whether it be... through economic support to build up alliances to undermine what has historically been the Western alliance in places like the Indo Pacific.”

Albanese thus depicted the entire region as an historic zone of Western domination. He pledged “our iron-clad commitment” to upholding such Western “norms in our own region, the Indo-Pacific,” while falsely claiming to stand for “peace and sovereignty.”

Albanese’s trip this year marks a stepping up of that “iron-clad commitment.” Yesterday’s confirmation of his visit came just before the US hosted a meeting of NATO members in Germany on Friday to discuss further boosting their weapons shipments and military involvement in Ukraine.

A day earlier too, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited Ukraine for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and publicly stated: “Ukraine’s rightful place is in NATO.” This declaration further exposed the underlying longtime US-NATO agenda of extending NATO to Russia’s borders and goading the Russian regime into a disastrous Ukraine conflict.

Albanese’s announcement also came amid US and allied fury over French President Emmanuel Macron’s three-day state visit to China this month, accompanied by a delegation of 50 business leaders, and Macron’s declaration that the European powers should not follow the US into a conflict with Beijing over Taiwan.

In his April 14 *Australian* column, Jennings insisted that Albanese’s attendance at the NATO summit was particularly necessary because of Macron’s statements. Jennings said Albanese “needs to refute the Macron thesis that national sovereignty means it is possible to cut deals with China and ignore Beijing’s authoritarian challenge.”

As the record shows, from the very day they took office, Albanese and his senior ministers, notably Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, have engaged in a frenetic series of overseas missions to support the Biden administration’s escalation of its confrontation with China.

This is to be intensified. Albanese will attend King Charles’s coronation just days before his government’s

May budget, and the G7-plus summit in Hiroshima that month as a guest of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

In addition, Albanese will host Biden, Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Sydney for a Quad leaders’ summit, also likely to be held in May. Albanese is then set to address the US-aligned Shangri-La Dialogue security conference in Singapore in early June, followed by the NATO summit and the Pacific Island Forum in the Cook Islands in the middle of the year, where he will continue to lay down the law to the small island states to reduce their links with China.

Despite having been elected last May with the support of less than a third of the voters, the Labor government is going much further than its predecessor, Scott Morrison’s hated Liberal-National Coalition administration, to place the population on the frontline of a potentially catastrophic third world war, ignited by the US against two nuclear-armed countries, Russia and China.

Under the \$368 billion AUKUS submarine deal announced last month, Australia will acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines designed for long-range use against China. This has provoked widespread shock and concern among working-class people over the danger of war, as well as the inevitable deep cuts to social spending required to finance the vast military expansion.

To go forward, this opposition needs a socialist perspective based on the fight for the unity of workers internationally in the struggle against the source of war, the capitalist profit system. That perspective will be elaborated at the global online rally to celebrate May Day 2023. It will be livestreamed at 5 a.m. (AEST) on Monday May 1. Register here.



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