

# Australian PM spearheads US diplomatic offensive against China

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At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue regional security summit in Singapore last Friday and on a subsequent visit to Vietnam last weekend, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese acted as a front man for the escalating US confrontation against China.

Speaking at the Singapore gathering of military and government leaders, Albanese echoed, at times almost word for word, the aggressive message delivered at the same event by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin the following day.

Austin stood to applaud Albanese's speech and warmly praised it the next day. It was a display of the extent to which Washington is relying on Albanese's Labor government to counteract rising concerns throughout southeast Asia's governments and populations over the prospect of a catastrophic US war against China.

Those concerns were voiced at the summit itself by representatives from southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia and the Philippines, reflecting the extent to which the entire region is being threatened by the prospect of war.

Both Albanese and Austin accused China of refusing to engage in dialogue with the US, saying it was necessary to prevent a "devastating" war. At the very same time, the Biden administration conducted another dangerous provocation by sailing a destroyer, accompanied by a Canadian frigate, through the narrow Taiwan Strait between mainland China and Taiwan island.

Like Austin, Albanese called on Beijing for talks and "guardrails" in US-China relations to avoid conflict. Austin seized on the fact that Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu, who has actually been the personal victim of punitive US sanctions since 2018, declined to accept an invitation to meet with him during the event.

Such allegations are designed to blame China for triggering any military clash that erupts, whether it be over Taiwan, the South China Sea or another flashpoint in

the intensifying US military and economic offensive against Beijing.

In his speech, Albanese was on script. He declared: "Australia strongly supports renewed efforts from President Biden's administration to establish reliable and open channels of communication between the governments of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China."

While trying to present himself as a voice of reason, Albanese gave an indication of the danger of military incidents, such as those in the Taiwan Strait, spiralling into war. Without dialogue, he said, there was "always a much greater risk of assumptions spilling over into irretrievable action and reaction."

Albanese attempted to push back against the alarm in the region over the reactivation of the Quad—a de facto military alliance between the US, Japan, India and Australia—and the AUKUS pact to supply US and UK nuclear-powered submarines, hypersonic missiles and other hi-tech weaponry to Australia for use against China.

Before joining US President Biden and UK Prime Minister Sunak in San Diego in March to unveil the AUKUS nuclear submarine plan, Albanese said he had conducted more than 60 phone calls to government leaders throughout the region, "being open and transparent with the region about our intentions."

Australia's goal, Albanese claimed, was "not to prepare for war but to prevent it," yet his language was threatening. He said Australia was working with other countries to make it "crystal clear" that "when it comes to any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force—be it in Taiwan, the South China Sea, the East China Sea or elsewhere—the risk of conflict will always far outweigh any potential reward."

In reality, while demanding adherence to the global "rules-based order" that it established after World War II, it is the US that is increasingly overturning the "status

quo,” such as the “One China” policy by which it recognised Beijing as the legitimate government over all China, including Taiwan, in 1979.

The Labor government, like its predecessors over the past decade, has intensified its commitment to Washington’s drive to prevent China from challenging the US regional and global hegemony, including by the provision of US access to Australian military bases. Albanese and foreign minister Penny Wong have been on virtual non-stop trips around the region, pushing governments into line.

Last Friday, Albanese tried to depict himself as an honest broker, promoting dialogue between the US and China, even while reasserting his government’s commitment to the US. “For as long as Australia has made our own foreign policy, our alliance with the United States has been central to it,” he said. He described “American leadership” in the region as “indispensable.”

The next day, Austin described Australia as one of America’s “staunch allies” in the region and was, along with Japan, a key site for basing American forces. He said “the historic AUKUS partnership,” along with work with Japan on missile defence technologies, demonstrated America’s efforts to ensure its allies and partners had the capabilities to deter Chinese “aggression.”

Austin emphasised the importance of next month’s Exercise Talisman Saber, a biennial military exercise held in Australia, which will include the UK, Germany and France. “It will be the largest iteration ever, with more than 30,000 people participating, including a significant contingent from Japan.”

Following his speech in Singapore, Albanese’s two-day state visit to Vietnam added another dimension to his mission. The government in Vietnam has clashed with China over territorial claims in the South China Sea, as recently as May 26. It has been courted by Washington as a frontline border state with China and as a source of cheap labour to reduce US reliance on Chinese imports.

While discussing trade relations, a small investment package and opportunities for Australian universities to profit from Vietnamese students, Albanese’s main focus was on pushing for a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.” What that entails exactly is not clear, but it would elevate the military ties between the two countries. Albanese spoke of lifting relations to those of “top-tier partners.”

That could potentially involve Australian support for Vietnam’s offshore territorial disputes with China. In a media statement, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh

Chinh said the two sides had reaffirmed “the importance of ensuring peace, stability, security, safety, freedom of navigation and overflight in the East Sea or South China Sea.”

These are code words for provocative US naval and aerial operations in the name of “freedom of navigation” in the contested waters.

Perversely, Albanese’s trip was conducted under the banner of commemorating “50 years of friendship and progress” between Vietnam and Australia. That dates the relationship to 1973, near the end of the Vietnam War, which was not mentioned.

That neo-colonial war by US imperialism, joined by Australian imperialism as part of its commitment to the US alliance, resulted in more than 3 million dead, the vast majority of them Vietnamese civilians slaughtered by American bombs, artillery shells, napalm and other weaponry.

At a June 4 media doorstep in Hanoi, one journalist asked Albanese: “PM, was it a mistake for Australia to become involved in the Vietnam War, and did you offer any gesture of reconciliation for Australia’s involvement in that war?”

Albanese refused to answer the question. “Look, I’m here, what we’re doing is looking ahead to the future,” he said. “That is what I’m doing. And that’s what governments in Australia have done on a bipartisan basis.”

Nevertheless, behind all the talk by Albanese and Austin about peace and prosperity, the Vietnam War demonstrated the real record of Washington and its partners in the region and globally. It is one of resorting to the most brutal methods to prosecute their interests.

By refusing to even acknowledge the historic crime of the Vietnam War, Albanese has underscored the militarist agenda that his Labor government is pursuing as it allocates hundreds of billions of dollars for AUKUS and other military hardware.



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