

Washington demands Australian government commit to war on China

Mike Head
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Just as Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was about to start a visit to China last weekend, the Trump administration leaked to the *Financial Times* (FT) that it is demanding a commitment from Australia, as well as Japan, of involvement in any war with China.

“The Pentagon is pressing Japan and Australia to make clear what role they would play if the US and China went to war over Taiwan,” the FT reported. Elbridge Colby, Trump’s under-secretary of defence for policy, “has been pushing the issue in meetings with Japanese and Australian defence officials in recent months, said five people familiar with the discussions.”

An unnamed US defence official alluded to advanced plans, involving Japan and Australia, telling the FT: “Concrete operational planning and exercises that have direct application to a Taiwan contingency are moving forward with Japan and Australia.”

An official said the Pentagon had received “positive” indicators on higher spending from Japan and Australia, but stressed that it was “critical for us all that we see results.”

After the article’s publication, Colby essentially confirmed the report. In a post on X, he said the Pentagon was “urging allies to step up their defence spending.” Colby, the grandson of former CIA director William Colby, is also conducting a review of the AUKUS military pact against China.

Colby’s demands underscore the advanced character of US preparations for conflict with China.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in May, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth declared a war with China over Taiwan could be “imminent.” While the US couches its military build-up in the Indo-Pacific as maintaining peace and stability, it has deliberately inflamed regional flashpoints, including the most sensitive—Taiwan.

In Singapore, Hegseth released a statement publicly calling on the Labor government to lift its military spending to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) “as soon as possible.” He also demanded that Asian countries massively increase their military spending to 5 percent of GDP—requiring the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars—and insisted they had to “choose” to line up with Washington against Beijing.

Colby’s call for Japan and Australia to commit to a US-led war with China over Taiwan ignores the fact that, formally at

least, the US maintains a policy of “strategic ambiguity”—not saying whether it would back Taiwan in a war with China.

However, Washington is attempting to goad China into a war over Taiwan by undermining the “One China” policy under which the US de facto recognises Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. President Biden effectively threw out the policy of “strategic ambiguity,” declaring on four occasions “rock solid” support for Taiwan.

In the name of defending Taiwan, Colby has long advocated focussing US military preparations against China, whose sheer economic growth successive US administrations have identified as an existential threat to American global hegemony.

Colby’s review of AUKUS, under which Australia will get nuclear-powered attack submarines from the US and UK while contributing billions of dollars to the US and UK military-industrial bases, has triggered concern in Australian ruling circles.

In an interview with Australian television last year, Colby said it would be “crazy” for the US to provide submarines to Australia unless the Pentagon could be assured it would have enough for itself. He added that the US would be “lucky” to get to the 2030s without a conflict with China.

Colby’s latest demands are something of an embarrassment to Albanese who is trying to walk a fine line between China, Australia’s largest trading partner, and the US, on which Australia is dependent militarily and strategically, as well for investment.

Albanese is heading a top-level corporate trade delegation that features iron ore and other big business chiefs, all eager to profit from trade with China for as long as possible. He is due to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang today.

Under these conditions, Albanese sought to evade the US demands at a media conference in Shanghai on Sunday. Pressed by reporters to respond to the FT report, he referred to the “strategic ambiguity” doctrine and said his government wanted to maintain the “status quo” on Taiwan—that is, the One China policy.

Despite declining to publicly commit in advance to a US war with China, Albanese said “private discussions” with the Trump administration were already in progress about how the

AUKUS pact would work. He refused to be drawn on these “private discussions.”

At the same time, Albanese reiterated the Labor government’s commitment to the “very important” US alliance, claiming it was about “peace and security in our region.” In reality, it has nothing to do with peace. For more than a decade, governments have vastly expanded US military basing arrangements in northern Australia, participated in US-led naval and air provocations off the Chinese mainland and engaged in a concerted campaign in the Asia Pacific to undermine Chinese influence.

The Australian media reported on Sunday that the Pentagon had asked Australian officials for undertakings on how the three Virginia-class nuclear submarines to be supplied under the AUKUS agreement would be used in the event of US military conflicts. They also requested “substantial increases” in defence spending as part of the AUKUS review.

Australia and Japan have stepped up trilateral exercises with the US in recent years, and both countries host American forces. Talisman Sabre, the biggest Australian-US joint exercise, commenced in Australia this weekend, bringing together more than 30,000 personnel from 19 countries, including Japan.

While Albanese declined to say if Australia would join a US war against China, Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles told the *Australian* newspaper’s “Defending Australia” summit last month that Australia would inevitably play a key role. “Our continent is more relevant to the great-power contest now than it’s ever been before,” Marles said.

That points to the truth. Australia would be automatically engaged in any such war. It hosts a network of communications, logistics, air force and naval bases—all ramped up under the Albanese government. They constitute “the central base of operations” for a US war against China, to cite the term used last year by US Republican congressman Michael McCaul.

This network includes the Pine Gap satellite surveillance facility near Alice Springs and the Harold E. Holt Naval Communication Station in Western Australia’s North West Cape, both of which are crucial for US military operations from the Middle East to the Pacific.

About 2,500 Marines now train in the Northern Territory for six months a year, alongside rotational deployments of US Navy warships and of nuclear-capable B-52s and B2 stealth bombers. Under the AUKUS treaty, US and British nuclear-powered submarines will begin operating from HMAS Stirling, near Perth, within two years.

In the interests of corporate profit, most editorials in Australia last week cautiously welcomed Albanese’s trip to China, while noting with concern his failure to secure a meeting with Trump, despite intensive efforts.

Yesterday, however, the missive delivered by Colby triggered anxiety. The *Australian Financial Review* warned: “Anthony

Albanese’s six-day goodwill charm offensive in China had only just begun when it was thrown off course on Sunday by the fresh American shots across Australia’s AUKUS bows from far away in Washington.”

No commentary has yet recalled the fate of the last Australian prime minister who sought to balance ever so slightly between the US and China. In June 2010, a cabal of Labor Party and trade union powerbrokers, acting on behalf of the US embassy, carried out a backroom, inner-party coup to remove Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and install his deputy, Julia Gillard.

Rudd was, and remains, fully committed to the US military alliance. But secret US diplomatic cables, published by WikiLeaks, showed that the Obama administration had become hostile to Rudd’s diplomatic initiatives, launched without reference to Washington, to ease rising tensions between the US and China in the interests of Australian big business.

In her first public appearance after knifing Rudd, Gillard demonstrated her devotion to Washington by posing for a photo op with the US ambassador, flanked by US and Australian flags. She soon had a phone call with Obama, who had previously twice postponed a planned visit to Australia under Rudd.

In November 2011, Obama travelled to Australia. He announced the US military and strategic “pivot to Asia” on the floor of the Australian parliament. During his visit, Gillard and Obama signed an agreement to station US Marines in Darwin and allow greater US access to military bases—a process that has been intensified ever since.

Rudd’s removal sent a blunt message: there was no room for equivocation by the Australian ruling class. It had to line up unconditionally behind the US conflict with China, no matter what the consequences for its massive export markets in China. That message is now being broadcast even more belligerently by the Trump administration.



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