

No Trump-Albanese meeting amid demands for increased Australian military spending

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will depart the US tomorrow, without having held a formal meeting with President Donald Trump.

During his visit to New York, Albanese joined with several other countries in an utterly hypocritical “recognition” of a Palestine they are helping to ethnically cleanse. He sought to drum up business investment from Wall Street speculators and delivered his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly.

Whatever Albanese may now say, it was clear enough that those engagements came a distant second to the real purpose of the visit, which was to meet with Trump.

After the US leader effectively stood Albanese up at the June G7 summit, departing Canada before a scheduled meeting, Albanese and Australian officials declared that there would be another opportunity in New York in September. But it was not to be.

Albanese is the only leader of a close US ally not to have had a formal meeting with Trump since the latter won the US presidential election last November. That is increasingly a topic of discussion in Australian domestic politics, prompting handwringing over the state of the US-Australian alliance.

As if to ensure that Albanese did not leave entirely empty handed, the White House announced that a meeting would be held in Washington on October 20. Based on past experience, though, there’s no guarantee that it will not be cancelled before then. And even if it is not, Albanese will be compelled to make a previously unscheduled trip to the US, amid a series of regional summits in Asia.

At a dinner on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Albanese was able to take a selfie with Trump, which he rapidly posted to social media.

Whatever the erratic functioning of Trump’s White House, it is fairly evident that pressure is being placed on Albanese’s Labor government.

That has been publicly indicated, with unprecedented demands from senior US officials that Australia massively increase its military spending, above already record levels, and give even greater commitments to participate in a US-led conflict with China than it already has.

In the lead-up to the visit, Labor was clearly desperate to meet what it perceived to be the conditions for securing a face-to-face meeting between Trump and Albanese.

In late August, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles made a sudden and unexplained visit to Washington, where he not only met with his US counterparts but also with key Trump insiders, such as White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller.

Only upon Marles’ return did the press report that the trip had been an effort to smooth the way for a meeting between Trump and Albanese. Marles was deployed because of his reputation as a militarist figure with close ties to the military-intelligence apparatus.

Then, in the weeks immediately preceding Albanese’s departure for New York, he and Marles made announcements aimed at demonstrating they were pressing ahead with an anti-China build-up.

That included unveiling a new fleet of “ghost shark” marine drones, which are capable of firing missiles, and pledging the first \$12 billion of a broader commitment to transform Perth, the capital of Western Australia, into a naval hub at the service of the US military.

At the same time, Albanese sought to demonstrate his government’s role in the broader regional drive against China. He tried, and failed, to ram through defence agreements with Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea,

which would have committed them to a permanent military relationship with Australia and given Canberra scope to block the Pacific Island countries from entering into relationships with China.

The treaties were not signed, with prominent political figures in both countries correctly noting that Australia's neo-colonial pacts would undermine their sovereignty.

Whether the setback in the Pacific played a role in Trump's latest snub of Albanese is not clear. But the fact that the pressure remains on his Labor government points to the scale of the US demands upon its allies.

Labor has already increased defence spending to more than \$50 billion annually. It is equipping all branches of the military with strike capabilities, especially missiles. Under the AUKUS pact with the US and the UK, Labor has committed to spending a staggering \$368 billion to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

As part of that, it is subsidising the American military ship-building sector to the tune of several billion dollars, with Marles already having handed over more than half a billion dollars in an arrangement that has the character of tribute.

But US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth publicly demanded earlier this year that US allies in the Indo-Pacific increase their defence spending to 5 percent of gross domestic product, in the context of Washington's aggression against Beijing. He even set an immediate target for Australia of 3.5 percent, far above the current level of just over 2 percent and equating to tens of billions more a year than is already spent.

The exact contents of the backroom demands and the extent of the arm-twisting are not known. But it is clear that the Labor government is desperate to retain AUKUS, which is under review by the Trump administration, and to deepen its already intimate partnership with an American imperialism that is at war with the world.

As part of that, the Labor government is helping to normalise the undeniably fascistic and anti-democratic rule of Trump. Albanese and his Foreign Minister Penny Wong sat through Trump's hour-long diatribe at the UN General Assembly this week.

Trump frenetically denounced any, even nominal, action to address climate change. He declared that Europe was being overrun by immigrants and insisted

that its governments begin the same sort of mass roundups that he is carrying out in America. And he proclaimed the "right" of American imperialism to enforce its interests everywhere, in contempt of even a semblance of international law and diplomatic norms.

Albanese told the media he was "pleased" to have been able to sit through Trump's Hitler-esque rant. Pressed on the torrent of reaction that had spewed forth from Trump, Albanese would not differ with the fascist leader on a single issue, blandly noting that what was said at the UN was "consistent" with what Trump had said before.

Albanese's own address to the General Assembly had a groveling character. He pushed the case for Australia to be admitted as an observer to the UN Security Council. His speech contained hymns of praise to the United Nations, together with warnings of mounting conflicts and uncertainty.

He made it clear where Australia stood in those conflicts. Having desperately fawned over the leader of an American imperialism that is on a war path, Albanese denounced Russia for its role in the US-NATO instigated conflict in Ukraine.

He boasted of his government's expulsion of the Iranian ambassador last month, on the basis of unsubstantiated and utterly improbable accusations that that country played a role in murky acts of "antisemitic" vandalism in Australia.

While calling for a "ceasefire" in the Middle East, Albanese said nothing about Israel's mass slaughter of the Palestinians or its explicit aim of ethnically cleansing Gaza. His only explicit reference to the besieged Strip was to declare that "the terrorists of Hamas...have no role in Gaza's future."

In his pathetic attempts to secure a meeting with the gangster in the White House and his alignment with the global US war drive on every front, Albanese summed up Australia's role as a grasping middle-order imperialist power.



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