

Australian Labor government tacitly backs Trump's illegal assault on Venezuela

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9 January 2026

The Australian Labor government, like its imperialist counterparts in Europe and internationally, has effectively lined up behind the Trump administration's lawless assault on Venezuela, including its kidnapping of that country's President Nicolás Maduro on January 3.

At the same time, Labor's response has been marked by an evident nervousness. It is fearful of being too closely identified with Trump's act of aggression, because of popular opposition. And the brazen illegality of the onslaught against Venezuela has triggered concerns over the potential international implications, with commentators noting that all of the old norms of international relations are finished.

Labor leaders have sought to manage the difficulty by saying as little as possible.

The tone was set by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. In the immediate wake of the US sneak attack, he issued a statement so vague and evasive as to be almost unreal.

The government was "monitoring developments in Venezuela," Albanese wrote. "We urge all parties to support dialogue and diplomacy in order to secure regional stability and prevent escalation."

By that stage, Maduro was in New York, having been abducted by US Special Forces. What sort of "dialogue" or "diplomacy" was Albanese talking about, when Venezuela's elected head of state had already been subjected to an "extraordinary rendition" in violation of the most basic precepts of sovereignty and national self-determination?

Albanese then stated that "Australia has long held concerns about the situation in Venezuela, including the need to respect democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms." That was a nod to US and right-wing talking points, depicting Maduro as some sort of dictator and casting vague aspersions on Venezuela's electoral processes.

Labor has not indicated what "democratic principles"

are associated with the invasion of a sovereign nation and the kidnapping of a foreign leader by the most powerful military nation on earth. And that kidnapping was carried out by Donald Trump, who is not only on a militarist rampage globally, but is also seeking to overturn the US Constitution and establish a personalist dictatorship in America.

Albanese rounded off the statement with a ludicrous reference to the importance of "international law." The words "US" and "Trump" did not appear once. Someone who had not seen the news would have had no idea what prompted Albanese's statement or what it was referring to.

In politics, silence and refusal to condemn criminal actions can only be interpreted as consent.

That was made more explicit by two other Labor government ministers. Speaking on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio on Monday, industry minister Tim Ayres said: "It's for the United States to make out the argument here and to set out the facts." It was "very early" in the "series of events" Ayres stated, and the government was "working carefully to establish the facts."

On the same day, Treasurer Jim Chalmers, addressing a press conference on an unrelated topic, said, "We are supporters of international law, and it's for the Americans to make clear the legal basis of the steps taken over the weekend."

Stripped of the vague terminology and the disclaimers, both were essentially saying that the Trump administration could do what it liked and justify it how it pleased. By the time both of them spoke, there was not the slightest doubt that what had occurred was an illegal regime-change operation. And Trump and other administration figures had spelt out their motives, declaring they wanted to seize Venezuela's oil resources.

Notwithstanding Ayres' comment, reminiscent of

Inspector Clouseau, that Labor was engaged in some investigation of what had occurred, since the beginning of the week, its representatives have said nothing literally. They have not commented on the escalation of the war, including Trump's seizure of oil tanks in a blatant act of piracy, nor of his threats against other Latin American countries, Greenland and the world.

The silence continues a longstanding policy set by Albanese himself. In February, shortly after Trump's inauguration, the fascistic US leader unveiled a plan for the forcible ethnic-cleansing of all of Gaza and its neo-colonial rule by American imperialism.

Asked about those plans for a crime of Hitlerian dimensions, Albanese, over and over, declared that he was "not going to have a running commentary on statements by the President of the United States." That has been his position on every outrage of the Trump administration, both internationally and domestically. Labor will simply say nothing.

How different is the situation when it comes to countries in the crosshairs of US imperialism? Albanese and co have denounced Russia stridently, over its reactionary invasion of Ukraine, continuously covering up the reality that the conflict was provoked by the US and NATO.

And at one international or regional summit after another, Labor leaders have issued baseless claims that China is violating the "rules-based order" and international law because of its maritime activities in the South China Sea and its insistence on maintaining the status quo over Taiwan. Again, those accusations turn reality on its head, under conditions of a vast US build-up in the region directed against Beijing.

While adopting the position that Trump can essentially do as he pleases, Labor's preoccupation since its reelection in May has been in deepening US-Australian ties in those preparations for war against China.

Vast efforts were devoted to securing a meeting between Trump and Albanese in November, at which the two signed an agreement on critical minerals, which are decisive to the confrontation with China. Labor has vastly expanded US basing, is committed to the AUKUS pact, under which Australia will acquire nuclear powered submarines from America at a cost of \$368 billion and has increased domestic military spending to record levels.

Reflecting Australia's role as a middle-order imperialist power, which has always prosecuted its own predatory interests under the umbrella of the dominant power of the day, Labor has gone "all in" with a Trump administration

that is on a global rampage.

An article in the *Australian Financial Review* last week was headlined "Australia 'on notice' after US breach of international law." It cited Donald Rothwell, a professor of international law at Australian National University, who assessed that Trump's kidnapping of Maduro was a violation of the United Nations charter and of international law.

As per the article, "Rothwell cautioned against drawing immediate implications for the Indo-Pacific region but said Washington's actions 'certainly puts Australia on notice' that the US would not hesitate to use military force to achieve policy goals in its own national interest." He raised the prospect that its flouting of international law in respect to Venezuela, "might embolden the United States to take a more robust approach to confronting China."

The attack on Venezuela was not simply an assault on its national sovereignty in another criminal intervention by US imperialism in Latin America. It was very much part of a developing global war that is already underway and was aimed at undercutting China's growing influence and ties in the region.

Trump commented, following a meeting with US oil companies after the invasion of Venezuela and the commandeering of its reserves, that if the US did not, invade then China or Russia would have. There is, of course, not one shred of evidence for this allegation, but it highlights that these lawless measures are all in preparation for war against the American imperialism's main rivals.

As Rothwell's comments underscore, the political establishment knows that it is playing with fire, risking a war between the US and China that would be catastrophic. But under conditions of a breakdown of global capitalism and an eruption of imperialist militarism, that is the direction the ruling elites are heading unless they are stopped by an international and socialist anti-war movement of the working class.



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