

Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy under the Albanese Labor Government

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Abstract

Australia's enduring alliance with the United States continues to act as a crucial force multiplier for Australia's security policy. Although the Australia-U.S. alliance has effectively advanced both nations' interests for decades, the rise of China could affect such an alliance — in other words, when facing a rising China, Australia might have to modify its alliance with the U.S. and forge a closer relationship with China. In a decade or so, Chinese interference has gained increasing influence over Australian politics, business, society and even universities, and it was not until recently that Australia responded by implementing several tough policies against China's influence operations on Australian society. Later, China unleashed its “wolf warrior” diplomacy and launched a trade war against Australia, prompting most Australians to regard China as a security threat to their country. Meanwhile, the Coalition government was also deeply concerned with China's acts of expanding its footprint in the South China Sea and the Pacific. Following the election of Anthony Albanese, Australia is expected to maintain most of the Coalition's foreign and defense policies, and Albanese has also made a firm commitment to Australia's security alliance with the United States. Despite Australia's economic and trade dependence on China, Australia, under the Albanese Labor government, is likely to prioritize its ties with the U.S. over those with China, particularly for the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Keywords: Albanese Labor Government, Indo-Pacific, Quad, AUKUS, Australia-China Relations

Australia and the United States have longstanding security ties. The two countries fought side-by-side in every battle over the past century, but through the signing of the *ANZUS Treaty* in 1951, which constituted a cornerstone of U.S.-Australia security relations, the U.S. has been committed to the security and protection of Australia. Together with the fact that the U.S. plays a vital role in Australia's foreign policy, it is no surprise that the U.S. global strategy has a profound influence on Australia's security policy. However, Australia's foreign policy is also shaped by China, another major player in the Pacific. As the security and the economic environment Australia faces is determined by the U.S. and China, any conflict between the two can have immense implications on Australia.

I. The China Factor: China's Influence on Australia's Foreign Policy

In the past two decades, China's rapid economic growth benefitted Australia's economy. China is Australia's largest export market for goods and services, accounting for 35.3% of Australia's export trade with the world in 2020-2021.¹ Besides, while travel restrictions as a result of COVID-19 have had an impact on international travel, China continues to be Australia's largest source of overseas students. Prior to the imposition of restrictions on international travel, China was Australia's largest inbound market in terms of visitor arrivals and total visitor spending. China remained the largest source country for visitor visa applications in the first half of 2020-2021.² The above statistics demonstrate China's importance for Australia's economy.

Additionally, the complex relations between Taiwan and China, especially during the early 2000s when the two were competing for recognition and influence in the South Pacific, also shaped Australia's foreign policy. For example, Vanuatu became a major issue in Australia-China-Taiwan relations during Serge Vohor's turbulent prime

1. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *TRADE AND INVESTMENT AT A GLANCE 2021* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022), p. 18.

2. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "China country brief," May 30, 2022, accessed, *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, <<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china-country-brief#:~:text=Bilateral%20relations&text=The%20Australia%2DChina%20bilateral%20relationship,a%20%22comprehensive%20strategic%20partnership%22>>.

ministership in 2004. Vohor signed an agreement diplomatically recognizing Taiwan. After subsequent and intense diplomatic activity, and a public spat between Australia and Taiwan over Vohor's leadership, Chinese and Australian pressure resulted in Vohor's ouster. Taiwan and Vanuatu only maintained official ties for seven days, an embarrassing diplomatic setback for Taiwan.³ As China began to expand its influence in the region around 2008, it became even more imperative for Australia to maintain its leadership role and influence in the region, which helps to ensure the security and stability of the South Pacific island nations.

While some policymakers and analysts, such as former prime minister Turnbull, advocated a closer economic relationship between Australia and China through measures such as integration into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is important to note that China is keen to become a major player in the Asia-Pacific economy, one whose growing economic influence over the world will definitely affect Australia's economic prospects. Australia has many reasons to act prudently. Realizing that China's growing influence and ambition in the region have affected Australia's economic and security interests, the latter first turned to the so-called "fear and greed" diplomacy, one that sought to establish partnership with "opponent" China before it becomes too powerful. The "fear and greed" diplomacy was predicated on the assumption that China would follow the pre-existing international order. As it turned out, China did not want to play by established rules — rather, it sought to create and lead alternative institutions, which in turn disrupted the existing international order and status quo in the South China Sea. While Australia benefitted from its economic ties with China, China's economic and military rise can greatly weaken Australia's influence and challenge Australia's leadership in the South Pacific. This in turn has prompted Australia to modify its policy regarding China.

Despite China's repeated claim that its rise is peaceful, in 2004 prominent scholar John Mearsheimer predicted otherwise. The Australian government also expressed concern over China's rise in its *2009 Defence White Paper*. China's subsequent

3. Joel Atkinson, "Vanuatu in Australia-China-Taiwan relations," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 3, November 2007, pp. 351-352.

actions, including its military expansion in the South China Sea and launch of aircraft carriers, have reinforced the “China threat” impression and caused much concern among its neighbors, Australia chief among them.



Figure 1. Australia and Its South Pacific Neighboring Island Nations: Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

Source: Norman Einstein, “Coral Sea map,” January 30, 2009, *Wikimedia*, <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5827423>>.

II. China's Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and Australia's Reaction

It is important for Australia to find a new way to respond to an increasingly powerful China. For Australia, the best response is to cultivate its economic strength, remain loyal to its friends and allies in the region, assist the U.S. to maintain its position in the region, and last but not least, to continue to uphold democracy and human rights. While Australia has no interest in confronting China, it does not serve the country, or any other countries, any good to respond to China with appeasement.

Moreover, in the context of rising competition and tensions between the U.S. and China, Australia is more likely to side with the U.S. First, the two share common values and strategic interests, and therefore there is widespread support for closer relations. Second, relations have evolved to include the traditional issues of managing a rising new power and global partnership encompassing transnational security issues. Australia and the U.S. thus need to collaborate to find innovative ways to deal with China, to prevent China from using its military and economic influence to undermine stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

With powerful business interests firmly supporting the prioritization of trade ties, and polls showing the Australian public overwhelmingly views China as an economic partner rather than a security threat, there appeared to be little political incentive for securitization of China-related threats.⁴ Indeed, Australia is unwilling to choose a side if there is conflict between the U.S. and China. But Beijing's wolf warrior diplomacy from 2017 and its political interference in Australian society had an impact on Australia's national security calculations. From the mid-2017 onwards, Australian politicians and bureaucrats began making strong securitizing statements about a range of China's overseas political activities that had been ongoing for some time. Economic interests were a key source of stability behind Australia's policy of prioritizing trade relations with China before 2017. Key members of the advocacy coalition that successfully securitized "Chinese influence" in Australia had had concerns

4. Andrew Chubb, "The Securitization of 'Chinese Influence' in Australia," March 21, 2022, *Taylor & Francis Online*, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10670564.2022.2052437>>.

about Chinese overseas political activities for many years.⁵ Besides, the Australian public was also deeply concerned about China's influence on Australian politics and society. From 2017 onwards, Australian media presentations, particularly those inspired by government information, conveyed a narrative of pervasive espionage and infiltration by everyday Chinese people in Australia. Headlines and commentaries presented a wide array of state and non-state political activities as a coordinated "Chinese operation." Not only were spies and propagandists systematically subverting Australia's sovereignty and political system, but Chinese community organizations, businesspeople, academics, and students were also accomplices and agents for these operations.⁶

On December 5, 2017, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced the biggest shakeup of Australia's national security laws since the Cold War in order to protect "our way of life" and "our democracy."⁷ "Foreign powers are making unprecedented and increasingly sophisticated attempts to influence the political process," Turnbull said, telling the assembled press that his government was responding to "disturbing reports about Chinese influence."⁸ On December 9, 2017, Turnbull struck out at Beijing, speaking Mandarin to declare he would "stand up" for Australians with his tougher foreign interference laws. Turnbull said, "There has been foreign interference in Australian politics," and he mentioned his concerns about Chinese influence in domestic politics, but insisted the laws were not focused on any one country alone. Defense analyst Malcolm Davis, from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said Beijing was trying to intimidate Australia by complaining about references to its interference in domestic politics with the ultimate goal of making Australia more pro-China, less pro-U.S. and ultimately ending the alliance.⁹ Finally, in 2018, the Australian parliament passed the *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018*, the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act*

5. Andrew Chubb, "The Securitization of 'Chinese Influence' in Australia."

6. Andrew Chubb, "The Securitization of 'Chinese Influence' in Australia."

7. Malcolm Turnbull, "Transcript of Joint Press Conference (5 December 2017)," December 5, 2017, *Parliament House*, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/5676717/upload_binary/5676717.pdf>.

8. Malcolm Turnbull, "Transcript of Joint Press Conference (5 December 2017)."

9. Malcolm Turnbull, "Transcript of Joint Press Conference (5 December 2017)."

2018 and the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018* to counter China's influence operations in Australia.

Tensions between Australia and China increased after 2017 and peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 2020 was considered the lowest point in Australia-China relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties. In response to Australia's persistent calls for an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus, China retaliated by imposing tariffs on a long list of Australia export commodities. Australia-China tensions also influenced Australian society, leading to a record low for Australians' views of China.

Figure 2 shows that China is now regarded as a security threat to Australia rather than an economic partner. In a conspicuous shift, a majority of Australians (63%) consider China to be “more of a security threat to Australia” in 2021. This represents a substantial 51-point increase from 2018; only 34% say China is “more of an economic partner to Australia,” a 48-point drop from 2018.¹⁰ This is a remarkable change in

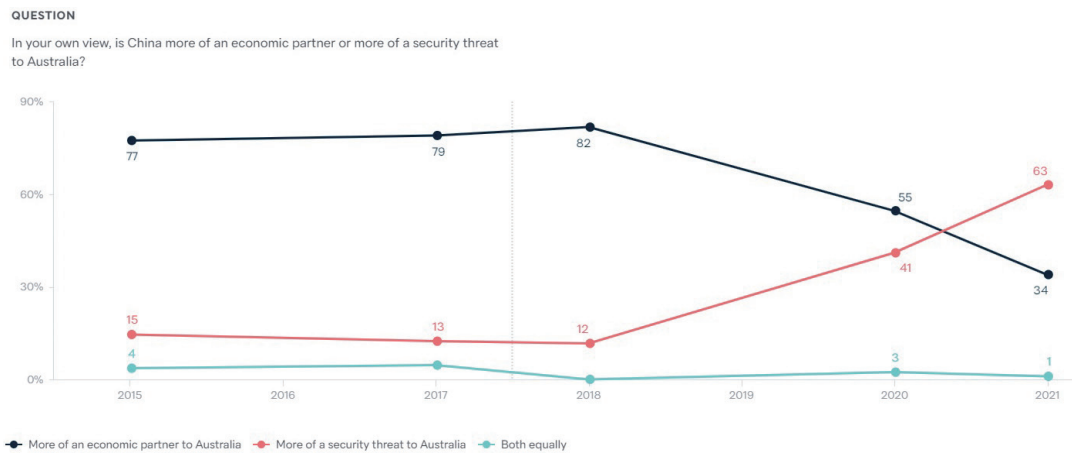


Figure 2. China: Economic Partner or Security Threat

Source: Lowy Institute, “Lowy Institute Poll 2021 (China: economic partner or security threat).”

¹⁰ Lowy Institute, “Lowy Institute Poll 2021 (China: economic partner or security threat),” 2021, *Lowy Institute*, <<https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/china-economic-partner-or-security-threat/>>.

Australians' views of China which can only shape Australian politics and policy.

III. The Albanese Government and Its Potential Indo-Pacific Strategy

1. ANZUS and AUKUS

The 1951 *ANZUS Treaty* is a cornerstone of Australia's defense policy — Australia's alliance with the U.S. is the pillar of both the Coalition and the Australian Labor Party's foreign policy. In recent years, national security has been one of a number of priority issues in Australian politics as well as society, and "China's threat to Australia" has become the main theme for Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy. Therefore, the "China threat" became one of the main topics in the 2022 Australian federal elections. On September 15, 2021, just around eight months prior to the 2022 elections, Australia, the UK and the U.S. formed a trilateral security pact, known as AUKUS, for the Indo-Pacific region. The AUKUS defense pact aims to counter China's hegemony in the South China Sea. Under the AUKUS, the UK and the U.S. will help Australia acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines. According to ASPI's Malcolm Davis, Australian Nuclear-powered submarines could reach the South China Sea in a day and stay indefinitely. These submarines are primarily to boost Australian defense against a rising China that is challenging not only the U.S. in the region but also Australia. The growing military challenge from China is very real, and Australia is preparing for various contingencies, including the prospect of a major power war between the U.S. and China over Taiwan some time this decade.¹¹ As the Biden administration shows signs of turning away from its traditional approach of strategic ambiguity, it is unlikely that Australia, a vital strategic ally of the U.S., will not become involved in the event the U.S. comes into conflict with China over Taiwan.

11. Ralph Jennings, "How a Western Military Pact for Nuclear Subs Affects China," *VOA News*, September 20, 2021, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/how-a-western-military-pact-for-nuclear-subs-affects-china/6236919.html>>.



Figure 3. HMAS Sheean

Source: Australian Navy, “HMAS Sheean,” June 7, 2022, accessed, *Australian Navy*, <<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-sheean>>.

Note: HMAS Sheean is the fifth of the six Collins Class submarines. Under the AUKUS, the UK and the U.S. will help Australia to acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines to replace Collins Class submarines.

2. Albanese’s Stronger Pacific Family Plan

Due to the fact that the “China factor” was a core issue in the 2022 federal election, the Labor party listed several policies to deal with China and the Indo-Pacific region. On April 26, 2022, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), led by Anthony Albanese, vowed to build a stronger Pacific family. The ALP’s plan intends to strengthen Australia’s Pacific partnerships by delivering a comprehensive package of new programs to secure the region and build a “Stronger Pacific Family.” According to the plan, the ALP will combine enhanced diplomatic capability, defense and security cooperation with effective climate leadership, vital development assistance and boosted Australian media outreach and increased people to people links to strengthen

Australia's Pacific partnerships.

The ALP's plan includes (1) the Australia Pacific Defence School: Labor will establish a new Australia Pacific Defence School to provide training programs for members of Pacific Island country defense and security forces. The new School will expand and bring greater coordination to existing Australian Defence Force (ADF) Pacific training activities. The School will build on existing Australian Defence Force programs including the Defence Cooperation Program, Pacific Support Team, Pacific Mobile Training Teams and Defence International Training School. Participants will include members of the PNG Defence Force, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Tonga's Armed Forces, the Timor-Leste Defence Force, the Vanuatu Mobile Force and the Royal Solomon Islands Police. (2) Boosting Support for Pacific Maritime Security: Labor will step up Australia's support for aerial surveillance activities as part of the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) by increasing funding by A\$12 million a year from 2024-25. (3) Boosting Australian development assistance to the Pacific: Labor will increase Australian Official Development Assistance to Pacific countries by A\$525 million over four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26. The new funding will support Australian bilateral and regional aid and development projects in Pacific countries and Timor-Leste. (4) Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership: Labor will create a Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership to support climate-related infrastructure and energy projects in Pacific countries and Timor-Leste. (5) Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy: Labor will deliver an Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy that includes increased funding to the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)* as Australia's international broadcaster to boost Australian content and to project Australian identity, values, and interests to the Indo-Pacific region. (6) Bipartisan Parliamentary Pacific Visits: Labor will reinstate regular bipartisan Parliamentary Pacific visits to demonstrate to Australia's Pacific family that stronger Pacific partnerships are in Australia's national interest. (7) Reforming the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Seasonal Worker Program (PALM-SWP): PALM-SWP allows Pacific nationals to work in Australia for up to nine months in the agriculture sector where farmers cannot secure local labor. (8) Expanding the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM-PLS): PALM-PLS allows Pacific nationals to work in Australia for between one and four years in rural and regional Australia. (9) Pacific

Australia Labour Mobility – Agriculture Stream: Australia will relocate the proposed Agriculture Visa to sit as a third visa stream under the PALM. This will create a robust and sustainable four-year visa, with portability, strong oversight mechanisms, protections and rights for workers. (10) Boosting Pacific permanent migration: Labor will boost permanent migration from Pacific countries to Australia by creating a new Pacific Engagement Visa for nationals of Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste.

In addition, the ALP also plans to deepen “Australia’s Engagement with Southeast Asia Supporting Southeast Asian Development.” The project contains (1) Supporting Southeast Asian development: Labor will deliver as additional A\$470 million over the forward estimates for Australia’s bilateral and regional Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programs for Southeast and Asian developing countries (including Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam). (2) ASEAN Special Envoy: Labor will appoint a dedicated high-level roving regional Ambassador to complement existing missions and cut through bureaucratic blockages. (3) ASEAN Economic Strategy: Labor will deliver a comprehensive ASEAN Economic Strategy to 2040, based on the Varghese India Economic Strategy, to map current and future export and investment opportunities across key ASEAN markets for Australian business and transform Australia’s economic links to the region. (4) Establish Office of Southeast Asia: Labor will also establish an Office of Southeast Asia in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure whole-of-government coordination of Australian efforts in the region. (5) Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesia Studies Vietnam Pilot Program: Labor will deliver a two-year pilot program for flexible in-country language studies programs in Vietnam, based on the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesia Studies (ACICIS) model. This will help promote student mobility to Vietnam, using a network of universities in Vietnam and fostering collaboration with Australian universities. (6) Australia-Indonesia Climate Resilience and Infrastructure Partnership: Labor will establish an Australia-Indonesia Climate Resilience and Infrastructure Partnership with an initial A\$200 million in grant funding from the ODA program.



Figure 4. Prime Minister Albanese Attended the Quad Meeting in Tokyo Right After the Federation Election

Source: Anthony Albanese, “2022 Quad Summit in Tokyo,” May 24, 2022, *Twitter*, <<https://twitter.com/AlboMP/status/1528945347632177152/photo/1>>.

3. The Quad and Countering China’s South Pacific Security Proposal

Generally speaking, defense and security would not have been the top concerns of the newly elected Australian government. In response to rising public concern about climate change, in this year’s election the Australian Labour Party came up with a strong climate platform, with Albanese vowing to take a different, more concrete climate policy. Immediately after the election, Albanese attended the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in Japan, to participate in the launch of the Indo-Pacific

Economic Framework (IPEF). During Quad leadership meeting, Albanese echoed President Biden's crusade against climate change and unveiled Australia's new approach on global carbon emissions, thereby showing the new government's commitment to fighting climate change. However, the world's attention focused on Biden's commitment to Taiwan's security during the Quad leadership meeting. The reassurances followed Biden's answer to a question at a press conference where he said "yes" after being asked if the U.S. would be willing to get involved militarily in Taiwan's defense. "That's the commitment we made," Biden told a news conference, drawing a link between Taiwan and Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calling for Moscow to pay a "long-term price" as a message to China.¹²

China, however, has also proposed a plan to counter Australia and the United States in the South Pacific region. In March 2022, a proposed security treaty between China and some islands in the Pacific sent shock waves across the ocean. A 10-day South Pacific regional diplomatic tour led by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi began in the Solomon Islands, one of the 2022 federal election's crucial topics, and included Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste. A key partner of the AUKUS alliance in the Pacific and one that has already suspected Chinese ambitions since 2017 (when it saw the sudden vast inflow of Chinese loans and investments into the Solomon Islands), Australia was especially alarmed by the proposal, as it signaled the possible Chinese deployment of troops to the Solomon Islands and the potential establishment of a naval base there. Because of China's actions, participants of this year's Quad leader's meeting made the South Pacific nations an important topic on their agenda.

12. Shaun Tandon & Amber Wang, "Joe Biden sticks to US policy on Taiwan," *The Australian*, May 24, 2022, <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/joe-biden-sticks-to-us-policy-on-taiwan/news-story/cb9793bb7291d2c4bf76f6ce6da3535b>>.



Figure 5. NATO Military Committee Chiefs at the Defense Session

Source: Angus J. Campbell, “NATO Military Committee Chiefs of Defence Session,” May 24, 2022, *Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/CDF_Aust/status/1528896113813643264>.

Note: General Angus J. Campbell, Chief of the Australian Defence Force, joined Asia-Pacific Plus 4 partners (Australia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand) in sharing perspectives on common security challenges affecting the Euro-Atlantic & Indo-Pacific.

Australia’s allies, especially the U.S., also worry about the prospects of China gaining a foothold in Australia’s backyard. Unlike previous foreign minister Marise Payne, current Foreign Minister Penny Wong said it was up to each island nation to decide what partnerships they formed and what agreements they signed. Wong urged the island nations to consider the benefits of sticking with Australia, adding that the new Labor government would renew the focus on climate change and continued economic support for the region.¹³ Wong softened her diplomatic rhetoric toward

¹³ “China, Australia vie for influence, as Beijing touts vision for the Pacific,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 27, 2022, <<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/australia-pacific-05272022094159.html>>.

China, saying she hoped to repair the relationship between Australia and China. However, Albanese admitted that Australia's relations with China remained difficult. "It is China that has changed, not Australia, and Australia should always stand up for our values and we will in a government that I lead," he said.¹⁴ In addition, Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, who also serves as Defence Minister, said China's presence in the Pacific influenced Australia's strategic framework and argued it represented "enormous challenges for us."¹⁵

Before Albanese came to power, he made it clear that on issues of security substance, Labor agreed with Morrison. Thus, the new government is likely to do the following: commit to strengthened the U.S. alliance, express faith in American military power, exhibit confidence that Labor and the Biden administration have "pretty similar" world views, support Morrison's tough stance on China, back an agreement to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, listen to advice from the security agencies, support the Quad, and increase defense spending above 2% of GDP.¹⁶ Analysts expect the Albanese Labor government will continue most of the Coalition's foreign and defense policies.¹⁷ Former prime minister Kevin Rudd says he believes China under Xi Jinping seeks to assert Chinese power in the Pacific region and in the world. Rudd argues that the U.S., together with its allies around the world, is now responding to that challenge.¹⁸ U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called China "the

14. "Australia PM Albanese says relationship with China to remain 'a difficult one'," *Reuters*, May 23, 2022, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-pm-albanese-says-relationship-with-china-remain-a-difficult-one-2022-05-23/>>.

15. Tyrone Clarke, "Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles says China is Australia's 'biggest security anxiety' as Beijing renews drive in Pacific," *Sky news*, June 1, 2022, <<https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/politics/deputy-prime-minister-richard-marles-says-china-is-australias-biggest-security-anxiety-as-beijing-renews-drive-in-pacific/news-story/6e4c1482a1d049947d7dc5fa0fb5fd7e>>.

16. Paul Kelly, "Morrison, Albanese coincide on foreign policy," *The Australian*, March 11, 2022, <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/morrison-albanese-coincide-on-foreign-policy/news-story/3a865169a7db3ae68a48fdaf8cf7b32>>.

17. Sam Roggeveen, "China: The Morrison legacy and beyond," *Lowy Institute*, May 23, 2022, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-morrison-legacy-and-beyond>>.

18. Kevin Rudd, "Opening Remarks to the Biden Administration's Approach to China," May 26, 2022, *Asia Society*, <<https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/opening-remarks-biden-administrations-approach-china>>.

most serious long-term challenge to the international order,” and has committed the U.S. to stand up against Beijing’s increasingly repressive, aggressive and “deeply destabilizing” behavior wherever it risks the peace, security and freedom of other nations. He added that the U.S. would marshal its resources and network of alliances to counter malign Chinese influence.¹⁹ China intends to change the *status quo* in a manner that advances the Chinese definition of the national interest and values. As a



Figure 6. P-8A Poseidon

Source: The Australian Department of Defence, “P-8A Poseidon,” December 2020, *The Australian Department of Defence*, <<https://www.defence.gov.au/project/p-8a-poseidon>>.

Note: Just one day after Mr. Albanese’s attendance at the Quad meeting, on May 26, 2022, Australian P-8A Poseidon surveillance jet was intercepted by a Chinese J-16 fighter aircraft during a routine maritime surveillance activity in international airspace in the South China Sea region.

¹⁹ Adam Creighton, “US must stand up to China, but no ‘Cold War’ confrontation: Blinken,” *The Australian*, May 27, 2022, <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/us-must-stand-up-to-china-but-no-cold-war-confrontation-blinken/news-story/af86353881ccff1647e49b49589f4112>>.

faithful and close ally of the U.S., Australia has little choice but to collaborate with the U.S. to counter China's ambition in the Indo-Pacific region. To a certain extent, it is expected that the Albanese government will continue the Morrison Coalition government's tough stance on China.

IV. Conclusion

Canberra's enduring security ties with Washington and strong economic links with Beijing have led some critics to question whether Australia will eventually have to choose between the U.S. and China. Australia was facing a strategic dilemma, which was either to continue to side with the U.S., as Australia's military guarantor, or lean closer to China, Australia's trade partner. As a rising power, China does not hesitate to make its economic and military presence known in the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, China has employed "wolf warrior" diplomacy to force Australia to change its China policy. In response to China's expanding footprint in the South China Sea and the South Pacific region, Australia has adhered to the Indo-Pacific strategy of its close ally — the U.S. — but also joined AUKUS and the IPEF, which were created to counter China's ambitions over South China Sea and the Pacific region. As China has covertly attempted to influence and shape the views of members of the Australian public, Australian media, Australian universities, and officials in the Australian government for the past decade, the Turnbull Coalition government passed new laws against foreign interference in Australian politics, and Chinese companies were excluded from a lucrative 5G contract to counter Chinese influence operations. The most commendable achievement, however, was the successful resistance of the Morrison Coalition government to the economic sanctions campaign launched by Beijing in May 2020.

After the Australian Labor Party came to power in May 2022, Prime Minister Albanese remains committed to Australia's strong security alliance with the U.S. and attended a key meeting of the Quad security grouping in Tokyo right after his swearing in as Australia's 31st prime minister. The Quad leaders meeting was an indicator of the Albanese Labor government's Indo-Pacific strategy. The meeting of the Quad leaders was widely regarded — certainly by China — as a forum of democracies to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific. In general, the Labor government is

expected to persist with most of the Coalition government's foreign and defense policies, with some minor but useful changes. There is no prospect of radical change under the Albanese government, which in opposition had expressed its support for AUKUS and had promised to match the former Coalition government's defense spending commitments. Some differences between the Labor Party and the Coalition include Albanese's new plan for the Pacific region and the Southeast Asia region, notably a "Stronger Pacific Family" and "Australia's Engagement with Southeast Asia Supporting Southeast Asian Development", designed to foster closer ties with the regions.