



AUSTRALIA'S SHIFT IN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE ALBANESE LABOUR GOVERNMENT: BALANCING NATIONAL INTERESTS AND GLOBAL COOPERATION (2022-2024)

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Abstract : Since Anthony Albanese was elected as the Prime Minister in 2022, the foreign policy of Australia has changed by placing greater emphasis on diplomacy, multilateralism, and global cooperation. The Albanese Labor government has been trying to achieve an equilibrium between national interest and regional or international engagement while carefully embracing traditional allies like the United States but deepening relationships within the Indo-Pacific, particularly Southeastern Asia. One of such significant diplomatic initiatives includes resuming cautious relations with China, deepening defense cooperation under AUKUS and Quad umbrella as well as addressing global challenges like climate change and security in the region. Foreign minister Penny Wong has played a vital role in constructing an image of modern multicultural Australia which stresses that diplomacy is essential for both strengthening regional stability and making the country more influential on world stage. The Albanese government's foreign policy approach embodies both continuity and change, with a concentration on attaining strategic balance in a convoluted geopolitical arena while safeguarding Australia's devotion to its safety, democratic tenets, and economic development. This paper seeks to illustrate that the Labour administration has directed Australia towards an increasingly assertive and productive foreign policy position thus establishing it as an unwavering force in world affairs.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Multilateralism, Indo-Pacific, AUKUS

INTRODUCTION

On May 23, 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese officially sworn in a new Labor government, ending nine years of continuous conservative rule in Australia. After a new government took power, diplomacy reestablished itself as the primary focus of Australia's foreign policy. Under Albanese's new Labour administration, Australia's foreign policy is characterized by a dedication to diplomacy, multilateralism, and the development of strong international partnerships by focusing on advancing Australia's interests while also actively engaging with the international community on critical issues including climate change, regional security, and economic cooperation.

NEED OF THE STUDY.

The Albanese Labour Government's foreign policy (2022-2024 in Australia) is a major break from those of earlier administrations, particularly in its effort to balance national interests against global cooperation. This shift necessitates research because it entails navigating through complex geopolitical landscapes, climate change, security, and trade relations. Therefore, an elaborate study is required to determine if Australia's new diplomatic strategies have enhanced Australia's position internationally, contributed to stability within the region as well as conformed to international frameworks for cooperation. In addition, this research may also assess how these policies tackle pressing issues like strategic partnerships, particularly with major powers including the US and China by the Albanese government.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design is suitable for studying shifts in foreign policy because it helps to understand political strategies, government decision-making processes, and diplomatic results more deeply. To do this, case reports and trend analysis will offer in-depth information into the shifts in Australia's foreign policies during this period. The data collection will be done through a few essential methods such as document analysis of primary sources, government resources, official foreign policy documents, speeches,

and statements from politicians like Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong. Additionally, a systematic review of previous research articles, books, and academic journals will contribute to the scholarly analysis of this study area.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Australian foreign policy has traditionally been bipartisan, with a strong commitment to the US alliance, regional engagement, and support for a rules-based international order (Gyngell, 2022). The Australian government's foreign policy is formulated and carried out by the prime minister and his cabinet. The Liberal Party and the Labour Party are the two main political parties in the country and traditionally, these two parties have competing views on politics. It is believed that in the field of foreign policy, the Liberal Party is less "progressive" than the Labour Party.

Gareth Evans, the former foreign minister, described the foreign policy stance of the Labor governments that followed as "being a good international citizen." (Singh, 2022). Under Albanese and Wong, foreign policy appears to be guided by a continuation of Labor's previous proactive foreign policy approach: an Australia prepared to engage in world affairs proactively and positively and uphold significant bilateral and regional ties. While the Liberal Party had its own foreign policy goals, which included the 'Pacific Step Up', improving relations with the Quad, and putting pressure on China, after the election of the current Albanese Government, Australia has become a 'global citizen' once again.

On social media, Albanese portrays himself as a confident, regular man, in contrast to former prime minister Morrison, who posts awkward pictures and quotes from the Liberal Party. Voters are the target audience for this modern soft power strategy of Albanese. According to Blair Williams' description, "Brand Albo" appears to be very different from "Brand Morrison." (Clayton, 2023). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, the Labor Party established a new administration that abandoned the "drums of war" in favor of cautious but respectful cooperation with Beijing, China (Curran, 2023). However, it also emphasized its strong dedication to the pillars of the policies of previous governments. This included increasing defense spending, its commitment to the United States alliance, and strengthening ties with Japan and India (Curran, 2023). After years of marginalization, foreign policy has been elevated to a more fundamental role in Australian statecraft during this new administration. Foreign Minister Penny Wong is a prominent foreign minister and a key part of the Labor Party team.

One of the most outrageous allegations made throughout the election campaign was that voting for the Australian Labour Party meant a vote for China (Tyler, 2022). Perhaps aware of the risks associated with such statements, the Albanese administration has repeatedly stated that its policy toward China has not changed in substance (Tyler, 2022). It indicates that the only changes will be in tone and that it will continue to advocate for Australia's national interests (Tyler, 2022). The first meeting between Australian and Chinese leaders after 2015 took place on the day of Albanese's meeting with China's President Xi Jinping at the G20 Summit in Bali in November 2022 (Curran, 2023). Therefore, Labor has succeeded in reestablishing cautious relations with Beijing; but this has not resulted in any release from China's economic coercion (Curran, 2023). Therefore, what could result from the present "stabilization" of Australia's ties with China, such as the potential reduction of Chinese tariffs on Australian imports, has been the main topic since 2022 (Curran, 2023).

However, in June 2022, Australia and China's diplomatic restrictions were lifted following meetings between their defense and foreign affairs ministers in Singapore and Indonesia, respectively. "Stabilizing the relationship" and "being professional and understanding the power of diplomacy" were the stated goals of these discussions (Tyler, 2022). Albanese discussed the bilateral relationship with China during his speech at the Woodford Folk Festival on December 28 saying that *"we've gone from a government that chose to not have a single conversation with China – our major trading partner – for the entire last term they were in power, to one that understands that dialogue is always a good thing. Australia and China are talking again ... it doesn't mean we agree with China on everything. It doesn't mean we won't raise our concerns and our significant points of difference. We will cooperate with China where we can, disagree where we must, and engage in Australia's national interest"* (internationalaffairs.org, 2023).

Therefore, it is clear that the government aims to maintain stable relations with China and manage bilateral issues "wisely," but its foreign policy is largely aimed toward achieving a favorable "strategic equilibrium" in the Indo-Pacific in which "no country dominates and no country is dominated." (Maude, 2023).

Australia's Labor administration has expressed concerns about the impact of China's bullying on its security, but they also noted that Australia's relationship with Washington will strengthen as a result of this coercion (Curran, 2023). The defense minister of Australia, Marles, has reaffirmed Labor's dedication to the US alliance. *"Our alliance with the United States is completely central to our national security and to our worldview,"* he stated after meeting with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in October 2022 (Curran, 2023). During the yearly Ministerial Consultations between the United States and Australia in Washington in late 2022, ministers approved the continuation of United States military posture strategies in Australia (Curran, 2023). On the other hand, Australia has committed to assisting United States efforts to enhance the foundations of military stability in the Indo-Pacific (Maude, 2023).

Additionally, the Albanese administration reaffirmed Australia's policy to its neighbors in Southeast Asia. It is important to acknowledge the significance of Australia's first Asian woman serving as foreign minister of Australia. This has made it possible for Wong to use charm and skilled diplomacy. In her major address since 2022, given at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore, Wong discussed a "shared future" for Australia and Southeast Asia (Clayton, 2023). The majority of Wong's travels as Foreign Minister have been to Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The statement "Australia must find its security in Asia, not from Asia" was pointedly noted by Wong (Clayton, 2023).

Additionally, she portrayed Southeast Asia and Australia as collaborators in creating a common future. Therefore, the government's increased emphasis on strengthening ties with Southeast Asia and its commitment to engage ASEAN more closely, together with increasing aid for international development and setting up an office in the region, broadens its security sphere. Moreover, Albanese approved the Sun Cable Australia-Asia PowerLink project, the Asia Renewable Energy Hub, and expanded energy engagement in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Clayton, 2023).

Wong places the Quad and AUKUS in a larger context of regional security involvement, emphasizing that Canberra's focus on ASEAN centrality "*does not mean [an] ASEAN only*" foreign policy (Curran, 2023). Labor persisted in the strengthened security ties with Japan and therefore, Albanese met his Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida, in Perth in September 2022 (Clayton, 2023). The summit represented improved relations on security, sustainable energy, and regional cooperation. Also, the Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was signed in Perth, marking a significant moment in greater security interaction (Clayton, 2023). As a result, a proposal to send Japanese fighters to Australia was also initiated by Japan and Australia (Curran, 2023).

Albanese and Wong also seek to show Australia's "modern face" (Maude, 2023). They believe that Australia's regional position is dependent on its diversity, pluralism, and dynamics. The government has nominated an Ambassador for First Nations People to promote First Nations' trade and community relations while also advocating for their rights across the world (Maude, 2023). Wong said that the Ambassador for First Nations People "will lead work to embed Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and interests into our foreign policy, including to help grow First Nations' trade and investment" when she announced the opening of Expressions of Interest applications (Clayton, 2023).

Australia's relationship with the Indo-Pacific region expanded in 2022 when a new government relaxed travel restrictions. Australia's relationship with Pacific Island nations has been impacted greatly as a result of changes to its climate policies (Tyler, 2022). Because Pacific Island nations are the most affected by climate change, Australia's shift to a greater carbon reduction goal was required for the country to consolidate its position in the area (Gyngell, 2022). In response to international climate change commitments, the previous administration showed a lack of interest. In the House of Representatives, former prime minister Scott Morrison told the parliament "This is coal, don't be afraid," (Singh, 2022). However, the Albanese administration stressed the urgency of the climate emergency at the 2022 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Summit and backed Vanuatu's legal assessment of the damage caused by climate change (Tyler, 2022). As a result, leaders from the Pacific region welcomed Australia's new emissions targets and suggested co-hosting the COP 29 United Nations climate change summit in 2024 (Gyngell, 2022).

During his speech at the Woodford Folk Festival on December 28, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese discussed the accomplishments of the Labor Government in 2022, particularly in the area of foreign policy. He noted that "*we have repaired our international relations and got Australia out of the naughty corner*", continuing by stating that "*we've gone from a government that treated both climate change and the fate of our Pacific neighbors as a punchline to a bad joke*" (internationalaffairs.org, 2023).

Also, the Albanese administration has successfully managed to increase engagement with the Indo-Pacific region by enhancing Australian security capabilities through the AUKUS pact (Clayton, 2023). The current government also increased relationships with other countries including increased aid to Pakistan to help with floods, supported Tuvalu and Kiribati during the drought, and sent relief to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the Horn of Africa, and Yemen (Clayton, 2023).

When it comes to trade during this government, Minister of Trade and Tourism Don Farrell emphasized continuity at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference by chairing the meeting of the Cairns Group, a group of free-trade agricultural exporters founded in 1986 (Tyler, 2022). Moreover, there have been bilateral discussions with India and the European Union to advance free trade agreements, as well as with the United States to discuss the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (Tyler, 2022). Australia also collaborated with Pacific allies, particularly Fiji, to achieve a new global fisheries subsidy agreement to combat overfishing to enhance trade relations (Tyler, 2022).

More importantly, the Albanese administration aimed to aid Ukraine in its war with Russia by strengthening its European connections. As an Enhanced Opportunities Partner, Albanese visited Madrid then Spain, and Paris, reaffirming Australia's support for Ukraine. The Prime Minister's relations with France had been strained following the Morrison government's termination of a contract to buy French submarines, however, Albanese has had close relations with France since 2022 (Gyngell, 2022). Then he met with Zelensky in Kyiv and ended his European tour in Ukraine, announcing Australian military and humanitarian aid, sanctions against Russia, and financial support for Ukraine since 2022 (Clayton, 2023).

Tim Watts' appointment as Assistant Foreign Minister is one of the key aspects that identify the Albanese-Wong foreign policy program. During his role as Assistant Minister, he traveled much throughout the Indo-Pacific, particularly to South America, Africa, and the Indian Ocean, an area that is sometimes forgotten (Clayton, 2023). In situations where the Foreign Minister could be busy or performing other tasks, Watts' position allows Australia to be represented at the table. An Assistant Foreign Minister role broadens Australia's sphere of influence internationally (Clayton, 2023).

Therefore, it is evident that this new administration presented Australia as a more confident and involved participant in the region and world affairs. More importantly, it is clear that the foreign Minister Penny Wong has provided the world with an image of a modern, multicultural Australia. However, when considering the balance of continuity and change in Australian foreign policy, political impulses, and external factors are likely to bring more substantive and impactful changes under the Albanese government.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from above mentioned points, it is clear that the Australian government's foreign policy under Albanese leadership is a diligent balance between traditional allies, regional interests, and growing global issues. With a strategic emphasis on preserving strong connections with historical partners such as the United States and establishing deeper connections within the Indo-Pacific region, Australia seeks to manage complicated geopolitical dynamics while protecting its national interests. This government's dedication to supporting security, economic growth, and democratic ideals characterizes its approach to foreign affairs. This involves active engagement in international forums and efforts addressing critical global concerns including climate change, security challenges, and economic cooperation. Therefore, it is clear that the Albanese Labor administration has undoubtedly witnessed a more active and productive strategy for Australian foreign policy.

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