

# Australia and the Second Trump Administration



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**Trump** 2.0 has offered up a set of exceptionally challenging circumstances for both Australia's strategic settings and its domestic political debates on international policy. The progressive Albanese Labor government in Australia has been undertaking a high wire balancing act since Trump's election victory.

Domestically, the Labor government has sought to distance itself from the MAGA (Make America Great Again) brand that is the antithesis of the Albanese government's progressive approach to domestic politics. Indeed, the Australian conservative Coalition's faint echoing of Trumpian style political rhetoric during the May 2025 Australian federal election was seen as one of the reasons for Albanese's thumping second electoral victory.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There is a range of Australian media coverage that argues this point. See as an example Olivia Ireland and Daniel Lo Surdo, 'Angus Taylor, Donald Trump

blamed for Coalition's devastating defeat', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 2025  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/angus->

Internationally, however, the Albanese government has sought to protect Australia's interests and reaffirm the centrality of the U.S. alliance and the AUKUS pact. As such, the Albanese government has been cautious, pragmatic and focused with its interactions with the Trump administration. This culminated in a much delayed, but highly successful, bilateral meeting in October 2025 in Washington, D.C. that [reaffirmed](#) AUKUS and the Australia-U.S. security partnership and significantly expanded a critical minerals partnership that includes \$2.2 billion in U.S. financing and aims at "unlocking up to \$5 billion of total investment, to advance critical minerals and supply-chain security projects between our two countries...[and] the U.S. Department of War will invest in the construction of a 100 metric ton-per-year advanced gallium refinery in Western Australia."

Subsequently, one of the main focuses of Trump's 2025 [National Security Strategy](#) that was on Asia and the need for a new regional balance of power affirmed Australia's strategic approach. The October summit 2025 was backed up by a 2+2 AUSMIN meeting in December, which [included](#) force posture initiatives, defence industrial cooperation, reaffirming the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue including the United States, Australia, Japan, and India), and regional security.

This meeting was followed by an AUKUS Defence Ministers' Meeting in Washington D.C. just a few days later, [emphasizing](#) submarine cooperation, advanced capabilities development,

and near-term warfighting objectives. Overall, despite a bumpy start and strong divergences in domestic politics, the Trump and Albanese governments have formed an effective working relationship built around a strong alignment of key security interests in Asia.

## THE ONGOING CENTRALITY OF THE U.S. ALLIANCE TO AUSTRALIAN STRATEGY

On Valentine's Day 2023, Albanese received a copy of the *Defence Strategic Review* (DSR) from Air Marshal Sir Angus Houston. Sir Angus, a former Australian Chief of Defence Force, along with Professor Stephen Smith, a former Minister of Defence, had been commissioned in July 2022 by the Albanese government to undertake a full, independent, and external review of the nation's defence strategy. This [included](#) a holistic consideration of Australia's defence force structure and posture by including force disposition, preparedness, strategy, and associated investments, including all elements of Defence's Integrated Investment Program.

The 2023 DSR is a seminal defence document. It was the first external review of Australian defence strategy and policy since 1986, and it radically recast Australia's approach to strategy.

In the face of a resurgent and revisionist China and a changing Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape, the DSR ended 10 years of strategic warning time, moving the Australian Defence Force (ADF) from a balanced to a focused force

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[taylor-donald-trump-blamed-for-coalition-s-devastating-defeat-20250505-p5hwjb.html](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/04/taylor-donald-trump-blamed-for-coalition-s-devastating-defeat-20250505-p5hwjb.html); Michelle Grattan, 'Multiple factors played into this debacle for the Coalition, here's where it went wrong,' *The New*

*Daily*, 4 May 2025 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/04/taylor-donald-trump-blamed-for-coalition-s-devastating-defeat-20250505-p5hwjb.html>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/04/taylor-donald-trump-blamed-for-coalition-s-devastating-defeat-20250505-p5hwjb.html>

structure. It adopted net assessment (or threat-based) planning for force structure development, adopted an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) focus to capability development, endorsed the AUKUS pact and developed a new concept for strategic policy—National Defence—that is both whole-of-government and whole-of-nation in orientation. This is essential to tackle what the government has consistently [called](#) the most dangerous set of strategic circumstances for Australia since the end of the Second World War. The DSR finding has survived a subsequent National Defence Strategy and federal election campaign. The Conservative opposition's criticism of the review and Albanese defence policy has [centered](#) almost exclusively on the need for new funding with no indications of any changes to the underlying strategy or approach.

Yet despite the major changes to the defence strategy proposed in the DSR, which were accepted by the government and endorsed through the first *National Defence Strategy* in 2024 (NDS24), the approach of the DSR continues the tradition since the 1950s of building Australia's strategic approach around its most important strategic partnership—its alliance with the United States. This remains a core element of Australia's defence strategy, yet the relative decline of the U.S. has seen Australia hedge through an increase in defense spending, a focus on new capabilities such as long range strike and doubling down on regional partnerships with states such as Japan, the ROK, India, Indonesia as well as other Indo-Pacific partners.

The DSR was bold in that it was the first major strategic document by a U.S. ally in the Indo-Pacific to acknowledge the relative decline of the U.S., the end of U.S. primacy, and the rise of

multipolarity in the region. This is a position subsequently adopted in 2025 by the Trump administration's *National Security Strategy* (NSS) with its narrowing of U.S. national interests, its focus on the Western Hemisphere and aim to reduce global commitments. This recognition, the DSR [argued](#), made the role of the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific even more important:

Our Alliance with the United States will remain central to Australia's security and strategy. The United States will become even more important in the coming decades. Defence should pursue greater advanced scientific, technological, and industrial cooperation in the Alliance, as well as increased United States rotational force posture in Australia, including with submarines.

At its heart, the 2023 DSR in Australia was a response to the rising and revisionist PRC under Xi Jinping, the relative decline of the U.S., and the changing nature of the Indo-Pacific strategic order. In doing so, it proposed that Australia formally adopt a regional balancing strategy enabled through collective deterrence, underpinned by a strategy of denial. Central to this approach is the continued role of the United States as the cornerstone balancing power in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, while the region has shifted from unipolar to multipolar, this in fact made the United States even more important to underpinning a favorable regional strategic balance.

## THE TRUMP 2.0 STORM

The Trump administration's early moves raised major questions for Australia's national interests. Such moves as the evisceration of USAID, the administration's tariff agenda, which seemed to punish allies more than adversaries, and its demands for concessions to Russia over its illegal

and immoral invasions of Ukraine heightened concern across America's major allies across the region. Moreover, the treatment of international leaders such as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the summits with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the manoeuvring with Xi Jinping reinforced the seeming lack of a comprehensive foreign policy strategy in the second Trump administration.

Compounding these issues was a set of bilateral flare-ups. These included blanket tariffs on Australia, despite the United States holding a positive trade balance with Australia, disputes over Australia's pharmaceutical benefits scheme, proposed social media laws, and local media content laws, as well as specific tariffs on aluminium and steel. The U.S. Department of War's (renamed by Trump) criticisms of Australia's level of defence spending added to rising concerns. AUKUS, however, quickly emerged as the most high-profile test of the relationship. Media reports indicated that a Trump administration review into AUKUS was later confirmed.

Early on in Trump's second term, the relationship looked fragile. Albanese and Trump missed a series of opportunities for bilateral meetings on the sidelines of major international gatherings. Calls for Australia to increase defence spending were publicly aired by U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby's AUKUS review led to widespread consternation in Australia.

## PUBLIC POLLING ON TRUMP 2.0

The Australian public also raised serious doubts about Trump. Opinion polling was scathing about Trump 2.0. A 2025 Lowy Institute survey [noted](#),

in part, that:

Australians' trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world fell by 20 points, with only 36% of the public expressing any level of trust — a new low in two decades of Lowy Institute polling. Correspondingly, almost two-thirds of the public (64%) say they hold 'not very much' trust (32%) or no trust 'at all' (32%) in the United States to act responsibly.

The same poll recorded that only 25% of Australians say they have 'a lot' of or 'some' confidence in Donald Trump to do the right thing in world affairs. This equals Trump's lowest reading in 2019, during his first term. The Sydney-based United States Studies Centre 2025 poll [showed](#) that only 24% saw the United States under Trump as "mostly helpful" in the region, with 33% saying it was "mostly harmful." In the [same poll](#), 73% of respondents worried about the future of American democracy, 82% expressed concern about political violence in the United States, and only 16% of Australians believe that the second Trump administration has been good for Australia.

Interestingly, despite the Australian public's apparent dislike of Trump and MAGA politics, this does not translate into concerns about the U.S.-Australia alliance. In the USSC poll, most Australians (54%) [disagree](#) that Australia should withdraw from its alliance with the United States, while 47% of Australians think that Australia needs its alliance with the United States more than ever, more than double the number of Australians (21%) who disagree. In the Lowy poll, despite the massive drop in trust in the United States under Trump, support for the U.S. alliance dropped only marginally, from 83% in 2024 to 80% in 2025.

This support for the U.S. alliance was higher than during Trump 1.0, when support averaged 76%. Support for AUKUS has remained steady. Overall public support for the U.S. alliance was consistent with the Biden years and higher than at the beginning of Trump's first term.

This indicates that despite Australians' dislike of the U.S. president and his policies, Australian support for the United States and the alliance remains rock solid. The data also shows that Australians' concern for the Indo-Pacific strategic environment and their distrust of China are likely driving factors in shaping their views of the alliance. In the Lowy Poll, "(69%) continue to think it is likely China will become a military threat to Australia in the next 20 years", only 22% have trust in China, and only 20% trust in Xi Jinping. While Australians rate cyber-attacks from other countries as the most critical threat to Australia, many of which have been attributed to China, in second place is the public's concerns about a military conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan.

## **BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS**

Despite tensions in the bilateral relationship, Australia and the United States have deepened their engagement and cooperation across a range of diplomatic and defence issues since Trump's return. For instance, the Quad foreign ministers held a meeting in Washington, D.C. in July 2025 with the [announcement](#) of a "new, ambitious, and strong agenda" to be undertaken by the Quad, focusing on maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response. Importantly, critical minerals were highlighted as an important

issue that led to the launch of the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative.

The issue for Australia, the United States, and other partners is that China [controls](#) over 60% of global rare earth supply and over 85% of processing capability—a dominance that could readily be exploited in China's interests. Noting this vulnerability, a major critical mineral and rare earth deal was signed between Albanese and Trump at their summit meeting at the White House in October 2025. This \$8.5 billion deal champions the security intent of AUKUS Pillar II, which seeks greater defence industry cooperation between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in advanced military capabilities.

The October 20, 2025, [meeting](#) was Albanese's seventh visit to the U.S. as Prime Minister, and his third since his May 2025 re-election victory. Trump and Albanese have also [shared](#) four phone calls since Trump's re-election in November 2024, with the most recent of those calls being in September 2025. Albanese and Trump [met again](#) in October 2025 in South Korea, seated next to each other at a "special dinner in honour of President Donald J. Trump and state leaders" on the sidelines of the APEC summit.

Richard Marles, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, also [visited](#) the United States in 2025, meeting with the U.S. Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, and other senior administration officials in late August. In addition, Marles and Foreign Minister Penny Wong [met](#) with their counterparts in Washington D.C. in December 2025 for the first annual Australia–U.S. Ministerial (AUSMIN) meeting since Trump's re-election; the 40<sup>th</sup> annual AUSMIN meeting.

## WHY AUSTRALIA CONTINUES TO STAND WITH THE UNITED STATES

In conclusion, despite initial bumps and concerns after Trump's comeback and widely held negative public sentiments in Australia towards Trump, the alliance remains as strong as it has ever been. The Australian-U.S. alliance continues to receive bipartisan U.S. Congressional support. As an example, even when details of the Trump administration's AUKUS review were not released, Congressman Joe Courtney, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, [stated](#) that the review "reaffirms that Congress and our Australian allies must continue that effort to achieve the goals of AUKUS." He also highlighted that "[I]t is important to note that the 2021 AUKUS agreement has now survived three changes of government in all three nations and still stands strong."

As Trump heads into the second year of his second term, key developments need to be watched closely that will influence the future of the alliance. These include, but are not limited to, the releases of the U.S. National Defense Strategy, the Australian 2026 National Defence Strategy and Integrated Investment Plan, and the formal outcome of the U.S. AUKUS Review.

Despite a rocky start, the Albanese government has delivered a master class on engagement with the Trump administration. They have achieved key national objectives over AUKUS, critical minerals, and the U.S. role in the region while only receiving very moderate levels of criticism. Trump and Albanese have formed a solid working relationship and Marles has emerged as a major interlocutor in bilateral defense ties. Tensions clearly remain, such as optimizing extended deterrence and contrasting views on free trade.

But on key strategic issues and defence industrial cooperation, close alignment remains unchanged. Australia enjoys deep pockets of support in the U.S. government, including critical allies in Congress. Nevertheless, Australia must continue to monitor and manage the relationship since unpredictability and uncertainty reside simultaneously across America's long-established alliances in the Indo-Pacific, as well as Europe. This is the new normal in Australia's alliance with the United States under the second Trump administration.

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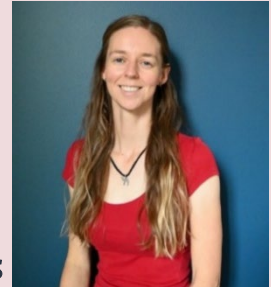
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