

Australia goes all-in on the Empire at Melbourne ‘Quad’ meeting

The conduct of senior Australian elected officials at and around the 11 February Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”) foreign ministers’ meeting is final proof, for any who did not know it already, that the Morrison government has no concept whatsoever of national sovereignty, and sees Australia only as an extension of the Anglo-American empire. Speaking in Parliament this week, Prime Minister Scott Morrison all but explicitly committed Australia to support a future US-led war with Russia over Ukraine, as Defence Minister Peter Dutton MP did against China over Taiwan last November. And in the lead-up to the Quad meeting itself, Foreign Minister Sen. Marise Payne slavishly aided the USA’s ultimately unsuccessful attempt to turn what is supposed to be an informal “Indo-Pacific” regional forum into a bloc aligned not only against China, but Russia as well. None of this serves any Australian national interests, but is in perfect accord with the Biden Administration’s *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* policy paper released by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken over the weekend. Combining the Trump Administration’s 2018 *US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific*¹ with the Obama Administration’s 2011 “Asia Pivot” policy (a.k.a. the USA’s military “rebalance” to the Asia-Pacific), the paper declares not only the Indo-Pacific area as it is historically defined—that is, from India in the west, through the Southeast Asian archipelago and the northern reaches of Australia, and eastwards to Japan—but the entire region “from [the US] Pacific coastline to the Indian Ocean, ... home to more than half of the world’s people [and] nearly two thirds of the world’s economy”, as the USA’s rightful domain, which must adhere to the “norms” of the “rules-based order” it prescribes—or else. Considering its similar attitude towards the trans-Atlantic region, which it largely controls already via NATO, the USA would therefore appear officially to proclaim itself the sole arbiter of the “rules” for the world and everyone in it.



The “Quad” is not the tight alliance Australia touts it to be. At this week’s Quad meeting in Melbourne, India’s Foreign Minister (right) criticised the discussion of India’s ally Russia. Photo: AFP/William West

The foreign ministers of the Quad member countries (Australia, India, Japan and the USA) met 11 February in Melbourne, the fourth such meeting since the Quad was revived in 2017 (after its abortive initial incarnation in 2007- 08). The meeting was preceded by a predictable barrage of anti-China propaganda from the Australian government and corporate media. Dutton, for example, complained in an interview for the 5 February *Sydney Morning Herald* that previous US administrations and Australian governments had “acquiesced” to Beijing” over the past decade by allowing it to (supposedly) “militarise” the South China Sea by constructing “defence bases” (actually small outposts which host early-warning radar installations and facilities for anti-piracy and disaster response operations) on artificial islands built atop semi-submerged stone reefs. Dutton accused China of violating “assurances” that it would not build military facilities in the South China Sea, ignoring that it only began to do so after the USA launched its Asia Pivot explicitly to “contain” China. “[T]he United States and others acquiesced and allowed the militarisation now to the point where China has 20 points of presence in the South China Sea, which does not help stability in the region”, Dutton told *SMH*. “If we continue on that trajectory, then I think we’ll lose the next decade.” Dutton offered no explanation of what we have “lost” or how regional stability has been affected. Nor did he mention that China had ceased its island-building operations by 2018, or that every other claimant in the South China Sea has similarly built up and/or garrisoned islands there.

China-Russia statement ruffles feathers

Payne, speaking to media on 9 February, touted the Quad meeting as “part of a wider push to protect sovereignty and democratic freedoms, and ensure nations were free from coercion by authoritarian nations”, the Australian newspaper reported. The article noted that the Quad meeting would take place one week after the governments of China and Russia released a joint statement on 4 February in which, as the *Australian* described it, “Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed unprecedented co-operation, backing each other over standoffs on Ukraine and Taiwan

with a promise to collaborate more against the West.”

As the Australian Alert Service reported last week,² the actual content of the Russia-China joint statement is very different than such media reports suggest. Chiding governments which, while “representing merely a minority on the international scale, continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force ... [and which] interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests”, the statement “call[s] on all States ... to build dialogue and mutual trust, strengthen mutual understanding, champion such universal human values as peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom, respect the rights of peoples to independently determine the development paths of their countries and the sovereignty and the security and development interests of States, to *protect the United Nations-driven international architecture and the international law-based world order, seek genuine multipolarity with the United Nations and its Security Council playing a central and coordinating role, promote more democratic international relations, and ensure peace, stability and sustainable development across the world.*” (Emphasis added.)

Giving away perhaps more than she intended, Payne declared that the joint statement “sets out a vision of the global order that is at odds with that of Australia and that of our allies and partners”, the *Australian* reported. Which is precisely the point. As Australian barrister and international law expert James O’Neill wrote 14 February in the online journal *New Eastern Outlook*, Russia and China’s championing of an international law-based order, as prescribed by the UN Charter, stands in stark contrast to the “rules-based order”—in which the USA and its allies make the rules, and everyone else follows orders. “There is no doubt that the Russian and Chinese view is widely shared in the so-called [Global] South”, wrote O’Neill. For evidence, one need only look to the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperative economic development program, whose “co-signees now represent nearly three quarters of the world’s countries, and an even greater share of the world’s population”.

This “is not a message that will be well received in western capitals, especially Washington that for 70 years has ridden roughshod over the world in pursuit of its own interests”, O’Neill wrote. “China and Russia have made it clear that in their view that era has long ended. The world for the first time in a very long time has a clear alternative. The majority have made their choice. It is unlikely the United States will accept that reality.”

Indo-Pacific Strategy a recipe for nuclear war

As, indeed, it has not. In an exclusive interview published 11 February, the day of the Quad meeting, Blinken told the *Australian* that there is “little doubt that China’s ambition over time is to be the leading military, economic, diplomatic and political power not just in the region but in the world.” He denied that the USA sought to build alliances aimed at “trying to hold [China] down or contain it”, but only at “standing up for the rules-based order that is being challenged”. In practice, however, they amount to the same thing, since Anglo-American “rules” dictate that China (and all nations) abandon its state-directed development model and liberalise and deregulate its economy, that it may be looted to death by Anglo-American banks and corporations and eventually dismembered, as Russia almost was during the 1990s before Putin and his circle came to power and put a stop to it. And where Blinken equivocated in person, the *Indo-Pacific Strategy* document does not. The USA’s objective, it states, is to “shape the strategic environment in which [China] operates”, so as to build “a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favourable to the United States”. To that end, “the United States is enhancing our capabilities to defend our interests as well as to deter aggression and to counter coercion against US territory and our allies and partners. *Integrated deterrence will be the cornerstone of our approach. We will more tightly integrate our efforts across warfighting domains and the spectrum of conflict* to ensure that the United States, alongside our allies and partners, can dissuade or defeat aggression in any form or domain.” (Emphasis added.)

This ought to send a chill down the spine of anybody familiar with contemporary US military jargon. “Integrated deterrence” is the insane policy, hatched during the Obama Administration and made official doctrine under Biden, of deliberately blurring the lines between conventional, electronic and nuclear warfare so that, for example, it might be deemed an acceptable risk to use small “tactical” nuclear weapons on the battlefield against overwhelming conventional enemy forces, or a “limited” nuclear strike judged an appropriate response to a damaging cyber attack. It is brinksmanship of the most foolish and dangerous sort— especially given that whilst China has a strict no-first-use policy, and while Russia will conduct a nuclear first strike only under existential threat, both have made abundantly clear that any nuclear strike upon them will result in a full and immediate counterstrike, including with new-generation hypersonic weapons the USA does not itself possess and cannot hope to counter. Nor would Australia be spared, since not only has the government agreed to host all manner of US forces and war materiel, but the “joint” (actually US-run) defence intelligence facility at Pine Gap in the Northern Territory is an essential part of the USA’s global missile detection and targeting apparatus.

And now, Canberra seems to be entertaining the notion of following the USA into a pointless and destructive war of choice in Ukraine, should one eventuate, just as John “deputy sheriff” Howard followed the USA and UK into their illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. Blinken and Payne had reportedly pushed the Quad to take the USA’s side in its manufactured dispute with Russia. Japan was reportedly

also in favour. But India, which has strong relations with Russia dating back to the 1950s, refused to be roped in. External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar told the media that whilst the Quad was working on an agenda to make it “a force for global good”, India was “uncomfortable with discussion of the Ukraine crisis in the regional forum”, the *Australian* reported. “This meeting is focused on the Indo-Pacific so I think you should figure out the geography there”, Dr Jaishankar said. As a result, neither Russia nor Ukraine got a mention in the joint statement issued at the end of the meeting. (Nor did China, by name, though the boilerplate allusions to its breaches of the “rules-based order” were present.)

Canberra, meanwhile, blunders on regardless. Payne’s department last week put Ukraine on its “do not travel” list, advised all Australians currently there to leave as soon as possible, and relocated its embassy to Lviv in the country’s far west, near Poland, ostensibly in anticipation of a Russian invasion from the east. Morrison on 15 February ranted in Parliament that “We support Ukraine’s sovereignty absolutely, we support their right to their territorial borders and that they not be imperilled by their neighbour”; mere loose words, perhaps, given the source, but “absolutely” in such a context means exactly that. Given Morrison’s habitual subservience to US geopolitical diktats, it is reasonable to speculate that a commitment of troops to demonstrate Australia’s “loyalty” was discussed during Blinken’s visit.

As for Dutton, he continues to peddle the idea that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would “embolden” China to move on Taiwan while the USA was “distracted”, the 14 February *Australian* reported. “The most alarming development in all of this”, he added, “is the very publicly declared close bond now between China and Russia—and Iran is on the edges, as is North Korea. *Countries of that nature coming together* should wake people from a slumber that they have been in for way too long.” (Emphasis added.)

Really. China has not invaded another country since its month-long incursion a few dozen miles into Vietnam in 1979, in response to an attack on its then treaty ally Cambodia. Iran hasn’t started a war in centuries. North Korea never has. It is the USA, UK, their NATO allies, and hangers-on like Australia that have committed aggression after aggression all over the world since the end of World War II, violating the UN Charter of which they were among the principal authors. So far as most of the rest of the world is concerned, it is countries of *that* nature one need be wary of. It is high time Australians realised it.

Footnotes

1. [“The Nazi roots of the ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’”](#), AAS, 20 Jan. 2021.
2. [“China-Russia diplomacy at Olympics—a ‘tectonic shift’”](#), AAS, 9 Feb. 2022.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 16 February 2022