

FLAT WHITE

Albanese must change his approach to Trump

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19 June 2025

More than any US President in recent history, Donald Trump's focus is upon the interests of the US itself. Promotion of other countries wealth and security is a by-product rather than a goal. A manifestation of Trump's policy is his mistaken protectionist approach to trade policy as a promoter of greater US wealth. And he holds little back in beratingly disparaging US opponents and even friendly foreign heads of state (Zelensky, Macron, and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa).

Trump recognises those seeking to usurp other nations as enemies. These include Islamic cultists (obviously Iran and its clients) but not 'normal' Islamic states like Egypt,

Saudi Arabia, or Turkey. He views China as a hegemonist that threatens key allies and economic partners. But he has no interest in becoming the world policeman. In this respect, he has sought to downgrade rather than escalate US support for Ukraine, seeing the issue as a less than clear-cut case of one nation seeking to annex another whose people are unwilling to be conjoined, and regarding Russia as a state with neither the capability nor the desire to absorb its non-Russian neighbours.

Trump chooses those he favours with meetings on the basis of how they contribute to the common cause of defending the West militarily, economically, and diplomatically.

Australia, Spain, Brazil, and South Korea are the only medium-sized nations that haven't had either a face-to-face discussion with President Trump at head-of-state level or a lengthy Zoom meeting. Mexico, which, like Australia, had an aborted meeting planned in Canada, has had Zoom meetings one of which took place after President Trump returned to Washington. India's president Modi, who has already met with Trump, had a telephone conversation following the cancellation of his own meeting at the Canadian G7 summit.

South Korea joins Australia in the shunned head-of-state club. Its previous president was under a cloud having attempted a *coup d'état*. And his successor, Lee Jae-myung, has only been in office since June 3. Lee shares with Australia a contempt for efficient electricity production and is focused on renewables. (He has an ABC-style cognitive preconception about wildfires and floods!) But although he plans to close down coal generation, nuclear is not on any immediate chopping block and, unlike Albanese, Lee is focused on defence and heads a nation with seven times the military personnel as Australia.

Like Australia, Spain, and Brazil are under socialist-left governments but, as neither is under any sort of outside threat, they have not seen a need to engage closely with the Trump Administration.

Australia is different.

We have Chinese ships circumnavigating the nation and engaged in live-fire exercises nearby. We are confronted by Chinese trade measures as pressure to recant criticism of its abuses of human rights.

But Trump would be aware that Australia has noisy and influential politicians who do not see any need for the US alliance and despise him as a man and as a leader.

Importantly, many of these are within the government party. Trump would see Albanese as a tiresome fellow who has not disguised his anti-US, and especially anti-Trump, leanings.

He would have been advised that Albanese appointed, as his Ambassador, a man who had publicly ridiculed him and was part of the Clinton cheer squad. Trump would have been briefed that Australia's 'independent' foreign policy is diametrically at odds with that of the US on Israel (from where Jewish spokespeople have been refused visas), on China, on the phoney International Criminal Court and the UN institutions generally.

Moreover, Trump, having spent most of his domestic effort on reversing the entry of unwholesome immigrants and unwinding the regulatory barriers to development of cheap gas, coal, and nuclear-based energy, would be advised that Australia is taking contrary routes. He would be aware that the Albanese government's energy and environment policies will further undermine Australia's capabilities of contributing to a common cause.

Unlike Australia, other friendly nations that are implementing harmful greenhouse-hyped energy and economic development policies – the EU, UK, Canada, Korea – are at least increasing defence expenditures. Australia, in addition to impeding the productive use of an area the size of the US 48 states, is also countering US advice on military preparedness with an asinine statement that 'Australia is a sovereign state that will decide its own defence priorities'.

Whereas previous US Presidents had couched their interfaces with foreign heads of states in diplomatic niceties, Trump has taken a different approach and done so under-

scripted and in the open. This means face-to-face meetings can spin out of control, something which the US Foreign Service would have been seeking to avoid in scheduling a one-on-one Trump and Albanese meeting.

Unless Australia changes direction, it is better all round if it avoids exposing its policy shortcomings to a humiliating Trumpian invective that might jeopardise future cooperation.