

Trump, AUKUS and Australia's Dim Servitors

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*There is something enormously satisfying about seeing those in the war racket worry that their assumptions on conflict have been upended. There they were, happily funding, planning and preparing to battle against threats imagined or otherwise, and there comes **Donald Trump**, malice and petulance combined, to pull the rug from under them again.*

What is fascinating about the return of Trump to the White House is that critics think his next round of potentially rowdy occupancy is going to encourage, rather than discourage war. Conflict may be the inadvertent consequence of any number of unilateral policies Trump might pursue, but they do not tally with his anti-war platform. Whatever can be said about his adolescent demagogic tendencies, a love of war is curiously absent from the complement. A tendency to predictable unpredictability, however, is.

The whole assessment also utterly misunderstands the premise that the foolishly menacing trilateral alliance of AUKUS is, by its nature, a pact for the making of war. This agreement between Australia, the UK and the US can hardly be dignified as some peaceful, unprovocative enterprise fashioned to preserve security. To that end, **President Joe Biden** should shoulder a considerable amount of the blame for destabilising the region. But instead, we are getting some rather streaky commentary from the security wonks in Australia. Trump spells, [in the pessimistic words](#) of Nick Bisley from La Trobe University, “uncertainty about just what direction the US will go”. His policies might, for instance, “badly destabilise Asia” and imperil the AUKUS, specifically on the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to the Royal Australian Navy. On the last point, we can only hope.

The Australians, being willing and unquestioning satellites of US power, have tried to pretend that a change of the guard in the White House will not doom the pact. Australian **Foreign Minister Penny Wong** [expressed](#) a “great deal of confidence” that things would not change under the new administration, seeing as AUKUS enjoyed bipartisan support.

Australia's ambassador to the US, **Kevin Rudd**, is also [of the view](#) that AUKUS will survive into the Trump administration as it “strengthens all three countries' ability to deter threats, and it grows the defence industrial base and creates jobs in all three countries”.

Another former ambassador to Washington, **Arthur Sinodinos**, who also occupies the role of AUKUS forum co-chair, has pitched the viability of the trilateral pact in such a way as to make it more appealing to Trump. Without any trace of humour, he suggests that tech oligarch **Elon Musk** oversee matters if needed.

“If Musk can deliver AUKUS, we should put Musk in charge of AUKUS, and I'm not joking, if new thinking is needed to get this done,” [advises](#) the deluded Sinodinos.

The reasoning offered on this is, to put it mildly, peculiar. As co-head of the proposed

Department of Government Efficiency, Musk, it is hoped, will apply “business principles” and “new thinking”. If the Pentagon can “reform supply chains, logistics, procurement rules, in a way that means there’s speed to market, we get minimum viable capability sooner, rather than later”.

These doltish assessments from Sinodinos are blatantly ignorant of the fact the defence industry is *never* efficient. Nor do they detract from the key premise of the arrangements. Certainly, if an anti-China focus is what you are focusing on – and AUKUS, centrally and evidently, is an anti-China agreement pure and simple – there would be little reason for Trump to tinker with its central tenets. For one, he is hankering for an even deeper trade war with Beijing. Why not also harry the Chinese with a provocative instrument, daft as it is, that entails militarising Australia and garrisoning it for any future conflict that might arise?

Whatever the case, AUKUS has always been contingent on the interests of one power. Congress has long signalled that US defence interests come first, including whether Australia should receive any Virginian class submarines to begin with. Trump would hardly disagree here.

“Trump’s decisions at each phase of AUKUS cooperation will be shaped by zero-sum balance sheets of US interest,” [suggests](#) Alice Nason of the University of Sydney’s US Studies Centre rather tritely.

If Trump be so transactional, he has an excellent example of a country utterly willing to give everything to US security, thereby improving the deal from the side of Washington’s military-industrial complex. If there was one lingering, pathological complaint he had about Washington’s NATO allies, it was always that they were not doing enough to ease the burdens of US defence. They stalled on defence budgets; they quibbled on various targets on recruitment.

This can hardly be said of Canberra. Australia’s government has abandoned all pretence of resistance, measure or judgment, outrageously willing to underwrite the US imperium in any of its needs in countering China, raiding the treasury of taxpayer funds to the tune of a figure that will, eventually, exceed A\$368 billion. Rudd openly [acknowledges](#) that Australian money is directly “investing into the US submarine industrial base to expand the capacity of their shipyards.” It would be silly to prevent this continuing windfall. It may well be that aspect that ends up convincing Trump that AUKUS is worth keeping. Why get rid of willing servitors of such dim tendency when they are so willing to please you with cash and compliments?

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