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By James Cogan
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Australian prime minister endorses US trade war and militarism

The state visit to the US by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has, thus far, largely unfolded according to the script developed in Washington and Canberra. Morrison has performed his expected role. He has conducted himself as the head of a middle-order imperialist power that has functioned since World War II as the willing enabler of the predatory economic and military policies of its great power ally.

On behalf of the Australian corporate and political establishment, Morrison has endorsed the Trump administration's diplomatic provocations, trade sanctions and even threats of nuclear annihilation against various countries that are viewed as a challenge to American global dominance.

The role of Australian imperialism as an adjunct of American foreign policy is the main reason for the pomp and ceremony accorded Morrison on his visit. This has included both a ceremonial White House lawn welcome and only the second state dinner put on by Trump since he became president.



President Donald J. Trump listens to remarks by Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison Friday evening, Sept. 20, 2019, during the State Dinner in the Rose Garden of the White House. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)

During a joint press conference on Friday, the Australian leader listened on as Trump threatened war over the US accusation that Iran was behind last week's drone attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities. "We all hope, and Scott [Morrison] hopes," Trump asserted, "that we never have to use nuclear."

Morrison dutifully responded that, in his opinion, the US had taken a "very measured and calibrated approach to date." Encouraged by his stage-prop, Trump proceeded to boast that the "easiest thing" he could do was order immediate military strikes and "knock out 15 different major things in Iran.... But I think restraint is a good thing."

Morrison proceeded to back Trump's "America First" trade war against China on the pretext of "unfair" competition. While asserting that Australia and China "work well," he declared that "there can't be special rules" and "we need to make sure that we all compete on the same playing field."

Provided such an opening, Trump launched into an impromptu rant that his administration's tariffs on Chinese exports worth \$US362 billion had caused it to have the "worst year in 57 years"—an obscure reference to the economic impact in 1962 of the collapse in relations between Beijing and the Soviet Union.

Trump boasted that the tariffs had generated \$100 billion for the US Treasury while forcing Beijing to devalue its currency and implement emergency stimulus spending. He gloated: "They've lost over three million jobs. Their supply chain is crashing, and they have a lot of problems."

China is Australia's largest export market and trading partner. Economic think tank Deloitte has estimated that the halving of China's economic growth due to the trade war will plunge Australia into a severe downturn. At least 500,000 jobs will be lost, with massive social consequences. Morrison, however, refused to raise even a hint of disagreement with Trump over the destructive impact of US policies.

In the course of the joint media appearance, Trump referred in passing to the private discussions that would be held on Australia's role in the US confrontation with China, and whether Washington would ask for direct participation in any war with Iran.

Australian imperialism was among the only countries to deploy military forces alongside the US in the brutal colonial war in Vietnam, the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and 2003 invasion of Iraq. Australian forces took part in the subsequent occupations of both countries, as well as the 2014 US-led operations in Syria.

The present Liberal-National Coalition government has already announced the deployment of a warship—but not until January—to take part in the US naval operation in the Persian Gulf—the only country to do so apart from the United Kingdom and the tiny oil kingdom of Bahrain. If Canberra does not commit anything beyond this symbolic gesture, it is because the Australian military is preoccupied with preparing for involvement in a US war with China in the Asia-Pacific.

Article continues below the form

Australia—under both Labor and Coalition governments, and a procession of prime ministers—fully aligned with the Obama administration's military build-up and "pivot" to isolate, undermine and threaten China. Under Trump, the term "pivot" may have been dropped, but the confrontational policy initiated under Obama has only been expanded. China was described in the 2018 National Defense Strategy as a "revisionist power" and "strategic competitor" that was seeking the "displacement of the United States to achieve global pre-eminence."

Morrison is likewise building on the policies initiated under previous governments. He boasted that Australian military spending has been ramped up to near 2 percent of GDP and "we're in the middle of a \$200 billion upgrade"—involving the acquisition of F-35 jet fighters, warships and a new fleet of conventional submarines. Seeking to impress Trump, he declared he was presiding over the "biggest increase in our defense, as a share of GDP, since the Second World War."

The US military, however, wants more from Australia than the small number of aircraft, ships and troops that the country could provide in a military confrontation with China.

Both Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of the *Australian*, and Peter Jennings of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) suggested Morrison offer finances toward the US space program—which has overt military purposes—and to base US warships, including nuclear-powered and armed submarines, at the Western Australian port of Stirling, near Perth.

Publicly, Morrison has already used his visit to offer \$150 million as an Australian contribution to the space program. Behind-the-scenes, talks will be taking place on the viability of naval basing in Western Australia and the possibility of deploying medium-range, nuclear-capable US missiles from launch facilities in northern Australia.

As was expected, Morrison made no reference to the fate of Australian citizen and persecuted WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. His government, like the Labor and Coalition governments before him, has repudiated its responsibility toward one of its citizens and is actively collaborating with the American state apparatus to exact retribution on Assange for WikiLeaks' exposure of the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues of US imperialism.

Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) journalist Brett Mason asked Trump at the press conference with Morrison: “Is it right that the United States is prosecuting its Australian founder, Julian Assange?”

Trump, looking somewhat surprised, replied: “Well, you know, that’s a question I haven’t heard in a long time. I’ll leave that for you to determine.”

The *Washington Times* observed: “Mr. Morrison did not mention Mr. Assange while taking questions from reporters, and his office did not immediately return a message requesting comment.

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