

Labor

SPEECH | A FAIR GO FOR AUSTRALIA



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**Australian values, Australia's interests
Foreign policy under a Shorten Labor Government**

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Labor's foreign policy is founded on the belief that we deal with the world as it is and we seek to change it for the better.

Australia is an independent, multicultural nation, confident of our place in the world.

We know our values – compassion, fairness, equality, democracy, the rule of law and individual freedoms.

We know our interests – security, prosperity, a stable region anchored in the rule of law, and working constructively with

international partners to deliver collective benefits.

And we know who we are – an inclusive, diverse, multicultural nation which draws strength from the waves of immigrants who have come to this continent and from our First Peoples.

Labor's foreign policy speaks to who we are, the confidence we have in ourselves, the values we believe in, and the region and the world in which we want to live.

As the Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten characterised it: "Foreign policy with an Australian accent."

Foreign policy may not be front and centre in this election campaign. But amidst the grabs, 'gotcha moments' or issues of the day it is important to recognise that who governs our country has implications not only for us, but so to for our region and the world.

Disruption

We live in a time characterised by disruption.

Power is shifting.

The global order we have known and relied upon since World War Two is being transformed.

The disruption we face is driven by structural, economic, and strategic dynamics.

We see it in rising economic and social inequality; greater numbers of displaced persons; ethnic tensions; pressures on democracy; heightened security threats

from terrorism to cyber security; and the erosion of support for international norms, rules and institutions.

We see these trends in Australia with the rise of right-wing fringe groups like One Nation, Fraser Anning and Clive Palmer's UAP – and in the failure of some of our political leaders, including the current Prime Minister, to take a clear and unambiguous stand against the politics of prejudice and division.

Through his preference deal with Clive Palmer, and his refusal to ensure One Nation is preferenced last by all members of his government, Scott Morrison is supporting political figures who promote fear and division.

He is supporting figures whose views hark back to the White Australia policy – harming the perception of our nation in the region.

This is beneath the standards we should expect from any prime minister.

And it only serves to feed those disruptive forces.

The global dynamics I referenced earlier are accompanied by changes in the relative economic weight of the US, China and major powers, and by the way in which economic power is being refocused and reorganised.

In these circumstances, Australia's international engagement is of even greater importance.

Indeed, in today's world, our future prosperity depends on improved capability at home and greater engagement and collaboration abroad.

This is the terrain a Shorten Labor Government will need to navigate to protect and promote Australia's economic, strategic, and foreign policy interests.

We recognise and accept the responsibility of these times.

We know that the playbook of decades past may be of limited utility in dealing with the challenges and opportunities ahead.

As Bill Shorten said here at the Lowy Institute last October, foreign policy should be shaped by our national interest – first, second and third.

Focus on the Region

Labor looks to the region. Whitlam, Hawke, Keating, Rudd and Gillard did – and so too Shorten.

Australia's prosperity and security is shaped by the region in which we live – the Indo-Pacific.

And the features of this region are critical.

Australia wants a region which retains a system of institutions, rules and norms to guide behaviour, to enable collective action and to resolve disputes.

A region in which those seeking to make or shape the rules do so through negotiation not imposition.

A region with an open trading system and investment transparency to maximise opportunity.

A region where outcomes are not determined only by power.

A region where all people live in peace and prosperity.

A region with these characteristics reflects our national interests and our values.

Protecting and promoting this kind of region in this time of disruption is one of the principal foreign policy challenges Australia faces.

It is not a challenge we face alone; nor something we can achieve alone.

Central to achieving this are closer ties with our region – both across Asia and the Pacific.

How successful we are will have profound consequences for Australia's future prosperity.

Pacific

Labor will ensure the Pacific is front and centre of our foreign policy.

We will engage with the Pacific with respect, to promote the wellbeing of region, for the benefit of both Australia and the 10 million people of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

We need to demonstrate that we understand the region's challenges and offer support and partnership to assist our Pacific friends in their pursuit of security and prosperity.

And unlike the Coalition, we will ensure our commitments to our Pacific neighbours are reflected in our actions.

We want to see improvements to economic and development outcomes – fewer women dying in childbirth, more children vaccinated and nourished, those with avoidable blindness treated, enabling them to participate in their communities.

We want to see gender-based violence reduced, sexual and reproductive rights

protected and women's voices represented and heard.

We want to see more communities across the Pacific powered by renewable energy – in line with Pacific countries' ambitious climate change plans.

We want to see the ocean protected – from illegal fishing and from plastic debris.

We want Pacific nations to have improved infrastructure and connectivity that is sustainable and resilient.

And we want an Australian Labor Government to make an important contribution to these achievements.

We want there to be deeper ties between our communities.

We want Australians to hear and listen to Pacific island perspectives.

And we want Australian voices to be heard in the Pacific.

Australia's economy benefits from the availability of Pacific workers. And our society benefits from the connections with Pacific communities.

A Shorten Labor Government would work closely in equal partnership with our Pacific neighbours to help support and create opportunities and possibilities for realising the Pacific's own vision for the Blue Pacific continent.

FutureAsia

But unlike the Coalition, our increased focus on the Pacific will not come at the expense of our engagement in Asia.

The Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government's short-sighted cuts to development assistance to Southeast Asia demonstrates a disconnect with the realities of Australia's foreign policy.

Supporting the Pacific region to the detriment of other nations will not serve our relationships, our influence, and our long-term prosperity and security.

Labor has outlined in considerable detail a policy blueprint for deepening and broadening our engagement with Asia.

FutureAsia is a step change in our relations with Asia.

It will help secure Australia's future prosperity, improving our capability at home and driving greater engagement and collaboration in the Asian region.

It's a comprehensive nationwide plan for advancing Australia's interests and contributing to the prosperity, stability and security of the region.

Under FutureAsia, we've announced initiatives that focus on:

- Improving Asia capability in business
- Better leveraging our diaspora communities
- Strengthening high-level economic engagement with Indonesia and India, including through APEC and the G20, and
- Greater support for Southeast Asian studies.

Importantly, FutureAsia also includes initiatives to improve Asian language capability in Australia.

And we've announced that we would expand our diplomatic presence and capabilities in the region.

Engagement with Asia requires working across government and with business, the education sector, industry and across the community to deepen our ties, improve our Asia capability and enable more opportunities for Australians.

Our FutureAsia policies will enable us to draw on Australia's strengths, experience and expertise to maximise the benefit of our engagement with the region.

And in doing so it will enable us to deepen ties with key partners – like Indonesia and India; countries that are crucial to the nature of the region and to Australia.

China

The China relationship is a critical relationship for Australia – it is both complex and consequential.

Labor's approach to foreign policy will bring a more considered, disciplined and consistent approach to the management of Australia's relationship with China.

That's not to say it will be easy or straightforward.

Indeed, I've said before that the relationship may become harder to manage in the future.

Many of the current pressures will persist.

At times our interests will differ.

And challenges in the relationship may intensify.

It is not simply a matter of a “diplomatic reset.”

Fundamentally, we are in a new phase in the relationship.

I’ve spoken before about the realities and the principles that will underpin our management of this relationship.

First, we don’t pre-emptively frame China only as a threat.

Second, we must be grounded in the realities.

China is not a democracy nor does it share our commitment to the rule of law.

Differences between our systems and values will inevitably affect the nature of our interactions.

But those realities include the fact that China will remain important to Australia’s prosperity.

And that China will be critical to the shape and character of the entire region.

In fact it is hard to think of an important issue for Australia’s future where China will not be an influential player.

We also recognise that China has a right to develop, and a right to a role in the region alongside other regional powers.

Third, we need to consider the relationship as a whole.

The idea of an economic-strategic bifurcation was never really accurate, and certainly is not now.

A Labor Government will protect Australia's interests and values – this means there will be occasions where decisions may not accord with China's preferences.

We will be clear about where Australia and China's interests come together and where they differ.

In this next phase in the relationship, we believe that engagement remains in best interests of Australia and China.

And the nature of that engagement needs to be redefined.

This is not just a task or responsibility for government alone.

All stakeholders – government, the foreign policy community, business, industry – need to work together to identify those opportunities for deeper engagement where our interests coincide and to manage difference constructively.

As we work together as a country to navigate the relationship, we need to include a wide range of Australian voices, including those of Australia's Chinese communities. And we must guard against racial fault lines from our past being allowed to resonate today.

United States

Australia's alliance with the United States is a pillar of our nation's foreign policy.

It has been fundamental to our security since Curtin's famous war-time turn to America over 75 years ago.

And it will continue to be central into the future.

The alliance's enduring nature reflects the fact that Australia and the US have shared histories, interests and values.

Maintaining a strong alliance relationship with the US strengthens Australia's national security.

It provides our defence forces with access to leading edge technologies and opportunities for cooperation and training.

It provides our security agencies with intelligence sharing, so important in counter-terrorism efforts.

And it gives Australia an opportunity to influence the world's great power.

Of course this does not mean that we will always agree with every aspect of American policy.

Labor will always act in Australia's national interest.

We will let our ally know when we disagree with its policies and decisions.

Both Labor and the Coalition Government, for instance, have disagreed with decisions by the Trump Administration to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal.

It is a reflection of the closeness of our relationship with the US that we are able to discuss our differences frankly.

And it is a reflection of the importance of the relationship to Australia that it has bipartisan support across the major political parties.

That's why it was disappointing to see the Prime Minister seeking to politicise the US alliance this week.

Mr Morrison likes to promote his national security credentials.

Yet he is the only leader in this election campaign who has played politics with national security by questioning the bipartisan nature of Australia's commitment to the US alliance.

A Shorten Labor Government will work with the US to advance our mutual interests and benefit the broader international community.

And we will work to maintain and strengthen constructive US engagement in the Indo-Pacific because this will be critical for the region's resilience, prosperity and security into the future.

Indeed, Australia's strength and value as an alliance partner lies in the fact that we are a substantial power in this region, sharing much in common with other regional partners - Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and India.

We have a shared interest in protecting and promoting the kind of region I outlined earlier. We must work together to navigate the challenges in our region.

Constructive Internationalism

The second key element of Labor's foreign policy agenda is constructive internationalism – where Australia works with other countries to achieve common benefit.

Constructive internationalism reflects the pragmatic observation that there are certain interests which cannot be

effectively pursued without international co-operation.

And that some issues – climate change, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, space, the oceans – require a collective response.

Constructive internationalism encompasses a commitment to collective and co-operative processes which is reflected in Labor's tradition of multilateralism and regionalism.

This tradition is about forging groupings, associations and partnerships to act in the common good.

It's about Australia acting with like-minded partners to deliver effective, sustainable, and long-term action.

It is a tradition which would be built upon and advanced by a Shorten Labor Government.

Our approach here builds on the work begun by Gareth Evans 25 years ago.

I've spoken previously about Labor's intended contribution to global challenges like nuclear disarmament, oceans, multilateral trade liberalisation, space and counter-terrorism.

Three areas that will be early priorities are climate change, development assistance and promotion of democracy and human rights.

Climate change

The Coalition's continued refusal to accept climate science and take meaningful action has had a direct cost to Australia's reputation internationally, our relations with our region, and particularly with our Pacific neighbours to whom

this is a threat to their very existence.

A Labor Government will restore Australia's place as a collaborative and energetic member of the community of nations committed to reducing carbon pollution.

We will advocate globally for more ambitious climate action.

We will rebuild DFAT's skills and capabilities for the international climate change agenda.

And there will be close coordination between the Foreign Affairs and the Energy and Climate Change portfolios on the international dimensions of this challenge.

And our work internationally will be backed by comprehensive domestic policy to tackle climate change. This is a key challenge for our nation and a challenge a divided Coalition is utterly incapable of meeting.

Development assistance

Our international development program should once again reflect the generous spirit of the Australian people.

It is something we should be proud of.

The Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government proudly declares that it has cut Australia's international development program by \$80 billion over the medium term to 2028-29.

These cuts have not only had a real impact on some of the world's poorest people.

They have damaged Australia's reputation as a reliable partner in the region and reduced Australia's influence – at a time when our national interest requires us to engage more deeply.

Labor will increase Official Development Assistance as a percentage of Gross National Income every year, starting with our first Budget.

Democracy and Human Rights

In this era of disruption, marked by the rise of illiberalism and authoritarianism, democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights are under pressure.

We need to find ways to ensure the resilience of our own democratic institutions as well as support the protection and promotion of democracy abroad.

A robust Australian democracy is not only fundamental to the country we cherish, it is a necessary prerequisite to our ability to advance our interests and advocate our values internationally.

Even as Australia rebuilds confidence in our own system, we will continue to be affected by developments in democracy in other parts of the world.

So we have to work with likeminded nations to promote, protect and defend democratic values.

The role of civil society in promoting democracy and human rights should also be recognised.

A strong civil society is vital to democracy, inclusion, transparency and openness, accountability, and the protection of minorities and marginalised groups

Ensuring the viability of civil society – NGOs, business and professional organisations, unions, media, and religious institutions – is even more pressing in the face of rising authoritarianism and attacks on freedom of speech.

Conclusion

Over the course of this campaign I have been asked about the significance of an Asian-Australian being our foreign minister should Labor win the election.

What is significant about that possibility is not my personal attributes. Rather what would be significant about an Asian Australian being our foreign minister is what it says about us.

What it says about who we are.

Narratives matter, as do perceptions. There are times when Australia's past attitudes on race can be evoked in ways which are neither accurate nor helpful.

This was brought home to me during the first iteration of Pauline Hanson, when my father, still living in Malaysia, asked me if I would need to leave Australia.

But just as historical negatives can be evoked, so too they can be shifted.

When Paul Keating spoke about our place in Asia it spoke to our region and the world of a different Australia.

When the Gillard government embarked on the preparation of the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century, this prompted interest and discussion in the region.

And when Prime Minister Rudd gave me the honour of representing Australia as Climate Change Minister in the international negotiations at Bali and when I

sat as our Finance Minister in a G20 Finance Ministers meeting, this said something to the region and beyond about who we are.

An independent multicultural Australia confident of our place in the world.

Of course, like any minister, I would inevitably bring my experiences and perspective to the role.

Southeast Asia is not just our region, it is where I was born.

I grew up with stories of the fall of Singapore, the occupation of Malaya and the unique American contribution to peace in the Pacific.

China's rise and its future place in the world was far more likely a topic of discussion than nostalgia over the Anglosphere.

Like Chris Bowen, Richard Marles, Jason Clare and my Labor colleagues more broadly, the import of Australia's place in and relationship with the region is an accepted fact.

My intention, if we are elected, is to make my first overseas visit as foreign minister to Indonesia, and the land of my birth, Malaysia.

I finish on a note about values.

There is one imperative which has been a feature of my public life, from my first speech to parliament, and since, and that is the imperative to stand against prejudice and discrimination.

It is an imperative for the health and resilience of our Australian democracy.

And it is critical to our ability to advance our interests and advocate our values

internationally.

Those who have been willing to toy with the race card in recent times are not only damaging national cohesion and eroding our national identity.

They also diminish our national power.

So from my perspective, both personally and as someone with the honour of serving Australia as an elected representative, this election – whether it be in foreign policy, whether it be in economic policy, environmental policy or social policy – this election presents a choice.

And that choice is between Labor's open, expansive and inclusive vision for the future of our country – and the divisive, chaotic, impoverished and cynical approach of our opponents.

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