

**20<sup>TH</sup> ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT**  
**THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**FRIDAY 2 JUNE 2023**

**ANTHONY ALBANESE**  
**PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIA**

**Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS**

Prime Minister Albanese, everyone here recognises that Australia under your leadership has accelerated its defence and security engagements with many Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations, as well as larger powers such as India and Japan. Your administration has moved expeditiously to complete and publish a defence and security review, and you have been present at all recent major international gatherings at which the international order has been discussed. All of us look forward to your setting the agenda for our deliberations. Prime Minister, the floor and this podium is yours. Thank you.

**Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister, Australia**

Well, thank you very much, and I am delighted to be back in Singapore and here for my first visit as Australia's Prime Minister. I'm grateful to Acting Prime Minister Wong for a very positive and productive leaders' meeting this morning, and I wish my friend Prime Minister Lee a speedy recovery. And I'm deeply honoured that the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has invited me to deliver the keynote address at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue.

For two decades, this highly respected forum has brought together experts in both defence and diplomacy, long-standing recognition that building peace, security and stability depend on both strategic capability and diplomatic capacity, reinforcing each other. And by bringing together leaders and analysts from across the Indo-Pacific, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and founding Dialogue partners such as Australia, this gathering emphasises the value of frank and constructive discussion, as well as making it clear that preserving peace and security is not a task that any one of us can shoulder alone.

Because just as the prosperity of our region has always been driven by shared opportunity, the stability of our region can only be secured through collective responsibility. That emphasis on both agreement and action, cooperation and capacity, has always been at the core of this forum, and indeed is at the heart of ASEAN itself. And even as the threats and challenges facing our nations have evolved and multiplied, we have held to the common understanding that we achieve far more together than we do alone.

In the context of the current strategic environment, this has never been more important. We sometimes hear our region described as a potential theatre for conflict, as if this is merely a backdrop, a location, an arena for the ambitions of others. Such a view is entirely and, might I say, dangerously wrong. Not only does such a characterisation dismiss the agency and ambition of a majority of the world's population and the engine room of the global economy, it also presents the future of this region as somehow a foregone conclusion. And we've seen the flaw in that kind of thinking in the past.

The benign assumption post-Cold War that the spread of globalisation, free trade and new technologies would create a more open, more stable world. Some talked about 'the end of history', the beginning of a new world order, a unipolar era. There was a strand of complacency underpinning that, meaning governments didn't always thoroughly examine or properly explain the benefits of trade agreements to our people, as if the virtues of open economies were self-evident. And we didn't always pay sufficient attention to the maintenance and effectiveness of multilateral institutions and global rules. The years that followed provided a sharp correction. The rise of nativism and isolationism, a land war in Europe and the biggest conventional military build-up since the Second World War in our own region – all proof that peace, prosperity and stability can never be taken for granted.

But the lesson we draw from this must not be that trade and dialogue and rules and people-to-people connections don't support regional and global security. That would only mean being wrong for a

second time, but in a different way. To move from imagining conflict is impossible to assuming war is inevitable is just as harmful to our shared goals. The fate of our region is not preordained. It never was and it never is. What we do here, what we decide here, matters for us and the world, and it always will. I can assure you that when Australia looks north, we don't see a void for others to impose their will. We see growing and modernising economies, the fastest-growing region of the world in human history. We see the drivers of the global transition to net zero and we see a community of nations whose actions and decisions are essential to building prosperity and preserving peace in the Indo-Pacific.

Peace is not a gift and it's never a given. It's not the default setting of any part of the world. It has to be built, pursued, defended and upheld. And when nations such as ours choose to promote peace, we are not opting out from the big questions of security and stability. We are not choosing the smooth ride or the passive course. We are committing to a whole-of-nation effort, and that's my government's focus in Australia: investing in our capability and investing in our relationships, strengthening our deterrence and our diplomacy, and bringing both to our presence in this region. Directing both to the ongoing task of maintaining an environment that enables economic competition and guards against strategic conflict. A region and a world where two countries can disagree, even very firmly, without that disagreement ending in disaster.

Central to this is the word of the moment: guardrails. Now, I'm a former minister for infrastructure, so I confess that when I hear guardrails, my mind goes straight to the safety barriers on the side of major roads. But that's actually not a bad way of thinking about what is being proposed, because this isn't about a policy of containment. It's not a question of placing obstacles in the way of any nation's progress or their potential. This is a matter of simple, practical structures to prevent a worst-case scenario, and the essential precondition for this is, of course, dialogue.

Australia strongly supports the renewed efforts from President Biden's administration to establish reliable and open channels of communication between the governments of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. I want to recognise the very important speech that Prime Minister Lee gave in China recently on this subject, where he said this: 'Big powers have a heavy responsibility to maintain stable and workable relations with one another.' Because the alternative, the silence of the diplomatic deep freeze, only breeds suspicion, only makes it easier for nations to attribute motive to misunderstanding, to assume the worst of one another.

If you don't have the pressure valve of dialogue, if you don't have the capacity at a decision-making level to pick up the phone to seek some clarity or provide some context, then there is always a much greater risk of assumptions spilling over into irretrievable action and reaction. The consequences of such a breakdown, whether in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere, would not be confined to the big powers or the site of their conflict. That would be devastating for the world. And that's why, as leaders in this region and indeed as citizens of it, we should be doing everything we can to support the building of that first and most fundamental guardrail.

In Australia, our government has put dialogue at the heart of our efforts to stabilise our relationship with China. We're not naive about this process or its limitations. We recognise there are fundamental differences in our two nations' systems of government, our values and our worldviews, but we begin from the principle that whatever the issue, whether we agree or disagree, it is always better and it is always more effective if we deal direct. It is also an acknowledgement of our common interests.

We have advocated strongly for the removal of any impediments to our trade, not just because Australian producers benefit from being able to export our high-quality products and resources to our largest trading partner, but because China also benefits from being able to import them. It's a win-win.

And that's true on a broader level. China's extraordinary economic transformation has benefited not only its population. China's extraordinary economic transformation has also benefited our entire region. And that is important, but it's also been important for the region. It's been made possible by a regional architecture that facilitates fair trade, encourages the sharing of knowledge, spurs innovation and builds people-to-people connections through education and tourism and business and orderly migration.

American leadership has been an indispensable part of this, but we have all played our part, creating a prevailing climate of peace and stability secured by sovereignty. This is where guardrails are absolutely necessary, while of course not being entirely sufficient. Because while we welcome any safeguard against a crash, there must also be a set of rules that serve all of us who use the road. This has to go beyond a catalogue of principles or a set of ideals. It must be adaptable for unforeseen challenges like a pandemic, and it must be workable and meaningful, not just to those of you here practiced in the artful formulations of statecraft, but to the citizens that we serve. Because the success and survival of the rules-based order depends on it both being fair and being seen as fair, on working and being seen to work, upholding sovereignty, not just for the biggest powers or the loudest voices, but for every nation. Sovereignty that confers on every nation the right to determine its own destiny, to enjoy freedom of action and policy independence.

The right to make our own choices, to speak for ourselves and our interests, free of external pressure or duress. To pursue opportunities for our people without fear of coercion or retribution. To have confidence in the integrity of our borders, including our maritime zones, and control of our own resources. If this breaks down, if one nation imagines itself too big for the rules or too powerful to be held to the standards that the rest of us respect, then our region's strategic stability is undermined and our individual national sovereignty is eroded. That's why, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea matters to all of us in this region. Its role is not simply to adjudicate on an incident-by-incident basis; it's to guarantee the security of our communications and our maritime trade and travel, essential for our shared prosperity.

The same is true for the rules which govern global trade, where we need to make sure that the deals we arrive at deliver greater opportunity for our people and industries and economies. Because delivering stronger economic stability and facilitating closer exchange between our businesses and educational institutions and citizens is critical to building security in the region.

For as long as Australia has made our own foreign policy, our alliance with the United States has been central to it. Ours has always been a bond of shared values and it remains a partnership of shared strategic interest, a common determination to preserve stability, prosperity and peace. Australia has also helped to build the regional architecture that has grown to be so important for stability in our region, including recognising the centrality of ASEAN. Of course, Australia has also always been a strong supporter of multilateral institutions and a constructive contributor to them.

A great Australian, a former Labor leader Doc Evatt, played an instrumental role as an advocate for the formation of the United Nations and was a driving force in the drafting and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Evatt and Australia, this was a matter of principle and practicality because he didn't want the future entrusted to a 'great power peace' alone. He wanted middle powers and smaller nations to have a seat at the table and to be able to make a contribution to their collective security. The wisdom of that approach endures.

Of course, as I said before, bilateral dialogue is vital, but when relations are strained, bilateral talks can sometimes be reduced to a list of topics to avoid or be seen and judged through the prism of a single

issue to be solved. Whereas multilateral forums, the regional and the global, provide a new perspective, placing points of tension in the broader context where they belong. They safeguard our capacity to argue constructively and disagree respectfully. Might I add, events such as this are part of that process as well. Better still, they remind us what we can achieve when we do agree, the challenges we can overcome if we work together, from climate change to the threat of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is a cause I've been passionate about since I was a university student. It's one of the issues that drew me to a life in politics. And I wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge this region's long-standing commitment to nuclear disarmament, from the creation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in the 1970s, through to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Bangkok Treaty in the 1990s. The citizens of this region have shown an unflinching commitment to preventing the spread of these destructive, inhumane and indiscriminate weapons, recognising from the outset that this vital process could not be safely left to the Cold War mindset, with nations operating as counter-balancing pairs. It depended on multilateral rule-making.

Of course, we know this is not a danger that belongs only to history. North Korea's extraordinarily reckless launch of ballistic missiles and Russia's reprehensible threats to use nuclear force underscore the ongoing necessity of cooperative action and global rules to drive disarmament. Multilateral forums also remind us of the opportunities we can grasp if we cooperate, in everything from sustainable development to the global shift to clean energy. This understanding is at the heart of Australia's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with ASEAN, where we are seeking to provide practical support for the outlook on the Indo-Pacific, because while our existing trade agreements play an important role, we recognise we need to do more here in the region.

And that's why my government appointed Australia's first Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, Nicholas Moore, who is driving Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040. The strategy will identify new opportunities to strengthen our shared economic future. It will build on Australia's existing contribution to the key needs of Southeast Asian countries, particularly energy security, food security and infrastructure investment. It's that same spirit of practical partnership that drives our engagement with the Pacific Islands Forum, working with our partners, our equals, and neighbours and our family on the basis of respect. And whether it is in Australia's engagement in the Pacific, our support for ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, our founding pride in APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), our faith in the leadership of the G20 – none of this is altered or supplanted by our participation in the revitalised Quad or, indeed, our new AUKUS agreement.

Before I stood alongside President Biden and Prime Minister Sunak to announce Australia's pathway to acquiring conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines, I ensured that my government spoke with every ASEAN and Pacific partner and many other nations – more than 60 calls, being open and transparent with the region about our intentions. Being clear with the region and the world that Australia remains strongly committed to our obligations under the NPT and the Treaty of Rarotonga, and as well to cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency to set the highest standards for any country acquiring this capability.

More broadly, I think my friend President Widodo made a really valuable point in the course of talking about the goal of making the region a stable and peaceful one when he said that the Quad and AUKUS should work as partners and not competitors. Partners, not competitors. That's very much Australia's view and it is precisely our approach. The submarines we are acquiring, the single biggest leap in Australia's defence capability in our history, reflect our determination to live up to those expectations, to be a stronger partner and a more effective contributor to stability in our region.

Multilateral institutions are essential to writing the rules and keeping them relevant, but reinforcing the rules and upholding them depends on our capability as well. Because Australia was not just one of the first countries to work on creating the United Nations, we were also part of the first UN peacekeeping mission supporting the independence of Indonesia, backing our words with our deeds. Our government's investments in new capability and technology and personnel are, unapologetically, about our national defence and our national sovereignty. But they are also an investment in regional stability, strengthening our capacity to contribute to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific, from shared peacekeeping missions such as the regional assistance mission in the Solomon Islands, to providing essential support in times of humanitarian and environmental disaster, most recently in Vanuatu.

Australia is determined to deepen this cooperation with more shared exercises, building on the recent success of *Talisman Sabre* and our flagship regional engagement activity, Indo-Pacific Endeavour. In boosting our nation's defence capability, Australia's goal is not to prepare for war, but to prevent it through deterrence and reassurance and building resilience in the region, doing our part to fulfil the shared responsibility all of us have to preserve peace and security. And making it crystal clear that when it comes to any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force, be it in Taiwan, the South China Sea, the East China Sea or elsewhere, the risk of conflict will always far outweigh any potential reward.

Can I conclude by saying that before Shangri-La was an important dialogue or indeed the name of a hotel, it was an old story. The tale of a remote mountain paradise where time passed more slowly, safely cut off from the cares of the world. Yet for us, as leaders and thinkers and decision-makers, Shangri-La is about dealing with uncertain, uneven, fast-moving complexity. Even in the life of this forum, we can see how quickly the ground can shift. When this Dialogue first convened, it was in the shadow of the 11 September 2001 attacks and on the threshold of new wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. When Kevin Rudd became the first Australian Prime Minister to address this forum in 2009, he said the question at the forefront of every nation's mind was the global financial crisis. He also cautioned against strategic drift and emphasised the need for robust structures in a dynamic environment. We could see the wisdom of that by the time Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull spoke here in 2017, warning of fighters in Syria and Iraq seeking to return to this region and the need for revitalised cooperation against the emerging threat of cyber crime.

We can never know for sure the timing or indeed the nature of the next shock that our region will face. The test for all of us is not predicting when that challenge will arise; it's how we respond when it does. Recognising our collective agency and our shared responsibility, understanding that there is no security to be found in isolation, no growth or prosperity to be gained from closing ourselves off from the world. No stability without respect for sovereignty, no lasting peace without engaging with each other and working together.

That's why Australia is invested and engaged and committed to Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Australia is engaged not as a spectator or a commentator, not calling for others to act while we stand and watch, not urging nations down a path we are not prepared to walk ourselves. Australia is engaged as a champion for peace and prosperity in the region and the world, and as a constructive and committed contributor to the solutions to the challenges that all of us will face in the years ahead. Investing in our capability and investing in our relationships, working to shape the future, not waiting for the future to shape us. Thank you very much.