

Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Securing Australia's future in a changing world

Australian foreign policy for a new era

Statement by Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs
Senator the Hon Penny Wong
November 2026

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to all First Nations peoples, to their cultures, and to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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ISBN 978-1-74322-647-6 (print)
ISBN 978-1-74322-648-3 (online)

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Introduction

When the Albanese Government came to office in 2022, we knew Australia needed a new foreign policy. We could not assume that the conditions that supported Australia's security and prosperity for decades would continue. Nor could we afford to remain overly reliant on a single security partner or a single trading partner.

We understood the urgency of expanding our partnerships. We had to rebuild trust and invest in the region we share, after a decade of neglect and disrespect for our partners' priorities. We also had to make better use of every instrument of Australian national power.

Four years on, it is even clearer why this diplomatic transformation was necessary, and why the imperative remains today. The world, and our region, have changed – and continue to change – before our eyes.

Wars in Europe and the Middle East have upended the world's energy, food, and commodity markets and triggered a global inflation surge. Australians feel it at the bowser, at the checkout and in their mortgage repayments.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the foundations of our societies, cyber attacks are more frequent and dangerous, and trade settings, investment flows, shipping lanes, food security, undersea cables and critical minerals are all being weaponised in this new era.

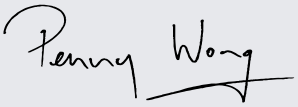
Climate change is compounding instability and threatening lives and livelihoods, while human rights and fundamental freedoms are under challenge. The great powers – the United States and China – are competing across every domain, with less regard for the guardrails that once kept competition from tipping into conflict.

I understand why Australians feel anxious about the turmoil in the world and its effects at home. *Securing Australia's future in a changing world* outlines how the Albanese Government is acting to protect and advance Australia's interests.

We are charting a foreign policy that is active, adaptive and ambitious. That is what Australia's continued security, confidence and prosperity demand in a time of rapid change. Ensuring, as a middle power, we can act to protect what we cherish and decide our own future. Seeking to shape outcomes so that we can continue to live in a region that is peaceful, stable and prosperous. Where countries, large and small, operate by the same rules and have space to agree and to disagree.

Faced with ever greater uncertainty and instability, we are also expanding our diplomatic options to maximise our sovereign choices. Australia is more present in our region, with more partners and more pathways.

It is my responsibility as Foreign Minister to explain Australia to the world, and the world to Australians. *Securing Australia's future in a changing world* therefore sets out the changes reshaping our world, the work we have done since 2022, and the course we must pursue from here. I do this with realism about the circumstances we face, but with equal conviction in our capacity to meet the moment.



Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs

How the world is changing

Power has always shaped the international system. The international order that emerged from the Second World War was not sustained by rules alone. It was also sustained by power and by a shared interest in preventing the return of catastrophic conflict. It reflected some key characteristics: respect for state sovereignty, human rights, and open trade.

The order was never perfect. Rules were not always applied consistently, and the powerful did not always accept the same constraints they expected of others – as parts of our region felt deeply. For all its imperfections, it established expectations or norms about how countries should behave, how disputes should be resolved and how sovereignty should be respected.

What is changing today is the great powers' willingness to exercise power, without accepting the constraints that make international order possible, in ways not seen since the height of the Cold War. Rules without power cannot secure peace. Power without rules cannot sustain it.

Shifts reshaping the international system

We see six fundamental shifts reshaping the international system – changing who holds power, the sources of that power, and how it is exercised.

The **first** shift is the growing and more frequent threat or use of force and coercion. The clearest example is Russia – a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – continuing its illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine: a large state claiming the right to determine a smaller neighbour's future and carve up its territory.

We cannot allow that proposition to succeed. That is why Australia has provided nearly $1.9 billion in support to Ukraine including military aid, imposed almost 1,900 sanctions on Russia and those who enable its invasion, and in September 2026 signed a Bilateral Security Agreement with Ukraine. Russia's war is brought closer to our region through direct support from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which continues its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in violation of UNSC Resolutions.

China is also undertaking the largest military build-up by any country since the Second World War, without the transparency and reassurance the region expects. China has militarised disputed features across the South China Sea. We also see encounters at sea and in the air that increase the risk of miscalculation and serious incidents.

Second, the two great powers have both fundamentally shifted how they define and pursue their interests. This rethinking manifests in other changes: what they seek to achieve, the role they intend to play and how they compete.

The relationship between the United States (US) and China remains the central strategic dynamic of our time, nowhere more so than in our region. As a great power, China will continue to assert itself in reshaping the region and the world. China is using its substantial economic weight and growing military capability to reshape the Indo-Pacific in ways more closely aligned with its own interests. It is also intensifying its efforts to remake the multilateral system as evidenced by a host of initiatives which reach deep into existing global bodies.

At the same time, the US has been clear that it is changing its priorities, how and where it applies its resources and what it expects partners to contribute. The 2025 US National Security Strategy says the 'days of the United States propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over'. It states that the US will focus more on the Western Hemisphere and expects allies to carry more of the burden of regional security.

This change in US strategic posture does not alter the formidable fundamentals of American power: a dynamic economy, unmatched global military power, and an indispensable role in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific. The US is a vigorous democracy with the ability to remake and reimagine itself. The direction of its foreign policy is still being contested at home in ways that will affect the entire world.

The **third** shift is the distribution of power. Like Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and others are bringing growing economic, diplomatic and military weight to bear. By some estimates, the number of mid-sized powers has nearly doubled since the end of the Cold War. In contrast, the combined share of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) held by the US and China has largely plateaued since 2015. A more fragmented and complex world is emerging, one in which Australia must work to build alignment with partners who share our interests.

Fourth, trade, investment and technology that have lifted living standards and created powerful incentives for peace are increasingly also being used as levers of power. History demonstrates a strategic dimension to economic power, but today's unprecedented economic integration is being deliberately deployed for strategic purpose.

Concentrated supply chains, control of essential resources and restrictions on access to markets are being used to narrow the choices available to others. The economic interdependence that once acted to constrain conflict has now become a means of coercion. Restrictions on rare earths exports have shown how quickly concentrated supply chains can become chokepoints. Australians know from experience what it means to be on the receiving end of the exercise of economic power.

The **fifth** shift is that technology is transforming the foundations and dimensions of economic and strategic power. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies are spreading and disrupting faster than any previous revolutionary technologies – reordering our lives, economies and militaries in ways we cannot fully foresee. Technology is already changing how wars are fought, how information is manipulated, and how foreign actors can interfere in our societies.

The threat of foreign interference is also becoming more sophisticated. In September 2026, OpenAI reported that it disrupted an Iran-based operation using seven fictitious journalist personas to place almost 100 articles in online publications to influence public opinion on the conflict between the United States and Iran. According to the New York Times, Russia authorised

covert online disinformation operations, harnessing AI-generated deepfakes and impersonations of major news organisations to influence US elections.

We have long known that actors beyond our shores seek to interfere in Australia's democracy and in the lives of those who call Australia home. These tools make that interference faster, cheaper and harder to recognise.

Sixth, it is becoming more challenging for countries to exercise power together. International institutions are under financial and political strain, and consensus is more difficult to reach. Trust is being eroded across our societies as well as the international system. When the capacity to act collectively is weakened, every other challenge becomes harder. It is increasingly costly for middle powers and smaller nations to simply hold the strategic space they have, let alone expand it.

These developments are confronting. However, they do not warrant fatalism. Nor can they be answered by nostalgia for a world that no longer exists. The question is how we use our strengths to shape our future.

Prosperity as a strategic interest

The purpose of foreign policy is to advance Australians' security and prosperity. This encompasses the jobs Australians do, the pay they earn, the cost of energy and essential goods, the markets available to our farmers and exporters, and the opportunities we create for the next generation.

Foreign policy starts and ends at home. Our economic and foreign policies must therefore reinforce one another. Foreign policy helps enable a strong economy, which in turn gives us the means to become even stronger by investing in defence, diplomacy, intelligence and development – which also gives us the capacity to contribute to the growth and resilience of our region.

Prosperity is not simply what funds our statecraft; it is at the very heart of it. When Australia is a reliable seller of food, energy and critical minerals, we strengthen the relationships that sustain our economy and security, and those of our neighbours and trading partners. When Australian investment helps build a port, an energy network or an undersea cable in our region, we are helping create economic opportunity and reducing strategic vulnerability.

Australia is one of the world's 20 largest economies, 14th by nominal GDP in 2025. China is our largest trading partner, but the foundations of our prosperity are far wider and deeper.

In March 2026, we concluded negotiations on the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement after eight years of talks. Once the agreement enters into force, it will give 98 per cent of Australian goods exports duty-free entry to a market of some 450 million people and mean Australia's network of free trade agreements will cover 88 per cent of Australia's global trade. Australia's network of free trade agreements is a national asset and the envy of the world. It shows the direction of our economic statecraft: more partners, more pathways, more markets, and greater resilience.

Southeast Asia is on track to be the world's fourth-largest economy by 2040. Our economic future is overwhelmingly tied to the success of the region in which we live. The region also has an interest in Australia's continued strength and reliability.

That is why we commissioned former Macquarie Group CEO Nicholas Moore as Special Envoy for Southeast Asia to develop *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* – a blueprint to build shared prosperity, create economic opportunity and build alignment between Australia and the countries of our region. *Invested* has already supported

$4.5 billion in new Australian investment in the region. In 2025, our two-way goods and services trade with Southeast Asia increased by $3.5 billion to a record high of $197.5 billion, and our two-way investment increased by $6.2 billion to $296.2 billion. In 2025–2026 in total, we recorded $1.37 trillion worth of two-way trade, which is up $300 billion since we came to government in 2022.

These outcomes underscore why we will remain a strong advocate for free, open and non-discriminatory trade which benefits Australia and our region. We must remain open while reducing the vulnerabilities that others might exploit. Resilience is not found in retreat from the world.



Australia's power

We are a nation of talented people, living on a continent of resources. We have a sophisticated economy, a capable Defence Force and diplomatic service, deep international partnerships and a society connected to every part of our region and the globe. Our geography places us at the meeting point of the Indian, Pacific and Southern oceans, in a region that is central to global growth and security, where the future of the 21st century is being made.

Australia's economic weight, and our capacity to continue to grow, are fundamental sources of our power and our ability to project it. We have abundant renewable and traditional energy investment opportunities, and new ones in green technologies and industries. We have world-class critical minerals and metal ores in a trusted jurisdiction. We are a digital hub in the Indo-Pacific, and the Pacific's largest and most comprehensive development partner.

Our $4.8 trillion superannuation system is also one of the largest pools of patient capital in the world. All of these strengths help finance opportunities here and abroad. Our exports of strategic goods and services including education, resources, food, energy and critical minerals are essential to our region's prosperity and stability. That our neighbours value the opportunity to participate in our economy and in our labour market is a strategic asset for Australia.

Our Defence Force, intelligence agencies and partnerships help us understand, anticipate, deter and respond to threats. We are also delivering

the largest peacetime increase in defence spending in our history – an extra $117 billion over the decade.

Australia's diplomatic network spans 172 overseas posts and consulates in more than 90 countries around the world. This presence enables us to promote Australia's interests in peace, security, trade, investment and other areas of cooperation.

Our national power starts with who we are. We are home to the oldest continuous culture on the planet. More than half of Australians were born overseas or have a parent who was, including Prime Minister Albanese and me. Australia's communities speak the languages and understand the societies of the region in which we live. It is a source of Australian capability and Australian influence.

The aim of statecraft is to bring these strengths together, to make the whole bigger than the parts: diplomacy supported by defence, intelligence that informs decisions, development assistance that builds resilience, trade and investment that create shared value, and institutions that allow us to act collectively. In Opposition, I emphasised the need for the coordinated deployment of all aspects of state power – strategic, diplomatic, social, economic – to maximise Australia's power and influence.

When we came to government, as well as resetting foreign policy, we commissioned the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) to assess whether Australia's defence capabilities, posture and preparedness were suited to the strategic circumstances we faced. The DSR called for a fundamental change in our approach to defence, recognising that Australia could no longer rely on all the old assumptions. It recommended a new approach to national defence, and an Australian Defence Force capable of deterring threats and projecting further from our shores. Through AUKUS and our pathway to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines, along with record investment in Defence capabilities, we are putting that into practice.

We have also introduced the concept of *National Defence* which recognises that all arms of national power are required to meet our strategic circumstances. As the DSR put it, 'statecraft also requires the utilisation of all elements of national power.' This is our task. We must use all tools at our disposal to ensure our security and our prosperity with a strategic balance of power.

We have sought to harness strategic finance as a tool of national power. Export Finance Australia (EFA) and our Pacific and Southeast Asia financing facilities turn economic potential into infrastructure, enterprise and connections that make our countries more resilient and give us more choices. So do education, labour mobility, language capability and the relationships between our peoples. No single element is enough alone. Their power comes from the way they reinforce one another.

Our approach is adaptive, because the means must change as circumstances change. Earlier this year, we demonstrated that adaptability by creating and using Export Finance Australia's new powers to help secure petrol, diesel, jet fuel and fertiliser in the face of global disruption.

It is active and focused, because a middle power must continually direct its effort and resources where they matter most – where it can reduce a vulnerability, change a calculation or build a coalition. It is also ambitious, because Australians should not be content to simply accept a region, or a world, shaped by others.

We want to help shape it ourselves, in Australia's interests. We are pursuing that ambition in our foreign policy through four priorities: our region, our relationships, the rules that protect us all, and our resilience.

Tools of national power



Ministerial engagement



International law



Trade, investment and industry



Diplomatic engagement



Development assistance



Military power



Human rights



Multilateral engagement



Policing and law enforcement



Education and research



Migration



Intelligence



Economy and workforce



Science and technology



Resilient communities



Strategic communications



Disarmament and non-proliferation



Humanitarian support



Strategic finance



Trusted institutions

Investing in Southeast Asia in 2025

Two-way trade with Southeast Asia increased to a record

A$197.5 billion

Two-way investment with Southeast Asia increased to

A$296.2 billion

A$4.5 billion

in new committed Australian investment has been supported under *Invested*

including

A$330 million

under the Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility (SEAIFF)

A$77 million

for Singapore's Financing Asia's Transition Partnership (FAST-P)

bolstered by an additional

A$100 million

through Export Finance Australia's Commercial Account financing

FAST-P is already making a difference, funding:

Hydropower projects in Indonesia

Solar and battery storage projects across Southeast Asia, including in the Philippines

Bioenergy projects across the region

A$175 million

into IFM Investors' Asia Pacific Debt Fund

To support projects in:

- **Renewable energy**
- **Telecommunications**
- **Logistics**

IFM established an **office in Singapore** and is already investing in agribusiness projects

A$77 million

for a new Public-Private Partnership regional infrastructure fund

To support projects in:

- **Healthcare**
- **Education**
- **Transport**

Investing in the Pacific

Australia
is the Pacific's largest economic partner

Two-way trade in goods and services with the Pacific increased by
20 per cent
in the last year

in 2026

A$2.1 billion
in committed project financing, supported by Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP)

Projects in
13 countries
across the Pacific and Timor-Leste

67 projects
signed and announced

36 off-grid
renewable energy projects

All Pacific Islands Forum members connected to undersea international telecommunications, with
10,300 kilometres
of cables delivered

2.5 million
customers communicating across the Pacific, supported by the Australian Government-backed acquisition of Digicel Pacific by Telstra





Region

Our security begins in our region; that is why it is our first foreign policy priority. The Indo-Pacific is where we have the most on the line, and where our actions can make the greatest difference, across three oceans and three continents.

In my first year as Foreign Minister, I travelled to every Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) member and every Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) country, with the exception of Myanmar. That was deliberate. We wanted our neighbours to know that with the change in government, there would be a change in approach. Australia would now show up as an equal partner, listen with respect, and follow through on our promises.

As I have said before, we do not just live here; we are not bystanders. We are architects, and for the past four years we have been building Australia's future in our region.

Papua New Guinea, our closest neighbour, is now our ally. The Pukpuk Treaty entered into force in July 2026 – Papua New Guinea's first alliance, and Australia's first new alliance in more than 70 years. In 2028, the PNG Chiefs will also enter the National Rugby League competition.

The Ocean of Peace Alliance, proposed by Prime Minister Rabuka and signed in Suva in July 2026, will make Fiji our newest ally – alongside the Vuvale Union, which lifts our partnership across security, our economies and our people. The Falepili Union responds to the existential challenge of climate change for Tuvalu, with a deeper partnership on security and a world-first mobility pathway. The Nauru-Australia Treaty supports essential banking and makes provisions for decisions about security and critical infrastructure to be taken together.

The Nakamal Agreement, signed in June 2026, recognises Vanuatu's economic aspirations, cultural connections, and its sovereign decision not to allow foreign military bases or the militarisation of critical infrastructure. We have signed a Statement of Intent to elevate our partnership with the Kingdom of Tonga through a Kaume'a Ofi (close friends) agreement. We are also finalising a new comprehensive treaty with Solomon Islands, which will elevate and deepen our partnership.

These agreements – unthinkable in 2021 – are a result of our unflagging diplomatic efforts and the reliability and credibility we have with our Pacific partners. We have offered partnership that is enduring, practical and respectful – that strengthens Pacific regionalism to answer the region's challenges.

We have listened to what the Pacific has been telling us for years: that climate change is the greatest threat to their security, livelihoods and wellbeing. Where the previous government refused to take it seriously and even joked about water lapping at the Pacific's doors, we have put climate action at the heart of our engagement. When we asked Pacific partners what their priority was for climate finance, their idea was the Pacific Resilience Facility.

Australia therefore provided the foundational $100 million investment to establish the first Pacific-led, owned and managed climate resilience fund, putting resources directly into the hands of communities to prepare for disasters, adapt to climate change and protect their livelihoods.

Australia has also helped deliver more than 10,300 kilometres of new undersea cables in the region, ensuring every PIF member is now connected to the global cable network. Whether it is our $400 million support for the Pacific Policing Initiative or our $600 million contribution to the Pacific Islands Forum 'Waqa Moana' initiative to combat illegal drug trafficking, our work reflects the principle that guides our engagement: Pacific-led, Australia-backed.

When we support the PIF vision of an Ocean of Peace, we are describing a region in which security comes from cooperation among its own peoples, not from the security ambitions of outsiders.

We have rebuilt Australia's development program after almost a decade of cuts. As global aid has been cut, we have also reprioritised our region. Today, more than 75 cents in every Australian development dollar goes to the Indo-Pacific.

Recognising the unique cultural connections between First Nations Australians and our region that stretch back thousands of years as a source of strategic national advantage, we have also released Australia's first-ever First Nations International Engagement Strategy to help strenghten our relationships.

The PIF and ASEAN are at the heart of our region's architecture. In Southeast Asia, we support ASEAN centrality because a strong and cohesive ASEAN contributes to the balance, stability and prosperity of the whole region. We were proud to support Timor-Leste in becoming ASEAN's 11th member in 2025.

During my first bilateral visit to my birthplace of Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, I said it matters that Australia speaks with Southeast Asia in a way that recognises that we are part of this region. Our futures are shared.

In my time as Foreign Minister, Australia has strengthened relationships with Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Brunei, Timor-Leste and others. We have upgraded our defence and security partnerships with Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste. We hosted the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Melbourne in March 2024, attended by every ASEAN country except Myanmar. We have increased our support for maritime cooperation in the region, because the maritime domain is the heart of our region's shared security, prosperity and stability.

We have also written a new chapter in our relationship with Indonesia. When (then) Foreign Minister Sugiono and I first discussed the Treaty on Common Security, I was driven by one unassailable truth: that there is no more important country to Australia than Indonesia. It was therefore with great pride that, in February 2026, I accompanied the Prime Minister to Jakarta to sign the Treaty on Common Security (the Jakarta Treaty) with President Prabowo – the most consequential agreement between our countries in three decades.

With Singapore, we are working even more closely together on essential supplies, economic resilience and trade, from the Green Economy Agreement to practical cooperation on food security. The lesson of the Strait of Hormuz oil shock is that relationships and trust must be built before a crisis, not in the middle of one. For example, when the Strait closed in February 2026, the trust we had built with Singapore – which supplies more than half of our petrol – meant that, within weeks, our leaders committed to keeping essential supplies flowing both ways, and in July, we signed a new Protocol on Economic Resilience and Essential Supplies.

We are trusted because we listen. We show up. We do what we say we will do. Our partners' trust and resilience are mutually reinforcing. Their prosperity strengthens ours and their capacity to make sovereign decisions helps build the balanced region that all of us need.

Fuel Security Taskforce

Australian Government agencies stepped up economic security efforts to secure access to the goods, resources and markets that underpin Australia's prosperity, including liquid fuels.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) strengthened Australia's fuel security by working with industry, and negotiating joint approaches and leader-level commitments on energy with key partners – Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, and in regional forums and the Quad. 80 per cent of Australia's refined fuel imports came from countries with whom we have joint statements.

Our fuel diplomacy gave markets confidence that fuel would continue to arrive in Australia, and supported regional energy security, including in the Pacific.

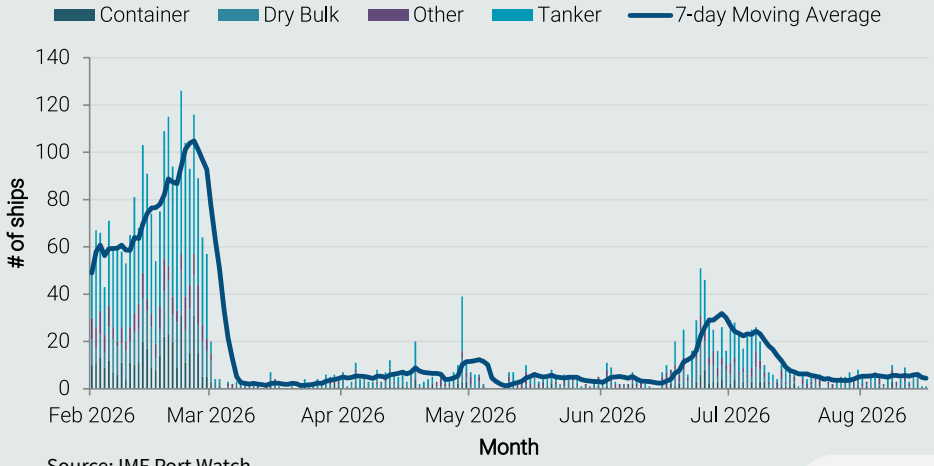
In response to the Middle East crisis, the Australian Government stood up the Fuel and Fertiliser Security Facility, delivered by Export Finance Australia, to shore up Australia's fuel and fertiliser supplies.

340,000 tonnes
Agricultural grade urea

154 million
litres additional jet fuel

780 million
litres additional diesel

Strait of Hormuz transit calls # of ships, data to August 2026



Source: IMF Port Watch

Strengthening climate resilience in agriculture

Australia is working with Southeast Asia to invest in our collective prosperity. Through *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* the Government has supported $4.5 billion in new committed Australian investment.

After an *Invested*-linked business mission to Thailand, Australian company Earth Systems struck a partnership agreement and multimillion-dollar export sale of its technology that converts biomass into biochar, a charcoal-like material that can improve soil health, support carbon storage and be used in higher-value products, such as carbon fibre.

Earth Systems has now built and opened a biochar production facility in northern Thailand, helping to develop a biochar industry, attract investment and build local capability in cleaner, more sustainable food production.

By fostering investment in our region, we create new jobs for Australians, new ideas, new technology and new markets for Australian products, which ultimately help deliver better jobs and better opportunities here at home.



Fertiliser supplies

The Strait of Hormuz oil shock highlighted the value Australia derives from regional partnerships, particularly during times of crisis.

It was our Southeast Asian partners who stepped up to supply Australia with nearly 1.7 million metric tonnes of fertiliser, meeting the shortfall caused by disrupted supply chains from Gulf states. This meant Southeast Asia has supplied over 60 per cent of our urea fertiliser since the crisis began.

For example, Indonesia was quick to offer Australia access to stores of its agricultural grade urea at a time when Australia faced critical shortages. DFAT facilitated an agreement between Indonesian fertiliser company PT Pupuk and Australia's Incitec Pivot to supply an additional 250,000 metric tonnes of urea, with the first shipment arriving in Brisbane in June 2026.

This arrangement underscored the spirit of partnership that embodies the Jakarta Treaty, as well as the intent of both countries to support each other's economic security and resilience.

This demonstrated the mutual benefit and complementarities between our economies: Indonesian fertiliser helped Australian farmers grow crops; and food exported to Indonesia helped meet demand and reinforced its food security.



When I addressed the National Press Club in 2023, I focused on: *'…how we avert war and maintain peace – and more than that, how we shape a region that reflects our national interests and our shared regional interests.'*

Our strategic objective is straightforward: a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. We seek a region where no country dominates, and no country is dominated. In such a region, states large and small can make their own sovereign choices. Differences are managed through dialogue. No country believes it can secure its interests by coercing another.

In our region, we know there are several places where the potential for conflict exists. These include the South and East China Seas. The potential for conflict also exists on the Korean Peninsula. It also exists across the Taiwan Strait.

Australia's positions are consistent and clear. We put diplomacy at the front line and advocate approaches that prevent miscalculation leading to conflict. We call for differences to be managed peacefully through dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion, and oppose any unilateral change to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

For Australia and the world, the best outcome is the preservation of peace and stability. Our task is to contribute all we can to avert crisis and conflict. That requires both reassurance and deterrence. Reassurance means making clear that every country has more to gain from peace. Deterrence means ensuring that no potential aggressor concludes that force will succeed at an acceptable cost.

Conflict prevention

A peaceful and stable region underpins Australia's security and prosperity, keeping trade flowing, supply chains open and Australians secure.

In October 2025, Australia and ASEAN Leaders agreed to the ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Statement on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the ASEAN-led regional architecture, strengthening regional cooperation to de-escalate tensions and prevent crises. This outcome followed sustained Australian diplomacy to build the habits of cooperation and dialogue essential for long-term peace.

ASEAN-Australia Track 2 discussions in January 2024 progressed to Track 1.5 engagement in December 2024 and, in September 2025, a formal Track 1 Workshop co-chaired by Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia involving all East Asia Summit (EAS) participating countries. Australia is now working with ASEAN partners to translate the leaders' commitments into practical action, including strengthening the EAS Ambassadors Group in Jakarta and exploring early warning mechanisms.



Relationships

Our second foreign policy priority is to deepen the partnerships that give Australia more options, reflecting our alliances, our geography and the values and interests we share with countries across the world.

The US is Australia's closest ally and principal strategic partner. The US has made a fundamental contribution to the stability of the Indo-Pacific and continues to do so. During the darkest days of the Second World War, when Prime Minister John Curtin declared that Australia 'looks to America', US forces were indispensable to our security and Allied victory in the Pacific. We fought side by side with the US for more than seven decades.

Today, the alliance enhances our security, gives us access to advanced technology and intelligence we could not acquire on our own, and bolsters our capacity to deter aggression. Through AUKUS, force posture initiatives, and our wider defence cooperation, our alliance lifts the capability we can bring to our own defence and in turn to regional stability.

Our economic relationship is equally important. The US is Australia's largest source of foreign investment, and the relationship supports hundreds of thousands of Australian jobs. The Critical Minerals Framework the Prime Minister and President Trump signed in October 2025 is backing a US$8.5 billion pipeline of projects.

The US has never stood still. Its approach to the world, and what it asks of partners, has evolved. In 1969, President Nixon said America would honour its commitments but expected allies to take greater responsibility for their own defence. Similarly, President Trump has always been clear that he envisages a different role for America in the world, even before he was elected.

There are those who say uncertainty about American policy means Australia should abandon America. They ignore the vibrancy of American democracy, the dynamism of its economy and its contribution to the prosperity of our region. They also present a retreat from the alliance as a road to autonomy, ignoring and even undermining Australia's standing as an already independent, sovereign nation.

What they would do is surrender a central source of Australian strategic weight at precisely the moment we need every opportunity for influence available to us. What they would do is give us fewer choices. They would leave us more vulnerable. They would reduce our capacity to contribute to a regional balance in which our sovereignty can be protected.

The Albanese Government has never relied on the alliance alone to secure our future. Instead, we have shaped it, while building greater Australian capability and a wider network of effective partnerships. That is why amplified middle power diplomacy has been a constant for the Albanese Government since day one, when the Prime Minister and I travelled to Tokyo for the Quad, hours after being sworn in.

In October 2022, Prime Minister Albanese and then-Prime Minister Kishida renewed our Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. Japan's economic strength, strategic resolve and growing defence cooperation with Australia contribute to regional balance. In May 2026, Prime Ministers Albanese and Takaichi agreed to enhance defence and security cooperation even further, strengthening our respective capability and deepening integration of our defence industries.

India's growing weight creates new opportunities for economic diversification and a more balanced regional order. Our leaders' 2026 Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation committed us to closer strategic consultation, more complex exercises and stronger practical cooperation. As the world's largest emerging economy, India is a major strategic partner whose choices will help shape this century. We have introduced *A New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India* as part of how we are seizing the opportunity that our relationship with India presents.

With over half of Australia's sea-borne exports departing from Indian Ocean ports, our partnerships in the Indian Ocean – anchored in our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India – are also building resilience in maritime security and sovereignty.

When Australians look west, we see the Indian Ocean. We are bound not just by shared geography, but by the shared destiny of our interests.

We seek to preserve the sovereign character of our own nations, and the open, inclusive and rules-based character of our region. Australia was proud to host the 7th Indian Ocean Conference in Perth in February 2024 to discuss these shared priorities and new habits of cooperation and collaboration.

The Republic of Korea is a major industry, investment and technology partner. We have upgraded trade and investment cooperation, including on clean energy and critical minerals, and reaffirmed energy security cooperation.

Together with the US, Japan and India, we are also working through the Quad on practical cooperation that supports an open and stable Indo-Pacific – delivering concrete outcomes that improve the lives of our peoples and those across the region.

At the Quad Leaders' Summit in November 2026, leaders announced the establishment of an inaugural Quad Business Leaders' Forum, and advanced practical cooperation to support the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific in the areas of: AI, maritime domain awareness, cyber security, counterterrorism, and enhancing access to secure and trusted communications infrastructure through the Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience.

The Albanese Government has worked deliberately to stabilise our relationship with China. China is Australia's largest trading partner, and we will continue to cooperate where we can, including on the clean energy transition. The relationship has enduring strengths, grounded in the deep and longstanding connections between our peoples, across generations, education, culture and commerce – connections that helped sustain ties during the recent downturn.

Through calm and consistent diplomacy, trade impediments that were costing our exporters $20 billion a year have been removed. We will clearly state our views on the issues that matter to Australians.

We recognise that frank dialogue does not eliminate differences; it helps us manage them: cooperating where we can, disagreeing where we must and reducing the risk of mistakes and missteps. We believe a stable relationship, in which differences can be managed, is better for Australia, better for China and better for our region.

The United Kingdom (UK) and Australia of course share history, but we also share values and interests – and the UK remains an essential security and technology partner, including through AUKUS. Canada is deepening cooperation with us on critical minerals, AI and defence technology.

The European Union (EU) is an essential partner in projecting the influence of rules in the global system. With the EU, we have concluded free trade negotiations and signed a Security and Defence Partnership. Together, they widen the markets open to Australia and the cooperation possible on cyber, critical minerals, economic security and defence.

We are also working through smaller and more flexible groupings, including with Canada, New Zealand and the UK, and through MIKTA – Mexico,

Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and Türkiye – which Australia is chairing in 2026 is an example of bringing different experiences, perspectives and priorities to the table, while working to find common ground on the challenges we share.

Our work to contribute momentum to peace in the Middle East also demonstrates the value of these different groupings. With Canada, the UK and other partners, Australia has recognised Palestine, established a new International Peace Fund for Israelis and Palestinians, sanctioned extremists, pushed for disarmament of terrorist group Hamas and condemned its 7 October 2023 attacks that killed Australian Galit Carbone, and advocated for and delivered humanitarian assistance to Gaza. We have used our voice, our humanitarian aid and our partnerships to protect lives, uphold international law and keep the hope of a two-state solution alive.

Across the United Nations (UN) system, we often work with Canada and New Zealand, to multiply our presence and effect beyond what one country could accomplish in a multiplicity of forums and issues.

In Africa, we have strengthened relationships with South Africa, Kenya and Ghana, including growing trade and investment in mining and other critical sectors. We have backed the African Union's G20 membership, and we are increasingly working with African partners to shape the international institutions and decisions that protect us all.

We are also strengthening our relationships in Latin America, including with growing trade and investment, and deeper collaboration in multilateral forums. My Chilean counterpart and I have announced that we will upgrade our bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership.

Amplified middle power diplomacy characterises our approach – bringing together countries that can achieve more in partnership than any one of us could achieve alone.

Australia–European Union Free Trade Agreement

In March 2026, we concluded negotiations on the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement (A-EU FTA) after eight years of talks.

Once the agreement enters into force, it will give 98 per cent of Australian goods exports duty-free entry to a market of some 450 million people and mean Australia's network of trade agreements will cover 88 per cent of Australia's global trade. AU-EU FTA opens up new market access worth billions of dollars of new trade for Australian farmers, businesses, and exporters.

98 per cent
of Australian goods exports given duty-free entry to the EU

Lifting value of Australian trade covered by free trade agreements from 79 to
88 per cent

Entry to a market of some
450 million people



Rules

Our third foreign policy priority is to protect and strengthen the international rules that underpin everyday Australian life. These rules govern aircraft that carry our people and goods. They allocate the satellite spectrum and orbits on which our communications depend. They protect rights of navigation on the sea lanes that carry our trade. They set standards for food safety that stop people from getting sick. They help prevent more countries acquiring nuclear weapons.

For an open, trading nation and middle power like Australia, these rules are part of the essential infrastructure of our security and prosperity. Rules give us ways to manage disputes without allowing stronger countries to simply impose their will. For example, when our barley and wine exporters faced punitive duties, our action through the World Trade Organization, backed by patient diplomacy, helped restore their access.

Our support for rules is why we uphold and support international law, including the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – and it is why we are seeking a seat on the UNSC for 2029-2030.

Australia advocates globally for gender equality and the protection and promotion of human rights for all, including women and girls, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disability, children and older persons – because we believe equality reduces poverty, strengthens social cohesion, unlocks economic productivity and enhances prosperity for all.

As strong defenders of multilateralism, we cannot pretend that global and regional institutions are working as they should. The UN is facing serious financial pressures. Decision-making is too often paralysed by great power dynamics. At a time when we see the six shifts described earlier, the institutions charged with maintaining peace are too often unable to act.

Reform is necessary and we will promote the reform of institutions that are critical to Australia's interests. Countries must collectively decide what institutions are indispensable. That includes the UN Security Council. The Security Council remains central to our collective peace and security However, it must better reflect the world as it is in the 21st century.

We also must reform the peacebuilding and conflict prevention architecture. It requires investing in diplomacy and dialogue, reducing the risks of misunderstanding and miscalculation, and addressing the drivers of conflict before tensions become crises. We must be as committed to preventing wars as we are to ending them.

Middle powers would not help themselves by walking away from multilateralism because it is imperfect. It would leave a vacuum, and vacuums are rarely filled by peace. Our task is to preserve what we cannot afford to lose, improve what is failing and build new forms of cooperation where they are needed.

There are reasons for hope. The High Seas Biodiversity Treaty (also known as the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction) entered into force in 2026 after decades of negotiation, including sustained Australian advocacy. In November 2026, Australia is presiding over the negotiations at COP31, having brought leaders to the Pacific for the Pre-COP in October 2026.

Australia has also led international efforts to protect humanitarian workers in conflict. In September 2025, we launched the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel in honour of Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom, who was killed by the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza alongside six of her World Central Kitchen colleagues. The Declaration commits governments to practical action to protect aid workers, to ensure safe humanitarian access and to strengthen the accountability for attacks against those delivering lifesaving assistance. It is a demonstration that even in the face of conflict and division, countries want to come together to uphold international law and protect those who risk their lives to help others.

Together, these initiatives are evidence that countries still want a world in which cooperation is possible and the rules mean something.

New challenges, from AI to cyber threats and economic coercion, will demand new arrangements. As the Prime Minister told the UN General Assembly in September 2026, it means ‘building beyond multilateralism with new coalitions and partnerships to address and solve complex problems.’

Sometimes this will start within universal institutions. Sometimes it will begin with smaller coalitions of countries prepared to act together. At other times, the second could lead to the first – the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, for example, began with a small group of countries, and has now been endorsed by more than two-thirds of the UN, through patient and determined advocacy.

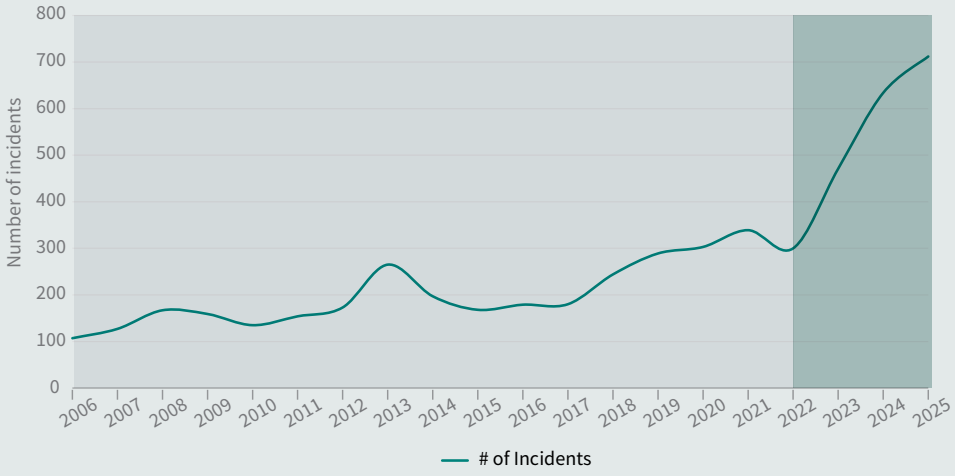
Protection of humanitarian personnel

Australia led the launch of the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel on 21 September 2025, mobilising international action in response to rising attacks on aid workers and eroding respect for international humanitarian law. More than 130 countries have since endorsed the Declaration, reflecting Australia's ability to build broad international support for stronger protection of frontline humanitarian personnel.

This leadership advances Australia's commitment to the international rules that prevent conflict and protect civilians, a pillar of Australia's 2029-2030 UNSC campaign. Australia is working with signatories to take practical action, including security training for aid workers, stronger incident tracking and evidence collection, expanded legal assistance for victims and families, and measures to counter mis- and disinformation and reinforce compliance with international humanitarian law.

Incidents affecting humanitarian personnel (2006–2025)

2023 saw a marked increase in incidents, with 471 incidents recorded (up from 300 in 2022). This trend continued into 2024 (634 incidents recorded) and 2025 (713 incidents recorded).



Source: Aid Worker Security Database 2023-2025

Resilience

Our fourth foreign policy priority is strengthening Australia's resilience – the capacity to absorb shocks, to make sound decisions under pressure and to act on them together. That capacity begins at home. A stronger, diverse economy is harder to coerce. Trusted institutions are harder to undermine. Secure infrastructure is harder to disrupt. A cohesive society is also harder to divide.

Much of this work is a whole-of-government effort. However, it should also be a whole-of-Australia effort – contributed to by industry, by businesses, by communities, by the Commonwealth, by the states and the territories, and by our political leaders of all stripes.

Our foreign policy has an important role to play. We help diversify markets and suppliers so that Australia is less exposed to concentrated risks – through agreements like our free trade agreement with the EU, critical minerals partnerships like our framework with the US, and our $1.2 billion Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve.

Australia's efforts in the world keep Australians more secure at home, but as the world becomes more uncertain and unstable, the Australian Government's support for Australians overseas is increasingly important. There are more than one million Australians overseas at any time. Following disasters and conflicts in recent years, DFAT assisted the departure of thousands of Australians from conflicts and crises around the world. We have provided consular support to thousands more Australians who find themselves in hardship overseas, and have secured the return of Australians unfairly detained.

We work with partners to expose malicious cyber activity, counter foreign interference and protect the integrity of democratic institutions. When the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) found that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) directed antisemitic attacks on Australian soil, we expelled Iran's Ambassador – the first such expulsion since the Second World War – and listed the IRGC as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Prime Minister has been a global leader in working with partners to shape the rules and standards for digital technologies, ensuring that Australians can both benefit from, and be protected from, their impacts. Since Australia set the world's first social media minimum age, countries from Malaysia to Spain have followed.

We are strengthening our critical technology, infrastructure and cyber resilience, and legislating mandatory safety and security protections for every frontier AI company that operates in Australia. We welcome frontier AI investment and innovation, but on terms that work for all Australians. We must do what we can to ensure that the race to develop frontier AI, concentrated in a handful of companies and countries, does not reward speed over prudence.

Australia is working with partners on AI safety, making it a shared, global endeavour. That means building trust between countries, cooperating when things go wrong, and making sure the world's response matches the power of the technology. Australia has helped to shape the international order before, in non-proliferation and in online safety. With AI, we intend to do it again.

We are investing in the Australian expertise that enables us to understand and therefore meaningfully engage with our neighbourhood. Languages, cultural knowledge and professional connections are strategic capabilities. That is why we have reformed the New Colombo Plan and are working to arrest the decline in Asian language learning in Australia, including by funding the *Fluency in Asian Languages* program.

We are also defending one of the greatest strengths our country possesses: our multicultural society. Australia's people connect us to the world in ways other countries cannot easily replicate. It is a source of insight and influence.

I have said before that those who seek to divide Australians, whether for political advantage or online attention, undermine our country. Our diversity makes us stronger in a diverse world. Our cohesion is part of our national security. A confident, united Australia is one that can engage in the world on our own terms.

Conclusion

Australia must retain the capacity to make our own choices in a world where others would make them for us. The Australian Government is working to reduce vulnerability and manage instability today, while shaping the environment around us in a more contested future. That means working with partners to make domination harder, coercion costlier and cooperation more valuable.

Resilience strengthens our capacity to manage instability and to shape what comes next. We cannot prevent every shock, but we can invest in our region, relationships, rules and resilience – the things that give us choices when shocks come.

No single element of national power will be sufficient. Markets alone will not secure our supply chains. Military capability alone will not achieve enduring peace. Multilateral institutions alone cannot uphold rules that powerful countries choose to ignore. Nor can any other country substitute for our own choices and our own effort.

We have remade Australian diplomacy because we need all of these elements of national power, and we need them working together. We have partnerships based on mutual respect. We have friends to help us defend rules. We also must invest in peace before it is too late.

This is the tradition of Australian statecraft we inherit – Curtin's recognition of the importance of American leadership, Evatt's belief in international cooperation, Whitlam's conviction that our future lay in Asia, and the outward-looking ambition carried forward by successive Labor Governments.

We honour that tradition, not by repeating old formulas, but by applying its purpose to the circumstances we face now. We do so with an active, adaptive and ambitious foreign policy.

Four priorities drive us: our region, our relationships, the rules, and our resilience. We are strengthening our capability. We are expanding our partnerships. We are defending and growing the space in which every country can make sovereign choices.

We are also working every single day to make peace more likely than conflict. That is how we contribute to a peaceful, stable and prosperous region. That is how we protect Australia's security and prosperity. That is also why the work the Albanese Government has undertaken since 2022 is not the end of the transformation.

It is the beginning.

Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade