

# *If Albanese's such a buddy of Biden's, why is Assange still in jail?*



\* Bob Carr was NSW's longest-serving premier and is a former Australian foreign affairs minister.

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by Bob Carr / NSW's longest-serving premier and is a former Australian foreign affairs minister.

## **If Albanese's such a buddy of Biden's, why is Assange still in jail?**

Julian Assange is in his fourth year in Britain's Belmarsh prison. If the current appeal fails, he will be shackled and driven off in a prison van and flown across the Atlantic on a CIA aircraft for a long trial. He faces likely life imprisonment in a federal jail, perhaps in Oklahoma.

In 2021, then opposition leader Anthony Albanese said, "Enough is enough. I don't have sympathy for many of his actions, but essentially, I can't see what is served by keeping him incarcerated."

Anthony Albanese's bromance with Joe Biden has yet not delivered any progress in Julian Assange's bid to thwart extradition to the United States.

As prime minister, Albanese said he had already made his position clear to the Biden administration. "We are working through diplomatic channels," he said, "but we're making very clear what our position is on Mr Assange's case."

So we can assume that at one of his seven meetings with US President Joe Biden he has raised Assange, even on the fringes of the Quad or at one of two NATO summits. Or perhaps in San Diego when they launched AUKUS, under which Australia will make the largest transfer of wealth ever made outside this country. This \$368 billion is a whopping subsidy to American naval shipyards and to the troubled, chronically tardy British naval builder BAE Systems.

But it clinches Australia's reputation as a deliriously loyal, entirely gullible US ally. It gives President Biden the justification for telling Republicans or Clinton loyalists in his own party that he had no alternative but to end the pursuit of Assange. "Those Aussies insisted on it. They're doing us all these favours ... we can't say no."

In addition to the grandiose AUKUS deal, Biden could list other decisions by the Albanese government that render Australia a military stronghold to help US regional dominance while materially weakening our own security.

Candid words, but they aren't mine. They belong to Sam Roggeveen of the Lowy Institute in this month's edition of Australian Foreign Affairs. In a seminal piece of analysis, Roggeveen nominated Australia's decision to fully service six American B52 bombers at RAAF Tindal, in the Northern Territory, as belonging on that list. It is assumed these are aimed at China's nuclear infrastructure such as missile silos. "It is hard to overstate the sensitivity involved in threatening another nation's nuclear forces," Roggeveen writes.

In his article, he reminds us we've also agreed to host four US nuclear subs on our west coast at something to be called "Submarine Rotational Force-West." Their mission would be destroying Chinese warships or enforcing a blockade of Chinese ports.

The east coast submarine base, planned most likely for Port Kembla, will also directly support US military operations. It's another nuclear target. As Roggeveen says, all these locations raise Australia's profile in the eyes of the Chinese military planners designing their response in the event of war with the US.

In this context, I can't believe the US president is not on the point of agreeing to the prime minister's request to drop charges against Assange.

The British government has ordered the extradition of Julian Assange to the US.

Apart from the titanic strategic favours, two killer facts help our case. One, former US president Barack Obama commuted the sentence of Chelsea Manning, who had supplied Assange with the information he

published. The Yank is free, the Aussie still pursued.

Two, the crimes Manning and Assange exposed involved US troops on a helicopter gunning down unarmed civilians in Baghdad. They are directly comparable to the alleged Australian battlefield murders in Afghanistan we are currently prosecuting.

An initial refusal from Biden is only an invitation to ask a second time, in a firmer voice.

It's possible to imagine an Australian PM – Fraser, Hawke, Keating, Howard or Rudd – being appropriately forceful with a US president. There would be an inflection point in their exchange – prime minister to president – when the glint-eyed Australian says, “Mr President, it's gone on too long. Both sides of our politics are united. Your old boss commuted Chelsea Manning, an American, in the same case.”

A pause. A beat. Then the killer summation. “Mr President, I speak for Australia.”

Surely this counts.

I don't believe the president can shake his head and say, “nope”, given all we have gifted – the potent symbolism of B52s, nuclear subs and bases on the east and west coast. It would look like we have sunk into the role of US territory, as much a dependency as Guam or Puerto Rico.

US counter-intelligence conceded during court proceedings there is no evidence of a life being lost because of Assange's revelations. Our Defence Department reached the same view.

If Assange walks out the gates of Belmarsh into the arms of his wife and children it will show we are worth a crumb or two off the table of the imperium. If it's a van to the airport, then making ourselves a more likely target has conferred no standing at all. We are a client state, almost officially.

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