

Why stable China ties are vital for Australia

By Wang Zhenyu

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers were sworn in for a second term on Tuesday after the Labor Party's landslide win in the national election. The new government's domestic and foreign policy directions have drawn widespread attention. Recently, Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan announced that she will lead a trade mission to China this September to hold in-depth talks on education, trade and culture. Allan emphasized, "In an era of tariffs and global economic uncertainty, I want to seize an opportunity for Victoria," adding, "We have an opportunity to turn a new page in our relationship with China."

Allan's comments precisely reflect the public mood revealed by this Australian election. In fact, the vote took place against a backdrop of unprecedented global uncertainty and a "cost-of-living crisis" at home. At the crucial final stage of the campaign, the US announced it would impose "reciprocal tariffs" on most of its trading partners – even its ally Australia. That move left Australian voters feeling cold, anxious, and resentful, and caused trust in Coalition leader Peter Dutton to plummet. In the end, the Coalition suffered a crushing defeat, and Dutton himself became the first opposition leader in nearly a century to lose his own seat.

In an uncertain

world, people crave stability, and Australian electoral behavior is no different: In challenging times, voters tend to stick with the incumbent government. Over the past three years, the Albanese administration has been defined by cautious steadiness. It's fair to say that stabilizing relations with China has emerged as one of Labor's standout foreign policy achievements.

Since Albanese's Labor Party came to power in May 2022, it has rolled back the previous Coalition's anti-China stance and taken proactive measures to enhance dialogue with Beijing. Under the direct engagement and strategic leadership of both countries' leaders, China-Australia relations have bottomed out and rebounded, warming across the board. Exchanges in various fields have taken positive strides, and economic and trade flows have fully recovered – earning widespread support

on both sides. Throughout the election campaign, Labor, as the governing party, maintained continuity in its China policy and generally adopted a rational, restrained tone in all China-related statements. This pragmatic, steady approach won the trust of voters.

Mainstream polling ahead of the election showed that voters were almost equally confident in Labor and the Coalition on relations with the US. However, on relations with China – especially on China policy – confidence in Labor outstripped the Coalition by a full 20 percentage points. This gap underscores Australians' stronger appetite for a healthy, stable China-Australia relationship and their expectation that China-Australia free trade will help shield the economy from the shocks of economic nationalism.

Following his re-election, Albanese faces the crucial task of boosting economic growth and stabilizing foreign relations. In this context, the strategic significance of the China-Australia relationship is heightened. China is Australia's largest export market, and maintaining a stable relationship with China – solidifying and expanding exports to China – is vital for the well-being of the Australian people and for Australia's economic resilience.

On a strategic level, China and Australia need to work together to uphold the international system centered around the United Nations (UN), firmly defend the rules-based

international order, and maintain the multilateral trading system. Australian society is increasingly recognizing that China is a reliable market and a trustworthy partner in a world full of uncertainty, and the China-Australia relationship provides significant certainty for Australia.

It is also worth noting that local diplomacy as well as economic ties are important aspects of the China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership and are sources of vitality for economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. The Australian Labor government has extensive experience in promoting local cooperation between the two countries. Protecting the enthusiasm for local diplomacy, creating a favorable policy environment for local economic and trade cooperation, and providing strong support for local diplomatic practice are also essential.

In this election, the Australian people ultimately chose the Labor Party, the side of certainty facing an uncertain world, based on their expectations of policy stability and continuity. The Labor government now has more reason to adhere to an independent foreign policy and to work toward the steady and sustained growth of China-Australia relations. In this way, the two countries can provide a more stable and favorable policy environment for mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation, striving to bring more tangible benefits to both countries and their people.

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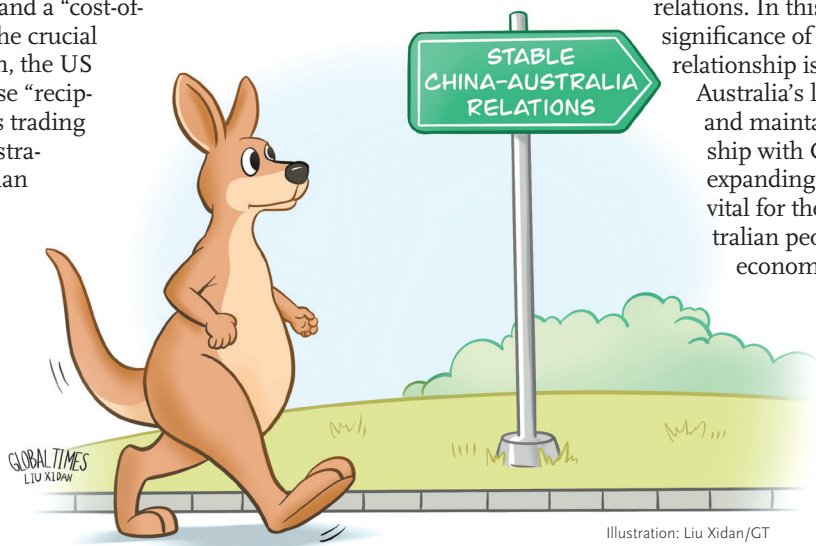


Illustration: Liu Xidan/GT

The US still views the rapidly changing Middle East through an old lens

By Ding Long

US President Donald Trump began his first major foreign trip since returning to the White House by traveling to the Middle East on Tuesday. The last time he visited the region, eight years ago, he only went to Saudi Arabia. However, this time he will visit three oil-rich countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

From a geopolitical perspective, these three countries are regarded by the US as key pieces in its chess game in the region. This visit underscores the US' intention to use these three countries as a fulcrum to reintegrate its Middle East allies and build a US-led Middle East alliance system aimed at containing Iran, excluding China and Russia, and consolidating US hegemony in the region.

Economic interests are another important consideration. Saudi Arabia has promised to invest \$600 billion in the

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US, but the US administration is aiming for \$1 trillion. The UAE has announced that it would invest \$1.4 trillion in the US over the next 10 years. The US attempts to leverage the Gulf countries to bolster its economy while simultaneously consolidating its financial hegemony based on the dollar-denominated oil prices.

However, it's important to note that there are inherent flaws in US Middle East policy, which have become increasingly evident in light of new political and economic realities in the region.

The Gulf countries are unwilling to dance to the tune of the US. With the implementation of national transformation strategies, the strategic autonomy and confidence of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have increased significantly. These nations are focusing on domestic economic development and transformation, which necessitates a peaceful external environment. They are not keen on geopolitical confrontation, and no longer believe in the security guarantees provided by the US.

Under China's mediation, Saudi Arabia and Iran have achieved a historic reconciliation, and the confrontation between the various camps in the Middle East has been greatly eased. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have stepped onto the international stage, frequently mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as hosting US-Russia dialogues. This demonstrates that

the regional and international influence of the Gulf countries has significantly evolved and is no longer what it once was. However, the US still views the rapidly changing Middle East through an old lens. Its attempts to re-ignite the camp confrontation are unpopular.

The US attempts to influence the Gulf countries by emphasizing the "honor" of the first foreign trip from a US president, seeking to bolster its political achievements through huge investment promises from these countries. This approach overlooks the complexity and uncertainty of economic cooperation and underestimates the political wisdom and determination of the Gulf countries. Washington's loosening coal mining restrictions as part of efforts aimed at "unleashing US energy" have seriously lowered international oil prices, undermined the core interests of the Gulf countries, and are likely to trigger fierce competition between them and

the US in the energy field.

Currently, Middle Eastern countries are in a critical period of economic transformation, with considerable work to be done and funding needed across various sectors. Their aspirations for large-scale investments in the US may prove to be illusory. Such significant investments require a multitude of viable projects, and ultimately, the implementation of these investments may be challenging. Of course, while this visit may improve US relations with its Arab allies to a certain extent, various factors suggest that the outcomes are likely to fall short of the geopolitical ambitions of the US.

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