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TURNBULL TUMBLES, TRUMP MATESHIP, CHINA FROST

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In a week of political mayhem, Australia's ruling Liberal Party dumped its leader, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and shunned its deputy leader, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. While the political unrest is deeply domestic in nature, it shares one element with Australian's foreign policy concerns – uncertainty. The Australia-US relationship under Donald Trump has been defined by what the president has NOT done to Australia. Trump hasn't questioned the alliance; hasn't hit Australia with trade tirades and tariffs; hasn't broken the refugee deal he so denounced when first taking office; and hasn't even sent an ambassador to Australia. Canberra's softly-softly approach to Trump is to talk up the military history – “100 years of mateship” – stressing Australia is an alliance partner that doesn't cost the US much. A major talking-point is that Australia has a trade deficit with the US. In the way that Trump defines trade relationships, the US makes a profit out of Australia. In contrast, the relationship with China has gone through an icy patch.

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Canberra's political explosion

Since Australia's second longest-serving prime minister, John Howard, (1996–2007) lost power in the 2007 election, no Australian leader has served a full three-year term. Australia has had five prime ministers in the past five years – the fifth is Scott Morrison who took over after a party-room vote felled Malcolm Turnbull on Aug. 24. The caucus coup that toppled Turnbull reflected the struggle inside the Liberal Party between its conservative and moderate wings. For the hard men of the conservative camp, Turnbull was never “one of us.” Beyond the internal ideological divide, the blowup was caused by the decade of conflict between two key Liberals, Tony Abbot (conservative wing) and Turnbull (moderates).

Turnbull had his first stint as Liberal leader in 2008 and 2009, but was deposed as head of the party and Opposition leader by Tony Abbott, in a caucus vote in December 2009. Abbott led the Liberals back into government at the 2013 election, but his popularity as prime minister plunged. In September, 2015, Turnbull mounted a party-room challenge and retook the Liberal leadership from Abbott, becoming prime minister. In the 2016 federal election, Turnbull's government retained office by the narrowest margin (a one-seat majority in the House of Representatives), losing the comfortable majority Abbott achieved in the previous election. Thus, arguments inside the Liberal Party over the past two years were driven by these realities:

- Turnbull and Abbott were locked in a death struggle to define their own destinies and the immediate course of the Liberal Party.
- Turnbull led a government with a one-seat majority. History and political gravity (and Abbott) drove him toward defeat.
- The opinion polls consistently report that the Liberals will lose federal election due next year.

The move to overthrow Turnbull was made by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, the candidate of the conservative wing, backed by Abbott. Dutton succeeded in getting a caucus majority for a leadership spill, ending Turnbull's prime ministership. But in the subsequent leadership vote, Dutton was defeated by the treasurer, Scott Morrison. To

block Dutton, many MPs and senators from the moderate wing deserted the deputy leader and foreign minister, Julie Bishop, to support Morrison. After coming in third in the leadership vote, Bishop stepped down as foreign minister (the job she's held since 2013) and went to the backbench.



Figure 1 Australia's new Prime Minister Scott Morrison.
Photo: abc.net.au

Turnbull quickly resigned from his seat in the House of Representatives and left Parliament. Abbott is still in Parliament, but remains on the backbench. Morrison was once close to Abbott, but the two men fell out in 2016, when Morrison supported the Turnbull coup against Abbott. In making his Cabinet, Morrison was not prepared to bring Abbott back into the ministry. The usual calculus of party room coups is that an unpopular leader is discarded for a rival who is more popular and likely to win more electoral support. In rolling Turnbull, however, the Liberals got rid of the most popular politician in their ranks.

The Liberal caucus was focused on internal politics, not the voters, and was duly punished in the opinion polls. Popular support for the government crashed to its lowest levels in a decade. A Newspoll conducted for *The Australian* newspaper immediately after the leadership change, showed the government's primary vote dropping four points to 33 percent following the week-long chaos that ended Turnbull's leadership. The two-party-preferred split between Labor and the Liberal-led Coalition had blown out, from 49–51 in favor of Labor a fortnight before, to 44–56. If Labor gets a 51–49 two-party vote in the federal election next year, it will have a good majority in the House of Representatives. If Labor got anything close to Newspoll's 56–44 result, it'd be one of the biggest landslides in Australian history,

decimating the Liberals in the lower house. Scott Morrison faces a massive task to turn around the negative poll numbers – a job that even the more popular Turnbull couldn't manage. Morrison will serve as prime minister for less than nine months before the voters get the chance to deliver their verdict in a federal election. The uncertainty of domestic politics is replicated in Australian's foreign policy.

Matanship with Donald Trump

Prime Minister Turnbull flew to Washington in February to join President Trump in celebrating "100 years of mateship" between the US and Australia. It was their first White House meeting after bilateral talks in New York in 2017, plus meetings on the sidelines of two international events in 2017. The ceremonies in the White House were the symbolic counterpoint to the tempestuous first conversation between the two leaders in the opening days of Trump's presidency. In that notorious phone conversation in January 2017, Trump blasted an agreement for the US to take 1,250 refugees from Australian detention centers as "the worst deal ever." That initial blowup has shaped the Turnbull government's careful effort to Trump-proof the alliance, lavishing praise on the US while never saying anything critical of the president. The Canberra approach to the US relationship under this president is: hold tight to what we've got, get what we can, and don't anger Trump. The refugee deal that caused the telephone turmoil has been quietly, slowly implemented. More than 300 people have been transferred to the US. In return, Australia accepts refugees who've fled violence in El Salvador and Honduras.

The softly-softly tactic Canberra is using with Trump plays into the 2018 theme of the relationship: 100 years of mateship. The mateship centenary commemorates bonds formed during the Battle of Hamel in northern France on July 4, 1918. It was the first time US troops fought under the command of a non-American – the Australian General Sir John Monash. In honor of the Americans he was commanding, Monash chose US Independence Day as the date of the offensive. Turnbull used the line that "mates stick by each other through good times and bad." The subtext being, that with Trump, Australia will take the good with the bad. As the two leaders met in the Oval office, Turnbull lauded Trump for his hospitality and friendship, linking directly to the centenary

theme: "It's 100 years of mateship that we're celebrating – mateship, 100 years ago for the first time Australians and American soldiers went into battle together on July 4, 1918 and we have been fighting side by side in freedom's cause ever since. So 100 years of mateship and 100 more to come."



Figure 2 Turnbull and Trump meet on the theme of 'mateship'. Canberra's approach to the US relationship under President Trump is: hold what we've got, get what we can, and never get in Trump's way. Photo: pm.gov.au

The president's salute to mateship was to announce that the US Navy will name Littoral Combat Ship 30 the *USS Canberra* in honor of an Australian cruiser lost fighting alongside the US Navy during World War II: "I know that the *USS Canberra* will be a worthy successor to her Australian namesake and her American predecessor the former *Baltimore*-class heavy cruiser, *USS Canberra*. As she sails the open sea, the new *USS Canberra* will symbolize to all who cross her path the enduring friendship between United States and Australia. There is no closer friendship."

In a joint White House press conference, Trump said that the US and Australia, "strengthened by our common values and history" were working together to promote mutual interests. A translation of that thought might be that past partnership and shared principles are a useful conversation starter with Trump – then the serious talk turns to what deals can be done. Turnbull said the "security alliance is as close as it possibly could be," while underlining the trade talking point: "Since the US-Australia free trade agreement came in force in 2005, two-way trade has grown by over 50 percent. The United States does have a trade surplus with Australia of \$25 billion. It's your third largest trade surplus – with us. But we know it works both ways. The two-way investment has more than doubled in the past decade. It was worth around

\$1.1 trillion in 2016. Again, boosting jobs and growth in both our nations, both our economies.”

Canberra is grateful that Trump hasn't made Australia a target for trade pressure or tensions. In a phone call to Turnbull in March, Trump said that Australia will be exempt from new US tariffs on steel and aluminum – and he's kept that promise.

In the spirit of taking the good with the bad, Australia has made no official comment on the fact that the president hasn't appointed an ambassador to Canberra. The US has not had an ambassador in Australia since Barack Obama's appointee, John Berry, left the post in September 2016. In February, Trump announced that the commander of US Pacific Command, Adm. Harry Harris, would be nominated to become ambassador to Australia. But the following month, just before Harris was due to appear before a nomination hearing on Capitol Hill, the administration decided that Harris should be used to fill the more urgent vacancy of ambassador to South Korea. Former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer has described the delay in appointing a new ambassador as an “insult” while former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says that “Australia, from President Trump's perspective, is a second-class ally.” The government, though, says it can “well understand” the decision to reallocate Harris to South Korea. The acting US ambassador in Canberra since 2016 has been a career diplomat, James Carouso. And commentary about the lack of a Trump appointment makes the point that Australia should be happy to have a professional like Carouso. There's some nervousness about Australia getting a crazy Trump crony as ambassador.

The annual Lowy Institute poll of Australian attitudes on foreign policy found the Australian people's affection for the US alliance hasn't been dented by misgivings about Trump. A bare majority of Australians (55 percent) say they trust the United States to “act responsibly in the world,” a six-point fall since 2017, and a 28-point fall since 2011. It's the lowest level of trust in the US recorded in the 14 years of the poll. Australians' highest level of trust is placed in the United Kingdom (90 percent). Japan is trusted by 87 percent of Australians, and France by 84 percent. Trust in India (59 percent) is ahead of the United States (55 percent), followed

closely by China (52 percent). Just 28 percent trust Russia, and 8 percent trust North Korea.

The poll found three-quarters (76 percent) of Australians say the US alliance is either “very” or “fairly” important for Australia's security, a result almost unchanged since last year. Only 31 percent say “Australia should distance itself from the US under President Donald Trump.” Reluctance about Australia joining the US in military action under Trump has eased, with only a minority (48 percent, down 11 points since 2016) saying they would be “less likely ... to support Australia taking future military action in coalition with the United States under Donald Trump.”

The opinion of the Australian government on such topics was offered in the foreign policy white paper issued in November 2017. The two countries that dominate Australia's official world view are the US and China.

Australia's white paper: China contends with the US

“Today, China is challenging America's position.”

Australia's foreign policy white paper is a contrast study, both dark and light. Bright vistas of international opportunity are described beneath storm clouds of ‘political alienation and economic nationalism.’ Standing in the central atrium of Canberra's foreign affairs building, Prime Minister Turnbull launched the paper as the government's vision of the next decade of “uncertain and dangerous times.” A leader who projected beaming optimism as his personal motif spent a lot of time discussing the policy document's “clear-eyed and hard-headed” approach to an era of rapid change, political uncertainty, strategic ambition, and foreign interference. The United States and China stand at the center of the paper as the key bilateral relationship which will decide much of the next decade. The third paragraph puts it simply: “Today, China is challenging America's position.” Shared economic interests may not be enough to produce a sharing of power that suits Beijing or Washington accepts: “They have a mutual interest in managing strategic tensions but this by itself is not a guarantee of stability. Compounding divergent strategic interests as China's power grows, tensions could also flare between them over trade and other economic issues.”

Australia's 2017 defense white paper was staunch in its confidence in the US alliance and that the US is in Asia to stay. Coming at the end of the first year of the Trump presidency, the foreign policy white paper is needier and fretful. The subtext of the declarations of deep affection for the US is uncertainty about Trump. The foreign policy paper affirms that the US alliance is good for Australia and good for the region: "The alliance is a choice we make about how best to pursue our security interests. It is central to our shared objective of shaping the regional order. It delivers a capability edge to our armed forces and intelligence agencies, giving Australia added weight and regional influence." Canberra's belief (and prayer) is that the US will stay in Asia: "The Australian Government judges that the United States' long-term interests will anchor its economic and security engagement in the Indo-Pacific." The chapter discussing stability in the Indo-Pacific treats the US and China as a linked topic. This is striking. The US no longer stands alone in the Australian pantheon, but now shares the central pillar with another. Throughout the paper, the love for the US is invariably followed by a paragraph on the deep friendship with China. Malcolm Turnbull might worry, in private, about China as a "frenemy," but the official statement of Australia's world view is notable for being China-friendly. Such policy documents are always significant for their hierarchies. The country hierarchy offered in the paper is: the US, China, Japan, Indonesia, and India. The second member of that hierarchy has been giving Canberra chills.

Australia's icy age with China

In 2018, an icy age descended on China-Australia relations – cooling business, frosting diplomacy, and chilling strategic perspectives. China put Australia into diplomatic "deep freeze." China speaks of "a growing lack of mutual trust," accusing Australia of "systematic, irresponsible, negative remarks and comments regarding China." Australia concedes "tensions" while blaming "misunderstandings and mischaracterisations." Australia's former ambassador to China, Geoff Raby, sees "incoherence" in the way Australia is dealing with China, judging that the relationship is at its lowest since the Tiananmen Square massacre. The domestic dimension of the cooling was dramatized in December by the fall of a Labor senator seen to be doing China's bidding

because of political donations from Chinese business. Almost at the same moment, the prime minister was announcing legislation to ban foreign political donations and to broaden the definition of espionage. To make the point in the most pointed way, Turnbull used Mandarin to quote Mao's famous line about China standing up to state that Australia will stand against foreign interference.

China's ambassador to Canberra, Chen Jingye, complained to *The Australian* about "a growing lack of mutual trust" that could hurt trade: "We have seen a kind of systematic, irresponsible, negative remarks and comments regarding China which has caused adverse impact on bilateral relations." Turnbull's version was that "tension" in the relationship is caused by "misunderstandings and mischaracterizations of our foreign interference legislation in some of the Chinese media."

The chill has a domestic as well as a foreign policy dimensions. Australia is arguing about itself as well as China: the way we do politics and the life of a multicultural society. The policy issues have become personal because of the presence of Chinese Australians. The 2016 census found that 2.2 percent of Australia's population was born in China and 5.6 percent of the population has Chinese ancestry; China ranks in the top five in Australia in such categories as languages spoken at home, country of ancestry and country of birth.

Introducing legislation to widen the reach of the foreign interference and espionage law in December, Turnbull said the focus is on foreign states and their agents, not the loyalties of Australians from another country: "There is no place for racism or xenophobia in our country. Our diaspora communities are part of the solution, not the problem." The arguments between panda huggers and dragon slayers were illustrated in the clash of petitions between two groups of Australian China scholars. Coming from the panda-ish side, the Concerned Scholars of China see no evidence that China aims to compromise Australian sovereignty, and disagree with key claims about Chinese influence made in support of the national security legislation:

Instead of a narrative of an Australian society in which the presence of China is being felt to a greater degree in series of disparate fields, we are witnessing the

creation of a radicalized narrative of a vast official Chinese conspiracy. In the eyes of some, the objective of this conspiracy is no less than to reduce Australia to the status of a 'tribute state' or 'vassal'. The discourse is couched in such a way as to encourage suspicion and stigmatization of Chinese Australians in general. The alarmist tone of this discourse impinges directly on our ability to deal with questions involving China in the calm and reasoned way they require. Already it is dissuading Chinese Australians from contributing to public debate for fear of being associated with such a conspiracy.

A response from the dragon's direction from Scholars of China and the Chinese diaspora said the debate is not driven by "sensationalism or racism" but responds to "well-documented reports about the Chinese Communist Party's interference in Australia" offering this checklist:

- Espionage and other unlawful operations by Chinese officials or their proxies on Australian soil
- Attempts to interfere in political elections
- Direct and indirect control of Chinese-language media in Australia
- Intimidation of Chinese Australians (both Australian citizens and permanent residents) for their political views and activities in Australia
- The use of political donations and agents of influence in attempts to change Australian government policies
- The takeover and co-opting of Chinese community groups to censor sensitive political discussions and increase the Chinese government's presence in the community
- The establishment of Chinese government-backed organizations on university campuses used for monitoring Chinese students
- Interference in academic freedom
- The cultivation of prominent Australians in attempts to sway public and elite opinion
- The covert organization of political rallies by the Chinese government

Australia is arguing about China's power and role in Asia. Add to this that Australia is now

arguing about China's effort to exert power within Australia. The icy period asks Australia to think about itself, not just about the relationship with China. In his last major foreign policy speech, only weeks before being deposed as leader, Turnbull attempted what his office called a "reset" of the China relationship, to end the icy period. The prime minister's speech to an audience including the Chinese ambassador paid tribute to the rise of China, accepting Beijing's "more confident and assertive voice in world affairs." He said, "In the midst of this rapid change, Australia continues to address its own interests by pursuing a relationship with China based on mutual respect and understanding." Continuing, "For our part we act to advance Australia's prosperity, ensure the independence of our decision-making and secure the safety and freedom of our people. And in doing so, we support an international order based on the rule of law, where might is not right and the sovereignty of all nations is respected by others."

The reset effort quickly hit trouble when it was soon followed by another Australian security decision that angered Beijing: Canberra announced it would ban Chinese-owned tech firms Huawei and ZTE from taking part in the rollout of 5G mobile infrastructure. The government said it disqualified any company that was "likely subject to extrajudicial directions from a foreign government that conflict with Australian law." Beijing expressed "serious concern" at the ban, accusing Canberra of "ideological prejudices."

Australia ponders Trump and the US relationship

The pragmatic view is that Australia has stayed out of trouble with Trump and has had a positive experience with a transactional president. The pessimistic argument is that Trump is tearing up the international system and Australia must rethink and reposition. The pragmatic line is put by Alexander Downer, the longest serving Australian foreign minister (1996-2007), who has just completed a five-year term as Australia's High Commissioner (ambassador) to the United Kingdom. Downer says Trump has been better for Australia than Barack Obama. Obama "made America look weak," Downer writes, and "under Obama, America pulled back from the world."

Trump may be bombastic, crude and crass, Downer observes, but so what? The Downer judgement:

In Asia, Trump has built a half-decent personal relationship with Xi Jinping. That has helped with his attempts to get North Korea to scrap its program to build nuclear-armed intercontinental missiles that could hit American cities. The talks have happened; let's see if that strategy has worked. It's too early to say. Trump certainly hasn't persuaded the Chinese to desist from militarising reefs in the South China Sea. But his aggressive commitment to American military power – including a huge increase in defence spending – has probably made the Chinese realise it would be dangerous to go much further in the South China Sea. All that's good for us.

Downer says Australia's experience with Trump has been mostly positive: "So the Trump presidency is going quite well for Australia. Not perfectly, mind you. Pity he pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. That was a bad mistake. But pulling out of the Paris Agreement will have a marginal effect. And he did exempt us from the steel and aluminum tariffs."

The former Labor Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans (1988-1996) says the US under Trump is a rogue superpower, "tearing up the order it did so much to create." Evans says the "irremediable damage" being done by Trump means Australia must think hard about future responses. He offers four policy shifts:

Less America: Continued US engagement in the region is certainly highly desirable, Evans says, and Australia shouldn't walk away from the alliance. "But less reflexive support for everything the US chooses to do is long overdue."

More Self-Reliance: Australia should be more of a diplomatic free agent, Evans says, abandoning the constant urge to look over our shoulder to Washington.

More Asia: Strengthen relationships at all levels with key regional neighbors like India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea, as a collective counterweight to a potentially overreaching China. At the same time, Evans

says, Australia should "develop a more multidimensional relationship, not just a one dimensional economic one, with China itself."

More Global Engagement: "In the contemporary world, every state's security, prosperity and quality of life is best advanced by cooperation rather than confrontation, and Australia should be a relentless campaigner for just that. There are many global public goods issues on which we could make a positive difference, using our own strengths as a capable, credible middle power and the strategies of international coalition building that are the essence of effective middle power diplomacy."

The former prime minister, Tony Abbott, observed to the Heritage Foundation in Washington that Donald Trump is "the most unconventional president ever," but is well on the way "to being a consequential president" – even if "erratic and ill-disciplined." In the Abbott view, Trump's trump card is that "the rest of the world needs America much more than America needs us." The world would confront that need as the US brings its military home, as Abbott stated in a vivid image: "A new age is coming. The legions are going home. American values can be relied upon but American help less so. This need not presage a darker time, like Rome's withdrawal from Britain, but more will be required of the world's other free countries."

Dealing with a deal-making president, Abbott said, Australia could not rely on tradition or sentiment. But in Abbott's view, Australia is getting a good deal from Trump:

For Australia, Trump has so far been a good president. Despite a testy initial conversation with Prime Minister Turnbull, he's honoured the "very bad deal" that his predecessor had done to take boat people from Nauru and Manus Island and to settle them in the United States. He seems to appreciate that Australia is the only ally who's been side-by-side with America in every conflict since the Great War, and has exempted our steel and aluminium from the tariffs slapped on many others. As a country that's 'paid its dues' on the American alliance, we have been treated with courtesy and respect but that's no grounds for complacency in dealing with a transactional president.

Even before Trump launched his trade battle with China, former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd observed in December that an “America First” administration could find itself being put last in Asia. Rudd said Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership was symbolic of a US becoming less relevant to Asia’s economic future:

In fact, the US is increasingly emerging as an incomplete superpower. It remains a formidable military actor, with unique power-projection capabilities that extend far beyond its aircraft carrier battle groups to include an array of other capabilities that are as yet unmatched by other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. But its relevance to the region’s future—in terms of employment, trade and investment growth, as well as sustainable development—is declining fast. Some in Washington DC seem to think that the US can sustain this pattern for decades to come. But many of us are skeptical. Unless and until the US chooses comprehensive economic re-engagement with the region, its significance to the overall future of Asia, the world’s most economically dynamic region, will continue to fade.

The idea of the US fading away will be encouraged by Trump’s decision to skip the East Asia Summit in Singapore and the APEC summit in Papua New Guinea. If Trump had got to PNG, the expectation was that he’d also come next door to make a presidential visit to Australia. That chance of an Australian stop has now disappeared. So one other thing Donald Trump didn’t do to Australia in 2018 was to visit the country.

CHRONOLOGY OF AUSTRALIA-US/EAST ASIA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER 2017 – AUGUST 2018

Sept 1, 2017: Australia and Timor-Leste agree on "central elements" of a maritime boundary in the Timor Sea.

Sept.20, 2017: Australia announces that 54 refugees will leave its South Pacific detention centers for the US, the first group under the deal President Trump reluctantly agreed to honor.

Sept. 24, 2017: Opposition leader Bill Shorten flies out for talks in South Korea and Japan.

Oct. 13, 2017: The defense and foreign ministers of South Korea and Australia meet in Seoul for their third annual meeting.

Oct. 18, 2017: US-Australia Space Tracking Treaty is signed in Washington, extending the 1960 bilateral agreement on space exploration and NASA use of Australian facilities.

Nov. 5, 2017: PM Turnbull meets New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Nov. 9, 2017: PM Turnbull leaves for Vietnam for the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting, a bilateral visit to Hong Kong, and the Philippines for the East Asia Summit.

Nov. 10, 2017: On the sidelines of the APEC meeting, trade ministers from 11 nations announce agreement on the revived Trans-Pacific Partnership, but Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau refuses to ratify the deal. Australia and Peru sign a bilateral free trade agreement.

Nov. 15, 2018: Australia votes to allow same-sex couples to marry. In a postal survey, 12,727,920 (79.5 percent) of eligible Australians respond, with 61.6 percent voting Yes, while 38.4 percent vote No.

Nov. 23, 2017: PM Turnbull launches Australia's foreign affairs white paper.

Dec. 1, 2017: Nick Warner is appointed as director general of the Office of National Assessments and director-general of national intelligence.

Dec, 5, 2017: PM Turnbull announces legislation to ban foreign political donations and to fight foreign espionage and interference in Australian affairs.

Dec 7, 2017: Federal Parliament legislates for same-sex marriage in Australia.

Dec. 12, 2017: Labor Sen. Sam Dastyari resigns from Parliament over claims that he was acting on behalf of Chinese interests.

Jan. 18, 2018: PM Turnbull visits Japan for talks with Abe Shinzo.

Jan. 29, 2018: PM Turnbull releases a defense export strategy with the aim of making Australia one of the world's top 10 defense exporters within a decade.

Feb. 9, 2018: Harry Harris is nominated as the US ambassador to Australia.

Feb. 23, 2018: President Trump and PM Turnbull meet at the White House to celebrate "100 years of mateship" between the US and Australia.

Feb. 23, 2018: Barnaby Joyce resigns as deputy prime minister, leader of the National Party and Cabinet minister, after revelations of an extramarital affair with his press secretary.

March 1, 2018: New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern arrives in Sydney for dinner at the Sydney home of PM Turnbull and then a day of talks.

March 6, 2018: Timor-Leste and Australia sign a new maritime boundary treaty.

March 8, 2018: Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) agreement is signed, in Chile, by the 11 remaining nations, following the withdrawal of the US.

March 10, 2018: In a phone call to Turnbull, Trump confirms that Australia will be exempt from new US tariffs on steel and aluminum.

March 17, 2018: [Australia-ASEAN](#) summit is held in Sydney.

April 16, 2018: Lt. Gen. Angus Campbell announced as next Chief of the Australian Defence Force.

June 28, 2018: Former Australian spy and his lawyer are charged with breaching intelligence laws for revealing that Australia bugged ministerial offices of the Timor-Leste government during border negotiations over maritime oil and gas rights.

July 23, 2018: Annual Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) held in California.

Aug. 4, 2018: Foreign Minister Julie Bishop meets Japanese counterpart Kono Taro and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Singapore for the eighth [Trilateral Strategic Dialogue](#).

Aug. 23, 2018: Australia bans Chinese tech companies Huawei and ZTE from taking part in the rollout of 5G mobile infrastructure, because of national security concerns.

Aug. 24, 2018: Spill motion in the Liberal Party room ends the leadership of PM Malcolm Turnbull. Scott Morrison is elected the new leader and prime minister.

Aug. 30, 2018: PM Morrison flies to Indonesia to conclude a [free-trade agreement](#) with President Joko Widodo.

Aug. 31, 2018: Ex-PM Turnbull resigns seat in the House of Representatives, leaving Parliament.