

[Australia and China Agree to Cooperate on Cyber Security](#)

Australia and China have agreed to enhanced cyber security cooperation following discussions between Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Meng Jianzhu, Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Commission for Political and Legal Affairs in Sydney on 21 April.

This follows Prime Minister Turnbull raising cyber-enabled intellectual property theft issues with Premier Li Keqiang during his visit to Australia in March.

In the 21 April talks, Australia and China agreed that neither country would conduct or support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, trade secrets or confidential business information with the intent of obtaining competitive advantage. This is consistent with a similar agreement between the US and China.

Both countries also agreed to act in accordance with the reports of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on cyber, including the norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace identified by those reports.

The two countries agreed to establish a mechanism to discuss cyber security and cyber crime issues with a view to preventing cyber incidents that could create problems between them.

Meng Jianzhu was in Australia for the inaugural meeting of the High-Level Security Dialogue – agreed between the Prime Minister and Premier Li – that was held in Sydney on 21 April. This came on the same day of the one year anniversary of the Australian Cyber Security Strategy where the Prime Minister underlined the growing importance of cyber security as both a threat and an opportunity for Government, the private sector, and broader society.

[Navy training exercises deemed success](#)



Liaoning carrier battle group [File Photo]

The Chinese Navy has disclosed a series of exercises and missions carried out this month as part of long-term efforts to hone the operational capabilities of its combat forces.

Details of the exercises and sea patrols were provided in a news release ahead of the 68th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Navy's founding, which was on Sunday.

This month, a group of combat ships led by the CNS Xuzhou, a guided missile frigate, carried out combat exercise in the Western Pacific, J-15 carrier-borne fighter jets conducted tactical training above Bohai Bay, various types of naval aircraft made regular patrols over the East China and South China seas, and new-generation submarines sailed silently through deep oceans.

These were a small part of what the Navy has been doing to improve its combat readiness, the news release said, adding that each year every combat vessel and submarine will spend nearly eight months at sea, carrying out patrols, drills and training.

Every day, dozens of aircraft, more than 100 ships and submarines and thousands of Navy personnel are in operation, it added.

According to military observers, the length of time a ship or submarine can perform at sea is a key indicator of its capability, as only those with good equipment, reliable logistics and a well-trained crew can regularly make long-term voyages.

The news release also said the CNS Liaoning, China's only aircraft carrier, continues to move toward gaining full operational capability. The Liaoning carrier battle group completed a cross-sea, live-fire exercise at the end of last year, marking a big step in the group's development.

So far, dozens of J-15 pilots and landing signal officers have become qualified to operate aboard the carrier, the Navy said, adding that construction on the first domestically developed carrier is proceeding well.

It also said the nuclear submarine force has made “great progress” in its efforts to enhance fighting ability, without elaborating.

Rear Admiral Du Benyin, deputy political commissar of the PLA Navy’s South Sea Fleet, said long-distance training, international exercises and escort missions have tested the Navy’s front-line commanders and sailors and improved their capabilities.

“During the process, we also found and solved problems such as inefficient logistical support. Though we have made achievements, we are fully aware that more efforts are needed before we become a strong navy,” he said.

Senior Captain Hua Ming, deputy commander of a submarine flotilla with the East Sea Fleet, said that he remembers when the Chinese Navy began escort missions in the Gulf of Aden, some officers from other units told him their ships were unable to fulfill all of their designated tasks.

“But after these years, the Navy now has a great number of advanced destroyers, frigates, submarines and planes. These new weapons enable us to better safeguard our maritime interests and sovereignty,” Hua said.

Talking about his unit, he added, “In the submarine force, we treat each training mission as if it were a real combat scenario.”

Since 2012, the PLA Navy has taken delivery of several new types of ships, which strongly strengthened its defense and strike capacity, the Navy said.

Last year, the Navy commissioned 18 ships, including a Type-052D guided missile destroyer, three Type-054A guided missile frigates and six Type-056 corvettes.

These ships have a total displacement of 150,000 metric tons, roughly half the overall displacement of the British navy.

Since the start of this year, the PLA Navy has commissioned at least five ships: a destroyer, an electronic reconnaissance ship, a training ship and two corvettes, according to information provided by the Navy.

[Ex-captive panda may be pregnant](#)



Giant panda Caocao. [Screenshot: CNTV]

Monitoring data show that Cao Cao, a 16-year-old giant panda raised in captivity, has mated with a male in the wild—a rare occurrence for the endangered species—according to a panda research center in Sichuan province.

Cao Cao was released in the Liziping Nature Reserve in early February in time for mating season from March to May.

In March, researchers reported seeing several males fight for the right to mate with her and began checking data sent by the GPS tag on her neck—which is fitted with a recording device—every five days.

“When we checked the recording on March 27, we heard her making noises similar to those made by females while mating,” said Zhang Hemin, head of the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda, where Cao Cao was raised. “It lasted one minute and 30 seconds.”

If the panda is pregnant, she will give birth in July or August, “at which point we will bring her and her cub back to the center”, Zhang said.

Cao Cao arrived at the center when she was 2 years old, after being found in poor health inside the Wolong National Nature Reserve. She has already mothered two cubs: male Tao Tao and female Zhang Xiang. Both are 2 years old and have been released into the wild in the Liziping reserve.

The research center, which was set up in the Wolong reserve in 1983, has released seven captive pandas since 2006 in an effort to boost the wild giant panda population.

There are 471 captive pandas worldwide, 234 of which are from the Wolong center—enough to prevent extinction, experts say.

In the early 1990s, the government banned the capture of wild pandas to mate with captive ones. Captive pandas have mated with few of their captive peers, which hurts biodiversity, researchers say.

The center formulated the plan last year to have captive pandas mate with wild ones. Cao Cao is the first to be chosen.

“She has a close bond with humans, and researchers have helped feed her since she was released,” Zhang said.

Cao Cao is the equivalent of 48 years old in human terms, and she has only one or two years left before she is too old to participate in a breeding program.

“If she fails to get pregnant this year, she will have one last opportunity to mate with a wild panda next spring,” Zhang said.

More captive pandas will be selected to mate wild ones, he said.

Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the killing of an OSCE SMM monitor in a non-government

Today’s news from Pryshyb – a part of the Luhansk region not currently controlled by the government of Ukraine – that a member of the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission has been killed by a mine is a tragic reminder of the urgent need for progress on a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which has already taken many innocent lives.

Our condolences go to the family of the victim and I wish a speedy recovery to others injured in this incident, which needs to be thoroughly investigated. Those responsible must be held accountable. I was already in touch with OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier; we have agreed to stay in close contact.

Full implementation of the Minsk agreements remains the basis for a sustainable solution that respects Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The European Union will continue to support the vital work of the OSCE and its Special Monitoring Mission, which must be granted full, secure and unimpeded access to all conflict-affected areas, with safety of monitors of crucial importance. The EU will also continue to support de-mining efforts.

Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the Mission, there cannot be a credible and verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track of the peace process.

Joint Press Conference with The Honorable Michael R. Pence, Vice President of the United States of America

PRIME MINISTER:

Vice President, it has been a great honour to welcome you to Australia. This is the earliest visit to Australia of any Vice President in a new administration, and your commitment to our Alliance, your commitment to the region, the commitment of the Trump Administration to the security and the stability, the maintenance of the rule of law in our region, in the Indo-Pacific is one that we welcome, we are delighted that you're here.

And it has been great too, as we discussed earlier, for Lucy and I to welcome you and Karen and your daughters with our family, or many of them, two out of our three grandchildren. And we observed earlier Karen was showing great ability in nursing baby Alice. Hope that all augurs well.

We've had a very productive discussion this morning. We have the strongest and the closest ties between our two nations, at every level.

Vice President Pence's visit is an opportunity for both our nations emphatically to reaffirm those ties, and our deep commitment to the Alliance.

The Alliance is as important today as it was more than 60 years ago, indeed as it has been for the 99 years that since Australian and American troops went into battle together.

It will be 100 years from the Battle of Hamel next year in 2018. And through all of that time, the people of the United States understand that they have no stronger, no more committed, no more loyal partner, ally, than Australia.

In every major conflict for 99 years we have stood side-by-side in freedom's cause.

And this year is also the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, when American and Australian naval forces turned back the Japanese invaders.

And then went on to turn them back again and again and keep Australia and our region free. We have stood side-by-side in freedom's cause through all of those years and today brave men and women of the Australian Defence Forces and their American allies, and our partners, are fighting together with the common goal of utterly destroying ISIS in the field in the Middle East. That is our commitment. In that theatre of war and around the world, we are in

absolute lock step, totally united with a common purpose and a resolute intent to destroy the threat of terrorism and to destroy it in the field and to combat it around the world, whether at home or abroad. Our freedom depends on it and we are committed to it and again, today, as 99 years ago, as 75 years ago, in all of those conflicts we have stood side-by-side because we are united by values. A commitment to freedom, democracy and the rule of law – our two great nations, we share so much but above all, we share, and Mr Vice President, you know you come here on the eve of Anzac Day where we honour the sacrifice of thousands of Australians, over 100,000 Australians who paid the supreme sacrifice to keep us free and they have done that again and again side-by-side in mateship, an Australian term but well understood across the Pacific, in mateship, 100 years of mateship, side-by-side with our American allies.

Mr Vice President, we also stand with you and with President Trump in condemning the behavior, the criminal, abhorrent use of chemical weapons in Syria by President Assad's regime. We welcomed and endorsed and supported the quick and calibrated and proportionate response of the United States in answer to that shocking crime.

And here in our region we have spent a lot of time this morning talking about the threat from North Korea. This reckless and dangerous regime puts the peace, the stability, the prosperity of our region at risk. And we endorse and indeed have echoed and made directly the calls to China to step up, to take responsibility, because China has a leverage, an ability to influence North Korea that far exceeds any others – with their economy, the North Korean economy is entirely dependent on China.

So as I have said earlier this week, the eyes of the world are on Beijing and we seek leadership from China to join the leadership shown by the United States, Japan and Australia and other nations around the world committed to peace. We call on China to make that stronger commitment to ensure that North Korea stops this reckless and dangerous conduct.

We are very very heartened by your visit Mr Vice President. The United States commitment to our region has underpinned the prosperity of the last 40 years. We would not have seen the extraordinary lifting out of poverty of billions of people in our region had it not been for the peace and the stability, the Pax Americana if you like that has been delivered by that continuing American commitment.

And your presence, so early in the administration, and of the Secretary of State and of the Defense Secretary, and as you've confirmed on your visit, the commitment of President Trump to attend the East Asia Summit, all of this sends a strong commitment, a strong message that the United States is committed to our region, committed to the peace and stability upon which so much depends in every nation.

We've also discussed matters economic.

The United States is, by some considerable margin, Australia's largest source of foreign investment. And the United States is also the leading destination

for Australian foreign investment.

In 2015, Australian investment in the United States was worth \$594 billion – representing almost double what it was in 2005, while the United States' investment in Australia has almost tripled since then and now represents about \$860 billion.

We have a very successful Free Trade Agreement. Bilateral trade has grown from \$41 billion to \$70 billion since the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement entered into force in that year 2005.

The US is Australia's second largest trading partner.

We'll continue this close cooperation on trade and investment, and we had a very good discussion too about President Trump's commitment to reduce company tax and tax generally in the United States. We too recognise that reducing business taxes is vital to deliver stronger economic growth. Businesses that can retain more of their profits for investment will grow, they'll hire more employees – investment, employment are driven by lower business taxes. And we applaud the commitment of President Trump to that. And we are grateful for your update on those plans.

We will continue to work more closely together in every field. The relationship is a very deep, it is a very intimate one. It is carried by millions of Australians and Americans over a century and more. We have a shared destiny. We always have. We grow closer together, built on those ties – defence, common strategic goals, shared values, stronger economic relationship and above all those connections of family that extend across the Pacific.

It is a close relationship, it is a family relationship and our family gathering this morning underpinned the nature of this very deep friendship.

Mr Vice President – I thank you very much for visiting Australia. We've had a very good meeting with the Foreign Minister this morning, following on her meetings with you in Washington. You'll meet more of our ministers today, including the Deputy Prime Minister and the Trade Minister. We have a very deep commitment to growing and strengthening this relationship – so important to our region, so important to our world, so important for the security and the prosperity, the opportunity for both our peoples.

Welcome, Mr Vice President.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Prime Minister Turnbull, thank you so much for those gracious words, for the hospitality you've shown me and my family upon our arrival in Australia today.

The warm welcome that you and the Australian people have given us is something that we will cherish for the rest of our lives.

I am honoured to be in Australia today, to offer greetings from the President

of the United States, President Donald Trump.

As I spoke to the President this morning. Mr Prime Minister, he wanted me to offer his best wishes to you and his congratulations on your strong leadership for the Commonwealth.

Mr Prime Minister, with the strong encouragement of your administration, only two days ago, as you mentioned, it was my privilege to announce that President Trump will attend the APEC, the Leaders' Summit, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Summit in Vietnam and the Philippines this November.

I trust that my visit here today on my very first trip to the Asia Pacific as Vice President of the United States, and the President's plans to travel to this region this fall are a strong sign of our enduring commitment to the historic Alliance between the people of the United States of America and the people of Australia.

As I told Prime Minister Turnbull today, Australia is and always will be one of America's closest allies and truest friends. We are partners in security, we are partners in prosperity and together we are bound by our historic Alliance.

Under President Trump I can assure you that the United States is committed to strengthening our bond for the benefit of all our people and for the benefit of the world.

The relationship between our nations stretches back for generations, as the Prime Minister just said. From the Coral Sea to Kandahar, our friendship has been forged in the fires of sacrifice.

It is very humbling for me to say that only three days from now on April 25th, Australia will commemorate Anzac Day to honour those brave Australians and New Zealanders who gave their lives in defence of freedom, often times shoulder-to-shoulder with Americans.

The sons and daughters of both of our lands have fought together in every major conflict for the past 100 years. From World Wars One and Two to Korea to Vietnam and most recently in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, our grandparents, our parents and now our children have served together, sacrificed together and have defended our freedom and all that we hold dear.

That represents the foundation of an unshakeable bond between America and Australia.

Even now our citizens serve together in Afghanistan in the fight against ISIS and around the world we are deepening our defence collaboration. As the Prime Minister Turnbull and I discussed today we will continue to deepen our defence and security collaboration in the days ahead.

The historic United States-Australia Alliance is more vital than ever to regional security and prosperity.

In recent years we've dramatically stepped up our intelligence sharing,

increased our emphasis on shared cyber capabilities, we've conducted and will continue to conduct joint military exercises to ensure our readiness, including the Talisman Saber later this year.

As the Prime Minister and I discussed, together our nations will continue to uphold a rules based system that is the foundation of peace and prosperity in the Asia Pacific.

In the South China Sea, and throughout the region, we will defend the fundamental freedoms of navigation and over flight and ensure the unimpeded flow of lawful commerce and promote peaceful diplomatic dialogue to address issues of regional and global concern.

And as the Prime Minister and I just reaffirmed, under President Trump's leadership, and yours, the United States and Australia will continue to stand firm and stand strong to confront the most urgent and dangerous threat to peace and security in the Asia Pacific – the regime in North Korea.

While all options are on the table, let me assure you the United States will continue to work closely with Australia, our other allies in the region, and with China to bring economic and the diplomatic pressure to bear on the regime in Pyongyang until they abandon their nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

Mr Prime Minister, know that President Trump and I are truly grateful, truly grateful to you for calling on China even this week to play an even more active and constructive role in addressing the North Korean threat.

Now the President and I have, in his words, great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea, and I know you share that hope.

But as President Trump made clear just a few days ago, if China is unable to deal with North Korea, the United States and our allies will.

The United States and Australia face this threat and every other one together because we know that our security is the foundation of our prosperity.

And today Prime Minister Turnbull and I discussed ways for us to promote renewed prosperity for our people. We are already building on a sturdy foundation, the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement is a case study in success. And while we can still make additional progress, it is a model for what a mutually beneficial trade agreement can be.

Today the United States is far and away Australia's largest economic partner – not just in the region but all across the world. Our economic relationship is worth a stunning \$1.5 trillion. And our two-way investment has grown by 50 per cent in just the last three years alone. And we still have room to grow. Today the Prime Minister and I discussed the need to break down barriers and encourage the kind of policies that will encourage even more trade and investment, more innovation and more opportunities for both our peoples.

We are confident that working together will build on our strong foundation in a way that will be beneficial to the people of America and the people the

Australia.

Beyond our commercial partnership, the President and I are confident that this historic Alliance between the United States and Australia will grow even stronger in the years ahead.

Nowhere is our enduring commitment to each other, and to our shared future more evident than in the topic that the Prime Minister just addressed so eloquently and so passionately – the global fight against terror.

The people of the United States will never forget that Australia invoked our ANZUS security treaty for the first and only time following the September 11 terrorist attacks which claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 innocent people including 11 Australians.

The support that Australia showed America in our darkest hour will never be forgotten.

Australia, like the United States has not been spared. The four lone wolf terror attacks over the past 31 months were all inspired by this global cancer.

People of Australia can rest assured, under President Trump's leadership, and under your capable leadership in Australia, we will not rest, we will not relent until together we drive this evil from the face of the earth.

As I close, let me simply say it is an honour to be here on behalf of President Donald Trump. To say simply from our hearts, the historic Alliance between the United States and Australia is inviolate, it is immutable, and it is a beacon that shines throughout the Asia Pacific and inspires the wider world.

Our shared history, our shared values bind us together and as we look toward what lies ahead, it is always heartening to stand beside a friend and I do so today.

Prime Minister Turnbull, know that under President Donald Trump the historic Alliance between the United States and Australia will grow stronger, our people will grow closer, enhancing our security and our prosperity for generations to come.

And so we go forward with faith, with faith in our historic Alliance, with faith in our shared values, and faith that the best days for America and for Australia are yet to come.

Thank you Mr Prime Minister, it is an honour to be with you today.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, thank you Mr Vice President for those eloquent words – heartfelt, passionate, committed. Thank you so much.

Now, we have some questions and I believe the first is from Marija Jovanovic.

MARIJA JOVANOVIC:

Very well said Prime Minister.

(Laughter)

Marija Jovanovic from SBS News. This question is actually for both of you, if I may? Look, does Australia have an increased role to play in helping moderate the North Korea threat? If so, what is that role and could it indeed be a military one down the track?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you. We work very closely with our ally and our friends in the region. I mean, the global community is committed to the end of this reckless and dangerous conduct and the challenge now is obviously for China because they have, as I have said, and this is not a political point, this is a statement of fact, China has the greatest leverage over North Korea. There is no question about that.

I have made this point to Chinese leaders over a long period of time, in fact before I was Prime Minister. It is self-evident that China has the opportunity and we say the responsibility to bring pressure to bear on North Korea to stop this reckless and dangerous trajectory upon which they are embarked.

Now, we will work closely with the United States as we have, as we always do. At this stage the support that we are providing at the level of diplomacy, and public diplomacy, both private and public diplomacy, is of critical importance and we are quietly confident I would say that China will step up to this challenge and responsibility.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

For more than a generation there's been a consensus in the world community for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. In the 1990s, it was the subject of negotiations, and an agreed framework was arrived at and six party talks would follow some time later. The last administration embraced a policy of strategic patience – all along the way, the regime in North Korea answered the treaties of the world community with broken promises and with continued pursuit, headlong pursuit of their nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions.

As President Trump has made clear, and I have made clear as I travel on his behalf throughout this region, the era of strategic patience is over.

Under the President's leadership and working closely with our allies, with Prime Minister Turnbull, and from my meetings with Prime Minister Abe, and with Acting-President Hwang in South Korea and others, the United States is determined to bring economic and diplomatic pressure to bear working with all of our allies and China to ensure that we achieve a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

All options are on the table and the United States is prepared to do what's

necessary in conjunction with our allies, to see to the security of this region and of our own people. But we are hopeful, in fact, in President Trump's words we have great confidence that China with the encouragement of the United States, of our allies, and we are grateful to say with the strong encouragement of the leadership here in Australia that China will take advantage of the unique position and relationship that it has with North Korea, to bring an end to their nuclear programme and to their ballistic missile programmes.

We call on them to do that.

The President observed recently that China, in a very real sense, is the economic lifeline for North Korea. They've already taken steps which we greatly welcome, intervening in coal shipments and intervening in commercial travel but we believe China can do more and on behalf of the President I am just very grateful that even this week Australia has taken steps to engage with China directly and encourage them to take even more steps to bring that economic and diplomatic pressure to bear.

But make no mistake about it, the United States of America is committed to seeing this way forward, and achieve what has eluded the world community for more a generation and that is to achieve the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Justin Sink from Bloomberg.

JUSTIN SINK:

Thank you. Prime Minister, I wanted to ask you about trade and if there are specific steps the US has asked you to take or that you will be taking to improve bilateral trade after President Trump pulled out of TPP? I'm also wondering what you see is the best way to improve regional trade after the collapse of that agreement?

And Mr Vice President, I wanted to follow on North Korea but ask specifically about some of the recent statements from the Administration. Earlier this week there was some controversy regarding the timing of the armada that President Trump said that he'd send to the region. It has led to mockery in North Korean and Chinese press, and criticism from the South Korean presidential candidate who said that it potentially undermined your Administration's credibility. Does the lack of rhetorical clarity make your job with allies and partners like China harder? And to that point can I ask you to explain the President's recent statement that China is just now taking some unusual moves towards North Korea?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you. In terms of trade we have obviously continuing discussions but at this stage the Australia US Free Trade Agreement is working very, very well.

In terms of trade generally, Australia has been a great beneficiary of free trade and open markets.

(Laughs)

We'll just let that helicopter pass.

We have been a great beneficiary of free trade and open markets. We strongly supported the TPP as being in our national interest.

President Trump has discontinued America's engagement in it. That is his right, absolutely.

Each nation is committed to protecting its economic interests first and foremost, that's the duty each leader has to their own people.

So the United States Government must make its own judgements on that, we look forward to more trade.

President Trump is an international businessman. So he is not, he is hardly, he can hardly be described as somebody who is unused to the benefits of international trade and international commerce. He understands it very well.

But he obviously will decide as the Vice President and I were discussing today, he will decide the, how agreements, new trade deals, whether and to what extent they work in America's interest.

That is the sovereign right and in fact the solemn obligation of every nation and every leader.

But at this stage in terms of the bilateral relationship it is proceeding very, very well. It is proceeding apace actually. And the economic engagement and the prosperity that flows from that has been demonstrated over the years since it came into force in 2005.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Well first on trade, with great respect to the Prime Minister's view and Australia's view of TPP. The President has made it clear and America has taken steps. The Trans Pacific Partnership is a thing of the past for the United States.

As we move forward with the President's philosophy of an America First foreign policy and trade policy. We will continue to pursue opportunities for expanded commerce, but do so on a bilateral basis.

I trust that my travels alone throughout the Asia Pacific this week give evidence of the fact that this Administration is committed to building both our security and economic relationships with countries all across this

region.

We do believe that the bilateral agreement, trade agreement between the United States and Australia is a win-win for our countries. And it is, as I said earlier we think it's a model agreement for how to encourage investment and encourage trade between nations.

I think in the days ahead, we initiated an economic dialogue that I and the Deputy Prime Minister of Japan will be heading up to begin to explore the possibility of expanded economic relations with Japan.

We had discussions about our Free Trade Agreement while I was in South Korea, but it think you'll continue to see President Trump engaging with nations across this region, but again on a bilateral basis.

With regard to the USS Carl Vinson carrier group. Our expectation is that they will be in the Sea of Japan in position in a matter of days, before the end of this month. That decision was set into motion some time ago.

The one thing that nations, most especially the regime in North Korea should make no mistake about, is that the United States has the resources, the personnel and the presence in this region of the world to see to our interests and to see to the security of those interests and our allies.

I think what the President was referring to with regard to China is encouraging news. In his summit at the Southern White House with President Xi. President Trump engaged President Xi in a candid and respectful discussion about China's engagement with North Korea.

And now the steps we're seeing China take, in many ways unprecedented steps, bringing economic pressure to bear on North Korea, are very welcome. We do believe China can do more.

And as I mentioned, we are very grateful for the clear message that Prime Minister Turnbull's Government and Australia are sending to the Chinese to do just that.

But this is a time when I think you'll continue to see the United States and our allies in the region work together to encourage China to take those steps necessary to bring about a peaceable solution, to achieve a nuclear free Korean peninsula.

PRIME MINISTER:

Now, Colin Packham

COLIN PACKHAM:

Thank you, my question relates to the refugee deal signed last year.

Mr Vice President, in February President Trump said of the refugee deal: "I will study this dumb deal", seemingly contradicting assurances given to Mr Turnbull. In recent weeks we've seen officials from the department of

Homeland Security in both detention centres.

Can we infer that President Trump has given the final approval for that deal proceeding? And if so, how many refugees will be resettled in the United States?

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Let me make it clear, the United States intends to honour the agreement, subject to the results of the vetting processes that now apply to all refugees considered for admission to the United States of America.

President Trump has made it clear that we will honour the agreement. It doesn't mean that we admire the agreement.

Frankly, looking back on the last administration the President has never been shy about expressing frustration with other international agreements, most notably the so-called nuclear agreement with Iran.

But rest assured, as I confirmed today with the Prime Minister, the United States of America will honour the agreement and actually we have initiated the process of fulfilling that agreement, subject to the results of the vetting processes that now apply to all refugees in the United States.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you, and Mr Vice President, as I said to the President, we thank you for honouring the commitment made by the President's predecessor.

The commitment to honouring that deal is, that agreement, is very important. And it's one that speaks – whatever the reservations of the President are, and we know what they are about the deal – nonetheless it speaks volumes for the commitment, the integrity of President Trump and your Administration sir, to honour that commitment, as you have committed to and indeed as you are doing, so we thank you for that commitment.

That is a, it's been a, that's been a very important commitment and we thank you for restating that today.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Well and I would just add, if I may Mr Prime Minister, as this topic came up early in the Administration, Prime Minister Turnbull made a case for the agreement with the President.

And the decision to go forward, I think can rightly be seen as a reflection of the enormous importance of the historic alliance between the United States and Australia.

And whatever reservations the President may have about the details of agreements reached by the prior administration. We'll honour this agreement, out of respect for that enormously important alliance.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you sir.

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

I get to call on, Andrew Beatty.

ANDREW BEATTY:

Yep, correct with AFP.

(Laughter)

Mr Vice President, the Administration is ramping up pressure on North Korea, at the same time you seem to have ruled out talks. I'm wondering what you think the end game is here?

What makes you believe that the regime will give up the weapons systems and weapons that it has that ensure that is perhaps the best guarantee of its own survival?

And for the Prime Minister, did you get any clarity on the US position with regards to South China Sea? Do you think that there's a need for more freedom of navigation operations in the region? Would you consider more joint operations in the region?

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

This is just a very serious time and the President sent me to this region to engage with our allies and to reaffirm the alliances that we enjoy but also to make it very, very clear that the era of strategic partnership, or strategic patience is over.

That the United States of America is determined to work with our allies, and especially with China to achieve the objective of a nuclear free Korean peninsula.

We believe that that can occur peaceably, largely owing to the new engagement of China.

In this regard I think the world is seeing President Trump's leadership in high relief. He is a very real sense like the Prime Minister of Australia, he is a bottom line person that likes to get to the point.

And in his meeting with President Xi, he had a very candid conversation about a broad range of issues.

But on the issue of North Korea, the President made it very clear to President Xi that we were looking to China to step up and use that unique relationship that it has with North Korea to achieve an end to the nuclear ambitions and the ballistic missile ambitions of that regime.

And as I said we're encouraged by the steps that China has taken thus far.

That being said we also wanted to make it clear that all options are on the table. And that the United States is prepared to work with our allies to ensure the security of our allies in the region and to ensure the security of the people of the United States of America.

Nuclear weapons in the hands of the regime in Pyongyang, with a ballistic missile program and with the potential for intercontinental ballistic missiles represents a threat to the stability and security of this region and potentially a threat to the continental United States.

And continuing on the path that the world has been on with North Korea over the last 25 years is just unacceptable.

But, again we continue to be hopeful and continue to have great confidence that we can finally after a generation achieve a peaceful solution.

And I want to reiterate again the gratitude of the United States of America for the strong support that our ally here in Australia has provided to this effort.

Even this week meeting with high ranking officials from China urging them to do more, to bring economic and diplomatic pressure to bear on China is welcome.

We truly believe that as our allies in the region and China bring that pressure to bear, that there is a chance that we can achieve a historic objective of a nuclear free Korean peninsula by peaceable means.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you Mr Vice President and we as we have described we share that commitment.

And we are absolutely united in our determination to achieve a nuclear free Korean peninsula.

That has been the goal as the Vice President described, of the global community for many years. The time has come now to realise it.

In turn you asked about the South China Sea, and I just repeat what we have said consistently for many years and that is this: that Australia has no territorial claims in the South China Sea.

We are committed to freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight. Any territorial dispute should be resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law. We call on all parties to refrain from actions that will exacerbate tensions and in particular, we call on all parties to refrain from militarising any features in the South China Sea, any disputed features, in particular in the South China Sea.

The critical thing to understand in our region, as we said at the outset, as both the Vice President and I observed, is the prosperity of everyone in this region, in every nation has been underpinned by decades of peace and

stability, supported by the strong commitment by the United States to this region. The maintenance of peace and stability in this region has had as its sheet anchor the strong commitment of the United States.

And that is why we so welcome the commitment of President Trump's new Administration and as shown by the visit here today and through the region, over the last week of the Vice President.

This is a historic visit and it underlines the importance of the American commitment to our region. The sheet anchor, the foundation, the bedrock of the peace and the stability upon which the security and the prosperity of billions depend.

Thank you all very much.

[ENDS]