Paige Montfort:

Thank you so much and hello everyone. Good morning, or a very late good evening if you are dialing in from Australia like one of our speakers. As our operator stated, my name is Paige Montfort. I’m the media relations manager here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS, in Washington, D.C. Thank you all for joining us to preview next week’s 2023 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations. I am joined today by three leading Australia experts here at CSIS, who are going to weigh in on the agenda, their expectations for the dialogue, and bilateral relations more broadly, and so I’ll introduce them in the order in which they’ll be speaking. They’re each going to provide some opening remarks and analysis, and then afterwards we’ll open it up to your Q&A. And, as always, we will have a transcript out from this briefing within just a few hours.

So introducing our speakers now, first we’ll hear from Dr. Charles Edel. He is our Australia Chair and a senior adviser here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

And after Charlie, we’ll hear from James Carouso. He is senior adviser with our Australia Chair and also chairman of the advisory council to our Australia Chair and former acting U.S. ambassador to Australia.

And, finally, last but certainly not least, we have Lavina Lee dialing in today from Sydney. She is an adjunct fellow with CSIS and she’s also a professor at Macquarie University.

So without further ado, we have a lot of great insights and analysis to hear today. I’ll turn it over to Charlie to get us started.

Charles Edel:

Great. Thanks, Paige. Good morning, and thank you to all of us. Thank you to everyone who’s dialing in here, especially Lavina, who’s calling in from Sydney where it’s quite late.

Looking forward to next week’s Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations – that’s AUSMIN for short – in Brisbane I thought I would offer an overview of what to expect in this year’s meeting, a look at the progress since last year’s AUSMIN, which is held in December in Washington, and some context on the state of American-Australian – of the American-Australian alliance.

I also note that while AUSMIN is the focus of this briefing there are other important stops on this trip. Lloyd Austin will stop in Papua New Guinea on his way to Australia and visit northern Australia to observe the Talisman Sabre exercises while Tony Blinken will visit Tonga and New Zealand on his way to Australia.
I’ll speak about those visits but want to start with AUSMIN. Since 1985 AUSMIN, the annual meeting between the U.S. secretary of state and defense and their Australian counterparts, has been the premier forum for the two nations’ leaders to exercise view – to exchange views, rather, on regional and global developments and to discuss how best to respond to those developments.

The 33 AUSMIN sessions held over the past three decades showcase the remarkable growth in the scope and scale of the relationship’s ambitions. This has been reflected in a more comprehensive AUSMIN agenda over time. You can see this in last year’s AUSMIN, which resulted in one of the most comprehensive sets of commitments from the U.S. and Australia covering a wide range of issues.

Because this year’s AUSMIN occurs so close to last year’s and as there is an upcoming state visit later this year I’d expect that next week’s meetings in Brisbane will be devoted to checking in, comparing notes, and monitoring progress. There will be some new announcements, too, but the lion’s share of deliverables will be deferred to leaders’ visit in Washington later this year.

Because of that next week’s AUSMIN meeting is an opportunity to advance progress on deliverables to be made at that state’s visit. In Brisbane there will be two discussions, one private and, largely, revolving around China and one public that centers on what the U.S. and Australia are doing to deliver for the region.

They won’t be that different but the private session will revolve around the candid exchange of views on China, on Taiwan, and on the broader Indo-Pacific, offering the principals an opportunity to compare approaches about what is working, where progress has been made, and where they need to step up the tempo of their activities.

The public discussion will focus on what actions, what activities, and what policies Australia and the United States are jointly pursuing to support their vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. On the latter there are three areas – three pillars – around which U.S.-Australian alliance and, therefore, AUSMIN now revolve – defense, economic, and climate change and clean energy.

Those are the three areas we should expect to see emphasis on at this year’s AUSMIN with the stress on following through on prior commitments and giving other key initiatives more concrete shape.

On the defense side we’ve seen the transformation in the defense relationship over the past several years as the two countries are increasing their interoperability, building their logistical capacity, strengthening force
posture initiatives, and integrating their planning to a degree that would have previously been unimaginable.

At last year’s AUSMIN, which should be the benchmark here, Canberra and Washington committed to enhancing Australia’s capability to provide logistical support for U.S. forces, identifying priority locations in Australia to support enhanced U.S. force posture with associated infrastructure, increasing the number and types of rotational deployments of U.S. forces in Australia, and expanding trilateral defense cooperation with Japan.

In line with that I’d expect this year’s AUSMIN will see further definition and greater details on the way forward for all those efforts, more on force posture, rotational presence, joint activities, logistics, munitions, and joint efforts with the Japanese.

On the economic front, prior to 2018 mentions of economic cooperation in AUSMIN joint statements were mostly related to broad macroeconomic priorities and commitments to increase bilateral trade.

However, with a renewed focus on both climate change and the increased vulnerability of global supply chains Washington and Canberra have bolstered their economic agenda at AUSMIN. Given the strategic value of critical minerals and the clean energy transition and modern manufacturing, Canberra and Washington also have stepped up their efforts to diversify their critical mineral mining and processing supply chains. In line with that, climate and clean energy have grown more prominent in recent AUSMIN announcements and will almost certainly be a focus of the discussions. Among other key developments likely to be discussed is the May 2023 Australia-U.S. Climate, Critical Minerals and Clean energy Transformation Compact, signed by President Biden and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Hiroshima, which is the first climate agreement between the two countries. This agreement establishes a framework for bilateral cooperation in accelerating the net zero transition and diversifying of green energy supply chains, but does not yet have a fully defined agenda.

Now, what should we expect? These discussions of enhanced cooperation on defense, diplomacy, economics, and climate are taking place against a backdrop of an alliance that has been not only getting closer over the past several years but a relationship that now works across an expanding number of fields, that coordinates strategy on things big and small, and that now sees two governments and two leaders whose visions are increasingly synced. Both the U.S. and Australian governments are at a critical juncture for how they deal with Beijing as they ramp up their deterrence efforts and seek to make their supply chains more resilient and further diversify their commercial relations away from trade with China. But both governments are also working to increase their contact points with Beijing. Discussing how
Washington and Canberra balance engagement and competition, both on their own and jointly, is really the backbone of this meeting.

Before concluding, let me note that Australia is not the only stop on the agenda for next week. Tony Blinken will be traveling to Tonga to open a new U.S. embassy and to New Zealand to cheer on the U.S. women’s soccer team at the World Cup games. Lloyd Austin will be stopping in Papua New Guinea to discuss the U.S.-PNG Defense Cooperation Agreement, and then to observe Talisman Saber exercises in Australia.

Three broad points to be made here.

First, this stress on U.S. engagement with the Pacific Island countries – the U.S. is increasing its presence across the region both diplomatically and militarily. These trips are significant and they’re not one-offs. The U.S. has significantly increased its tempo of engagement across the region, it’s opened other embassies this year, it’s in the process of finalizing negotiations to renew the compacts with Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands, and is set to host the second leaders meeting in two years in Washington. I’d also note that as important as these steps are, it’s important to stress that U.S. support for the Pacific Islands, particularly the increased funding for the compact states, is contingent on congressional approval.

Second, the U.S. approach is deliberately being framed and undertaken in contrast to how China operates in the region. That is, U.S. activities are meant to be undertaken in a transparent fashion, in a manner that’s intended to boost regionalism, and in a way that’s meant to enhance the sovereignty of the Pacific states, which is to say that this is being done in partnership with the island states to demonstrate U.S. attention to the region and implicitly as a counter to Chinese activities across the region. Moreover, this is also the first trip to PNG by a sitting secretary of Defense and it follows the secretary of State’s visit in May, and is intended to provide forward momentum on the Defense Cooperation Agreement.

Finally, the DCA between PNG and the U.S. and the Talisman Saber exercises should both be seen as a means to increase and diversify U.S. presence in the region, bolster local capacity and sovereignty, and enhance logistical capacity.

With that, let me hand it back over to Paige or, rather, over to Jim Carouso. Thank you.

Ms. Montfort: Yes, Jim, go ahead.

James Carouso: Thank you, Charlie.
First, let’s talk about what these meetings are like. I was in a couple of them in 2017 and 2018, and as much as it is agenda set forth by the sherpas and a lot of embassy preparation, it’s also an opportunity for some good time, for the foreign ministers to get together and really get in a deep dive into the issues. The fact that the U.S. and Australia are such close allies, speak the same language, and have a history of cooperation across the board means these meetings can be very useful in sort of plotting out all the blue-sky objectives. It all depends on the personal relationships between these individuals.

So in 2017, for instance, the meetings were in Sydney. Prime Minister Turnbull hosted a dinner at Kirribilli House, his residence in Sydney. The meetings were held in Admiralty House, the home of the governor general of New South Wales, spectacular views of the harbor. And it was a great atmosphere for building those relationships, given that this was the first meeting between Secretary Tillerson, at the time, and Secretary Mattis, and their counterparts in Australia. So it was a lot of good time together to start building those relationships.

By the next meeting, 2018, Secretary Tillerson was out. We had Secretary Pompeo. The meeting was in – at Stanford, in Palo Alto. A much more abbreviated set of meetings. Less time to really get into some of those relationship-building and big-picture ideas. Nevertheless, it was all very useful. This meeting this time, of course, Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin have known their counterparts for a while. Minister Wong, Minister Marles. Very, very up on the relationship. Know the issues inside and out. These will be detailed discussions of the issues relating to whether it’s Ukraine, China, South China Sea, how to cooperate more closely in the region on economic development, and climate change, which Lavina will get into.

Just a couple things to keep in mind. These are not economic ministers. Despite having the word “trade” in its name, Minister Wong leaves most of that to her Trade Minister Farrell. So when we talk about economic issues, it’s more sort of the big picture – IPEF, the Inter-Pacific Economic Framework, which is being negotiated. None of these ministers are involved in those negotiations, but they’ll make a comment about how they hope these will be completed by the end of the year.

Much more to the point, they’ll be talking about things like making more resilient supply chains, which they’ve been talking about actually since at least 2020, critical minerals, of how we work more closely together on those and other critical parts of the supply chain, how to make them more resilient, how to drive private investment into these areas. And, again, these have been discussed for at least the past three AUSMINs. They’ll talk about APEC, and the course of APEC. They’ll probably mention ASEAN centrality, not only as a security driver but an economic driver for the region. And we
can expect, I believe, a lot of discussion about how we will continue on things like the Minerals Security Partnership, Energy Resource Governance Initiative, and other things related to making a more seamless transition to a green economy.

Interestingly, Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Fernandez, at State, gave a speech yesterday at CSIS where he talked about securing the international critical mineral supply chain as a key goal of the United States government, and the importance of working with likeminded partners to achieve that goal. Mentioned the new security project having 14 members, aiming to catalyze investment in strategic critical minerals projects, not limited to the Minerals Security Project members for investment. He did not, however, mention AUSMIN or Australia specifically. Whether that’s not to steal his boss’s thunder or because he didn’t want to single any country out at this point, but it’s very interesting that he made that speech yesterday emphasizing these factors.

With that, I think I’ll turn now over to Lavina.

Lavina Lee: (Off mic.)

Ms. Montfort: Hey, Lavina, you might be on mute.

De. Lee: Yes, I am on mute. Sorry about that. Thank you, Jim, and thank you, Charlie, for that comprehensive introduction. Charlie’s asked me to focus mostly on the Pacific Islands, and then to also talk a little bit more about what we can expect about bilateral discussions on climate change.

So I’ll start with the Pacific Islands by saying that Australia and the U.S. have never been more interested in the Pacific Islands than they are now. It’s become a much bigger focus and subject for AUSMIN discussions, particularly after the Solomons debacle, that is the signing of the security pact between the Solomons and China in 2022. And this was made worse about a month ago when the Solomons then signed a pact on police cooperation and also upgraded their relationship with China to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Now, I think you could say that this represented a mutual failure to read the trends in the Solomons. And Australia had insisted that managing the Pacific was our responsibility. Australia has been the largest aid donor, by far, to the Pacific for more than 15 years. So what we’re seeing now is that the U.S. wants to ensure that other Pacific nations are not tempted to follow suit. And there’s a recognition that Australia can’t do this all by itself. So both countries are expanding their diplomatic presence and engagement. Australia, through our foreign minister, prime minister, and defense minister have made multiple trips and have been at pains to address Pacific Island
priorities in a way that the previous liberal government failed to do and, I would say, a primary breakthrough with the greater commitment of the new government to address climate change.

The U.S., as Charlie mentioned, has been opening new embassies and expanding its diplomatic footprint, but also both countries are ramping up their security cooperation with the Pacific Island countries. And we had the PNG-U.S. Defense and Maritime Agreement signed in May 2023. Australia too has been increasing its development aid. In 2022, it announced an increase of $900 million – Australian dollars – over four years for the Pacific. And this is directed towards climate change, policing, regional aerial surveillance, and in keeping with the Pacific Islands. Worries about illegal fishing and drug smuggling. And both Australia and the U.S. is keen to address the region’s concerns by also showing that they are a provider of public goods without strings attached, as opposed to China.

Now, finally, I’d just like to say that in their discussions at AUSMIN we’re likely to see some focus on how the two countries can bring in other liberal democratic and developed-country partners into the Pacific. And recently there was a partnership in the Blue Economy Initiative that was announced, involving the United Kingdom, Japan, and New Zealand. But I think we could see other groups being targeted like the EU and India after Modi’s visit, and to see also tying in with the Quad’s Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness.

Now, in terms of climate change, as Charlie mentioned, there was an Australia-U.S. Climate, Critical Minerals, and Clean Energy Transformation Compact announced only in May 2023. So we can’t anticipate too much – too much of a significant update on the agenda. This is meant to be fleshed out by the end of 2023, for this compact. But it is ambitiously titled as the third pillar of the alliance, along with energy – sorry – with economy and defense. The idea is to coordinate policy and investment on clean energy and critical minerals and supply chains. And the initial focus seems to be on electric vehicle supply chains, especially critical minerals needed for battery production and also green hydrogen production.

And we need to see this, I think, as part of the Biden administration’s new Washington consensus that is tying together U.S. objectives of bolstering the U.S. industrial base, addressing domestic inequalities, addressing climate change, and also competing with and countering China’s ability to dominate emerging climate change technology markets. And also, then, reducing dependency or de-risking relations with China. And I think there are great opportunities for both sides.

From Australia’s side, there is enormous gain to be had from global supply chain resilient initiatives, especially electric vehicle supply chains. And
Australia will likely experience diminishing returns on further liberalization through FTAs, and it really needs help to develop financing, workforce, and technological know-how to compete in the value-added industries that might be created by clean energy supply chain investments. So Australia would benefit enormously, should Congress agree to add Australia as a domestic source under the Defense Production Act. And it would – from the American side, obviously Australia would be a provider of critical minerals and commodities, whilst Australia would be a beneficiary of U.S. capital and industrial expertise.

And I’ll just leave it there.

Ms. Montfort: Great. Thank you so much, Lavina. And thank you to Charlie and to Jim as well for your insights.

At this time we are going to open it up to Q&A from those of you who have dialed in to listen. So I’ll turn it back over to our AT&T operator briefly. He is going to provide the queueing instructions.

Operator: Thank you.

(Gives queueing instructions.)

One moment, please, for the first question.

And we’ll go to the line of Anton La Guardia. Your line is open.

Q: Thank you. Can you hear me?

Ms. Montfort: Yes, we can.

Q: OK. Thank you very much, Charles and others, for doing this; really interesting.

Could you just take one step back? And looking at the development of U.S.-Australia relations, describe kind of what point they’ve got to, particularly Australia’s growing geopolitical role in, you know, in America’s sort of thinking about the Indo-Pacific? What place does it occupy?

Dr. Edel: Sure. I’m happy to start off with that and would love to hear both Jim and Lavina’s takes if they want to add in too, Anton.

So in terms of the place that they’ve got into, I would note that when we launched the CSIS Australia chair and had Kurt Campbell from the White House in to speak, he opened with the comment that everything that the
United States now does in the Indo-Pacific region, we will do with and in coordination with the Australians.

At this point, the alliance is central, it is key, to how the United States operates in and across the Indo-Pacific region. If we think about that from a military perspective, a real increase, in fact, even a transformation in the alliance. If we think about this in economic terms, as you heard from both Jim and Lavina, on supply chains, on critical minerals, and if we think too in the diplomatic space especially, there is just a syncing of both kind of objectives and a deconflicting and a coordination of what it is that we are doing with Australians.

Now, I don’t want to overstate things, that this means that Australia is the only or the most important partner in all aspects of the Indo-Pacific. Obviously when we travel up to Northeast Asia, Japan and Korea play a very significant role for the United States. But if we think about the breadth of activities across the Indo-Pacific, the history, the shared amounts of trust, and increasingly the aligned views of the degradation of the security environment, mean that Australia and the United States are now working at a level that they have not before. And when the United States thinks about its role in and across the region, Australia now occupies close to a central place, even if its geography is not central in the region.

Jim and Lavina, I’m not sure if you would like to add anything to that as well, but I’d love to hear your comments if you do.

Mr. Caruso: Thanks Charlie.

Just to add to that specifically about the Pacific Islands, you know, for years the U.S. sort of focused on the North Pacific and sort of expected Australia, and I guess to some extent New Zealand, to deal with the South Pacific. And as a result, we closed our embassies in places like the Solomons and Tonga.

The fact that we're reopening our embassies is not so much because any country failed. It's because U.S. presence in and of itself is an important factor in showing interest and being able to coordinate with our partners our efforts in these areas. I saw that in INDOPACOM. I saw that when I was at the State Department. The change in attitude towards the importance of the South Pacific, and our mere presence and working more closely with Australia to coordinate.

For instance, at the last AUSMIN it was agreed that our aid agencies would coordinate the efforts in the region so as not to start stepping on each other because these are, in fact, small economies, and we need more bang for the buck and not overwhelm them.
So, anyway, it’s a pretty big shift in the U.S. attitude.

Lavina?

Dr. Lee: Yeah, and I think what I’d emphasize if you were to look through – consistently look through defense and foreign policy documents over the last five to 10 years you would see especially the repeated refrain that the balance of power in this region can’t be maintained without the United States present.

So from Australia’s perspective what you can see that growing synergy between the U.S. and Australia is really about the Australians really trying to support and encourage the United States to continue its engagement and to deepen its engagement in the region, and we can see that things like AUKUS, our defense strategic review of this year, represents this idea that Australia should – it’s in Australia’s interests to help the United States to project power in the region and to allow our geography to be used in that way but to also step up our own defense capabilities so that we can also play a part in a partnership with the U.S. to maintain that balance of power.

And I’d just reiterate what the others have already said, that there’s a remarkable level of cooperation going on in – not only in defense and security but now in development aid, in technology cooperation, supply chains, economy and trade, et cetera.

Ms. Montfort: Great. Thank you so much, Lavina.

I will go on to our next question.

Operator: And that will come from the line of Emilie Gramenz. Your line is open.

Q: Hi. Thanks for doing this, everyone.

Just wanted to chase up it was mentioned earlier that there’s some working to try and expand the other partners who are involved in expanding things in the Pacific. Aside from, I guess, countering China, I mean, what are the U.S. and Australia saying to allies or partners to try and get further engagement in the region?

Dr. Lee: I can have a stab at that one.


Dr. Lee: OK. Well, I would say that when you say apart from countering China I think that is the central impetus behind why many countries are taking a greater interest in the Pacific.
Now, that might be an obvious thing to say but I think, you know, there’s many countries like Japan, Australia, New Zealand, to some extent the European Union, who have been giving development aid to the Pacific for a very long time and in much greater quantities than China ever has.

But, yet, now they’re seeing that this expenditure of aid doesn’t necessarily lead to strategic outcomes. So there’s a much more concerted effort to pull resources, to coordinate, to be able to, you know, not double count or work at cross purposes because they can see that China is making significant inroads into the Pacific and that’s not of benefit not only to Australia and New Zealand but to the United States and Japan, particularly, as well.

Dr. Edel: I’d add just a little bit on top of those very good comments because I think Lavina has nailed, as she said, the central impetus behind this drive.

When the U.S. and Australia reach out to other nations part of the strategic approach that they’re encouraging is that, collectively, we have more ability to deliver than we do individually; that it is oftentimes in coordination done more strategically; and that by doing so, the U.S., Australia, and others can help boost regionalism and, therefore, kind of collective strength of the Pacific region, and enhance the sovereignty of those individual countries.

Now, both enhancing regionalism and boosting sovereignty are things that are both desired by the Pacific and also stand in stark contrast to how China has approached each of those individual nations. So it’s both, I think, a conversation about objectives, about impetus, but also about the strategic approach that will both – that will best deliver those objectives.

Operator: And next we’ll go to the line of Tom Minear. Your line is open.

Q: Hi. Well, thanks for doing this. I just had a couple of quick questions.

One, on listing Australia as a domestic source in the Defense Production Act. I know that was mentioned earlier. That’s, obviously, something the Australian government wants to happen as soon as possible. I know Congress looked at it last year, and I think rejected it in the Senate. So I’m just interested in what kind of progress you’ve seen this year in that being considered on the Hill, what are the chances of that actually happening this year?

And just separately, on U.S. force posture in Australia, it sounds like for the last few AUSMINs, at least, that’s been a kind of constant announcement of, you know, increased U.S. rotations and a bolstered force posture. But it seems like we haven’t had much in the way of details and practical information about what that looks like in terms of numbers and different
rotations. I'm just wondering whether you think there's any reason to doubt that, you know, U.S. force posture is actually growing, or if that's more a case of sort of trying to signal to the region that it's happening without necessarily giving away, you know, the details that generals might like to know but might be less useful to broadcast more widely?

Dr. Edel: Tom, I can start out.

Ms. Montfort: Charlie, do you want to start?

Dr. Edel: Yeah, yeah, I'll start on that, although I'll leave aside the Defense Production Act, on where Congress is at on that. I think Congress is more wrapped up, I would say, Tom, with some of the discussions around AUKUS and the enabling legislation, which is not divorced from the question you ask, and certainly related. But let me put that to the side.

On the force posture announcements, these are incredibly important. And, I think as you have rightly pointed out, if we go back the last three or four years, starting really in 2020, we've seen a growth in ambition about what a diversified U.S. force posture would look like in Australia: more of a logistical hub in Australia; a buildout of some of the infrastructure or facilities, particularly in Northern Territories (sic; Territory) and in Queensland; the desire to have more fuel and munitions capabilities pre-positioned there. But also, as you've rightly noted, you know, not a lot of announcements and not always a lot of deliverables on this. Now, that is not completely fair, as we are beginning to see the enhanced rotational deployment of U.S. aircraft of all sorts, including bomber aircraft.

What I would anticipate is it takes a while to get these things going. We've seen some movement by the Australians, too, in both the Defense Strategic Review and in their budget, beginning to build out some of the infrastructure, particularly the airfields, in northern Australia. I know that we've still been waiting for movement on munitions, particularly surrounding initiatives like GWEO, the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Program that the Australians have promoted but have not yet delivered on. I would expect further announcements on both of those initiatives at this AUSMIN.

I'd also note that we are looking for more granularity for the placeholder that we got last year about the invitation to Japan to join in more defense posture initiatives. And I would expect that there has been a lot of progress that's been made on that and we'll see more announcements.

In terms of your question about whether or not this is deliberately, you know, obfuscated, I don't think that's the case because we know that, in addition to AUSMIN, we're seeing Talisman Saber exercises. We're seeing
more than 30,000 troops. We’re seeing troops from more than 13 different nations, including Indonesia, including three different Pacific Island states, including the Germans from Europe as well. So it’s not as if, you know, exercises are being shielded. In fact, they are deliberately, I think, being staged – the main focus of this one, I would note, too, is to look at logistics, contested logistics. And that is meant as a spur to both work together, to enhance how we work with many nations, but also as good messaging and a reminder to China that now there are more than a dozen countries participating in this and that it should expect a similar type of coalition if there were various contingencies on this.

So I’d expect that we’ll see more announcements here, but you’ll also begin to see an uptick in the tempo of activities which begins to put, as they say, some real meat on the bones there.

Mr. Caruso: Just to add on what Charlie said –

Ms. Montfort: Thanks, Charlie.

Jim, yeah, I was going to say, do you want to add there?

Mr. Caruso: Yeah, just quickly. If you look back at when the Marine rotations first started, you couldn’t call the base. The numbers were kept small deliberately. The idea of Marines being there permanently was actually a problem politically in Australia. And now we’ve gone, in not a lot of years, into this idea of when are we going to get more folks there longer term?

So it is an evolution, but a very quick evolution in thinking about these things. But it is happening. And certainly with the subs that are going to start visiting, they will need some support mechanism, which will probably require folks to be there for a period of time.

As far as domestic sources, you know, this is another political issue for some members of Congress from certain mining states, so that will have to be worked out.

Dr. Lee: I think I might just add something about the question of is the information deliberately maybe not being suppressed, but being withheld. I think you might think of it this way. There’s some aspects of force posture that send a deterrent signal, and those are the ones that need to be amplified, or the government – the Australian government, the U.S. government – would like to be amplified to Beijing. So, as Charlie mentioned, Talisman Saber and the number of countries that are involved and the complexity – the growing complexity of those exercises is something that both governments would want to signal.
In terms of suppression or keeping things a little bit more quiet, they would be the kinds of things that might start to alarm the Australian public. And there I’m thinking of the expansion of the Tindal airbase to allow for the rotation of – and the – stronger rotation of B-52 bombers in the Northern Territory. And I think whenever any types of – any type of allusion to Australia becoming a bigger target, potentially becoming a bigger target because of its support for U.S. forces, I think the Australian government would like to play that down.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you all so much. I know we’re coming up on time, but we do have one more question in the queue I’d like to get to before we wrap up.

Operator: And that comes from the line of Shaun Waterman. Your line is open.

Q: Yes. Hello. Can you hear me?

Ms. Montfort: Yes. Yes, we can.

Q: Thank you.

So I have one question then. Do we think the issue of the Assange case might come up in any context in this meeting? It is something the Australian prime minister said last year, and has said since, that he’s working on, you know, behind closed doors. Do we – I mean, perhaps these aren’t the right people to talk about that issue. What do you think?

Ms. Montfort: Thank you, Shaun.

Would anyone like to take a stab at that?

Dr. Edel: Sure. I’ll weigh in quickly, but I’d love to hear Jim’s take about the dynamics of public-private conversations, which is all to say that I think you can take the prime minister at his word that things will be brought up behind closed doors. I don’t think this will be part of the public announcements in any way. This is an issue that is important to the Albanese government. I wouldn’t be surprised if it comes up. I would be greatly surprised if this is a public issue in any way.

Mr. Caruso: Charlie’s absolutely right. I expect it to come up. I expect to hear nothing about it.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you both so much.

Q: Wonderful. Thank you.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you both. And thank you, Shaun, for your question.
We are coming up right perfectly on time, so we will stop it there. Thank you to everyone who has dialed in and to our experts for joining us, and Lavina for joining us quite late in Sydney.

To everyone who has dialed in, please feel free to reach out to me, Paige Montfort, if you have any follow-ups in the coming days as we approach AUSMIN. And again, as I noted at the top of the call, we will have a transcript out within just a few hours today. I’ll send it directly to everyone who has RSVPed. It will also be published on CSIS.org.

So have a great day ahead, everyone, or night in some cases, and thank you for calling in.

(END)