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By Melissa Harrison

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On 7 September 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that he would travel to Beijing within the next few months, to mark the 50th anniversary of former Labor PM Gough Whitlam's 1973 trip as the first Australian prime minister to visit China. In an historic 31 October 1973 speech in Beijing, Whitlam overturned decades of Cold War-era hostility by warmly advocating close cooperation and association between Australia and China. ...

The ABC reported on 8 September that Albanese believed dialogue between China and Australia would improve cooperation and engagement, and lead to "mutual agreement, mutual respect and advance the interests of both our nations". China's Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian stated in a 28 September 2023 address that Albanese's trip would "take place at a significant moment as our two countries are standing at the start point of another 50 years of our bilateral relations. It's my belief that his visit will certainly exert an important influence on the sound and stable development of China-Australia relations in the coming years and decades."

Albanese's trip will be the first time a sitting Australian prime minister has visited China since 2016. This period of absence coincides with the massive anti-China propaganda operation levelled against the Australian public, led by national security and intelligence agencies acting in collusion with the mainstream media, which escalated from 2017. This operation successfully implemented a shadow foreign policy agenda of hostility toward China, in service of US-UK geopolitical goals ahead of Australia's own national interest.

However, Albanese's move to stabilise the Australia-China relationship is being sabotaged by Albanese's predecessor, former Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has re-emerged after his election loss to agitate against China from the backbench. While serving as Prime Minister (in 2018-22), Morrison oversaw the Australian government's escalating hostility towards China, which significantly damaged Australia-China relations. The Morrison Government's numerous anti-China actions, which included developing a 2020 defence strategy which essentially re-committed to a Cold War with China, deliberately provoked a trade backlash which severely impacted Australian exporters.

As reported by the ABC, two days before Albanese announced his visit to Beijing, Morrison warned a Coalition party room meeting against the Albanese Government's so-called "appeasement and concessional approach" to restoring bilateral relations with China. One MP who was present told the ABC that Morrison "was warning us about [President Xi and his regime—urging us to hold the line, and not follow Labor's approach]. Morrison "continued to be proud at how his government stood up to China".

Shortly after Albanese confirmed his plans to travel to China to mark the anniversary of Whitlam's historic visit, Morrison provocatively announced that he would visit Taiwan to show his support for the island shortly before Albanese's trip. Morrison told the 20 September 2023 Australian that this would provide an "interesting contrast" to Albanese's visit. Morrison declared that regional security would not be achieved through "appeasement" of China, and claimed that Albanese's visit carried significant risks, because China could use the event to create the impression of a "backdown by Australia". Morrison will speak at the 11-12 October Yushan Forum, an event which is organised by the Taiwanese government and the Taiwan-Australia Exchange Foundation, an ostensibly non-governmental organisation headed by numerous Taiwanese government officials. At the same Yushan Forum in 2021, former Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott made a provocative speech labelling China a "bully" and urging solidarity with Taiwan.

The history of China-Australia bilateral relations demonstrates that Morrison's behaviour is an act of deliberate provocation, continuing his pattern of calculated insults toward China. When Australia established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in December 1972, shortly after Whitlam's election, a crucial part of the agreement was Australia's recognition of the PRC as the sole legal government of all China. Australia acknowledged the PRC's position that Taiwan is a province of China, and broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan in early 1973. Under this "One China" policy, which is still in effect today, Australia does not recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state and "does not regard the authorities in Taiwan as having the status of a national government", according to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Instead, Australia maintains unofficial economic, trade and cultural contacts with Taiwan.

Chinese Ambassador Xiao expressed concern over both Morrison's planned visit and a delegation of Australian parliamentarians who had recently travelled to Taiwan to meet with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. As reported by the 28 September 2023 Australian Financial Review, Xiao stated that these political figures "wear political hats, they carry political significance". Xiao said he hoped that Morrison and the parliamentary delegates would "stick with the One China policy in words and deeds" and refrain from engaging with Taiwan in a formal capacity, saying: "Their words, their actions on the question of Taiwan will absolutely bring about negative effects on the ongoing improvement of our relations between China and Australia". However, the 29 September 2023 Australian reported that in response to Xiao's concerns, Morrison retorted: "The Chinese government in Beijing does not get to decide whether Australian members of parliament can visit Taiwan or not, nor do they get to tell Australians or the world what Australia's One China policy means".

Morrison has not yet disclosed who will be paying for his trip to Taiwan to antagonise the Chinese government. However, Morrison's planned Taiwan address is just the latest in a bevy of international speaking engagements through which the former PM continues to agitate against China.

Morrison holds the distinction of being the first former prime minister to be formally censured by parliament, for secretly appointing himself to five ministerial positions, which caused a national scandal. However, Morrison's reputation as a disgraced former Prime Minister is apparently being rehabilitated, as he aims to be a fixture of the international speaking circuit. Morrison recently signed up with a talent



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