

Five Eyes sabotage of Albanese's China trip

To continue "stabilising" fraught Australia-China relations, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced on 7 September 2023 that he would visit China within the next several months, to mark the 50th anniversary of former PM Gough Whitlam's historic 1973 trip. However, mainstream media, and politicians acting on behalf of foreign powers, are attempting to sabotage this next step in repairing bilateral ties.

Shortly after Albanese's announcement, former Prime Minister Scott Morrison provocatively announced that he would travel to Taiwan to provide a "contrast" to Albanese's visit (AAS, 4 October 2023). Australian mainstream media soon followed suit, sensationally reporting that anonymous security experts had warned the Albanese government that the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircraft which the Prime Minister will use to fly to Beijing could be vulnerable to attacks by Chinese spies.

On 4 October 2023, *The Australian* claimed that Albanese's "VIP plane [was] at risk in Beijing", reporting that Albanese's upcoming trip to China "has been thrown off course by security advice that he should avoid travelling in his RAAF jet because its systems could be hacked by Chinese spies. ... The concerns over the aircraft's security on the tarmac in Beijing are a stark reminder that, while the government is determined to stabilise relations with China, the country remains a potential future adversary for Australia, and has high-level hacking capabilities."

However, Sky News on 5 October revealed the speculative nature of the reports: "In 2017, a team of United States government and industry personnel demonstrated it was *possible* to hack a commercial plane remotely. While the RAAF systems are more secure, *it is in theory possible* the same methods could be applied to the Prime Minister's plane." (Emphasis added.)

Groundhog Day: contrived crises derail diplomatic efforts



Scott Morrison with his "faith"-linked pals Mike Pence and Mike Pompeo: did these three use their professed "faith" as a cover for their warmongering? Photo: Flickr

The attempts to sabotage Albanese's important trip, which will be the first time a sitting Australian prime minister has visited China since 2016, are not the first time that media-intelligence-political operatives have derailed efforts to repair Australia-China relations. On 22 May 2018, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop met with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Argentina. The 23 May 2018 *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the Turnbull Government "had hoped the meeting would smooth over tensions in the bilateral relationship". However, only hours after Bishop's meeting, China-hawk Liberal MP Andrew Hastie re-inflamed tensions when he used parliamentary privilege to accuse prominent Chinese-Australian businessman Dr Chau Chak Wing of involvement in a bribery conspiracy, a claim which was later discredited by a federal court. Scandalously, Hastie, who has a background in military intelligence, forewarned Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) chief Duncan Lewis of his intended speech, but not his own prime minister, who may have stopped or delayed him to ensure a good outcome from Bishop's meeting.

In January 2019, Defence Minister Christopher Pyne visited China, as the first Australian defence minister to visit the country in four years, to smooth strained bilateral relations. At the same time, Australian-Chinese writer Yang Hengjun, a former Chinese spy who primarily resided in the USA, also visited China, where he was promptly arrested. The timing of Yang's visit is more than curious, given his connections to Australian intelligence figures and close affiliation with US government-connected individuals associated with efforts to foment political unrest in China. Mainstream media erupted with reports about the arrest, which undermined the reason for Pyne's visit. Chinese authorities have since charged Yang with espionage offences.

On 21 December 2022, Foreign Minister Penny Wong visited China to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Australia, the first visit of an Australian foreign minister to China since 2018, which was an effort toward rebuilding the Australia-China

relationship. The following day, Australian media headlined with reports that the Australian Federal Police (AFP) had raided the home of a former “Top Gun” pilot, Keith Hartley, in connection with previous media allegations that China had attempted to recruit Western ex-servicemen, including Australians, using a South African flight school as an intermediary, and that Western pilots had trained Chinese military pilots there. This narrative, which has been disputed by the flight school and the pilots concerned, was the product of a government-media-intelligence operation instigated in the UK. As the AAS has reported, ASIO was intimately involved in promoting these allegations. Although the raid had actually occurred a month earlier, mainstream media conveniently broke the story just in time to overshadow Wong’s Beijing trip. The 22 December 2022 *Australian* gloated that the “growing controversy coincides with the visit to China by Wong”, who sought to improve Australia-China ties after “years of strained diplomatic relations”.

Shock arrests conveniently timed to derail the repair of diplomatic relations with China have also occurred in other Five Eyes countries. The 1 December 2018 *New York Times* reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump had met and agreed to a compromise which called a truce to the US-China trade war. *NYT* reported that the handshake deal paused “what was becoming a headlong race toward economic conflict”. On the same day, Five Eyes partner Canada arrested Meng Wangzhou, the daughter of Ren Zhengfei, founder of Chinese telecommunications company Huawei. Meng, who was also Huawei’s Chief Financial Officer, was arrested at the request of US authorities on various financial crime charges which were later dismissed by a US judge. It was reported that the “shock arrest” riled Chinese authorities and “raise[d] fresh doubts over a 90-day truce on trade struck between” Trump and Xi, “dealing a blow to hopes of easing of Sino-US trade tensions”.

Morrison’s benefactor: Pious Mike ‘we lied, we cheated, we stole’ Pompeo

A common element in the aforementioned operations to derail efforts to repair relations with China, is the involvement of intelligence agencies or individuals associated with them. Questions arise over Morrison’s attempts to sabotage Albanese’s visit to China, given Morrison’s close personal relationship with a former CIA Director and former US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who was one of the most virulent anti-China voices in the Trump Administration.

Pompeo was considered to be a hawkish and combative CIA Director (serving 2017-18). Under Pompeo’s leadership, senior CIA officials considered abducting or assassinating journalist Julian Assange after WikiLeaks publicised “Vault 7”, which exposed the CIA’s widespread hacking and surveillance of telecommunications devices and software. In a 15 April 2019 speech, Pompeo infamously said of his time as CIA director: “We lied, we cheated, we stole”. Pompeo was appointed Secretary of State in April 2018, and was repeatedly accused of ethics violations while in office. In his January 2023 memoir titled *Never Give an Inch: Fighting for the America I Love*, Pompeo revealed that former US President Donald Trump had told him to “shut the hell up” about China during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis. As reported by CNN on 26 March 2020, Pompeo’s State Department pushed to “include the phrase ‘Wuhan virus’ in a joint statement with other Group of Seven members following a March 2020 meeting of foreign ministers on coronavirus”, an inflammatory proposition which was rejected by the other G7 ministers. According to Pompeo’s book, paraphrased by *The Hill*, Trump spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping the following day: “Xi had warned Trump on the call that his Secretary of State was endangering the recently signed ‘phase one’ trade deal, which sought to rein in the trade war between Washington and Beijing. ... Several days later, Trump accused Pompeo of ‘putting us all at risk’ by angering Xi, telling him, ‘Stop, for God’s sake!’”

In the last months of the Trump Administration, Pompeo escalated his inflammatory remarks against China. In November 2020, Pompeo removed the terrorist designation from the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), claiming that ETIM did not exist. ETIM, and its successor organisation, the Turkistan Islamic Party, are an al-Qaeda-linked Uyghur-associated terrorist group which was responsible for major terrorism in China’s Xinjiang province in the past two decades. On the last day of the Trump Administration, Pompeo left a bombshell behind when he issued a formal determination that China had committed genocide against Uyghurs in Xinjiang and compared the Chinese government with Nazi Germany.

After leaving government at the end of the Trump Administration, Pompeo continued to agitate against China in the mainstream media and criticised the Biden Administration’s foreign policy in a manner which was atypical of other former secretaries of state.

Soon after Pompeo left office, he was appointed to chair the advisory board of the Hudson Institute’s new China Centre. The Washington DC-based Hudson Institute is a stridently anti-China organisation with strong links to the US Republican Party, which receives funding from the US Defence Department, arms manufacturers and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO).

After Morrison’s election loss, he received prestigious appointments to two American security think tanks, one of which was the Hudson Institute. Hudson appointed Morrison to the Strategic Advisory Board of its China Centre in November 2022 at the invitation of Morrison’s “dear friend”, Board Chair Mike Pompeo. Notably, the Hudson Institute has received funds from Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII), an American company which manufactures nuclear submarines. HII is slated to deliver

Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which incites war against China at the behest of its US government donors, and which in turn drums up Australian government contracts for ASPI's private weapons manufacturing donors. ASPI is one of the loudest spruikers for the military-industrial complex which foments and profits from evil wars.

Morrison's hostile China policy moved in lockstep with US foreign policy. The Morrison Government's provocative and diplomatically damaging April 2020 call for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, demanding China subject itself to foreign inspectors with the equivalent of weapons-inspection powers—which no powerful nation would ever do—was loudly backed by Pompeo, who urged other countries to align with Australia.

Similarly, Morrison spoke positively of China's Belt and Road Initiative as late as June 2019; however, in May 2020 Pompeo threatened that Australia could be cut off from the Five Eyes intelligence agreement because of the Victorian Government's non-binding Memorandum of Understanding with the BRI. Shortly thereafter, Morrison announced that the BRI was against Australia's national interest and the Australian government enacted draconian legislation which empowered it to veto the agreement.

In addition, Pompeo's State Department directed considerable funding to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Australia's chief anti-China agitator and war propagandist. ASPI and Hudson Institute staff have collaborated on panel discussions and events, and ASPI staff have co-authored Hudson Institute reports. In a 15 March 2023 speech at the National Press Club, former Prime Minister Paul Keating described ASPI as a "pro-US cell", asserting that Australia had approached the USA to form the AUKUS pact, "on the arguments put to Morrison by the security agencies ... and ASPI".

As Prime Minister, Morrison oversaw the Australian government's escalating hostility towards China, in lockstep with US foreign policy. If the Albanese Government is serious about repairing Australia-China relations, it should investigate whether former CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Morrison's longtime confidant and now-benefactor, exercised undue influence over the former PM and Australia's China policy.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 11 October 2023