

Is Pompeo the Svengali behind Morrison's Taiwan-AUKUS provocations?

After his election loss, former Prime Minister Scott Morrison has reemerged from the back bench to continue poisoning the Australia-China relationship, which sunk to historic lows under his leadership. Morrison's latest provocation was a trip to Taiwan, aimed, he said, at providing a so-called "contrast" to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's planned visit to China to continue to smooth bilateral ties.

During his visit to Taipei last week, Morrison met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Taiwan's National Day (10 October), in what was



Scott Morrison with President Tsai of Taiwan, during his latest trip. Photo: Screenshot

described as a "highly symbolic meeting" by the 10 October 2023 issue of *The Australian*. According to *The Australian*, Taiwan's celebrations enjoyed an "unprecedented turnout from other liberal democracies", including a record 43 Japanese politicians and a delegation of five Canadian senators. Revealingly, for the first time an American marching band played in Taiwan's National Day parade. Since Tsai's 2016 election as president, relations between Taiwan and mainland China have deteriorated significantly. Tsai has repeatedly engaged in provocative behaviour which has destabilised cross-Strait relations, including meetings with highlevel American and Western officials, dramatically increased arms purchases and the implementation of a military modernisation program. Tsai has rejected the "1992 Consensus"—an understanding between Taipei and Beijing to agree that there is only "One China", with each side maintaining their own interpretation of what "One China" means. Factions of Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) advocate for Taiwan's independence, a red line for the Chinese government, which has accused Tsai of being a "separatist" since at least 2004.

The day after his meeting with Tsai, Morrison spoke at the Yushan Forum, an event which is co-organised by the Taiwanese government. Morrison's speech was titled "One China 2.0", in reference to Morrison's provocative call for a revision of Australia's One China policy. Under this policy, which has been in effect since the establishment of Australia-China diplomatic relations, 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.

The transcript of Morrison's speech was promptly published by the Hudson Institute, an American security think tank which appointed Morrison to the Strategic Advisory Board of its China Centre in November 2022. Morrison's appointment to the Hudson Institute, which receives funding from the Taiwanese government, the US Defence Department and the arms industry, was at the invitation of his "dear friend", Chair of the Strategic Advisory Board and former US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo.

Pompeo, who also formerly served as CIA Director, was one of the most virulent anti-China voices in the Trump Administration. Pompeo's leadership in the State Department was marked by numerous hostile anti-China actions and policies. Pompeo consistently made inflammatory remarks about China and has continued to agitate against the Chinese government after leaving office. There are questions as to whether Morrison's anti-China policies were a product of his close personal relationship with Pompeo, which was only recently revealed to the public.

Pompeo and Morrison, both evangelical Christians who reportedly share a "faith connection", kept in weekly contact during Morrison's term as prime minister. However, it appears that calls were not officially recorded, and it is unknown how much influence Pompeo exercised over Morrison's hostile anti-China policies. (AAS, 11 Oct. 2023.)

Was Pompeo behind Morrison's anti-China provocations?

In his Yushan Forum speech, Morrison claimed that as PM, he had "experienced the PRC's coercive tactics first hand", but declared that Australia had "stood [its] ground" against China (i.e. by Morrison deliberately antagonising the Chinese government, which caused massive damage to Australian exporters hurt by China's trade backlash). But were Morrison's noisy pronouncements of China's "economic coercion" his idea? In a 4 March 2022 speech at Taipei's Prospect Foundation, an organisation which has deep ties to Taiwan's ruling DPP party, Pompeo claimed credit: "As Secretary, I

led the effort at the Department of State to confront our flawed relationship with the PRC ... *we rallied our allies* to confront the CCP and its predatory economic practices". (Emphasis added.)

Similarly, Morrison oversaw the September 2021 establishment of AUKUS, the trilateral security pact between Australia, the USA and the UK, which is aimed at confronting China. In an interview published in the 12 October 2023 Australian, Morrison said that although China was the primary impetus for the establishment of AUKUS, Taiwan was "part of the mix". Although Morrison has described himself as the "father" of AUKUS, there are questions as to whether Morrison's championing of the security pact was prompted by Pompeo during their weekly conversations. In 2019, Pompeo foreshadowed that the US-Australia alliance was entering a new era, where a "determined effort" was required for the two countries to "band together" on China. In his 4 March 2022 speech, Pompeo said that as Secretary of State, he "led the effort at the Department of State to confront our flawed relationship with the PRC", which included "strengthen[ing] our military ties with our partners and allies across the Indo Pacific, in order to deter China's authoritarian aggression".

Moreover, although AUKUS was announced under the Biden Administration in September 2021, around nine months after Pompeo had left office, it appears that Pompeo played a critical role in negotiating the agreement. In a 31 May 2023 panel discussion hosted by the Hudson Institute titled "Partnership of Freedom: AUKUS Viewed by its Architects", the starring guests were two signatories of the agreement, Morrison and former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and the third "architect" was Mike Pompeo. The guests were described as "three key individuals [involved] in the conceptualisation, in negotiations and the final formation of AUKUS."

Recent speeches given by Morrison and Pompeo demonstrate a remarkable congruence in their views on China. How much of Morrison's anti-China posturing while Prime Minister was a product of Pompeo's secret influence?

Pompeo and Morrison: change longstanding 'One China' policy

On 9 January 2021, days before the end of the Trump Administration, Pompeo removed decades-long restrictions which had traditionally limited contact between American diplomats, servicemen and other officials and their Taiwanese counterparts. With this action, Pompeo challenged the foundation of US-China diplomatic relations, under which the US government recognises the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and only maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan. After leaving office, Pompeo became very outspoken in favour of Taiwan's independence. In a March 2022 visit, Pompeo provocatively referred to Taiwan as a nation, and in a speech on 4 March declared that it was "necessary to change 50 years of ambiguity", advocating a change to the USA's "One China" policy by arguing that the USA should diplomatically recognise Taiwan— a recipe for war.

In his Yushan Forum speech, Morrison followed suit, provocatively arguing that Australia should enact a "modernised One China framework". Morrison claimed that today Australia experienced a "vastly altered geo-political environment to the one in which our One China policy settings were first established fifty years ago. This requires a critical appraisal of our diplomatic, economic and security policy settings, within the context of preserving the status quo, regarding Taiwan." Morrison argued for Australia to broaden its unofficial relations with Taiwan, and for Taiwan's admission as a non-state member to international organisations, including as an "adjunct non-member" in the "Quad"—the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a partnership between Australia, the USA, Japan and India, which is aimed at confronting China.

Morrison acknowledged the argument that "updating our understanding of the status quo regarding Taiwan and our One China policy settings risks provoking the PRC and injuring the fragile stability that has been achieved over the past fifty years", conceding that "perhaps" this could be the case. Still a sitting MP, Morrison did not go as far as Pompeo in calling for Taiwan to be diplomatically recognised by Australia, but provocatively suggested that the USA could back out of its One China policy: "Acts of aggression by the PRC towards Taiwan, not limited to physical conflict, but including acts of intimidation and coercion, could credibly be argued to have already released the US from their adherence to their One China policy, under the US *Taiwan Relations Act*."

Compared China with Nazi Germany

In a 19 January 2021 announcement on the last day of the Trump Administration, Pompeo issued a formal determination that China had committed genocide against Uyghurs in Xinjiang and compared the Chinese government with Nazi Germany. In a 17 February 2023 speech for the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), a UK-based and US government-funded anti-China organisation, Morrison followed suit, claiming that the West's so-called "benign and accommodating view of China has proved to be, arguably, the most misplaced assumption in international relations since [British Prime Minister] Neville Chamberlain proclaimed 'peace in our time' on his return from Munich in 1938"—likening Western so-called "appeasement" of China to Chamberlain's ill-fated settlement with Adolf Hitler.

Ideological view of China

Pompeo's deeply ideological and Cold War-era views of China have also been parroted by Morrison. In

his January 2021 determination, Pompeo claimed that the Trump Administration had “exposed the nature of the Chinese Communist Party and called it what it is: a Marxist-Leninist regime that exerts power over the long-suffering Chinese people through brainwashing and brute force”.

In his IPAC speech, Morrison followed suit, claiming that “President Xi has pursued a new ‘Chinese Dream’ grounded in an unapologetic nationalist Marxist narrative of historical grievance for China’s century of humiliation from 1849 to 1949, at the hands of imperial powers including the British, the Americans and the Japanese”. In his Yushan Forum speech, Morrison claimed that under Xi, there had been a “rejuvenation of the PRC’s cultural Marxist ambitions”.

Using ideological and arguably unhinged language, both Pompeo and Morrison have claimed that China wishes to take over Taiwan to fulfil a “communist ideological commitment” or to achieve hegemony over the Asia-Pacific. In his March 2022 speech, Pompeo claimed that “the CCP leadership views taking over Taiwan as the ultimate fulfillment of a decades-long communist ideological commitment. From Mao to Deng to Xi Jinping, the inability to fulfill this commitment has been a major stain on the CCP’s domestic reputation. Under Xi, the CCP’s ideological hubris has reached new heights, thus making the taking over of Taiwan a necessary mission to not only boost Xi’s egomaniac claim of greatness, but to solidify it.”

In his IPAC speech, the failed tourism executive-turned geopolitical master-analyst Morrison echoed Pompeo, claiming that Xi’s “dream is to restore China to its ‘rightful place’ as the hegemon of Asia and the Indo-Pacific and to reset the world’s rules-based order in China’s favour, to reflect their global ascension. This nationalist vision also requires the reunification of Taiwan within China, by force if necessary ... We should not underestimate the appeal this ambitious narrative has with the Chinese population. Xi knows this.”

‘Balance of power’ geopolitical framing

Both Pompeo and Morrison have referred to China in “balance of power” geopolitical framing. In his March 2022 speech in Taipei, Pompeo claimed: “It’s clear that Xi now believes the PRC is stronger than the United States. ... This makes Xi dangerous—the very belief that the PRC could prevail in a confrontation with the United States and our allies makes the risk of conflict much, much greater. And because America is the most decisive backer of Taiwan’s freedom, taking over Taiwan would change the global balance of power, decidedly in the CCP’s favor.”

Morrison faithfully echoed Pompeo in his Yushan Forum speech, alleging that under Xi, “the PRC has made it very clear that they wish to rebalance the global rules based order, established following the end of the second world war, in a way that better advantages their interests, and autocracies like them”.

Taiwan first, you’re next

Both Pompeo and Morrison have framed Taiwan as a matter of American and Australian security, respectively, and claimed that if Taiwan was overtaken by China, the whole world would be next in line. In his March 2022 speech, Pompeo declared: “After Hong Kong, Xi will want Taiwan. And after Taiwan, he will want the South China Sea, then the Senkakus, and so on. If we do not learn the lessons of history, if we do not confront authoritarians who have no regard for the freedom and independence of those they do not control, then we will be drawn into a conflict that is far greater than it would have been had we acted sooner. ... the US-Taiwan relationship is fundamental to confronting China and promoting prosperity throughout the region. This is something I recognised during my time as Secretary of State, and it is something that must become an essential part of our nation’s foreign policy now and in the future. ... Taiwan is crucial to US defence and deterrence. It is situated right in the middle of our defensive parameters, from Japan to Korea to the Philippines in the South China Sea.” Implying that Taiwan was an American possession, Pompeo claimed that “Losing Taiwan would directly imperil our other vital national interests as well.”

Morrison parroted Pompeo’s assertions in his Yushan Forum speech, saying the “PRC’s claims over Taiwan are a threat to the entire region, as they are not isolated to Taiwan. There are also the PRC’s claims in the South China Sea, the Senkaku Islands, Natano Island and so on. Legitimately, in the region, one can reasonably ask, if Taiwan, then what and who is next. The threat is not just true for those of us who live here in the Indo-Pacific, but globally. ... Strategically, if the PRC were to forcefully occupy Taiwan, this would enable the PRC to project well beyond the first island chain, radically altering the security environment within the IndoPacific, through which the bulk of the world’s trade passes. When combined with Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, it would also significantly reset the balance of the international order in favour of autocracy and authoritarianism. There is therefore no country too far away from Taiwan not to be impacted by Taiwan’s future. The future of Taiwan is inextricably linked to all our futures and the peace, security and freedom of the world we live in.”

In a subsequent 2 June 2023 speech at the India Economic Conclave, an event organised by Indian media conglomerate, the Times Network, Pompeo said: “it is nearly impossible to imagine that this is contained with a conflict between China and Taiwan. It is difficult to imagine how Japan does not become involved, when Japan becomes involved we have a treaty guarantee with Japan—this gets big fast”, indicating that in Pompeo’s view, the USA would enter into a military conflict over Taiwan. In this

scenario, Australia could be dragged into a war with China—Pompeo has asserted that the ANZUS alliance is “unambiguous” in its obligation for Australia to participate in any American conflict.

Advocating Taiwan increase arms purchases



Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo receiving an award from President Tsai. Photo: Screenshot

Both Pompeo and Morrison have advocated that Taiwan should increase its arms purchases. In his March 2022 speech, Pompeo bragged that under the Trump Administration, Taiwan had purchased over US\$20 billion worth of arms from America. In his 2 June 2023 speech, Pompeo stated: “There should be no doubt in anybody’s mind what Xi Jinping’s intentions are with respect to Taiwan. He uses the term reunification, although Taiwan has never been part of the Chinese Communist Party’s power ... he has a timeline and we don’t know what that timeline is. So he will get to play his hand. We should collectively play ours, which is enormous economic might, enormous power. We should provide the Taiwanese today ... the tools that they need to convince and deter Xi Jinping from taking aggressive military action against Taiwan.”

In his Yushan Forum speech, Morrison argued that it was becoming increasingly urgent to strengthen Taiwan’s “resilience”, including militarily, to “not only to ward off an invasion, but to survive a blockade.” Morrison stated that this urgency “must be demonstrated by Taiwan itself”, comparing Taiwan’s defence spending with Israel, which spends proportionately more on defence.

Both Morrison’s and Pompeo’s call for Taiwan to increase arms spending is cynical, given that both are employed at American security think tanks which are funded by the arms industry. In addition to the Hudson Institute, which receives funding from large weapons manufacturers, Morrison has also received a prestigious appointment to the advisory board of the Center for New American Security (CNAS), a hawkish US think tank which is funded by arms manufacturers. During Morrison’s and President Tsai’s “highly symbolic” 10 October meeting, the *Australian* reported that Tsai said that her government would continue to “work with Australia and other like-minded democracies in continuing to bolster security cooperation”.

Outrageously, Morrison also claimed that when his government provided military aid to Ukraine, this was done with China, Australia’s largest trading partner, in mind! Morrison claimed that “No place could be more central to the cause of liberty and democracy, at this time, than Taiwan, including even Ukraine. ... I believe Taiwan stands above them all. To put this in some context, when my Government took the decision for Australia to swiftly provide lethal support to assist Ukraine, following the illegal invasion by Russia, this was as much a decision to support Ukraine, as it was to demonstrate our alignment with a global western resolve to resist the aggression of authoritarianism, especially given the tacit endorsement of the invasion by Beijing, that continues to this day. I was as concerned about Beijing as I was about Moscow.”

Who is paying for the pro-Taiwan speeches?

Morrison has not yet disclosed who paid for his trip to Taiwan to speak at the Yushan Forum. However, it was revealed that Pompeo’s March 2022 visit to Taiwan, where he was welcomed with promotional billboards and skyscrapers illuminated in his honour, and received the Order of the Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon from Tsai, was secretly funded by the Taiwanese government. Pompeo received US\$150,000 from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) for the trip, which was funnelled through a speaking agency. It was also reported that during his visit, Pompeo had lobbied Taiwan’s labour and pension funds on behalf of an American investment fund,

Anarock Global Partners.¹

Taiwan has a history of paying prominent overseas figures millions of dollars to build international support for the island and promote the Taiwanese government’s message. Taiwan also undertakes extensive lobbying activities in Washington, which have successfully resulted in American legislation and policies which are favourable to Taiwan. Over the last several years, Taiwan has donated large sums to influential American security think tanks, which churn out reams of pro-Taiwan and anti-China material.

Footnotes

1. Alex Lo, "Why Pompeo's Taiwan visit was so controversial", *South China Morning Post*, 13 Mar. 2022.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 18 October 2023

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