

Five Eyes directs destruction of Australia-China relationship

The Australian government's "Five Eyes"-directed China-bashing has badly damaged Australian winemakers and farmers, and is now destroying potential jobs in state infrastructure projects. Australians should be concerned at the 180-degree turnaround in the federal government's enthusiasm for China's Belt and Road project in two years, as it shows the extent to which the US- and UK-dominated Five Eyes spy alliance is dictating Australia's foreign policy.

The Citizens Party documented the well-coordinated media hysteria which justified the introduction of the "badly overreaching" Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act 2020 ([AAS, 23 Sept. 2020](#)). The law forced universities, and state and local governments to notify the federal government of their trade, academic, and cultural exchange agreements with other countries, such as sister city programs, which can now be vetoed if deemed contrary to federal foreign policy interests.

On 21 April 2021, Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced the obvious goal of the authoritarian campaign—the cancelling of the Victorian government's Memorandum of Understanding with China's Belt and Road Initiative, which promoted practical cooperation to enhance trade and bilateral participation in infrastructure, manufacturing and research and development projects. Of the 1,000 notifications received under the new bill, Payne only cancelled four, all with the Victorian government—including educational agreements with Syria (signed by the Kennett government in 1999) and Iran (2004) which had never been used, and the two BRI agreements. Contrary to Payne's denials, the Morrison government intended this to be a calculated insult towards China. In a 21 April Tweet, Professor James Laurenceson, Director of the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney, observed: "Let's be clear what has been cancelled: a non-legally binding MOU that didn't commit the VIC state government to do anything, let alone the national government. There was an option to just let it lapse and not approve new agreements. A choice was made to send a message to [China]."

High profile members of Australia's business community were floored, including Malcolm Broomhead, Chair of Orica, director of BHP, and former head of the Australia-China Belt and Road Initiative organisation, who told the 23 April 2021 *Australian* he did not understand this "deliberate provocation of China", predicting the BRI veto would further damage the Australia-China business relationship across all sectors. "Like many people in business, it is just a complete mystery as to what the Australian government is trying to achieve here.... The reality is that every time we do something, we do it in the most antagonistic way and it has got major trade implications for us. I would hope the government understands that. ... I really want the government to tell us what the strategy is."

Australian exporters who are losing their markets would be appalled to learn the government's anti-China "strategy" is not even an Australian policy, but has been dictated by the Five Eyes intelligence apparatus, which is intent on protecting the USA's sole superpower status by isolating China. It is no coincidence the spiralling of the Australia-China relationship coincides with changing US foreign policy towards China, which Australia has faithfully parroted.

The Citizens Party has documented the clandestine influence of Australia's Five Eyes-aligned spy agency, ASIO, over the antiChina narrative in Australia, which has poisoned our politics, academia, media, investment and trade. ("[The China Narrative Part Four: ASIO's disinformation campaign](#)", AAS, 17 Sept. 2020.)

In May 2020, then-US Secretary of State and former CIA Director, rabid China-hawk Mike Pompeo, threatened that the USA could "disconnect" from its Five Eyes intelligence-sharing partnership with Australia over Victoria's involvement in the BRI.

Peter Jennings, director of serial anti-China propagandists, the US government-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), lambasted New Zealand in the 24 April 2021 *Australian* for deciding to pursue an independent foreign policy towards China.

The Morrison government's escalating antagonism of China and demonising of the BRI obviously wasn't their idea— less than two years ago, Prime Minister Scott Morrison declared "[t]he infrastructure needs of the [Indo-Pacific] region are enormous and Australia welcomes the contribution that the Belt and Road Initiative can make to regional infrastructure investment and to regional development."¹

In November 2018, Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said during a trip to China that the government welcomed Victoria's "enthusiasm and initiative", and "welcomes the fact that through the Belt and Road Initiative, China invests more across our region." The same month, Foreign Minister Marise Payne herself declared "[w]e encourage the states and territories to expand opportunities with China". When the Victoria-BRI MOU was announced in 2018, the media hyped the supposedly "secret" deal with China (ignoring the fact the Victorian government consulted with DFAT), but Payne countered the media narrative. Saying the arrangement was a "matter for Victoria", she explained to ABC AM on 6 November that "the states and territories ... make arrangements of this nature, at this

level, regularly, with other countries in this region and more broadly". Two and a half years later, Payne has backflipped on encouraging engagement with China, and now considers the Victorian-BRI arrangements to be "inconsistent with Australia's foreign policy or adverse to our foreign relations".²

Professor Jane Golley, director of the Australian Centre on China in the World at ANU, and Prof. Laurenceson, coauthored the 31 July 2019 "Australia and the BRI: Cooperate, compete or challenge", which documented a number of government ministers and representatives supporting the Belt and Road Initiative only a few short years ago, including Australia's 2017 proposal to create a Trade Infrastructure Working Group which, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's secretary, would "exchange information about opportunities for collaboration on Belt and Road projects".³ Elena Collinson, a researcher at the Australia-China Relations Institute, documented in October 2019 that Australian business leaders acknowledged the commercial opportunities of the BRI and expressed concern that Australia would be "left behind".

It is no wonder business and industry leaders are baffled by the Australian government's sudden backflip on the BRI and deliberate antagonising of China. The Morrison government's damaging and hostile actions make no sense, unless understood in the context of obedience to a Five Eyes-directed foreign policy agenda to destroy our relationship with China.

Footnotes

¹. Speech by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, "Where We Live" 26 June 2019, (pm.gov.au).

². "Decisions under Australia's Foreign Arrangements Scheme", Media Release, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Marise Payne (foreignminister.gov.au).

³. Jane Golley and James Laurenceson, "Australia and the BRI: Cooperate, compete or challenge", Australia National University, 31 July 2019, (ciw.anu.edu.au).

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 28 April 2021