

Beware of dangerous disinformation. Taiwan is not part of China

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A daunting dilemma lurks beneath the surface of Australia's politically bruising AUKUS debate: Should Australia be militarily involved in a potential US-led effort to defend Taiwan?

Nothing in the [AUKUS plan to furnish Australia with nuclear-powered submarines](#) commits us to such action, but the extended range of nuclear-powered submarines will give future Australian leaders the option to substantially shift the balance of forces as far afield as the Taiwan Strait if conflict erupts.



China's Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian. *CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN*

Yet, for all their potency, future nuclear-powered submarines are an ineffective tool against the clear and present threat to Taiwan.

Writing for this masthead on Thursday, [China's Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian made a series of misleading claims about Taiwan](#). By twisting history and ignoring key details, the Ambassador told a deceptive story about the world accepting Beijing's view that Taiwan rightfully belongs to the People's Republic of China (PRC).

China's control of Taiwan has been shorter and patchier than the ambassador claims. And although past Chinese dynasties like the Ming and Qing exercised incomplete influence and control over Taiwan, the island has never been ruled by the PRC.

The Chinese Ambassador also claimed that the 1971 United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 2758 endorsed China's view that Taiwan is a province of the PRC. It did no such thing, focussed as it was on representation in UN bodies.

But perhaps the most egregious and consequential piece of disinformation in the Ambassador's op-ed centred on how the rest of the world relates to Taiwan. The Chinese envoy wrote that the notion that "Taiwan is part of China" is "the political foundation on which China develops relations with other countries and the consensus of the international community".

This is simply false.

Per the [1972 joint communique establishing official ties with the PRC](#), Australia "recognises the Government of the [PRC] as the sole legal Government of China" but only "acknowledges the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the PRC."

Accordingly, Australia has never endorsed the Chinese government's position that Taiwan is part of the PRC. Like Australia, many other countries globally recognise the government of the PRC while also declining to adopt Beijing's view that Taiwan is part of China.

The ambassador's misrepresentation might seem like an arcane matter of diplomatic verbiage. But the grim reality is that Taiwan's liberal democracy and the rights and freedoms of its 24 million people could suffer monstrous consequences if these Chinese government deceptions take hold.

China wants to make its control of Taiwan a fait accompli by convincing the world to accept its view that the island is rightfully, and so should be in practice, a province of the PRC. To implement its preferred view of Taiwan,

China also wants the world's ties with the island to be on the Chinese Communist Party's terms.

China wants Taiwan excluded from international organisations. It does not want the Taiwanese economy in multilateral free-trade agreements. It wants lawmakers from around the world to stay away from Taipei. And it wants governments to wind down key aspects of their unofficial engagement with Taiwan, including by limiting their economic cooperation with the island.

The ambassador's op-ed is therefore not just a simple expression of the Chinese government's position on Taiwan, it is part of a determined global effort to shape how the world understands Taiwan and limit engagement with the island.

But Australia need not sit idly by as China seeks to isolate Taiwan and convince the world to accept its eventual authoritarian rule over the island. The Albanese government should lead by example and deepen its ties with Taiwan.

Australia should restart free trade agreement negotiations with Taiwan, which Canberra abandoned under pressure from Beijing during the Turnbull government. Canberra should also back Taipei's bid to gain entry to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

With Taiwan as a reliable trade partner and one of Australia's top 10 export destinations, these moves would produce tangible economic benefits for our exporters. The Australian public and the wider world would see that deepening ties with Taiwan in economic and other arenas is perfectly consistent with maintaining a one-China policy.

The Chinese government would object to such moves. But Beijing is now unlikely to again turn off the trade and diplomatic taps with Canberra as they enthusiastically pursue relationship-repair with Australia.

China has already launched its campaign to annex Taiwan. But the battle for Taiwan is not yet being fought with bullets and bombs. China is waging war against Taiwan's de-facto independence with words like the Chinese ambassador's opinion piece.

Regardless of nuclear-powered submarines, Australia and its allies and partners will be unable to protect Taiwan if China deceives the world into

believing that countries are already committed to Beijing's position that the island is simply a province of the PRC.

Australians should remain alert to this kind of Chinese government disinformation. The spread of these falsehoods threatens the very survival of one of the world's great liberal democracies.

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