

We'll take Taiwan: China envoy pledges no retreat

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Chinese ambassador Xiao Qian has threatened a re-education process for Taiwan's 23 million people to give them "a correct understanding" of China, as he declared Beijing was "ready to use all necessary measures" to restore the liberal democracy "to the motherland".

After a week of Chinese military drills around the self-governed island, Mr Xiao warned Australia to handle the question of Taiwan's future "with caution", declaring there was "no room for compromise" on the issue.

His comments to the National Press Club in Canberra came as Beijing released a new white paper claiming ownership of the island and its people was "an indisputable fact" and reserving the right to use force to take it back.

Hours later, China's People's Liberation Army said it had "successfully completed" its exercises around Taiwan, but warned that its Eastern Theatre Command would continue to carry out "training and war preparation".

Amid ongoing fears the crisis could spark a major regional conflict, Mr Xiao said Taiwan was as much a part of China as Tasmania was of Australia, so any move to seize it would not amount to an "invasion".

He said when Taiwan was restored to China, its people would have "somewhat different views" about their country, which would need to be rectified.

"Once Taiwan is reunited, coming back to the motherland, there might be a process for the people in Taiwan to have a correct understanding of China," he said.

The envoy's chilling warning, raising the prospect of Xinjiang-style camps in one of Asia's most vibrant societies, followed that of China's ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, who last week said "after the reunification, we will do re-education".

Mr Xiao rejected opinion polls in Taiwan, that show overwhelming opposition to Communist Party-rule, claiming that "the majority" of Taiwan's people supported being absorbed into China, with just "a handful" supporting Taiwan's independence.

He said China's explosive reaction to US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit

to Taiwan, which included firing 11 ballistic missiles over and around Taiwan, was "legitimate and justified" to safeguard its sovereign territory.

"It is the US side that should and must take full responsibility for the escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait," he said.

"It's a determination to show that on the question of Taiwan, there's no room for compromise."

Just days after Beijing blasted Foreign Minister Penny Wong for her condemnation of its missile launches, Mr Xiao said China wanted "a sound stable, friendly and co-operative relationship" with Australia.

He said the election of the

Albanese government had opened up the possibility of a "reset" between Beijing and Canberra but "concrete actions" were needed on both sides. Mr Xiao held out the prospect of a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Anthony Albanese at the November G20 leaders' meeting in Bali, but warned after years of difficult relations, Mr Xi would be wary of being "humiliated".

"If you are, you know, talking bad about me, why should I meet you?" he said.

In his first major appearance before the Australian media, Mr

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“If you are talking bad about me, why should I meet you?”

CHINESE AMBASSADOR XIAO QIAN
on why there had been no top-level contact with Australia

AAP

Tremble, obey and be happy



GREG SHERIDAN
FOREIGN EDITOR

The speech by the Chinese ambassador, Xiao Qian, was full of menace and threat, lightly disguised by an emollient diplomatic tone.

At one level, the ambassador is on a charm offensive. The election of the Albanese government offered a chance to reset the relationship and encouraging early moves had been made, the ambassador said. But there was a need for further concrete action.

All Australia had to do was a few simple things: stop criticism of China for its well-justified actions against Taiwan and Japan; lift restrictions on Huawei and other Chinese companies; accept the imprisonment, isolation and secret trial of Australian citizens

in China as a perfectly normal part of the Chinese judicial process; work to establish a positive image of China in Australia; accept that the one-China, two-systems experiment in Hong Kong is a tremendous success now that China has solved a few "loop-holes" in its implementation; and half a dozen similar things.

In other words, if we simply capitulate on all of Beijing's demands, we can have a happy life, or, to put it another way, tremble and obey.

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Xiao blamed "negative" news coverage of his country for "harming the friendship between our two peoples".

He said detained Australian citizen Cheng Lei's rights were being protected under Chinese law - "Don't worry about that" - blaming Covid for long periods of isolation from relatives, legal advice and consular support.

After more than two years of trade tensions between the countries, Mr Xiao argued that Chinese bans on \$20bn worth of Australian exports should not be described as "sanctions", but were instead the result of trade disputes, unhappy consumers and fears by Chinese companies of being blacklisted by Australia, as with Huawei and ZTE. He also sought to dismiss a dangerous mid-air incident in which an Australian P-8A maritime surveillance aircraft was aggressively challenged by a Chinese fighter jet in the South China Sea.

The Chinese plane set off flares and "chaff" countermeasures ahead of the Australian jet near the disputed Paracel Islands, which China claims as its own.

Mr Xiao said the close call was "very unfortunate", but likened it to someone "driving around, carrying a gun and trying to peep into your windows".

The ambassador used his first National Press Club address to continue Beijing's decades-long attempt to rewrite Australia's One-China policy. He said the "One-China principle is a solemn commitment by successive Australian governments", conflating Beijing's hardline position with Canberra's ambiguous one that allows substantial unofficial relations with Taipei.

Australia has always insisted that any change to the status quo must be peaceful and would require the consent of both sides. That policy - shared by Japan, the US and most wealthy countries - has allowed the Taiwanese space to create their vibrant democracy and dynamic economy.

In a major concession to Beijing, Australia's policy also says Taiwan is not allowed to formally declare its independence.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade confirmed there had been no change to Australia's policy on handling Taiwan. "Australia has a long-standing bipartisan One-China policy. There has been no change to this policy," it told The Australian in a statement.

Senator Wong declined to comment on the Chinese envoy's mischaracterisation of Australia's policy. ANU National Security College head Rory Medcalf said the ambassador's performance was "a bracing eye-opener for ... anyone who still imagined a reset was possible or desirable".

"A reset is a fantasy, thanks to all the issues he was implacable on," Professor Medcalf said.

"The [Albanese] government's agenda is sensibly more about stabilisation than reset, but even that will be permanently fragile."

Japan's ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, said his Chinese counterpart's comments

“There's absolutely no room for us to compromise on the question of Taiwan ... Just like no Australian government would ever compromise on Australia's territorial integrity ... Tasmania will be part of Australia”

COMPARING TAIWAN TO TASMANIA

“Once Taiwan is reunited, coming back to the motherland, there might be process for the people in Taiwan to have a correct understanding of China about the motherland”

POSSIBLE RE-EDUCATION OF TAIWANESE PEOPLE AFTER REUNIFICATION

“There's no reason for us to support one against the other”

REFUSING TO CONDEMN RUSSIA

“China came to the Solomon Islands ... to help them to stabilise, to prosper, and to improve. There is no intention for China to set up the so-called military base in Solomon Islands”

ON MILITARY BASE IN SOLOMONS



Chinese ambassador Xiao Qian in Canberra on Wednesday

Tremble, obey and we can all live a happy life

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On all the issues of substance, the ambassador restated the maximal, unreasonable position of the Chinese Communist Party government in Beijing.

Yes, Beijing reserved the right to use force, or "all means necessary", to take control of Taiwan.

Don't the 23 million Taiwanese have any say at all regarding their future?

No, the ambassador said, Taiwan's future will be "decided by the 1.4 billion people of China". In truth, the 1.4 billion people of China get to decide absolutely nothing. The ambassador meant the CCP would decide Taiwan's future.

But the biggest fiction of all was the framework the ambassador set for the speech at the beginning. China, he claimed, is an upholder of the international system, not a challenger to it.

The press gallery's questions systematically exposed the hollowness of this proposition. This was one of the press

gallery's finest moments. The questions were polite but insistent, forensic, to the point, un intimidated but also unprovoked.

To list a few of the issues on which the ambassador restated Beijing's relentless aggression. The South China Sea. Against international law, Beijing has occupied and militarised islands and territories to which it has no legitimate claim, having previously promised that it would never militarise these territories. They belong to us, the ambassador asserted.

Beijing harassed and endangered an Australian plane flying in international air space in the South China Sea. Beijing was right to do so, the ambassador said.

The Taiwanese had false perspectives on China and these would be corrected after it came under mainland rule, whether you call it re-education or something else.

In the finest tradition of communist doublethink, and indeed doublespeak, the ambassador was happy to claim that black was right.

Even the rulers of Taiwan, he said, think of Taiwanese as Chinese and Taiwan as part of China and want reunification. Polls showing the vast majority

of Taiwanese don't want reunification were just misleading, he said.

So take a few steps back and what do we see?

The Albanese government is in just about as much bad odour with Beijing as the Morrison government was.

According to the Chinese embassy in Canberra, Foreign Minister Penny Wong has breached the UN Charter by criticising China over Taiwan, because this is an internal Chinese matter.

This all establishes definitively that it was not the rhetoric or tone of voice of the Morrison government that caused troubles with Beijing, but profound contradictions between Australian interests and values and the CCP's interest and values.

That's not to say the Morrison government did not frequently get the rhetoric wrong. Talking about war was foolish and irresponsible. Demanding an inquiry into the origins of Covid achieved nothing and cost a lot.

But these tactical mistakes were not the heart of the matter.

The Albanese government is right to try to stabilise the relationship with Beijing, but it

is also right not to negotiate away a single Australian interest. A good relationship would be a positively bad thing if that meant Canberra sold out key interests, or was prevented from speaking calmly but honestly to the Australian people.

Two final thoughts. Beijing has cut off communication with Washington over climate change in response to the Pelosi visit to Taiwan. Combined with the long cavalcade of agreements Beijing has breached - how can it apply trade sanctions to a nation like Australia with which it has a free-trade agreement? - this demonstrates the futility of placing serious climate change hopes in Beijing's word.

Beijing is not committed to battling climate change, it's committed to using climate change as a mechanism for gaining concessions from the West.

And this: when Beijing decides to start an actual deadly military operation against Taiwan, it will probably initially disguise this as an exercise, just like the ones going on right now.

Nothing in the ambassador's words belies the danger of this reality.

were alarming. "Bluntly speaking, I was very surprised and not a little concerned by the speech made today, because I thought this was a good opportunity to reset their relationship with Australia," he told Sky News. "This is a time to de-escalate tensions. How come we have to see military exercises around Taiwan?"

"How come missiles have to be shot over Taiwan into Japanese waters in response to the US Speaker of the house's visit to Taipei? This is beyond our comprehension."

In a crisis address delivered on Tuesday, Taiwan's Foreign Minister, Joseph Wu, thanked Australia for its support in the face of

China's attempt to use military might to "alter the status quo" in the Taiwan Strait and across the Indo-Pacific.

"The people of Taiwan also have the right to express their collective will through a democratic system. China has no right to interfere in or alter this," Mr Wu said in Taipei.

Taiwan's Ministry of Defence said 45 Chinese warplanes and 10 gunboats had been operating close to the island on Tuesday.

Beijing had made similar deployments every day since August 4, when it launched live-fire military drills in six zones close to Taiwan in what the PLA described as "blockade" rehearsals.