

Morrison's Adventurism Could Damage China-Australia Relations Beyond Repair

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*Australian **Prime Minister Scott Morrison** made a series of phone calls last week to several world leaders, including US **President Donald Trump**, German **Chancellor Angela Merkel** and French **President Emmanuel Macron**, appealing for their support of Australia's "independent" inquiry into "the origin and spread" of the COVID-19 outbreak, with China as the thinly veiled target.*

The calls were not an impulsive act. They were part of a strategic plan made through thoughtful deliberations. Morrison's proposal and lobbying came after his foreign minister Marise Payne made a similar threat on April 21. A day after that, at a [G20](#) ministerial meeting, Australia's agricultural minister David Little proudly called for international scrutiny of wet markets in China which he claimed were rampant with "live wildlife, exotic wildlife" that are creating "human risk and biosecurity risk."

While the rest of the world is actively joining forces and pooling resources to combat the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Morrison administration is spearheading this malicious campaign to frame and incriminate China with groundless conjecture and outlandish fabrications.

China has made tremendous human sacrifices and suffered great economic losses during its fight against the epidemic. At the start of the outbreak when the novel coronavirus caught everyone unprepared, China communicated with the WHO and other countries about the virus' genome sequence and other key information about the disease. In a January 29 telephone conversation with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister **Wang Yi**, Payne said she appreciated China's open, transparent and timely communication with the international community.

Even though the crisis still exists, China has kick-started its manufacturing of medical and personal protective equipment, providing much-needed supplies to 127 countries and four international organizations, and sending teams of experts to 15 countries.

It is utterly senseless for Australia to start a blame game that amounts to pointing a finger at the victim. Consequently, Chinese and other Asians in Australia have become a vulnerable target of racial discrimination and hate crimes.

Based on unsubstantiated anecdotes and hearsay, Australia has been spreading preposterous lies accusing China of opening wet markets trading in wildlife across the country. Sensational tales, which are far from reality, are being told by media shock jocks and some politicians, who allege that bats are on menus in restaurants in China. This

nonsense is stigmatizing the Chinese community and the Chinese way of life.

This is an all-out crusade against China and Chinese culture, led by Australia, which has worked hard in the past to become a comprehensive strategic partner of China.

This is not the first time that Canberra has attempted to lead a panda-bashing campaign. We still remember that in 2018, Morrison's predecessor, Malcolm Turnbull, fired the world's first shot at Huawei by imposing a blanket ban on its 5G equipment, and lobbied a number of Western countries to follow suit.

During this global existential crisis, Canberra is exercising despicable opportunism and is deluded in thinking it will result in geopolitical gains. All governments should be following the basic principles of humanitarianism during these dark hours of human history, and rally behind a global fight to end the pandemic, instead of guilefully trying to stab China in the back.

Australia prides itself on being in the vanguard of this anti-China crusade, and pretends it's not performing on the whims of the White House. A Sydney commentator congratulates Morrison's reckless ploy as "represent[ing] a remarkable moment in Australia's national self-assertion," denoting "a new boldness and independence."

It is a most ludicrous and immature illusion for Australia to think it is growing bigger and taller by waging one skirmish after another against China. By placing itself as a chess piece in Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy, Australia is still playing its part as America's "deputy sheriff." Bilateral relations between China and Australia have hit a record-low over the past three years. For almost 30 years, Australia sustained its economic growth by riding on the coattails of China's monumental development. China is Australia's largest destination of exports, largest source of international tourists and students, and one of the biggest overseas investors.

The Morrison government's adventurism to fiddle with this mutually beneficial comprehensive strategic partnership is in defiance of rational thought and common sense. It has seriously ravaged trust, confidence and shared interests, which are the bedrocks of the bilateral relationship. Canberra is treading on a hazardous path that has no prospect for a U-turn during the COVID-19 pandemic, and likely for a long time afterward.

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