

Australian media responds to Chinese ambassador's address with militarist hysteria

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An address to the National Press Club in Canberra by Chinese ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian has become the latest focus of a protracted anti-China campaign waged by the media, in line with the aggressive US-led confrontation with Beijing.

Xiao's remarks were a mild-mannered restatement of Chinese government policy on a host of issues, such as Taiwan, territorial disputes in the South China Sea and economic tariffs imposed on Beijing by the US and its allies. His presentation included an appeal for the normalisation of relations between China and Australia.

From the ensuing coverage in the Australian press, one would have no idea that Xiao's remarks were of a generally bland, matter-of-fact character and contained nothing that has not been said before.

In the days since the Wednesday event, virtually every major Australian publication has run hysterical stories. As if reading from the same script, they have declared that Xiao "threatened" Australia, made "chilling" comments on Taiwan and generally comported himself as the representative of a tyrannical and megalomaniacal regime, insensible to reason or diplomacy.

The media response, which bears not the slightest relation to the substance of the Press Club event, is ironic. In his opening remarks, Xiao had pointed to the biased and invariably negative character of media coverage of China, noting that issues related to the country of 1.4 billion people were almost always presented in black-and-white terms by the Australian press.

The appeal for a more nuanced and objective coverage of China clearly fell on deaf ears. But that was foreshadowed in the Press Club proceedings themselves.

Xiao's brief opening remarks had centred on calls for

greater "collaboration and cooperation," hopes of improved relations and points about the close economic and regional ties of Australia and China.

The moderator, opening the event up to the floor, may as well have been giving a signal to a firing squad to begin their fusillade. One after another, the leading lights of Australian journalism rose, to express their moral indignation over every Chinese policy they could bring to mind.

The issue of Taiwan was uppermost in these questions, many of which were in fact denunciatory statements.

Earlier this month, US House speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, in what was a pure political and military provocation. Even senior figures within the American political establishment noted that the visit, which involved military aircraft and warships, was an incendiary move that risked conflict, and it was initially opposed by the White House.

When China responded with live fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait, its actions were denounced as aggressive and threatening.

This was the line taken by the Australian journalists. All were suddenly passionately concerned about Taiwanese "sovereignty," the safety and security of its people and their democratic self-determination.

No such concern was ever shown by the Australian media over the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan, illegally invaded and occupied for years in neo-colonial endeavours aimed at stealing resources and involving daily killings and atrocities.

The Australian press, together with the Liberal-National Coalition and the current Labor government, has buried revelations that Australian special forces soldiers operated as a virtual death squad in Afghanistan, murdering children, women and prisoners.

In his response to these questions, Xiao noted that China was committed to the status quo in relation to Taiwan. He outlined the One China policy, under which since the 1970s, the US and the entire international community has effectively recognised the Chinese Communist Party as the government of all of China, including Taiwan.

It was other parties Xiao stated, i.e., the US, which was seeking to undermine these longstanding norms, by promoting Taiwanese separatism. Washington has handed vast arsenals of weaponry to Taipei, and Pelosi's visit was the latest and most high-profile of a series of such trips aimed at establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan, independent of Beijing.

Xiao emphasised that China would seek the reunification of China and Taiwan peacefully, but that if there were an attempt to separate the island from the Chinese mainland "all options" would be on the table. This line, completely taken out of context, was in virtually every headline reporting on the Press Club event.

Channel Nine's Chris Uhlman sought to outdo his colleagues. "Do you see why some Australians think when you talk about international law and positive policies, you do not do what you say?" he asked, before outlining a litany of charges against Beijing, which could have been scripted by Washington, or the Australian intelligence agencies.

Uhlman asserted that China was militarising the South China Sea. He said nothing about the massive US-Australian military build-up there, or Washington's role in inflaming longstanding territorial disputes in the sea, involving China and several southeast Asian states.

He referenced reports that there have been close calls between Australian and Chinese military forces in the South China Sea and elsewhere over recent months. But it has become clear that those incidents, which Uhlman presented as Chinese aggression, were deliberate provocations by the US, Australia and other allied states, as they conduct continuous military operations throughout the Indo-Pacific.

China was also detaining several Australian citizens, Uhlman declared. Another reporter took up the same theme, passionately demanding their freedom.

When Xiao noted in passing the plight of Julian Assange, an Australian citizen imprisoned in Britain and facing extradition to the US, the issue was largely

dropped. The Australian media has played a despicable role in the Assange case, cheering on the US-led persecution of a journalist for exposing American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, or simply pretending that the WikiLeaks founder does not exist.

Such is the essential role of the official media, including its erstwhile "liberal" and "progressive" wing represented by such outlets as the *Guardian*, *Crikey* and the publicly-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation. All of them have lined up behind the US-led confrontations with Russia and China, dispensing with even a hint of critical reportage on matters of foreign policy.

Labor and Coalition politicians have latched onto the media frenzy over Xiao's address. The Labor government is marching in lockstep with the Biden administration, taking upon itself the task of a deputy US sheriff throughout the Asia-Pacific, demanding that countries across the region line up behind Washington's confrontation with China and threatening them with "consequences" if they do not.

Labor is deepening a massive military build-up that already entails \$600 billion in military funding over the decade. This vast expenditure, set to be expanded as Labor undertakes a review into offensive capability, is uncritically accepted by all of the official journalists.

Socialists oppose the Chinese regime from the left, advancing a genuine socialist and internationalist alternative to Beijing's nationalist and pro-capitalist government. As Xiao's remarks demonstrated, the Chinese regime's response to the threat of war, together with its own military build-up that only heightens the dangers, is to issue plaintive and pathetic appeals for "cooperation" and "collaboration" to the warmongers in Washington and Canberra.

But such questions of principle are anathema to the well-heeled functionaries of the Australian press. They are the propagandists of aggressive militarist policies that threaten a catastrophe.



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