

Tony Abbott Goes to Taiwan

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*No one can stop him. He can barely stop himself. The former Australian prime minister, **Tony Abbott**, seems to be everywhere, fighting the poor cause. At the very least, he is everywhere with the press cameras, the niggling concerns, the irritations that make it into the twenty-four-hour news cycle before sinking with toxic charm. He is the perfect ingredient in a stew of conflict, the agitator, the irritant.*

The range of issues that have seen his intervention have taken him to conservative, often reactionary fora, the world over. He has given a gloss of legitimacy to the Great Replacement theory, worried that Christian Europeans have somehow forgotten how to breed, [including](#) members of the British Royal Family. He has [been praised](#) by Hungary’s Viktor Orbán for defending Western civilisation against the dark and swarthy. He has expressed a preference for a social Darwinian model in containing COVID-19, advising governments that [the elderly are dispensable](#) citizens. He has sold his brutal “turn back the boats” formula to European states with, it has to be said, some success. The United Kingdom and Denmark, for instance, are increasingly aping his stance in lifting the drawbridge and detaining those seeking asylum.

Then, it was time for the ironman pugilist to pay a visit to Taiwan, something [he considered a duty](#) to do and must have had, at least on some level, the nod of approval from Canberra. “Taiwan’s friends are so important right now.” He went, not as a peace envoy but as a representative flagging future conflict.

Abbott’s October 8 [address](#) to the Yushan forum began with an admission. Two years ago, he had hesitated to attend the conference, “lest that provoke China.” But since then – and here, Abbott keeps company with the war drummers in Canberra – China had altered the facts. Beijing had shredded the one-country, two systems understanding on Hong Kong, placed a million Uighurs into concentration camps, increased cyber surveillance of its own citizens, embraced a its own cancel culture “in favour of a cult of the new red emperor”, attacked Indian soldiers, coerced rival claimants in its eastern seas and “flown evermore intimidatory sorties against Taiwan.”

Much of this is true enough, though Abbott minimises the aggravations. China's "weaponised trade" against Australia was only because Canberra had "politely" sought an "impartial inquiry into the origins of the Wuhan virus." It all led him to believe that "China's belligerence is all self-generated."

It wasn't always like that. Abbott told his audience of how his government "finalised China's first free trade deal with another G20 country, in part, because we thought that would help us build trust between China and the democracies." His government also readied to join the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment bank as he "thought it would help to give China a stake in a rules-based global order."

Anyone invoking the expression "rules-based global order" is bound to be hiding behind the façade of global politics, where power is exerted with lofty ambition and justified in the language of noble refrain. But for Abbott, there is an inherent decency to such rules, even if they were, historically speaking, imposed on non-white nations of the planet in a civilising mission of some brutality.

And such rules can be broken, as evidenced by Abbott's own remarks about Taiwan's accepted international status, which he has ignored with near child-like determination. "Why would they want to get caught up in the old arguments about who is the 'real' China?" he asks about the Taiwanese – except that the seat of government of the "real" China remains in Beijing, with the assumption that Taiwan will, eventually, join the PRC.

Australia had behaved, according to Abbott, entirely appropriately despite becoming an unquestioning satellite of US power in the Indo-Pacific with a promise of acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. "If the 'drums of war' can be heard in our region, as an official of ours has noted, it's not Australia that's beating them." The only beating of drums, he insisted, were for "justice and freedom – freedom for all people, in China and Taiwan, to make their own decisions about their lives and their futures."

Having minimised Australian provocations, it is left to Abbott to add his own paving to war's road, pointing the accusing finger towards Beijing, whose policy makers had been so creative as to create the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue against themselves. "Sensing that its relative power might have peaked, with its population ageing, its economy slowing, and its finances creaking, it's quite possible that Beijing could lash out disastrously very soon."

Such a lashing could well take place across the Taiwan Strait, though Abbott is keen on the provocation. "I don't think America could stand by and watch Taiwan swallowed up. I don't think Australia should be indifferent to the fate of a fellow democracy of almost 25 million."

Taiwan has become the fetishized object of hostility towards Beijing, a powder keg increasingly at risk of being lit. It's foreign minister, **Joseph Wu**, could only capitalise on the addition of another member to the Taiwan fan club, [suggesting](#) that the former Australian PM had been "doing something right" in enraging China's "wolf warriors". If success can be measured by offence, Wu may be correct. But if success is a measure of how peace can be preserved, he was distinctly off the mark.

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