

A new China narrative for Australia

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As a citizen born in Australia, I have read the next-to-final draft of the 'China Narrative' statement with interest. While I am supportive of friendly and cordial relations between Australia and China, there are aspects of the statement which should be stated more strongly. In the following dot-points, I address these concerns and make suggestions to strengthen the document.

1. Page 1, para. 2: This paragraph distinguishes between values and interests. Quite rightly, it says: 'We do not negotiate or compromise our values.' This point needs to be strengthened by referring to democracy; e.g. 'democratic values.'

2. Page 4, 1st full para.: '... we care about international rules.' The document should state explicitly that Australia sees the PRC's aggressive island-building activities in the South China Sea as flouting the Law of the Sea – an international document that provides rules to resolve maritime disputes.

3. Page 5, para. 4: '... pressure on Hong Kong and Taiwan.' Issues about the status of Taiwan and Hong Kong must be resolved democratically. It must be the democratic will of the residents of those places to become absorbed into the PRC. The Narrative should state that Australia will step away from the 'One China' policy to a 'China and Taiwan' policy that recognises that, after seven decades, Taiwan has established itself as an independent polity with the right to its own democratic self-determination. Furthermore, Australia urges the PRC to no longer regard Taiwan as a 'renegade province' and to renounce the possible use of force (whether military, economic, diplomatic or otherwise) against Taiwan. Furthermore, the Narrative should state that Australia does not accept the right of the PRC to take action against companies (such as airlines) that choose to refer to Taiwan as a separate polity.

4. Page 5, paras. 6 & 7: '...universal human rights.' Australia's concern about universal human rights should be very strongly stated as a democratic value, and should embrace Tibet as well as Xinjiang. Australians well remember the appalling atrocity of Tiananmen Square in 1989. Furthermore, Australia should state firmly that, if any of its citizens are arrested in China on suspicion of breaking Chinese law, we expect that they are treated humanely, are given full and immediate access to legal, family and consular support, and are tried fairly and in a timely manner.

5. Page 6, para. starting 'Some commentators ...': 'revise the norms for governance in this region.' This sentence should specify democracy as the norm, e.g. '... and pull away from the democratic norm for governance in this region.'

6. Page 6, last para.: 'It does not seek to overthrow the international system.' Add these words to this sentence: '... but neither does it respect it.'
7. Page 7, 3rd para., after first sentence: Insert new sentence: 'This applies particularly to any democratically-elected government, at any level – national, state or local.'
8. Page 7, 4th para., 2nd last sentence: Add the words 'and Australia will resist any attempt to pressure or harass Chinese people in Australia (including Uyghurs) into submitting to the PRC's assumed authority.' The narrative should also state that Australia expects that the PRC will refrain from exerting any political or other pressure on PRC citizens who reside in Australia, on Australian citizens of Chinese ancestry, or on businesses in Australia run by people of Chinese ancestry.
9. Page 8, last section, first dot-point: Replace with the following: This narrative is about maintaining a healthy balance in Australia's relationship with China, protecting our democratic values while engaging with China in friendship.