

Morrison was naked at the G7

By **Geoff Raby**

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Far from being a vindication of the Morrison government's China policies, the G7-plus meeting highlighted the abject failure of Australia's reckless foreign policy towards China.

Australia alone of the 11 nations that were present has no official contact with China and significant parts of its trade suspended, which others at the meeting are busily backfilling.

Certainly, Australia was an invited guest to Cornwall at the same time as the G7 leaders were meeting, along with South Africa, India, and South Korea, because Britain as chair wanted to make a statement about democracies standing up to authoritarian states. And none matters more than China, or is more challenging for democracies.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is also keen to promote, post-Brexit, the new "global Britain". It is a measure of the extent to which the UK feels its global position is diminished after [Brexit that it is inclined to embrace Australia at almost every opportunity now](#) – trade, immigration policy, China.

The final G7 communiqué, which did not involve Australia, sent a message to China that democracies were increasingly worried about aberrant aspects of its behaviour, and again invoked the mantra of rule of law, freedom of navigation and human rights.

All of which would have been anticipated by Beijing and would hardly have had China's leaders hiding under their bedcovers. The G7 could at least congratulate itself at having produced a communiqué this time round.

But as the *Financial Times* reported, [the G7 was divided by how to frame references to China](#), with Canada, Italy and Britain apparently wanting to present the West in attractive terms rather than antagonising China. In the end, China was mentioned

only three times – which is a little odd in itself, as it is primary source of world economic growth at present.

Significantly, no explicit support was given to Australia in the document. References to following trade rules would have been present whether or not Australia was experiencing economic coercion from China. It is in the interests of each of these countries to maintain pressure on China to do so.

Australia has friends, and they were there in numbers at the G7-plus gathering, but the friends also have their interests. When it comes to foreign policy, interests prevail.

As for concrete measures by which the democracies were going to push back against China, there was vaccine diplomacy and infrastructure for developing countries. Whatever the efficacy of China's vaccine, [it is well ahead of the democracies in making it freely available](#) in developing countries.

It is even transferring technology so countries can manufacture their own and become regional supply hubs, [as in Egypt](#).

It is better to have some vaccine, even if it is not the Rolls-Royce version, than none. The G7 has a lot of catching up to do. Failure to deliver now will create more cynicism and strengthen China's standing.

Damage to Western credibility

The vague commitment to [an infrastructure build to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative](#) also risks falling short of its promise. It is an unfortunate reminder of the much-celebrated [Blue Dot initiative](#) that came out of the Bangkok ASEAN ministerial talks in late 2019.

A coalition of the US, Japan and Australia undertook to compete directly with China in building infrastructure in developing Asia. After the initial fanfare, little has been heard since. As it was a signature initiative of Donald Trump's secretary of state Mike Pompeo, we're unlikely to hear any more about it from the Biden administration.

But the West's credibility is harmed each time a poorly thought-through and funded proposal is advanced which has little chance of being executed – and even if it were to some extent, it would still not match the scale of China's efforts.

If the concern over China's BRI infrastructure projects is really about issues such as debt sustainability, transparency, corruption and environmental standards, then a

better approach for the G7 would be to discuss co-operation with China instead of competition.

A private meeting between Scott Morrison and Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi does not seem to have occurred, but if one had taken place would the Prime Minister have warned him about the dangers of the BRI and urged him to tear up [Italy's agreement](#) as the PM [tore up Victoria's memorandum of understanding](#)?

Morrison also does not seem to have had a bilateral meeting with his Canadian counterpart, Justin Trudeau. Had they met, he may have been interested in how Canada manages a particularly sensitive relationship with China – not least as, like Australia, it has two of its citizens in prison in China in high-profile cases that have led to public outrage in Canada and around the world over alleged “hostage diplomacy”.

Moreover, Canada has [held Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou](#), the daughter of its founder, under house arrest at the request of the US. Yet Canada's official relations have not been frozen, and Canada is happily replacing Australian coal, lobster, and timber in the Chinese market. Morrison could have asked Trudeau, as he should have asked all the other leaders, to demonstrate sincere solidarity with Australia – by not replacing our goods in China's market with theirs.

Perhaps Australia and Canada could also have made a joint statement about their respective citizens in Chinese detention, calling for due process and compassion.

Several days after the G7 summit, [following his bilateral talks with France's President Emmanuel Macron](#), Morrison finally got what he had been seeking thus far without success: an explicit public statement of support for Australia in the face of economic coercion. But with [the \\$50 billion French submarine deal looking increasingly troubled](#), he could expect nothing less.

Australia went to the G7-plus meeting with no strategies or objectives other than photo opportunities to show the folks back home that Australia was in good company.

While there were plenty of photo ops, the reality remains that Australia has demonstrated to the participants that its government is incapable of managing a complex relationship with China in the way that others of the group can and do.

We can be sure that no one present at the meetings would have taken much notice of Australian diplomacy towards China, other than as a case study of what not to do when dealing with China.

The Australian public should know that the emperor has no clothes.

Geoff Raby AO is an Australian economist and diplomat. He served as the Australian Ambassador to the People's Republic of China from February 2007 until August 2011. He is also an associate of China Matters.