

Quotes from the China Matters Oration delivered by Dr Kevin Rudd

“For these reasons, one cannot assume that the ideologically driven, statist intervention in the economy of the last five years has been repealed in a single stroke with the 2022 CEWC report.

The major ideological adjustments to the left, in favor of the state and away from Deng’s previous market model, remain in place. These still provide the deep, embedded framework within which the Party’s rolling economic policy debates are conducted, including those of the most recent Central Economic Work Conference. It is within these continuing ideological parameters that the Party has significantly changed its tactical course on the critical question of restoring economic growth—as reflected in the policy shifts identified above.”

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“Nonetheless, this new language from Xi did not represent a change in China’s enduring strategic objective of continuing to improve the China-U.S. balance of power in Beijing’s favor to make it possible to secure Taiwan by force at a time of Beijing’s choosing. Indeed, the structural tensions in the U.S.-China relationship over Taiwan will continue. This will likely manifest in continued and increasing Chinese air force crossings of the median line in the Taiwan Strait. So too with Chinese intercepts of U.S. and allied reconnaissance flights over the South China Sea.”

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“In other words, what we have seen since December [2022] is not a Xi Jinping equivalent of Deng’s “southern expedition” in 1992, when the latter reasserted the centrality of reform and opening after the tumults of Tiananmen. There is no sign of a Damascene conversion here. At least not yet.

Furthermore, for those who expect a softening in China’s ideological cleavage with the West as Beijing seeks to bring its wolf warriors under control and reduce political frictions with its economic partners in Europe and democratic Asia amid the re-prioritization of global economic engagement, the full-throated ideological assault on democratic capitalism outlined in Xi’s address [8 February 2023] should give further pause for thought.”