

Think  
*new things*  
Make  
*new connections*

**RIVALS WITHOUT, ENEMIES WITHIN:  
STANDING UP FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**The Honorable Malcolm Turnbull AC**

**Ditchley Annual Lecture 2021: summary**

**Direct quotations appear in italic**

*“On January 6 in Washington DC a mob stormed and sacked the Capitol. It was an insurrection, egged on by President Trump.... As unable to combat the virus as it was to protect its Congress, a battered America had never seemed so exhausted or so divided.*

*On July 1 in Beijing, President Xi Jinping presided over the celebration of 100 years of the Communist Party - China’s rulers for 72 of them.... China was stronger, richer and more united than ever.*

*Populist madness clawing at it from within, a disciplined rival challenging it from without - is liberal democracy caught helpless, smashed between the hammer of Trump and the anvil of Xi? Or, will it emerge, re-forged, renewed and resilient?”*

**From Without:**

***“Right now our biggest threats are from forces (biology and physics) we cannot bully or cajole”.*** Pandemics and global warming require a commitment to action by both the US and China but politically the two superpowers seem further apart than at any point since the Cold War.

**China has brought more people more rapidly out of poverty than the world has ever seen but it is becoming more authoritarian and more intolerant of criticism.** We have to deal with China as it is and not as we wanted it to be. We should never ignore human rights abuses but we should not expect to change China.

**We need to keep China a rival, not allow it to become an enemy.** *“Our objective should not be to constrain China’s growth, or technical advancement, let alone seek to undermine it. This is not a zero-sum game, but we cannot....allow China to make itself independent of foreign technology.... and at the same time allow ourselves to become, or remain, dependent on theirs.”*

**Free market Anglosphere governments and economies are going to have to get better at innovative industrial policy and controls on foreign investment in critical infrastructure.** If we don't want to be dependent on Chinese technology.

**China needs to be less brittle in response to criticism and less quick to sanction; it isn't working for China or anyone else.** Chinese sanctions against Australia have been counterproductive with Australian exports to China (through iron ore which China must have) never higher. Strident "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy may play well to nationalist sentiment at home but seriously damages the image of China abroad and certainly does not win friends or influence people. We need more quiet dialogue behind the scenes, more high-level contacts not less.

**In an era of low trust, good fences make good neighbours.** It is important for us to identify the boundaries in which we are prepared to work to enable cooperation between our countries. If we are clear with one another on our core interests and the critical national infrastructure we have to protect, then we can have collaboration as well as competition.

**The West has to offer the developing world a real choice on infrastructure.** Shared infrastructure projects with China are possible but alternative projects must be offered and separate branding is essential - the Belt and Road Initiative is a policy-directed lending and investing strategy designed to advance China's interests. Alternatives include things such as the Australian aid funded 'Coral Sea Cable' fibre optic network project, and on a grander scale the B3W initiative proposed by President Biden.

**Tensions with China must not become tensions with Chinese people.** There are 1.5 million of people of Chinese heritage in Australia and modern Australia would be impossible without them. Neither the Communist Party of China, nor populists within, should be allowed to whip up fear and ethnic tensions.

#### **From Within:**

**The most dangerous enemies of democracy are within, lies and populism.** *"The China challenge is real enough, but a far greater threat to American, and by extension, Western democracy, is anti-democratic populist media and politics. How do we combat it?"*

*"We are drowning in lies". "Stop the steal" is one of the most audacious and consequential lies ever told in American politics. Today, 70% of Republican voters in the United States believe that lie".* The uncurated and uncontrolled nature of social media is part of the problem but this has been compounded with the infection of mainstream media with truth denying partisanship.

**Democracy is being manipulated from the inside to keep populists in power.** Previously, it would have been expected that populists would have been ousted from government once people realised that they could not deliver. But populists are using tactics of gerrymandering and voter suppression in order to secure further electoral victories and retain power. Electoral systems must be inclusive, with all encouraged to vote as in Australia. Electoral boundaries should be set fairly and independently. Vote suppression has shameful roots in racism and segregation and the recent US Supreme Court validation of state legislation, that seems designed to suppress votes, is a worrying sign.

**Communities are being left behind and must be protected and know that they are.**

Populists try to channel economic disappointments into resentment of 'the other'. In order to combat this, leaders have to ensure that new jobs are lined up for people as old ones disappear. *"The invisible hand is not enough. The solution to the "rust belt" is to ensure it does not exist... When a leader speaks about renewable energy, he or she should focus on the thousands of new jobs it creates rather than just deliver a lecture on atmospheric physics.... It is no comfort to be woke if you are broke."*

**Thriving multicultural democratic societies depend on tough immigration policies.** This is essential for people to feel they have some control over who enters their country and the future of their society through their elected government. If not, then populists will exploit fear of 'the other' and sow division.

*"The mission – our mission – is honesty and trust". "The internal threats to liberal democracy are momentous. A bitterly divided nation may survive but it can hardly thrive. Nor can it provide an inspiring example of freedom to others. We have to expose the normalisation of lies and hold those responsible who enable it."*

