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## Morrison Warns U.S. Congress of China's "Charm Offensive", Australia Must Not Doze on Threat

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Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has cautioned U.S. lawmakers that Western democracies are at risk of becoming complacent in the face of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) long-term ambitions. Speaking before the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese

Communist Party, Morrison stated that China's recent diplomatic tone, marked by charm and flattery, should not distract from its continued efforts to undermine democratic institutions and expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Morrison urged the Australian government to significantly increase defense spending, recommending a target of 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2035. He argued that current spending levels, just over 2 percent, fall short of what is needed to confront strategic threats. He also emphasized that the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) submarine deal, estimated at 358 billion Australian dollars, should complement, rather than replace, traditional defense investment.

Referencing data from the Lowy Institute, Morrison expressed concern that public opinion in Australia is shifting toward prioritizing economic ties with China over national security considerations. He warned that this trend aligns with Beijing's strategy of leveraging economic engagement to lull democracies into complacency. While acknowledging the value of diplomacy and dialogue, Morrison firmly stated that such interactions should not blind the West to the realities of China's long-term agenda.

He cited examples of military intimidation and political coercion by the CCP, cautioning that expecting a change in Beijing's mindset through engagement alone is naive. Morrison called for stronger domestic resilience, including support for independent media and democratic institutions, to counter external authoritarian influence.

Also appearing at the hearing was former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, who advocated for the formation of a global coalition,

similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to coordinate economic responses to Chinese coercion. Emanuel commended Australia's response to China's trade pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic and urged closer collaboration through alliance frameworks such as AUKUS and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

Morrison was critical of the Australian Labour government's approach, accusing it of redirecting core defense funding into the AUKUS initiative while neglecting broader capability development. He insisted that AUKUS was never intended to be a substitute for sustained defense spending.

His testimony underscores a center-right strategic outlook: maintain robust defense funding, reinforce alliances, and confront the CCP's influence operations head-on. Morrison's remarks highlight the importance of vigilance and national resolve in safeguarding democratic values amid evolving geopolitical threats.