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## Former Foreign Minister Slams Albanese's Foreign Policy as China Trip Concludes

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As Prime Minister (PM) Anthony Albanese wrapped up his six-day China visit, former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer branded his foreign policy “embarrassing,” criticizing its focus on photo ops over substance. The trip, meant to bolster trade and diplomacy, has drawn scrutiny for prioritizing optics, with Downer arguing it weakens Australia’s strategic stance amid global tensions.

Albanese's itinerary spanning Shanghai, Beijing, and Chengdu, featured high-profile meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, alongside visits to tourist sites like the Great Wall and a panda research center. Downer, speaking to Sky News, called the trip a "diplomatic indulgence," accusing the Labor government of chasing symbolic gestures while neglecting critical alliances, particularly with the United States (US). "At a time when Trump's administration is reshaping global trade and security, Albanese's pandering to Beijing sends a weak signal," Downer said, pointing to the PM's failure to secure a face-to-face meeting with US President Donald Trump. The Coalition, including shadow defence spokesman Angus Taylor, echoed this, arguing Australia risks being sidelined in Washington's "America First" agenda.

The China visit yielded trade discussions, with Albanese highlighting a \$312 billion trade relationship and a new Tourism Australia deal with Trip.com. Yet, critics argue the PM sidestepped tougher issues. Chinese concerns over Australia's foreign investment restrictions, raised by Premier Li, were met with vague assurances, while Albanese's call for the release of detained Australian Yang Hengjun gained no traction. "This government's foreign policy lacks backbone," Downer remarked, per The Australian, noting the Labor Party's reluctance to confront China on human rights or regional security, such as its military drills in the Tasman Sea.

As global dynamics shift, with Trump's tariffs and AUKUS uncertainties looming, Albanese's approach has been labeled naive by centre-right commentators. The PM's emphasis on "cooperation where we can, disagreement where we must" feels hollow when Australia's economic reliance on China overshadows strategic clarity. Downer's critique

underscores a broader concern: Labor's foreign policy risks projecting weakness, prioritizing short-term trade wins over long-term security. As Albanese returns, the challenge remains balancing economic ties with China while reinforcing Australia's place in a US-led global order, without appearing to kowtow to either.