

Scott Morrison was frank, when quizzed at a news conference during his visit to Washington, on whether he would be seeking to travel to China in the next year.

“Well, you have to be invited to go,” he said.

With Australia-China relations at a low point – due to Australia’s foreign interference legislation, the banning of Huawei from 5G network and other issues – there’s no indication when an invitation might come.

Not that the Prime Minister wants to seem anxious.

He referred to his encounters with the Chinese leadership in the margins of summits, as well as senior level meetings in the areas of foreign affairs, defence and trade.

Pressed on whether he would like to be invited, Morrison said: “Well of course we would go if there was an invitation to attend.

“But it’s not something that is overly vexing us because we have this partnership. We continue to work closely with China,” he said. “So it’s not an issue that’s troubling me at all.”

Amid the glamour and glitter and the mutually admiring exchanges of rhetorically hype between Donald Trump and Morrison, China and Iran were the central policy issues of interest.

Morrison made clear that Australia and the United States brought differing economic perspectives on China. He was keen to encourage a deal to end the US-China trade war, but also to show understanding of Trump position.

He praised Trump's "natural instinct of restraint" on Iran, despite the President making reference to his nuclear arsenal. Morrison also stressed Australia's present commitment was strictly limited to the protection of the sea lanes.

He did not explicitly rule out further involvement if the situation escalated, rather saying nothing like that had been asked and people should not get ahead of themselves.

Read more: [As Scott Morrison heads to Washington, the US-Australia alliance is unlikely to change](#)

The theme of the Morrison visit is repeated over and over – renewing and modernising the deep connection between the two countries, which is now cast as looking from one century of "mateship" to a second century of it. Leaders of more powerful nations would visit America, Morrison said, "but you won't find a more sure and steadfast friend, a better political mate, than Australia".

From where Trump sits, Australia and its PM could hardly tick any more boxes.

The US has a trade surplus with Australia. Australia, as Morrison emphasised, would be spending 2% of GDP on defence – that is, an ally putting its weight. And, as Trump emphasised, it is buying a great deal of defence equipment from the US.

Then there is the fact that Morrison is right up Trump's alley as a leader – a conservative who has won an election against the odds.

No wonder Trump had a ready reply when reminded of George W Bush dubbing Howard "a man of steel" - Morrison is "a man of titanium".

On China, the President dwelt on the pain the US was imposing. “They’re having a very bad year, worst year in 57 years. ... We’re taking in billions and billions of dollars of tariffs. ... They’ve lost over three million jobs there. Supply chain is crashing. And they have a lot of problems. And I can tell you, they want to make a deal.”

Morrison highlighted Australia’s strategic partnership with China. “We have a great relationship with China. China’s growth has been great for Australia.

“But we need to make sure that we all compete on the same playing field,” he said.

On the Middle East, when asked “are you open to further military action against Iran or is the Australian commitment solely contained to a freedom of navigation patrol exercise?” Morrison replied: “As the President said ... there are no further activities planned or requested for assistance from Australia, so the question to that extent is moot”.

He praised the “calibrated, I think very measured response” of the US, as the administration announced further sanctions.

“Obviously at any time when issues are raised with us as an ally, we consider them on their merits at the time in Australia’s national interests,” Morrison said at their joint news conference.

Read more: [Grattan on Friday: Being a Trump 'bestie' comes with its own challenges for Scott Morrison](#)

Speaking at his news conference for the travelling media Morrison said there were no discussion of anything beyond the present commitment.

“I think people need to be careful about getting ahead of themselves and in running off on where these things might go. I mean these matters ... are dealt with I think in a very iterative way, and I think that’s what you’re seeing.”

Morrison announced a five year \$150 million investment for the Australian Space Agency to “foster the new ideas and hi-tech skilled jobs that will make Australian businesses a partner of choice to fit out NASA missions” to return to the Moon and travel to Mars.

He said the investment would bring more jobs, new technologies and more investment.

“We’re backing Australian businesses to the moon, and even Mars, and back,” he said.

“We’re getting behind Australian businesses so they can take advantage of the pipeline of work NASA has committed to. There is enormous opportunity for Australia’s space sector which is why we want to triple its size to \$12 billion to create around 20,000 extra jobs by 2030.”

The announcement prompted Malcolm Turnbull to tweet:

Morrison repeatedly dismissed as “gossip” - but did not deny – a Wall Street Journal [report](#) that he had wanted his close associate Hillsong founder Brian Houston invited to the state dinner but the Americans had vetoed him.

Houston said: “I have had no invitation to the White House and I have had no discussion with the prime minister or anyone else about this”.

Houston received an adverse finding from the royal commission into child sexual abuse. It found that “in 1999 and 2000, Pastor Brian Houston and the National Executive of the Assemblies of God in Australia did not refer the allegations of child sexual abuse against Mr Frank Houston [Brian’s father] to the police”.

View from The Hill: To go to China you have to be invited: Morrison

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