

From Balloons to AUKUS: The War Drive Against China

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When will this hate-filled nonsense stop? Surveillance balloons treated like evocations of Satan and his card-carrying followers; other innumerable unidentified phenomena that, nonetheless, remain attributable in origin, despite their designation; and then the issue of [spying](#) cranes. In the meantime, there has been much finger pointing on the culprit of COVID-19 and the global pandemic. Behold the China Threat, the Sino Monster, the Yellow Terror.

In this atmosphere, the hawkish disposition of media outlets in a number of countries in shrieking for war is becoming palpable.

The Fairfax press in Australia gave a less than admirable example of this in their absurd [Red Alert series](#), crowned by crowing warmongers warning Australia to get ready for the imminent confrontation. The publications were timed to soften the public for the inevitable, scandalous and possibly even treasonous announcement that the Australian government would be spending A\$368 billion in local currency on needless submarines against a garishly dressed-up threat backed by ill-motivated allies.

For days, the Australian press demonstrated a zombie-like adherence to the war line that had been fed by deskbound generals no doubt suffering from piles and deranged civilian strategists desperate to justify their supper. It is a line that always assumes the virtue of war; that going into battle, much like US President Theodore Roosevelt thought, will always outdo the tedium of peace in a haze of phosphorescent glory. It is only in the morgues and the crowded cemeteries that we find a worthy patriotism. Go out and kill, you noble sons and daughters. Do your nation proud, however stupidly.

The desperation of such a measure is also a reflection of how public opinion rejects the war drive. In a [2022 poll](#) by the Lowy Institute think tank, 51% of Australians said they preferred their country to remain "neutral" in a conflict between the US and China over Taiwan. This was not a bad return, given the repetitious insistence by various Australian government ministers that joining a war with the United States over Taiwan was simply assumed.

In the US, the *Wall Street Journal* was also doing much the same thing, plumping for great power competitions that can only end badly, rather than great power cooperation which, when it goes well, spares us the body bags, the funerals and the flag fluttering.

The introductory note of [one article](#) in that Rupert Murdoch-owned organ was not encouraging. “Since 2018, the [US] military has shifted to focus on China and Russia after decades fighting insurgencies, but it still faces challenges to produce weapons and come up with new ways of waging war.”

The obsession with war scenarios rather than diplomatic ones is hardening. It elevates the game to level pegging with peace overtures. In fact, it goes further, suggesting that such measures are to be frowned upon, if not abandoned in their entirety. Rather than considering discussions with China, for instance, on whether some rules of accommodation and observance can be made, the attitude from Washington and its satellites is one of excoriation, taking issue with any restrictions on the growth of the US defence complex. Acid observations are reserved for the Budget Control Act of 2011, which supposedly “hampered initiatives to transform the military, including on artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous systems and advanced manufacturing.”

As defence analyst William Hartung [writes](#), the Pentagon has never been short of cash in its pursuits, though it has been more than wasteful, obsessed with maintaining a global military presence spanning 750 bases and 170,000 overseas troops, not to mention the madness of shovelling \$2 billion into developing a new generation of nuclear weapons. Far from encouraging deterrence, this is bound to “accelerate a dangerous and costly arms race.”

The same must be said of AUKUS, the triumvirate alliance that is already terrifying several powers in the Indo-Pacific into joining the regional arms race. Here we see, yet again, the Anglosphere enthralled by protecting their possessions and routes of access, directly or indirectly held.

In the red mist of war, lucid voices can be found. Singaporean diplomat and foreign policy intellectual Kishore Mahbubani is one to offer a bracing analysis in [observing](#) that China is hardly going to undermine the very order that has benefitted it. The Chinese, far from wishing to upend the rules-based system with thuggish glee, saw it as a gift of Western legal engineering. “So the paradox about the world today is that even though the global rules based order is a gift of the west, China embraces it.”

He also has this to say about the US-China relationship. “China has been around for 5,000 years. The United States has been around for 250 years. And it’s not surprising that a juvenile like the United States would have difficulty dealing with a wiser, older civilisation”.

Mahbubani, ever wily but also penetratingly sharp, also offers a valuable point: that the notion of a remarkable weapon (the nuclear-propelled submarine is not so much remarkable as cumbersomely draining and costly) must surely come a distant second to the attainment of economic prosperity. “Submarines are stealthy, but trade is stealthier,” [he writes](#) with a touch of serene sagacity. Both provide security, in a fashion: the former in terms of raw deterrence; the latter in terms of interdependence – but the kind of security created by trade, he is adamant, “lasts longer”. To date, that realisation seems to have bypassed the AUKUS troika.

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