

Penny Wong's World View: AUKUS All the Way

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Global Research, April 19, 2023

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Military](#), [Military and WMD](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the **Translate Website** button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*If anyone was expecting a new tilt, a shine of novelty, a flash of independence from Australian **Foreign Minister Penny Wong's** [address to the National Press Club](#) on April 17, they were bound to be disappointed. The anti-China hawks, talons polished, got their fill. The US State Department would not be disturbed. The Pentagon could rest easy. The toadyish musings of the Canberra establishment would continue to circulate in reliable staleness.*

In reading (and hearing) Wong's speech, one must always assume the opposite, or something close to it. Whatever is said about strategic balance, don't believe a word of it; such views are always uttered in the shadow of US power. From that vantage point, Occam's Razor becomes a delicious blessing: nothing said by any Australian official in foreign policy should ever be taken as independently relevant. Best gaze across the Pacific for confirmation.

In Wong's address, the ill-dressed cliché waltzes with the scantily clad platitude. "When Australians look out to the world, we see ourselves reflected in it – just as the world can see itself reflected in us." (World, whatever you are, do tell.)

The basis for this strained nonsense is, at least, promising. Variety can, paradoxically, generate common ground. "This is a powerful natural asset for building alignment, for articulating our determination to see the interests of all the world's peoples upheld, alongside our own." Mightily aspirational, is Wong here, though such language seems pinched from the Non-Aligned Movement of the Cold War, one that Australia, US policing deputy of the Asia-Pacific, was never a part off. No informed listener would assume otherwise.

Like a lecture losing steam early, she finally gets to the point of her address: "how we avert war and maintain peace – and more than that, how we shape a region that reflects our

national interests and our shared regional interests.” It does not take long to realise what this entails: talk about “rules, standards and norms – where a larger country does not determine the fate of the smaller country, where each country can pursue its own aspirations, its own prosperity.”

That the United States has determined the fate of Australia since the Second World War, manipulating, interfering and guiding its politics and its policies, makes this statement risible, but no less significant. We are on bullying terrain, and Wong is trying to pick the most preferable bully.

She can't quite put it in those terms, so speaks about “the regional balance of power” instead, with Australia performing the role of handmaiden. She dons the sage's hat, consumes the shaman's herbal potion, insisting that commentators and strategists have gotten it wrong to talk about “great powers competing for primacy. They love a binary. And the appeal of a binary is obvious. Simple, clear choices. Black and white.”

It takes one, obviously, to know another, and Senator Wong, along with **Prime Minister Anthony Albanese**, have shown little resistance to the very binary concept they supposedly repudiate. Far from opposing it, we might even go so far as to see their seduction by US power as a move towards the unitary: there is *only* one choice for the Canberra cocktail set.

Much of the speech seems trapped in this register. It rejects the “prism of great power.” It abhors the nature of great powers scrapping and squawking over territories. And yet, Wong is keen to point the finger to one great power's behaviour: unsustainable lending, political interference, disinformation, reshaping international rules and standards.

Finally, the dastardly feline is out of the bag – and it is not the United States. “China continues to modernise its military at a pace and scale not seen in the world for nearly a century with little transparency or assurance about its strategic intent.”

Oh, Penny, if only you could understand the actual premise of AUKUS and the US modernising strategy, given that Washington's defence budget [exceeds those](#) of the next nine powers combined. Yes, you do say that a conflict over Taiwan “would be catastrophic for all”, but there is nothing to say what will restrain you, or your colleagues, from committing Australia to such a conflict. Given that the Albanese government has turned up its nose at war powers reform that would have given Parliament a greater say in committing national suicide, confidence can hardly be brimming.

The assessment of Australia's own role in international relations is not just off the mark but off the reservation. “We deploy our own statecraft toward shaping a region that is open, stable and prosperous. A predictable region, operated by agreed rules, standards and laws. Where no country dominates, and no country is dominated. A region where sovereignty is respected, and all countries benefit from a strategic equilibrium.”

To this, one is reminded of the remarks of former Australian **Prime Minister Paul Keating**, who [describes](#) Wong's alms-for-the-poor routine as, “Running around the Pacific Islands with a lei around your neck handing out money”. This could hardly count as foreign policy. “It's a consular task. Foreign policy is what you do with the great powers: what you do with China, what you do with the United States.”

Much of the speech inhabits the realm of the speculative. Wong is delusionary in assuming that regional states will accept Australia's observance of the Treaty of Rarotonga, whatever the stance taken by the AUKUS pact members. Otherwise known as the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, Wong has revealed Australia's ambivalence in observing its provisions. For one, she is on record as accepting the position that the US need not confirm whether nuclear-capable assets visiting Australia have nuclear weapons. She merely says that Washington "confirmed that the nuclear-powered submarines visiting Australia on rotation will be conventionally-armed."

This hardly squares with the assessments of her own minions in the Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs, [who have confirmed](#) that Australia will accept the deployment of nuclear weapons on its soil as long as they are not stationed.

The last word should be left to that great critic of the Albanese tilt towards Washington's military-industrial pathology. "Wong," [observed](#) Keating, "went on to eschew 'black and white' binary choices but then proceeded to make a choice herself - extolling the virtues of the United States, of it remaining 'the central power' - of 'balancing the region', while disparaging China as 'intent on being China', going on to say 'countries don't want to live in closed, hierarchical region, where rules are dictated by a single major power to suit its own interests'. Nothing too subtle about that." The Washington establishment will be delighted.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He currently lectures at RMIT University. He is a regular contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Featured image is from [@SenatorWong/Twitter](#)

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#), Global Research, 2023

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Dr. Binoy
Kampmark](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long as the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca