

We Need to Disarm the Discourse against China

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From racist tweets to rising hate crimes, the media's anti-China propaganda has created a climate of aggression.

Two weeks ago, a man drove a car into the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, yelling "Where's the CCP?" Arab Americans have been targeted during the Persian Gulf War, the War on Terror, and U.S.-backed atrocities in Palestine.

It's no surprise that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are in the crosshairs of white supremacy as the U.S. targets China. Back in April, a Columbia University survey found that three in four Chinese Americans said they'd suffered racial discrimination in the past 12 months.

When the Trump administration launched the China Initiative to prosecute spies, the Department of Justice racially profiled Chinese Americans and Chinese nationals. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of Chinese researchers who dropped their affiliation with U.S. institutions jumped 23 percent.

The Biden administration has ended the initiative, but the Department of Justice and the congressional anti-China committee are still targeting political leaders in the Chinese community.

As Biden continues the crackdowns of his predecessor, his administration is also escalating in the Asia-Pacific region. From expanding military bases in the Philippines - including one potential base in the works intended to join contingencies in Taiwan - to building a fleet of AI drones to target China, militarists are creating conditions for a hot war in the Pacific.

As the U.S. prepares for war, *Forbes* published an article on September 25 about an aircraft carrier "kill chain" and its potential use in a war with China. In February, CNN journalists accompanied a U.S. Navy jet approaching Chinese airspace. As a Chinese pilot warned the U.S. to keep a safe distance, an American soldier remarked: "It's another Friday afternoon in the South China Sea."

Not only are we normalizing U.S. aggression. We're also relying on the military-industrial complex as an unbiased source. Pro-war propaganda is derailing China-U.S. ties, increasing anti-Asian hate, and hiding the realities of public opinion across the Pacific.

After launching the AUKUS military pact between Britain and Australia in 2021, as well as stiff export controls designed to limit China's economy last year, the U.S. began 2023 with what appeared to be an olive branch. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was scheduled to visit China in February. Then came the "spy balloon."

A Chinese balloon was blown off course and eventually shot down by the U.S. military. The *Wall Street Journal* and NBC uncritically printed and broadcasted statements from US Air Force Brigadier General Pat Ryder about the balloon's surveillance capabilities.

On February 8, citing three unnamed officials, *The New York Times* said "American intelligence agencies have assessed that China's spy balloon program is part of global surveillance."

The same story mentions the U.S. State Department's briefings to foreign officials that were "designed to show that the balloons are equipped for intelligence gathering and that the Chinese military has been carrying out this collection for years, targeting, among other sites, the territories of Japan, Taiwan, India, and the Philippines."

On April 3, the BBC and CNN published conflicting stories on the balloon that cited anonymous officials but contained inconsistencies about its ability to take pictures. It wasn't until June 29 that Ryder admitted no data had been transmitted.

In September, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley told CBS the balloon wasn't even spying. This matched China's statements about the balloon, as well as that of American meteorologists. But the damage was done. Blinken had postponed his trip to China. He eventually went in June, after a trip to Papua New Guinea, where its student protesters rejected his plans to militarize their country under a security pact.

On May 26, Blinken made a speech, referring to China as a "long-term challenge." *Politico* went further, publishing a piece on May 26, called "Blinken calls China 'most serious long-term' threat to world order" with a same-day *USA Today* article also taking the liberty of using challenge and threat interchangeably.

A Princeton University study found Americans who perceive China as a threat were more likely to stereotype Chinese people as untrustworthy and immoral. Intelligence leaks about a China threat combined with the age-old Yellow Peril syndrome have allowed for incessant Sinophobia to dominate our politics.

Misinformation, the Other Pandemic

In May 2020, Trump told a scared country with 1 million recorded COVID-19 cases and almost 100,000 dead that the pandemic was China's fault. Again, our leaders cited undisclosed intelligence.

For its part, CNN showed images of wet markets after *The Wall Street Journal* published an op-ed by Walter Russell Mead called "China Is The Real Sick Man of Asia." A year later, *Politico* eventually acknowledged Trump cherry-picked intelligence to support his claims but

the Biden administration ended up also seeking to investigate the lab leak theory. And the media went along with it.

For The Wall Street Journal, pro-Iraq War propagandist Michael Gordon co-authored an article claiming that “three researchers from China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick enough in November 2019 that they sought hospital care.”

An anonymous source said, “The information that we had coming from the various sources was of exquisite quality.” But the source admits it’s not known why researchers were sick.

The article relies on the conservative Hudson Institute’s Senior Fellow David Asher’s testimony and the fact that China has not shared the medical records of citizens without potential COVID-19 symptoms. It is even admitted that several other unnamed U.S. officials find the Trump-era intelligence to be exactly what it is – circumstantial.

A year earlier, during the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries moderated by CNN, Dana Bash asked Bernie Sanders: “What consequences should China face for its role in its global crisis?” She asked the question referencing how Wuhan’s authorities silenced Dr. Wenliang but failed to mention China’s People’s Supreme Court condemned the city’s police for doing so.

She also didn’t acknowledge how Wuhan Institute of Virology’s Shi Zhengli revealed in July 2020 that all of the staff and students in her lab tested negative for COVID-19. Shi even shared her research with American scientists. Georgetown University COVID-19 origin specialist Daniel Lucey welcomed Shi’s transparency: “There are a lot of new facts I wasn’t aware of. It’s very exciting to hear this directly from her.”

But from the Page Act of 1875, which stereotyped Chinese as disease carriers, to job discrimination during the pandemic, it is Asian Americans who ultimately pay the price for the media’s irresponsibility and participation in medical racism. They are already among the casualties of the new cold war. But that war not only threatens residents of the U.S. but the entire planet too.

Profit, Not Principle

This summer, the U.S. armed Taiwan under the Foreign Military Transfer program, reserved for sovereign states only. This violates the one-China policy which holds that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge that there is one China. Biden is also trying to include Taiwan weapons funding in a supplemental request to Congress.

Weapons sales to Taiwan go back to the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, as well as Reagan administration’s assurances that the U.S. will keep sending weapons but not play any mediation role between Taipei and Beijing. In 1996, a military standoff between the U.S. and China erupted in the Taiwan Strait, followed by an increasing flow of lethal weaponry up to the present.

The *New York Times* published a story on September 18, mentioning Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, which it says was “a show of support for the island.”

Never mind that the majority of Taiwan residents surveyed by the Brookings Institute felt her visit was detrimental to their security. The media also often ignores voices from Taiwan who don’t want war, favor reunification, or reject attempts to delete Chinese history in their

textbooks.

Still, Fox News continues to give a platform to lawmakers like Representative Young Kim who wrote a piece on September 20 advocating for more military patrols in the South China Sea.

On October 17, *The Washington Post* published a story about the Pentagon releasing footage of Chinese aircraft intercepting U.S. warplanes over the last two years.

The story does not share the context of U.S. expansionism or how multiple secretaries of defense have threatened Beijing over its disputed maritime borders. Microsoft is even getting in on the action, with articles from CNN and Reuters last month uncritically sharing the software company's claims that China is using AI to interfere in our elections, despite no evidence shared with the voting public.

It demonstrates how war profiteers are edging us closer to a conflict. From sending the Patriot weapons system to Taiwan to practicing attacks with F-22 Raptors in the occupied Northern Marianas Islands, Lockheed Martin is raking in lucrative contracts while residents of the region fear an outbreak of war.

RTX supplies Israel's Iron Dome and is now designing engineering systems for gunboats in the Pacific. When arms dealers make money, victims of imperialism die. With strong links to the military, it's hard to imagine that Microsoft, News Corp, and Warner Bros. Discovery would care as long as their stocks go up too.

Intelligence spooks and media moguls don't know what's best for people or the planet. And it's time for a balanced and nuanced understanding of China. That begins with [disarming the discourse](#) and keeping the Pacific peaceful.

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