

AUKUS, Australia and China

PJ Keating

All governments declare that their fundamental responsibility is the defence of the nation.

- What they really mean, particularly Labor governments, is the defence of the nation's sovereignty – its right to divine its own destiny.
- Curtin and troop pull-back from the Middle East is an example.

Strategic threat is classically defined as a combination of capability to threaten and intention to do so.

- Because the intention of other powers can change quickly and is harder to judge confidently (eg the Russian invasion of Ukraine), defence forces are usually structured against an assessment of the capability of potential adversaries.

China's ability to take Taiwan and control the South China Sea is undeniably growing. No matter what the trajectory of its economic growth, and the impediments it faces, including demography. It will eventually rival the United States in economic scale.

It is now capable of challenging American military primacy in East Asia – that is, Washington's ability to move its forces at will, with the influence that provides.

- It is the potential loss of that primacy that has caused Washington's rapid policy shift towards military and economic containment of China.

Even so, the chance that the US will be able to preserve strategic primacy in East Asia, while protecting its critical interests in Europe and NATO, is fading.

In contrast to the United States, whose secure geography makes it unchallengeable by China or by anything other than nuclear weapons, China will always be surrounded by a group of strong large and middle powers - Japan, India, Vietnam, Korea, Indonesia and Russia. It will never be free to do as it pleases.

China is not able and will not be able to pose a direct invasive threat to Australia or to fundamentally threaten our connections with the outside world. Capability, let alone intention, is absent.

Australia's interests are well served by a close relationship with the United States

- which gives us political influence in Washington and access to advanced weaponry and intelligence.

But Australian and US interests are different. You don't need to be a conspiratorialist to acknowledge that powerful industry and national forces are pushing for Australia to go in one direction. But Australia's capacity to protect its sovereignty lies not in accession to US interests but in a broad diplomatic and security effort with our Asian neighbours to give the region the resilience they want, the economic growth they need. The peace which must be the objective, not a by-product, of regional statecraft.

On one level, the Morrison government's AUKUS announcement was in line with 100 years of Australian defence procurement.

- But it was structured and presented in a way designed to do more than that – that is, to draw Australian and American forces together in order to operate closely.
- Designing Australia's future Defence Force around the objective of deterring China, principally from an invasion of Taiwan, by means of integrating Australian defence assets into those of the United States is contrary to our interests. It constrains Australian decision-making and shreds its sovereignty.

A decision to commit Australia to an American/British submarine project will also

- delay access to submarine capability
- limit, because of the costs, options for Australia to adopt other emerging naval technologies, and other defence capabilities, including land and air-based
- restrict other fiscal options for the government.

If our aim is to deter a possible Chinese attack on Australia, this can be done cheaper and much more quickly by other means, including the sea mines the government has just announced, and land-based missiles, let alone aircraft, which are plentiful and mobile.

Submarines, like every military capability in history, will be valuable until they are vulnerable.

- Once they are visible to technology in the water, a major part of their value will be immediately written off.

In contrast to the key American decisions of the mid-20th century (creation of the United Nations; Marshall Plan; non-punitive approach to Japan and Germany; containment, not rollback, of Soviet power) - US strategic decisions in the post-cold war world (the invasion of Iraq; the handling of the Afghanistan war; backing away from free and open trade; containment of China) have been strategically damaging to its interests and to those of its allies.

Connected with this is the growing dysfunction of the US political system.

- For the first time in 70 years, Australia can't be confident that the general direction of US grand strategy will remain unchanged over the next eight years.

Australians have glossed over our role in Washington's poor decision-making since the end of the Cold War, convincing ourselves that the contribution we made was minor. But we can't let ourselves off the hook. We have to be sure that we are not again standing by while major and dangerous decisions are being made.

24 January 2023

From: s 22 [redacted] ([P. Keating, Former PM](#))
To: s 22 [redacted]
Subject: PJ Keating - response to the SMH and Age China provocations
Date: Tuesday, 7 March 2023 12:43:55 PM
Attachments: [07032023SMHAgeChinaHartcher.docx](#)

Dear s 22 [redacted]

Mr Keating has asked me to pass across to you a statement he is releasing taking the Sydney Morning Herald, Age and Peter Hartcher to task for their capricious and inflammatory material published this morning.

Kind regards

s 22 [redacted]

s 22 [redacted]

PJ KEATING

s 22



Australia and China – News Abuse by *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age*

Today's *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* front page stories on Australia's supposed war risk with China represents the most egregious and provocative news presentation of any newspaper I have witnessed in over fifty years of active public life.

It is way worse than the illustrated sampans shown to be coming from China in the build up to the war in Vietnam in the 1960s.

Apart from the outrageous illustrations of jet aircraft being shown leaving a profiled red-coloured map of China, the extent of the bias and news abuse is, I believe, unparalleled in modern Australian journalism.

And the arch villain in this is the provocateur and warmonger, Peter Hartcher, and his compliant editors.

The thinness of the narrative is built around five supposed 'experts', three of whom are regular anti-China commentators – each firmly and long identified with the strategic interests of the United States.

Their views form the basis of this exclusive 'Red Alert'.

Not anyone of the so-called 'experts' has any comprehensive knowledge of China – especially in matters of war and peace. A point Hartcher and his editors well know.

Locking five people up in a room for a day asking for an articulation of their views or biases on China's attitude to Australia – does not represent either revelation or responsible journalism.

The illegitimacy of the publication is manifest even to a moderately informed reader. The management and board of Nine Group will have much to answer for should it allow further publication of this wantonly biased and inflammatory material.

s 22



7 March 2023

s 22

From: s 22 (P. Keating, Former PM) s 22 @aph.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 22 February 2023 11:36 AM
To: s 22 @pm.gov.au>
Subject: RE: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

Hi s 22

Nice to speak earlier and many thanks for sending this through so quickly.

Best

s 22

From: s 22 @pm.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 22 February 2023 11:25 AM
To: s 22 (P. Keating, Former PM) s 22 @aph.gov.au>
Subject: FW: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

UNOFFICIAL

Hi s 22

Below are the extracts from the PM's speech dropped out. The PM is still working through the speech prooper, so don't have a full final to send you.

Cheers,

s 22

s 22

Office of the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
m. s 22 | e s 22 @pm.gov.au

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From: s 22 @pm.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 22 February 2023 10:57 AM
To: s 22 @pm.gov.au>
Subject: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

s 22

Office of the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese MP
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

M s 22 | APH s 22 | E s 22 [@pm.gov.au](mailto:pm.gov.au)

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This year, amidst volatility and complexity and uncertainty – our focus as a government is providing stability, confidence and security.

Greater security in the economy.

In energy and industry and jobs and wages.

Greater security in Medicare and child care and aged care.

In education and skills and housing.

In building and delivering the infrastructure and services Australians rely on.

And in defence and national security, investing in our sovereignty, strengthening Australia's relationships in our region and securing our place in the world.

After 9 months in government, my colleagues and I are fully aware of the size and scale of the problems we have inherited.

In every portfolio, we are confronting a decade of national policy failures.

Failures which have been exposed and compounded by global shocks.

The cost-of-living pressures Australians are facing can be traced back to a global pandemic that constricted supply chains, making it more difficult and more expensive to bring things here, but also a hollowing-

out of local manufacturing that meant we couldn't make things here.

Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine has pushed-up oil, gas, coal and fuel prices around the world and it comes on top of years spent attacking renewables and neglecting our energy grid, meaning energy prices were more vulnerable to international movements.

In every advanced economy, central banks are responding to inflationary pressures with sharp rises in interest rates, meaning mortgage-holders pay more.

And having inherited a trillion dollars of national debt, every interest rate rise increases the cost of servicing that debt.

The natural disasters which have visited devastation on families and communities across our continent have brought severe economic consequences too, billions of dollars in damage to agriculture and infrastructure, and further spikes in the price of food.

In an interconnected world of rapid change, there will always be shocks, there will always be challenges to our prosperity and threats to our security.

The measure of a government's performance and a nation's strength is not whether these events occur.

It's whether we are prepared.

It's how effectively we respond.

It's what we do to protect our people and our economy from the worst of the consequences.

And it's what we learn.

It's how we adapt and reform and improve.

This is the heart of our government's agenda for the year ahead.

An economic agenda of relief, repair and restraint.

Doing everything we can to tackle inflation and help Australian families with the cost-of-living.

Building on everything we have delivered since May last year.

And implementing reforms to deal with the structural weaknesses inflicted on the nation by a wasted decade of denial, delay, neglect and a pathology of political conflict above and beyond everything else.

The day I was elected Labor Leader, I spoke about Australians suffering from 'conflict fatigue'.

People were sick of the short-termism, the stunts and scares designed to whip up division or create a diversion.

More than that, they were tired of the government picking phoney fights instead of tackling real problems.

That political culture is corrosive for democracy.

It feeds those who cultivate cynicism and deal in misinformation.

The best way to push back against it, is to demonstrate the capacity of government to deliver real improvement in people's lives.

This is why my team and I are determined to bring a greater sense of purpose to the work of government.

Lifting Australia out of the cycle of neglect and crisis and hurried announcement.

And instead, balancing urgent action with a focus on long-term reform and investment, delivering the progress that endures.

Building greater security for our nation, greater confidence in our economy and greater stability in people's daily lives.

This begins with the first priority – and the foremost responsibility – of every government, national security.

Last week, the Deputy Prime Minister and I received the final report of the Defence Strategic Review.

The former Chief of Defence Force, Sir Angus Houston has described this as 'the most important' work that he has done in Defence.

Our Government commissioned this review because we recognise we live in a time of profound geopolitical uncertainty, both in our region

and around the world.

We wanted an independent, clear-eyed and expert assessment of the challenges we face, the capabilities we require and the tough decisions we need to make to keep Australia safe.

I can confirm today that before the Budget in May, we will be releasing an unclassified version of the report - as well as providing our formal response.

I do want to make two things clear, right now.

First, as I said before the election at the Lowy Institute, I can promise all Australians that our Government will ensure that Defence has the resources it needs to defend our nation and deter potential aggressors.

Secondly, while there will inevitably be a focus on the capability gaps we need to fill, we should never lose sight of the extraordinary service performed by the men and women of our ADF.

And on that, I want to outline to you a section from the Review's foreword.

"Australia has a strong and deep Alliance with the United States, a professional defence force and defence organisation, and an enviable international reputation as a capable country in military, peacekeeping and humanitarian and disaster relief".

All Australians can take pride in this – and we should take confidence from it.

Because with the right investments in our capability and sovereignty, our defence force can be made ready for future challenges.

These investments include announcing, through AUKUS, the optimal pathway by which Australia will operate our nuclear-powered submarines.

This will be the single biggest leap in our defence capability in our history.

Yet AUKUS is about much more than nuclear submarines, or even

technological inter-operability.

AUKUS is about the future.

It further formalises the common values and the shared interest that our three nations have in preserving peace and upholding the rules and institutions that secure our region and our world.

Australia has long understood that partnerships and alliances are key to our security – that's still true today.

But we recognise that pursuing and defending our sovereign interests and contributing to regional stability requires us to build our sovereign defence capability, including advanced manufacturing.

Richard Marles has said before national security demands a whole-of-nation effort.

It also presents a whole-of-nation opportunity: for new jobs, new industries and new expertise in science and technology and cyber.

Our collective cyber capability is, of course, a critical asset for our national security and – as the data breaches of last year highlight – it is vital to protect our economy, our businesses and our privacy.

That's why next week in Sydney, I will be convening a Cyber Security Roundtable.

Clare O'Neil and I will be bringing together representatives from industry, civil society, security agencies and the public service to discuss the shared imperative we all have to upgrade and uplift our cyber security.

This will be another important step ahead of the delivery of our new National Cyber Security Strategy later this year.

Our government has shown its clear commitment to the three pillars of Operation Sovereign Borders and the important role of the Australian Border Force.

And we understand that keeping Australians safe means supporting our intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies to guard

against threats abroad and here at home, whether that be foreign interference and espionage, or violent extremism in all its forms.

The shocking events at Wieambilla, which claimed the lives of two young police officers and an innocent neighbour were a terrible reminder of the dangers of violent extremism.

That devastating day also underscored the importance of continuing to upgrade our national co-operation on gun reform.

Australia's international engagement is an essential part of our Government's approach to national security.

From day one, we have made it a priority to rebuild Australia's standing and influence.

Emphasising that we work with our Pacific neighbours as partners and equals, with a shared interest and a shared responsibility to build a more secure and peaceful and prosperous region.

And in the months ahead, reflecting the focus our Government has placed on a family-first approach to regional security, we expect to sign our bilateral security treaty with Papua New Guinea and ratify our newly-signed Bilateral Security Agreement with Vanuatu.

Through APEC, ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, we have worked to deepen our connections and our strategic dialogue in South East Asia. Making sure Australian companies can seize the extraordinary chance we have to be a partner of choice to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

And towards the middle of the year, I'll be hosting the Quad Leaders Summit.

I'm looking forward to welcoming the leaders of three of our Indo-Pacific partners: the United States, Japan and India to Australia, to further our collaboration on regional security and prosperity.

Our Government has worked to stabilise Australia's relationship with

China.

Recognising the value of direct dialogue, seeking to co-operate where we can while being prepared to disagree where we must and always acting in our national interest and in support of regional stability.

In the best tradition of outward-looking, engaged Labor Governments, we are seeking to build security in the Indo-Pacific, not from it.

This is where Penny Wong has done such an outstanding job.

Demonstrating that Australia is back at the table; as a supporter of the rules-based order, as a constructive member of multilateral forums and as a trusted partner for regional co-operation and bilateral negotiations.

The entry ticket, the threshold credibility test for so many of these conversations is our commitment to act on climate change.

Upgrading our national emissions reduction target to 43 per cent by 2030 sent a message to the world about Australia returning to the ranks of responsible nations.

But the target, the number, is only the 'what'.

The Safeguard Mechanism before the Parliament is a big part of the 'how'. empowering business and industry with the certainty and confidence to invest in reducing their emissions.

Meaningful action on climate change is our environmental responsibility, it is central to our diplomatic strategy – and it represents a transformative economic opportunity.

Energy security is national security – and Australia can be a renewable energy superpower.

Powering our industries here at home to produce low-emissions products like green steel and green aluminium and green ammonia. And exporting clean energy, green hydrogen, critical minerals and value-added products.

Energy security is a pressing global challenge, we can make it a national economic strength: a new source of long-term prosperity for

Australia.

Already, 1 in 4 Australian jobs are related to international trade.

And jobs in export industries pay above the national average income.

We can create more of these jobs and grow our economy by diversifying our exports, moving up the global supply chain and revitalising local manufacturing.

Making our economy more resilient – and our nation more secure.

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From: [Keating, Paul \(Former PM\)](#)
To: s 22

Cc: s 22 [\(P. Keating, Former PM\)](#)
Subject: PJ Keating - National Press Club address 15 March 2023
Date: Wednesday, 15 March 2023 10:46:26 AM
Attachments: [NPCMarch2023.pdf](#)

Dear Cabinet Colleagues

Today I am addressing the National Press Club on the AUKUS announcements but first releasing a statement, a copy of which I have attached here for your benefit.

I begin the statement by saying the Government's complicity in joining with Britain and the United States in building nuclear submarines for Australia is the worst decision any Labor government has taken since the government of Billy Hughes sought to conscript Australian men and women for service in World War One.

I say the plan to spend around \$368 billion for Australian nuclear submarines designed to operate in China's peripheral waters will be of but minimal benefit to Australia's own defences while the cost will be maximal. Indeed, off the scale.

Were we to have the benefit of eight nuclear submarines at our disposal, only three, a third, would ever be at sea and on station at any one time. And the paucity of them necessarily means the broader maritime approaches to Australia would be highly porous and remain porous - while the expenditure would seriously maim the budget and jam all manner of social spending into the foreseeable future.

The decision to proceed down this path is terrible. And the Government has proceeded notwithstanding the absence of any White Paper as to the need and facilitation of it, let alone a Prime Ministerial or full ministerial statement outlining the reasons we judge such a pathway to be critical to our security.

In my view, the proposal is uncalled for and given its huge expense and concomitant lack of explanation – an affront to public administration.

My views will not please the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister nor the Defence Minister but the country is entitled to a rationale for such a radical and dangerous policy.

Yours sincerely
Paul Keating

The National Press Club**AUKUS****Statement by PJ Keating****Wednesday 15 March 2023**

The Albanese Government's complicity in joining with Britain and the United States in a tripartite build of a nuclear submarine for Australia under the AUKUS arrangements represents the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government since the former Labor leader, Billy Hughes, sought to introduce conscription to augment Australian forces in World War One.

Every Labor Party branch member will wince when they realise that the party we all fight for is returning to our former colonial master, Britain, to find our security in Asia – two hundred and thirty-six years after Europeans first grabbed the continent from its Indigenous people.

That of all things, a contemporary Labor government is shunning security in Asia for security in and within the Anglosphere.

And in an arrangement concocted on the English coast at Cornwall by Scott Morrison, Boris Johnson - one of the great vulgarians of our time – and Joe Biden, Australia is locking in its next half century in Asia as subordinate to the United States, an Atlantic power.

We have been here before: Australia's international interests subsumed by those of our allies. Defence policy substituting for foreign policy. But this time it is a Labor government lining us up.

Anthony Albanese's government has picked up and has taken ownership of the strategic architecture of the Morrison government – but taken it up in full and with unprecedented gusto.

The Morrison government, at great cost, walked away from the French submarine and approached the United States, for Australia to join its nuclear submarine program.

And because Boris Johnson succeeded in dynamiting Britain out of Europe with Brexit – Britain is trawling the world trying to stitch up the new ‘Global Britain’. And guess what? They believe they have turned up a bunch of naïve old comrades in Australia, an accommodating Prime Minister, a conservative defence minister and a risk-averse foreign minister – and all surrounded by a neo-con bureaucracy.

Yet, we approached the United States – not the other way around, on the arguments put to Morrison by the security agencies led by Andrew Shearer and ASPI and as it turns out, without even reference to the Department of Foreign Affairs or its minister. Rather, and remarkably, a Labor government has picked up Shearer’s neo-con proclivities and those of ASPI, a pro-US cell led by a recent former chief of staff to Liberal foreign minister Marise Payne.

And that approach was to have the United States supply nuclear submarines for deep and joint operations against China.

And how did this come to be? And by a Labor government?

The answer lies in Anthony Albanese’s reliance on two seriously unwise ministers. Penny Wong and Richard Marles. Penny Wong took a decision in 2016, five years before AUKUS, not to be at odds with the Coalition on foreign policy on any core issue. You cannot get into controversy as the foreign spokesperson for the Labor Party if you adopt the foreign policy of the Liberal Party – if you are on a unity ticket to deny the Liberals any wedge on foreign policy and defence.

You may stay out of trouble, but you are compromised. Self-compromised.

The cost was that Labor entered a policy depression on Asia – a bit like a low weather trough but in foreign policy. This trough – all five years of it – had Penny Wong and Labor on a unity ticket with Julie Bishop and Marise Payne – a unity ticket which supported the United States dominating East Asia – but not as the balancing power to all the other states, including China, but as the primary strategic power – notwithstanding that the United States was a country not resident in the metropolitan zone of Asia but on a continent of its own, 10,000 kilometres away - the other side of the world.

It was into this policy void, this twilight zone, that Scott Morrison summoned Anthony Albanese, Penny Wong and Richard Marles to unveil his secretly negotiated AUKUS agreement.

In the afternoon of Wednesday 20 September 2021, Morrison gave Labor a confidential briefing on dumping the French submarine to take up the US Virginia class boat and less than 24 hours later Labor adopted the policy unqualifiedly.

Anthony Albanese told Michael Fullilove at the Lowy Institute on 4 March this year – ‘I’m proud of what we did in less than 24 hours’. The Prime Minister thought a gigantic shift of this kind deserved less than twenty-four hours’ analysis, - notwithstanding the huge implications for sovereignty, for the budget, for manufacturing and relations with the region – and of course, with China. The Prime Minister is proud to buy submarines that will forever remain within the operational remit of the United States or now, of Britain – with technology owned and dependent on US management – in fact, buying a fleet of nuclear submarines which will forever be an adjunct to the Navy of the United States – whether commanded by an Australian national or not.

And just dropping the word ‘sovereignty’ into every sentence like a magic talisman does not make it real.

From a clear sovereignty capable of execution by Australia over a French conventionally powered submarine to sovereignty suborned to the whim and caprice of a US administration – that’s where we are now.

More than that, Morrison said his government would reserve twenty months to consider the enormity of the issues. So Labor had the same twenty months of leeway available to it. It could have spent twenty months trawling through the plethora of issues and then announced a considered decision. And, of course, a big one.

But instead, Labor’s valiant three fell immediately into line – they would join the neo-cons in the Office of National Intelligence, ASPI, the country’s principal US apologist, the security agencies and the hapless Defence department. And Morrison, the Member for Cook.

And in the meantime, no White Paper, no major ministerial or Prime Ministerial statement to explain to the Australian people what exactly is the threat we are supposedly facing and why nuclear submarines costing more than any national project since Federation were the best way to respond to such a threat.

And you can understand why. Penny Wong had spent five years rustling not a leaf - and was not about to start. There was to be no khaki election for her. Marles, though well-intentioned, completely captured by the idea of America, couldn't wait to join the pile on.

And the then Opposition leader not ever having displayed any deep or long-term interest in foreign affairs, fell in with Wong and Marles as leader of the great misadventure.

And the Prime Minister tells us, this is something to be proud of.

As someone who has had a share of big issues and over a long time, I can only regard these fateful events, the overnight conversion, as a lack of perceptive capacity in understanding the scale and weight of the issues at hand or more than that, a benign disregard of responsibility. Or both.

Signing the country up to the foreign proclivities of another country – the United States, with the gormless Brits, in their desperate search for relevance, lunging along behind is not a pretty sight.

The result is that through AUKUS, Australia is providing expensive support to the UK and US defence companies. At yesterday's kabuki show in San Diego, there were three people but only one payer. The Australian Prime Minister. The US President and the UK Prime Minister could barely conceal their joy with A\$368 billion heading the way to their defence companies – in the UK, BAE Systems, in the US its east coast submarine shipyards. No wonder they were smiling, and the band was playing.

But through the policy fog, informed American congressional figures soon realised that the provision of eight Virginia class nuclear submarines would seriously disrupt the US shipyard supply program to the US Navy.

So, conversations and ideas then turned to perhaps the UK building a tripartite-designed submarine for Australia and the United Kingdom itself, instead of one supplied out of the east coast yards of the United States.

The US would remain in the so-called AUKUS, not because it was building submarines for Australia but because it would forever own the nuclear propulsion technology and the fire control systems of any built elsewhere.

So Britain, which removed its battle fleet from East Asia in 1904, surrendered its citadel in Singapore in 1942, adopted its East of Suez policy in 1968, formally walking out on strategic obligations to Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia with its FPDA, the so-called Five Power Defence Agreement – finally dumping us in 1973 following its grand entry into the European Common Market, is now to be rewarded in its long contempt of us by having us fork out for the design of Britain's next Astute class submarine.

That is, we subsidise the design of the next British attack class Astute submarine simply to be able to grab half a dozen for ourselves on the way through.

We find this week, that that grand bargain has been struck.

Australia will buy six to eight nuclear powered submarines. But to deal with the capability gap, the United States will agree to supply between three and five aged Virginia class subs to Australia in the meantime. That is, ahead of any newly designed Astute class boats being delivered to the Australian Navy.

Designed to attack in China's peripheral waters, it is in these waters where China is most advantaged, where its anti-submarine platforms and sensors are most concentrated. And no Australian nuclear submarine could have more than a token military impact against China, using as is planned, conventional weaponry.

In short, a plan to spend around \$368 billion, for nuclear submarines to conduct operations against China in the most risky of conditions, is of little military benefit to anybody, even to the Americans.

The marginal benefit to Australia's own defences is minimal while the cost is maximal – indeed, off the scale. The proposal is irrational in every dimension. And an affront to public administration.

Imagine the complexity of the deal? Participating in the manufacture of a new Astute class boat to be built at Barrow-in-Furness in Britain while porting half a dozen ex-US Virginia class boats in and around Australia and crewing them.

But all this leads into the bigger point. That is, that the United States does not see itself as the 'balancing power' in East Asia but the 'primary strategic power'. Its geostrategic priority is to contain China militarily and economically.

China does not present and cannot present as an orthodox threat to the United States. By orthodox, I mean an invasive threat. The United States is protected by two vast oceans, with friendly neighbours north and south, in Canada and Mexico.

And the United States possesses the greatest arsenal in all human history. There is no way the Chinese have ever intended to attack the United States and it is not capable of doing so even had it contemplated it. So, why does the United States and its Congress insist that China is a 'threat'?

The US Defense department's own annual report to Congress in late 2022 said 'the PRC aims to restrict the United States from having a presence on China's periphery'.

In other words, China aims to keep US navy ships off its coast. Shocking.

Imagine how the US would react if China's blue water navy did its sightseeing off the coast of California. The US would be in a state of apoplexy.

The fact is China is not an outsider. It is part of the international system. It is a member of the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the G20 and APEC. And has been happy to be.

It has adopted and has a vested interest in globalisation – its President Xi Jinping proselytised for this at Davos six years ago.

China is a world trading state – it is not about upending the international system.

It is not the old Soviet Union. It is not seeking to propagate some competing international ideology.

If you were a sensible American, of the likes of Kissinger or of a Brzezinski, you would celebrate the fact that you had turned up a co-stabilising power in Asia – China. A power with which you could manage both great oceans – the Atlantic and the Pacific.

But no. China is to be circumscribed. It has committed the mortal sin, the high sin in internationalism - it has grown as large as the United States.

Nowhere in the American playbook is there provision for this affront to be explained or condoned. For the exceptional State to be co-partnered, let alone challenged.

The 1.4 billion of those Chinese, should keep their place – even if their place is safely land and water locked.

And should they not keep their place we, the United States, will shut them in – contain them – and with the complicity of a reliable bunch of deputy sheriffs, Japan, Korea, Australia and India.

But this week, China's new Foreign Minister Qin Gang said the United States is heading for 'conflict and confrontation' with Beijing – accusing America of engaging in 'suppression and containment'.

And Qin would not have said this without President Xi's express agreement.

President Xi later himself said that the United States and Western countries led by the United States 'have implemented all-round containment, containment and suppression on our country'.

This is not the China Daily saying this, or the Global Times in Beijing, this is the President himself. In other words, the rhetoric from the Chinese side, now they have worked out what the US game plan really is, is now sharper and more assertive.

So, the ball game has begun.

Nominally for the United States, over the future of Taiwan, but really in service of its underlying imperialism.

Taiwan, a territory which became a so-called 'democracy' as late as 1996.

And for this matter to be resolved in the favour of the United States, we are enjoined in Australia by the Hartchers and Jenningses of this world to step up to World War Three.

Indeed, two of our major dailies, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age, have for five years now, argued the notion of war against China. Or readiness for war.

I said at the Press Club in November 2021 that Taiwan is not a vital Australian interest. And it remains not a vital Australian interest.

A vital Australian interest would, for instance, be an invasive attack on Tasmania – that would constitute a vital interest for Australia – but Taiwan, a territory we have never recognised as a State – should not be commensurably considered.

I dare the Prime Minister to explicitly suggest or leave open the question that Australia might go to war over Taiwan – at the urgings of the United States or anyone else.

Before the Prime Minister attended the G20 in Indonesia ahead of his inaugural meeting with Xi Jinping I had an hour's conversation with him at Kirribilli.

Generally, I have found the Prime Minister responsive to calls, texts and email.

But on 2 February 2023, I emailed a long paper to the Prime Minister arguing that the first responsibility of a government to its community was the untrammelled

maintenance of sovereignty – the right to make the right choices for your own country. I received no reply to this correspondence.

More recently, on 21 February, I spoke to a member of the Prime Minister's staff inviting the Prime Minister into a conversation with me ahead of any meeting with the US President and particularly in respect of AUKUS and the submarines. The message was delivered but I heard nothing from the Prime Minister.

So, it is not that anything I say today could not first have been put to the Prime Minister. The fact is, he did not wish to hear the message or have the conversation.

I don't think I suffer from relevance deprivation, but I do suffer concern for Australia as it most unwisely proceeds down this singular and dangerous path.

Unambiguously, unqualifiedly and solely arraiging itself with an Atlantic power which upon any defeat or setback will see that power likely repair to California and with alacrity - ten thousand kilometres across the moat of the Pacific, as it retreated from Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving the scarified locals to deal with the destruction and chaos.

Labor has invariably got the big international ones right.

The Party knocked over Hughes when he sought to conscript young men to serve in Belgium in World War One.

Curtin knocked over Churchill when Churchill sought to ship our troops from Tobruk to Burma. In a clear exercise of sovereignty, Curtin brought the troops home to defeat the Japanese marines in Kokoda and Milne Bay.

Arthur Calwell valiantly, and correctly, opposed Australian military participation in the war in Vietnam – a national disaster for us and especially for the Americans.

Simon Crean, as leader, firmly opposed Howard's commitment to Iraq - a commitment which led to tragic consequences for the Iraqi people and ourselves, and again, for the Americans – friends, we again failed to properly warn as to the folly of their adventurism.

This one, AUKUS, is where Labor breaks its winning streak of now over a century. Falling into a major mistake, Anthony Albanese, befuddled by his own small target election strategy, emerges as Prime Minister with an American sword to rattle at the neighbourhood to impress upon it the United States's esteemed view of its untrammelled destiny.

Naturally, I should prefer to be singing the praises of the government in all matters but these issues carry deadly consequences for Australia and I believe, it is incumbent on any former Prime Minister, particularly now, a Labor one, to alert the country to the dangerous and unnecessary journey on which the government is now embarking.

This week, Anthony Albanese screwed into place the last shackle in the long chain the United States has laid out to contain China.

No mealy-mouthed talk of 'stabilisation' in our China relationship or resort to softer or polite language will disguise from the Chinese the extent and intent of our commitment to United States's strategic hegemony in East Asia with all its deadly portents.

History will be the judge of this project in the end. But I want my name clearly recorded among those who say it is a mistake. Who believe that, despite its enormous cost, it does not offer a solution to the challenge of great power competition in the region or to the security of the Australian people and its continent.

END

From: s 22 (P. Keating, Former PM)
To: [Gartrell, Tim](#)
Subject: FW: Statement by PJ Keating
Date: Thursday, 9 March 2023 3:54:47 PM
Attachments: [09032023SMHAge.pdf](#)

From: s 22 (P. Keating, Former PM)
Sent: Thursday, 9 March 2023 3:48 PM
To: s 22 @pm.gov.au
Subject: Statement by PJ Keating

Dear s 22
Please find attached a statement by Mr Keating today.
Would you mind forwarding it for the Prime Minister's information.
With thanks

s 22

s 22

Office of the Hon Paul Keating

s 22

T s 22

PJ KEATING

s 22



Statement by PJ Keating

***The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* urge nuclear war by Australia against China**

The Sydney Morning Herald's prominent series of provocations, urging Australia into a war with China, concluded its third instalment today.

At Item 20 of its presentation, apart from its advocacy of the reintroduction of compulsory national service, it wantonly urges that Australia should further consider 'basing US long-range missiles armed with nuclear weapons on Australian territory' and goes on to say 'if the US were interested in doing so'.

In the following point at 21, it refers to 'the threat from China'.

The first point is, there is no threat from China, in any strategic sense. There has never been such a threat from China, either implicit or explicit. But for the *Herald's* notion of it, it is urging Australia into a war with China armed with nuclear weapons on our territory to be provided by the United States.

Do Hartcher, Jennings, Lavina Lee and Mick Ryan believe that were we to be party to a nuclear attack on China, that China would just sit there and take it – and not respond with a nuclear attack on Australia and possibly its cities?

Peter Hartcher has now been into war talk and urging war on China for years courtesy of his stewardship of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Foreign Affairs editorship.

People should get this straight. *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* are editorialising in favour of a war between Australia and China.

The *Herald* and the *Age*, unbelievably, are countenancing a war with China. And not just countenancing, urging a war with China.

The editor of the *Herald*, Bevan Shields, should hang his head in shame for encouraging the publication of this provocative and dangerous rubbish.

But the intellectual source of it is Peter Hartcher. He has now picked up, as ‘experts’ a group of known pro-American, anti-Chinese commentators to back in his manic views about the Chinese Communist Party.

Peter Jennings, perhaps the worst of the pro-American, anti-Chinese commentators, is the person who told us three years ago that we would be at war with China within months. Three years have gone by and none of his predictions has come to pass. But he occupies pride of place in Hartcher and Shields’s council of war.

Along with Jennings, there is Lavina Lee, a perpetual critic of China, who is married to John Lee, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington and a former adviser to Liberal foreign minister, Julie Bishop. And then there is Mick Ryan. One of scores of former army Generals, who has spent most of his career focused on Afghanistan, the Middle East and Ukraine. Hardly people of independent and judicious mind.

Neither Alan Finkel or Lesley Seebeck traffics in the anti-China vitriol which is Hartcher and Jennings’s stock in trade, but they have loaned their names to this infamous group, either out of naivety or simply not knowing the manic people they were obliged to fit in with.

The key point is that not any one of the five of them has any experience or expert understanding of China. Their views about China represent nothing more than uninformed bias and one could live with this stupidity if the representations they are making were not so damaging to Australia’s interests. Urging your country into a war is wicked, by any measure. But this is what Hartcher and the *Sydney Morning Herald* have been up to now for five or six years.

There are any number of people who are indeed experts on China, most of them even competent in Mandarin. People who have served as ambassadors, general foreign policy advisers, ex-Office of National Assessments officers etc. But Hartcher and Shields pick the most rabid anti-China commentator in the country, Peter Jennings.

And when I took the *Herald* (and the *Age*) to task on Monday for their egregious and provocative, page upon page, news presentation, Shields and the *Age* editor refused to run one line of my criticism. This is the low point the *Herald* and the *Age* have now reached.

It is exceptionally important that the readership of these two capital city newspapers understands that the papers and their editors are urging war with China, over of all things, Taiwan. An island, off the Chinese coast, an island Australia does not recognise as an independent state. And has never recognised as an independent state.

And a war employing nuclear weapons. With the absurd assumption that were Chinese assets to be attacked with nuclear weapons the Chinese would not similarly attack Australia employing the same weapons.

In such a wicked scenario, how would the *Herald* and the *Age* report Chinese reprisals against Australia as nuclear weapons smash into Australian targets? But this is the game the fool, Hartcher, has urged the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* to be in. God help us.

9 March 2023