

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: If Albanese's such a buddy of Biden's, why is Assange still in jail? | The Sydney Morning Herald | July 26 2023
Date: Thursday, 27 July 2023 9:25:43 AM

The Sydney Morning Herald

If Albanese's such a buddy of Biden's, why is Assange still in jail?

July 26, 2023

Bob Carr

Julian Assange is in his fourth year in Britain's Belmarsh prison. If the current appeal fails, he will be shackled and driven off in a prison van and flown across the Atlantic on a CIA aircraft for a long trial. He faces likely life imprisonment in a federal jail, perhaps in Oklahoma.

In 2021, then opposition leader [Anthony Albanese said](#), "Enough is enough. I don't have sympathy for many of his actions, but essentially, I can't see what is served by keeping him incarcerated."

As prime minister, Albanese said he had already made his position clear to the Biden administration. "We are working through diplomatic channels," he said, "but we're making very clear what our position is on Mr Assange's case."

So we can assume that at one of his seven meetings with US President Joe Biden he has raised Assange, even on the fringes of the Quad or at one of two NATO summits. Or perhaps in San Diego when they launched AUKUS, under which Australia will make the largest transfer of wealth ever made outside this country. This [\\$368 billion](#) is a whopping subsidy to American naval shipyards and to the troubled, chronically tardy British naval builder BAE Systems.

But it clinches Australia's reputation as a deliriously loyal, entirely gullible US ally. It gives President Biden the justification for telling Republicans or Clinton loyalists in his own party that he had no alternative but to end the pursuit of Assange. "Those Aussies insisted on it. They're doing us all these favours ... we can't say no."

In addition to the grandiose AUKUS deal, Biden could list other decisions by the Albanese government that render Australia a military stronghold to help US regional dominance while materially weakening our own security.

Candid words, but they aren't mine. They belong to Sam Roggeveen of the Lowy Institute in this month's edition of [Australian Foreign Affairs](#). In a seminally important piece of analysis, Roggeveen nominated Australia's decision to fully service six American B52 bombers at [RAAF Tindal](#), in the Northern Territory, as belonging on that list. It is assumed these are aimed at China's nuclear infrastructure such as missile silos. "It is hard to overstate the sensitivity involved in threatening another nation's nuclear forces," Roggeveen writes.

In his article, he reminds us we've also agreed to host four US nuclear subs on our west coast at

something to be called “[Submarine Rotational Force-West](#)”. Their mission would be destroying Chinese warships or enforcing a blockade of Chinese ports.

The east coast submarine base, planned most likely for [Port Kembla](#), will also directly support US military operations. It’s another nuclear target. As Roggeveen says, all these locations raise Australia’s profile in the eyes of the Chinese military planners designing their response in the event of war with the US.

In this context, I can’t believe the US president is not on the point of agreeing to the prime minister’s request to drop charges against Assange.

Apart from the titanic strategic favours, two killer facts help our case. One, former US president Barack Obama [commuted the sentence of Chelsea Manning](#), who had supplied Assange with the information he published. The Yank is free, the Aussie still pursued.

Two, the crimes Manning and Assange exposed involved US troops on a helicopter gunning down [unarmed civilians in Baghdad](#). They are directly comparable to the alleged Australian battlefield murders in Afghanistan we are currently prosecuting.

An initial refusal from Biden is only an invitation to ask a second time, in a firmer voice.

It’s possible to imagine an Australian PM – Fraser, Hawke, Keating, Howard or Rudd – being appropriately forceful with a US president. There would be an inflection point in their exchange – prime minister to president – when the glint-eyed Australian says, “Mr President, it’s gone on too long. Both sides of our politics are united. Your old boss commuted Chelsea Manning, an American, in the same case.”

A pause. A beat. Then the killer summation. “Mr President, I speak for Australia.”

Surely this counts.

I don’t believe the president can shake his head and say, “nope”, given all we have gifted – the potent symbolism of B52s, nuclear subs and bases on the east and west coast. It would look like we have sunk into the role of US territory, as much a dependency as Guam or Puerto Rico.

US counter-intelligence [conceded](#) during court proceedings there is no evidence of a life being lost because of Assange’s revelations. Our Defence Department reached the same view.

If Assange walks out the gates of Belmarsh into the arms of his wife and children it will show we are worth a crumb or two off the table of the imperium. If it’s a van to the airport, then making ourselves a more likely target has conferred no standing at all. We are a client state, almost officially.

Bob Carr is a former foreign affairs minister of Australia and was the longest-serving premier of NSW.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/if-albanese-s-such-a-buddy-of-biden-s-why-is-assange-still-in-jail-20230721-p5dqci.html>

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: West Bank settlements always illegal | The Australian | February 12 2014
Date: Tuesday, 8 August 2023 4:11:45 PM

THE AUSTRALIAN

West Bank settlements always illegal

BOB CARR

FEBRUARY 12, 2014

ANY confusion about Israel's settlements in the West Bank can be easily resolved. There is a file in the office of the Israeli Prime Minister that will do it.

The file would be handy for John Kerry as he attempts to broker a peace. It would help Julie Bishop, who told The Times of Israel on January 15 she'd like to see advice that says settlements are illegal.

It was this advice that an Israeli prime minister asked for in 1967. Israel had just conquered what is now the West Bank. Prime minister Levi Eshkol asked Israel's top authority on international law, Theodor Meron, whether Israel could settle civilians there.

Meron was a child survivor of the Holocaust and has since become one of the world's leading authorities on the laws of war and a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

His advice was unequivocal, and today he sticks to it. He said: "Civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

When General Moshe Dayan in 1968 proposed building Israeli towns on the West Bank he blithely conceded: "Settling Israelis in administered territories, as is known, contravenes international conventions ... "

Indeed, the Fourth Geneva Convention would appear to leave no room for argument. It states: "The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

Apologists for settlements try to argue that Article 49 bars the occupier only from "forced transfer" (my emphasis) of its civilians. This is not the interpretation accepted by the International Court of Justice or anyone else. The adjective "forced" does not appear in the convention.

I think I recognise a killer argument when I see one. The killer argument here is that Israel's own legal authority, at the very start, told its government that settlements were illegal under international law.

It's curious that supporters of Israel would choose to fight on this ground - their weakest.

When I was foreign minister the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council directed a furious effort at trying to block even routine criticism of settlements, as if this were more vital than advocating a two-state solution or opposing boycotts of Israel. Settlers themselves shatter all sympathy, as on the ABC's Four Corners on Monday when Daniella Weiss stated they deliberately had occupied land to block the creation of a Palestinian state because "this land was promised to the Jewish nation by God".

In Louis Theroux's BBC documentary The Ultra Zionists, religious settlers declared Palestinians an inferior race. "This is the Jewish homeland and there's never been a Palestinian people," declared one, standing on a property formerly occupied by Palestinians. In one blast they defied centuries of priceless Jewish liberal and humanitarian instinct.

No one from the centre-Left of European politics is going to do anything other than repudiate this ultra-religious vision. "The kibbutz used to be the symbol of Israel," a British Labour MP told

me. "Now it's the settlement bloc." American Jewry is increasingly detaching itself from what it sees as a chauvinist, illiberal strain in Israeli politics.

Kerry warned Israel last month of the danger of delegitimisation, especially after the EU announced any economic treaties with Israel would carefully exclude - one may say boycott - business activity in Israeli settlements.

I know some supporters of Israel would want to point out that there are a range of settlement categories. My response is to quote Israeli prime minister Golda Meir, who once said: "If you've got to explain, you've lost already."

In any case, there is available a far more intelligent defence of Israel. Concede that the settlement mission is controversial within Israel. Point out many Israelis are opposed to the settler vision of a greater Israel indefinitely governing a majority Arab population. Give up any argument that settlements are legal under international law and move on to more fruitful territory.

Insist that liberal democracy and shining economic success - even with constant threat of war - are the chief virtues of Israel, a state where six former heads of its security agency, Shin Bet, can appear in a documentary (The Gatekeepers) and criticise Israel's occupation of the West Bank, a state where its own Supreme Court can overrule its government on use of torture or the direction of a wall opposed by Palestinian villagers, where historians freely challenge their country's own foundation myth. Where, as Four Corners showed, its military personnel can speak out against the occupation.

In all these respects, Israel presents a benchmark of pluralism and democracy - a formidable one - for a future Palestinian entity. If Palestinians achieved it, they would set off a challenge to Arab dictatorship and theocracy everywhere and realise their own greatness.

Bob Carr was Australia's foreign minister from March 2012 to September last year and was NSW premier from 1995 to 2005.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/west-bank-settlements-always-illegal/news-story/f541c421d00be0ecd09baf2aad94144b>

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: AUKUS, Assange, and the “seething pathologies” of the American Security State | Pearls and Irritations | May 12 2023
Date: Friday, 12 May 2023 9:58:00 AM

PEARLS AND IRRITATIONS

[HUMAN RIGHTS](#), [INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS](#), [POLITICS](#)

AUKUS, Assange, and the “seething pathologies” of the American Security State

By [Bob Carr](#) and Phillip Adams

May 12, 2023

We are permitting ourselves no character of our own under the architecture of the Alliance. It means we've accepted the status of a kind of client state, or American territory. I won't say the 51st state. It means we've got even less independence than a US governor would have, Former Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr says in conversation with ABC LNL host Phillip Adams.

Phillip Adams: There is a simple question that I want to put to you: Why is Julian Assange still there [Belmarsh prison]? Why is the US so determined to hold him?

Bob Carr: It's almost a self-loathing in one corner of the American security state. At a time when American dominance, leadership, primacy is challenged, not least because of their own seething pathologies, and... America with the manifestations of a failed state. Assange getting away with exposing an American war crime. An undoubted American war crime. You can see it on video by typing in [Collateral Murder](#). American serviceman from an Apache helicopter killing civilians, shooting twelve civilians on the ground during the appalling war in Iraq. It's a challenge to the American psychology. And Pompeo, who was Trump's second secretary of state, was activated to raise this and to pursue it. And there's a pathology in one part of the American character that wants to see this to the end. And the end is a very grim one, it means someone receiving a sentence of 175 years and dying in a very isolated prison on the plains of Oklahoma.

The whistleblower who gave the material to Assange. The very brave, altogether admirable Chelsea Manning, walks free today because of a commutation extended, to his very great credit, by President Barak Obama. So the American who gave the information to the Australian walks free. But the Australian who published the information continues to be pursued with all the vengeful fury of the American security state. And that is the argument that enables an Australian Prime Minister to say to his American counterpart – ‘Listen, I can't defend this before the public opinion of my own country’. And that's a pretty powerful argument. That's the ultimate, killer argument you use with the Americans. Your guy's gone free, you're still pursuing ours...

Think of this analogy. Think of an Australian based in Oxford who's exposed the mistreatment of Muslims in Kashmir by the Indian government, or of the Uyghur minority, the Uyghurs, in Xinjiang province, by the Chinese state.

And imagine if India or China, in these cases, said ‘hang on’ you've published online our state secrets. Discussion notes of the politburo or of the Indian Cabinet. We've got an extradition arrangement with London and we're going to bring you back to Beijing, or Delhi, to go on trial, because you've offended the national security laws of India, or in the other case study, of China.

Now we would see that at once as entirely intolerable. Yet that is *precisely* the analogy that applies to Assange – not a US citizen – but being plucked out of London to be put on trial in Virginia. No one imagines that he is a spy. But being put on trial under the US espionage act. And that is a threat, if you think about it, to anyone, anywhere in the world, who publishes anything the US state brands secret. They can be prosecuted under the 1917 US espionage act and offered up to the mores of America's notoriously cruel justice system.

There are arguments about America that resonate. About freedom of the media, every bit as important as what you've explored on your program several times, the principles enshrined in the US Supreme Court – a decision by a very different US Supreme Court – about Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers. I put it this way Phillip: No one could argue that the American people and the world weren't entitled to all that information compiled by the US defence department about the history of American involvement in Vietnam.

Could anyone say [now] that the world was not entitled to know? That American troops in an Apache helicopter murdered people on the ground?

Phillip Adams: And exulted in it!

Bob Carr: And exulted in it. They were quite jocose as they laughed about what they were doing. The recording that you can reach through Collateral Murder in your search engine, they are sitting behind the gun sight camera, circling a Baghdad street, and chirping merrily to one another as they picked their victim and punched bullets into twelve unarmed civilians, including a wounded man lying in the gutter.

Now, the world is entitled to know about that.

This was a war crime. We know about it because Chelsea Manning, now walking free, gave the information to an Australian who published it.

Phillip Adams: Bob, this talks to the very nature of our Alliance, doesn't it?

Bob Carr: It does. If we don't have the confidence and maturity to say to our partners, the Americans, this is – "Mr President, I don't think you appreciate how important it is to Australian opinion", then we are permitting ourselves no character of our own under the architecture of the Alliance. It means we've accepted the status of a kind of client state, or American territory. I won't say the 51st state. It means we've got even less independence than a US governor would have.

Really we're like Puerto Rico or Guam, up against the power of Washington. ... We've got out of the habit of having fruitful arguments with the Americans. We're now too cowed to think about that. We are loyal to the Alliance obligation to the extent of giddy excess. Even to the point where, under AUKUS, we're making, we're giving effect to the biggest transfer of wealth *outside this country*, that has ever taken place in our history.

And in that context of that massive subsidy to US shipbuilding, if we haven't got the confidence to say "Mr President, I am returning to this matter, I'm not going to let it go, the Australian public want me to say to you, if I can put it candidly, as friends, as buddies, as mates: ***just drop the Assange matter and do it now***, because I'm afraid of what will happen to his health in Belmarsh prison."

Phillip Adams: I'm glad you raised AUKUS. Because in this context, Julian looks like a very, very small chess piece.

Bob Carr: In this context, it's worth less than 5 minutes of the President's time. Here you've got

an American ally that makes itself a nuclear target by hosting several American communication facilities. We've committed ourselves it seems implicitly, if this is the real meaning of AUKUS, to entering war against China on *day 1* of any conflict. We better pray, pray, fervently to the goddess of fortune that that conflict, that war does not come about. It would be a disaster for us, we'd be a surrogate target. In that context, if we haven't got the confident character that enables us to say to the Yanks, 'You've got to trust our judgement on this. You *must*, you must drop this'.

Then, what confidence are we going to have in talking to the Americans should a conflict with China come about?

This is an edited extract of Bob Carr's interview with Philip Adams on Late Night Live, 'Bob Carr on the case to free Julian Assange', May 8, 2023 and transcribed from audio by Pearls and Irritations.

[AUKUS, Assange, and the “seething pathologies” of the American Security State - Pearls and Irritations \(johnmenadue.com\)](https://johnmenadue.com)

Listen to the full interview here:

[Bob Carr on the case to free Julian Assange - ABC Radio National](https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/content/2023/05/08/bob-carr-julian-assange.htm)

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: Statement by former Foreign Minister and Premier on Julian Assange
Date: Friday, 5 May 2023 10:42:35 AM
Importance: High

THE HON. BOB CARR

MEDIA STATEMENT

Both the prime minister and the opposition leader have said today the US should drop extradition proceedings against Julian Assange.

If America persists it will show Washington treats Australia with contempt and regards us as a client state not to be taken seriously.

The stubbornness of Washington in ignoring Australian opinion is confirmed by the fact Chelsea Manning walks free for providing information to Assange but Assange, an Australian, faces life in prison for publishing it.

This is a test of whether Washington sees its Australian ally as a pushover whose leaders can't be allowed to win a case about one of its citizens even when Australian public opinion is unanimous and Assange's offence is nothing more than exposing American war crimes in Iraq.

This is a test for US Ambassador Kennedy who must demonstrate she can pitch a case to Washington and must demonstrate she can shift the opinion of the White House and State Department.

END

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: Australia's real status as a submissive ally | Pearls and Irritations | May 19 2023
Date: Friday, 19 May 2023 9:36:02 AM

PEARLS AND IRRITATIONS

[POLITICS](#), [WORLD AFFAIRS](#)

Australia's real status as a submissive ally

By [Bob Carr](#)

May 19, 2023

Like the occasional failure of a president to pronounce the name of our prime minister, US President Joe Biden cancelling his attendance at the QUAD is a reminder that America needs to balance bilateral relationships with 192 nation states and that up to 20 flatter themselves that their relationship is a special one.

One time candidate for the Republican nomination Senator Marco Rubio of Florida this week warned about China's mounting economic strength in an opinion piece in *Nine Media*. Rubio referred to American allies and economic powerhouses in Asia. Any Australian reader might have assumed Australia would be listed. But we weren't. The Senator was referring to Japan and South Korea, it having escaped his notice that Australia defines itself as a dependable, rusted-on US ally. As for "economic powerhouse," our economy is roughly the same as Korea's and our GDP per head double.

When Ambassadors Hockey and Sinodinos were handing out Australian lapel badges in the corridors of the Capitol they must have missed the office of this totemic figure, even though in the 2016 nomination contest he was probably the most nimble debater and at 44 had a long future in a party now picking a 76 year old as its nominee. If Rubio doesn't reel-off Australia as an Asian ally, or if he imagines the size of our economy renders us less weighty than Korea, the assumption we are America's most loved partner- always a myth- has little resonance in the US capital itself.

Like the occasional failure of a president to pronounce the name of our prime minister it's a reminder that America needs to balance bilateral relationships with 192 nation states and that up to 20 flatter themselves that their relationship is a special one.

Cancelling his attendance at the QUAD was necessary given the crisis in Washington. It's useful if it reminds Australians the QUAD is not what our media imagine. When I was interviewed on Sky on Thursday the host referred to "the QUAD alliance." I enjoyed pointing out that it was not an alliance. It was not a security pact. It couldn't be described as a partnership. It was a forum for consultations.

For middle-power Australia any forum is valuable to explain our values and defend our interests. Implicitly the existence of the QUAD sends a message to China that something more might be made of this diplomatic talking shop if Chinese behaviour warranted it.

Four nations of the Indo Pacific in regular consultation is International Relations 101, a cautionary symbol to a rising power. But it's not going to take priority with the White House when America's extreme polarisation produces a crisis in a system of government wrapped around a 1789 constitution in which an executive is not defined by control of a budget.

Meanwhile Australia's real status as a submissive ally which will never complain is confirmed by the Biden's administration's apparent refusal to accept our prime minister's request to drop extradition proceedings against Julian Assange. It can be assumed from Prime Minister Albanese's statements that he was making representations about the matter three months after the election. The lack of movement confirms the American security state just won't buy the argument that its ally is entitled to a win- even when the Australian prime minister uses the killer fact that Chelsea Manning received a commuted sentence from Obama and walks free while the Australian, who received material from her and published it, is the subject of a merciless pursuit.

Given the flow of propaganda about how liked we are in Washington – our ambassadors playing golf with Trump, barbeques with Congressmen who sign up to an Australian friendship group- you would think the Assange matter would be resolved with a resigned shrug of the shoulders and the comment, "It's those persistent Aussies- both sides of their politics are asking this fella be set free. We can't say no."

At the end of next year Americans will determine whether Trump becomes President for a second time. He is fond of Putin and, like some other leaders of the Republican Party, critical of American support for Ukraine. In a Fox interview Trump praised the unshakable statesmanship of Xi Jinping and the lustrous beauty of his female interpreter. His vice-presidential running-mate could just as likely be Marjorie Taylor Greene as any of the other conspiratorial collaborators in Congress.

Australians might also begin to contemplate the frailties Joe Biden is unable to hide. Interviews and media conferences are getting harder for him. At the end of his second term Biden will be 85, an age at which one in five Americans struggle with Alzheimer's. Should the president be forced by illness to resign his vice-president Kamala Harris offers no grounds for confidence that she can emerge as the Harry Truman of her time.

In their novel *2034* (Penguin Press, 2021) Admiral James Stavridis and his co-author Elliot Ackerman create a circumstance where naval conflict between the US and China in the South China Sea sparks a decision by the president to detonate a tactical nuclear weapon over a Chinese city with a population of 10 million. Nothing in the book renders this dismal declension inherently unlikely. Stavridis was NATO Supreme Allied Commander and had served as commander of two US aircraft carrier battle groups.

Interestingly, this disturbing piece of fiction positions a woman as president, under pressure to take an extreme step because all of Washington – the media and the security apparatus especially – are determined to brand her as weak.

The slow motion exchange of theatre nuclear weapons between China and the US renders both of them incapacitated. What should grab the attention of our armchair warriors is that the mutual damage China and the US inflict on one another removes both from global leadership. The new world order is dominated by India, Iran and Russia.

Have our China hawks ever contemplated the world order that emerges from the US-China showdown they seem so happy to cheer on?

[Australia's real status as a submissive ally - Pearls and Irritations \(johnmenadue.com\)](http://johnmenadue.com)

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: Bipartisan aim must be avoiding US-China conflict | The Australian | August 23 2022
Date: Tuesday, 23 August 2022 10:35:25 AM

THE AUSTRALIAN

Bipartisan aim must be avoiding US-China conflict

Bob Carr
August 23 2022

Australian ambassadors in Washington Joe Hockey and Arthur Sinodinos took it upon themselves to cheer any hardening in US attitudes towards China.

This was the new role of the Australian envoy in the imperial centre: stirring up America to assert its primacy in Asia.

This is one view of Australia's international personality anyway – reflected in the stance of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and “the drums of war” rhetoric of the last days of the Morrison government.

But if America sallies forth to make a show of strength and loses, where does that leave Australia?

The Nancy Pelosi visit to Taiwan is proof that a US challenge to China could go wrong. And, strikingly, both sides of Australian politics seem to be thinking through the consequences and using the same words.

Before the Pelosi intervention, Hugh White identified the problem. Writing in February in Australian Foreign Affairs he said the great weakness in the US attitude on Taiwan was that Washington could not preserve its leadership whatever it did in response to a Chinese move on an island 180km from its shores.

“If it steps back from a fight, its credibility with allies, friends and rivals alike would be shattered. But its credibility would be equally shattered if it plunges into a war it cannot win. That means Australia has nothing to gain and much to lose by encouraging America to go to war over Taiwan.”

He didn't even consider a US victory. Presumably because nobody has yet defined what victory over 1.4 billion Chinese would look like.

In the Clinton era the firing of Chinese missiles brought two aircraft carrier battle groups sailing through the Taiwan Strait. China conceded there was nothing it could do to stop the US aid to Taiwan. But this month China brutally showed its military was strong enough to blockade the island.

The US did nothing – even when China sent five missiles into Japan’s exclusive economic zone.

Dave Sharma, the former Liberal member for Wentworth, wrote last week in *The Australian* that China’s response to the Pelosi visit has altered the status quo in a way unfavourable to Taiwan. He said, “Pelosi’s intent may have been laudatory, but ... she has damaged the security of allies such as Australia and Japan.”

Sharma supported strategic ambiguity; that Australia, like the US and Japan, leaves undefined what it would do in a cross-strait war. This strategic ambiguity, practised by Australia for decades, had been blown sky-high last November when Peter Dutton as defence minister had posited it was “inconceivable” that Australia would not go to war with the US against China. Our involvement would be automatic.

But Andrew Hastie has also been explicit in repudiating the Dutton doctrine. On the ABC’s *Insiders* on August 7 the opposition defence spokesman declined an invitation to endorse the Pelosi visit. “That’s a matter for the US,” he stated, using the same formula Foreign Minister Penny Wong has cleaved to.

Asked whether we would join America in a war, he used the same Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade-endorsed language I and other foreign ministers had been coached to use by saying such talk was “hypothetical”. And he used the touchstone expression “status quo” in reference to the Taiwan Strait.

Invoking the status quo, or the cross-straits status quo, is shorthand for saying: 1) we don’t recognise Taiwan as an independent country; 2) we acknowledge the Chinese claim over Taiwan without endorsing it; and 3) there must be no resort to force by either side.

This formula implies the existence of red lines, one of which is that the West does not foster the notion the island is moving towards independence. That’s how the Pelosi visit was seen by the Chinese – as a gesture to separatism. Viewing a US Speaker as roughly akin to a prime minister in any other system is

not an unreasonable reading of US politics.

Hastie is aware that Chinese-background voters recoiled at Dutton's warlike rhetoric and the "drums of war" enunciated by department head Mike Pezzullo. The shift in the votes of Chinese-background citizens in Bennelong, Reid and Chisholm gave Labor majority government. In North Sydney the revulsion of Chinese-background voters helped the teal independent thrash the Liberal incumbent. In Hastie's own state, Western Australia, talking up war against the titanic trading partner looks like the most flamboyant self-harm. That the Hastie-Sharma language on Taiwan is indistinguishable from the diplomacy of Wong reflects the new political imperative but also some serious thinking about Australian strategy.

Talking up conflict is to talk up a showdown. That showdown carries a high likelihood of US defeat. That increases the chance of US withdrawal from Asia. Urging a US-China showdown is what Paul Keating branded Australia's "strategic dead end".

This Taiwan flare-up leaves US allies Australia and Japan more exposed, as Sharma said and Hastie implied. Association of Southeast Asian Nations states continue to balance their relationship with both great powers and decline to take sides. US ally South Korea did not sign the joint statement by Australia, Japan and the US criticising China's military response. Nor did Canada or New Zealand. India demonstrated, as over Ukraine, that the obligations of the Quad do not comprise its foreign policy.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

It is an opening for Anthony Albanese to state that de-escalation and avoidance of conflict between the US and China is now Australia's highest diplomatic priority. It's bipartisan. He can speak for Australia.

Bob Carr is the longest serving premier of NSW and a former Australian foreign minister.

From: [Bob Carr](#)
Subject: Keep the peace between China and the US: our goal | Pearls and Irritations | August 6 2022
Date: Monday, 8 August 2022 9:41:40 AM

PEARLS AND IRRITATIONS

[CHINA](#)

Bob Carr – Keep the peace between China and the US: our goal

By [Bob Carr](#)

Aug 6, 2022

If there is conflict between the US and China this is how things might go- a crisis meeting of the Australian cabinet with a resigned air and desultory exchanges, until someone – defence minister or prime minister – says something like, “Well, there’s no alternative, is there?”

And the war comes, to strains of the World War I recruiting song “Australia Will Be There.” The vision is pure dystopia, our national nightmare. It could spell the end of the Australian national story as we know it.

There had once been a strategic ambiguity about the question whether we join such a showdown. But the China Panic unleashed by Malcolm Turnbull and John Garnaut in 2017 disposed of any notion that we could decide when the time comes. It was later given full expression with Marise Payne’s astonishing statement on “weapons inspectors” to Wuhan. In retrospect this concentrated Panic of 2017 to 2022 delivered one essential underlying shift. We went from keeping open our options in the event of such a war, to being signed up to automatically enter it on day one. Maybe this had been the goal of the China Panic from the very start.

The shift was captured by Peter Dutton on November 12 2021 saying, “It would be inconceivable that we wouldn’t support the US in an action if the US chose to take that action.” Inconceivable? Hitherto we had said such talk was hypothetical and had never given away our sovereign right to decide for ourselves. Menzies had rejected Taiwan commitments on half a dozen occasions. Alexander Downer gushed in 2004 that on Taiwan the ANZUS strategy would not apply. Bold, unrehearsed but the truth- until then.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had assiduously paved the way for the shift- a shift that, in retrospect may have been the most fateful decision of his Prime Ministership. He turned the inevitable decision to exclude Huawei into a gesture of fealty to Donald Trump, permitted our security agencies to advertise they were promoting that decision to our Five Eyes partners, chose to parody Chairman Mao in the Australian parliament when he introduced foreign influence laws and called for a US arms build-up in the Asia Pacific.

The new Labor government has tugged Australia’s diplomatic language back to where it had always been before the Turnbull-Dutton-Garnaut heresy. This may be the single most weighty contribution of the Albanese government. Even before the election Albanese and

Wong had made it clear they weren't being influenced by the new orthodoxy that declared it "inconceivable" that Australia would not join a war over Taiwan.

Throughout October and November 2021, Wong repeatedly called for the maintenance of the status quo over Taiwan. In a speech on November 23 2021 she criticised Dutton:

When Peter Dutton talks about it being 'inconceivable' that Australian would not 'join' a war over Taiwan, he is wildly out of step with the strategy long adopted by Australia and our principal ally.

On November 29 Anthony Albanese said of the then-Defence Minister's stance:

You look at the position of the Biden administration, it's very different from the rhetorical position that Peter Dutton has put forward. We maintain the same position as the United States. And we think that is sensible. That is support for the status quo.

On February 27 2022 Wong was asked, 'What should Australia do if China did try to seize Taiwan?' She replied:

I won't get into those hypotheticals. (My emphases) I would just simply say this: it is the principle of the region, of Taiwan, the United States and Australia that the status quo in relation to Taiwan can only be resolved peacefully, can only be altered peacefully and that there should be no unilateral changes to the status quo.

Key concepts here, and vital diplomatic wording: always rule out the hypotheticals and talk up the (cross-strait) status quo. Dutton by contrast had fallen into the trap of canvassing specific responses, and settled on war. Awful diplomacy. Potentially terrifying implications.

Given Labor's statements before the election the ASPI cold warriors should not have been surprised at the restraint of Foreign Minister Wong when, on August 3 2022 she pronounced in reference to the Pelosi visit:

I think we've seen a lot of rhetoric... I understand this is a very concerning situation for everyone. I think it's really important that we all continue to calmly assert the importance of peace and stability and to urge all parties to contribute to de-escalating tensions.

In several interviews Defence Minister Marles also emphasised the status quo – the cross-strait status quo which preserved the peace for decades.

Definitely to be avoided is saying of the Pelosi visit that "it shows America's commitment to the region"- a formula that was briefly picked up by Marles and echoed by Peter Khalil as chair of the Joint Intelligence and Security Committee but more recently relegated. It should stay relegated. The simple fact is White House advisors and the American military did not want the Pelosi visit. They did not see it as a useful symbol- of US commitment to the region or anything else.

Action that ramps up tensions in the strait is, in fact, a threat to a continuing American presence in the region. Hugh White points out that a showdown over Taiwan involves a high risk of American defeat. (I would add, if not a defeat, a risk of both sides fighting to a draw).

Either defeat or draw sends a message to the whole region that America does not prevail in the Western Pacific. It could be an invitation for an administration to withdraw from Asia-gradually, or in a Kabul style rush. That means it's in Australia's interest that both sides exercise restraint and avoid provocative gestures like the Pelosi adventure. Avoid anything that risks war and the US defeat that would despatch American power from our north.

Keep brushing away the hypotheticals. Keep invoking the status quo that kept the peace. Talk restraint all round. De-escalation of Taiwan tensions is in our interest and has got to be, at this time, the prime Australian diplomatic goal.

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