

Statement by PJ Keating

The China ‘threat’ and US Submarines

The Liberals, having no faith in the capacity of Australians and all we have created here, could not resist falling back, yet again, to do the bidding of another great power, the United States of America.

Menzies, even after World War Two, did Britain’s bidding against the international community in attempting to wrest the Suez Canal from Egypt just as he deceptively committed Australian troops to Vietnam to appease the United States.

Howard, another US appeaser extraordinaire, committed us to an illegal war in Iraq with tragic consequences.

And now, Morrison, a younger throwback to the Liberals’ Anglosphere, shops Australia’s sovereignty by locking the country and its military forces into the force structure of the United States by acquiring US submarines.

And all in the claim of a so-called ‘changed security environment’.

That change, is China’s more aggressive international posture – the posture of now, the world’s largest emerging economy. This change in China’s domestic and foreign posture is labelled by Morrison and his government not as the shifting posture of a re-emerging great power, but as ‘the China threat’.

As though China, through its more abrupt and ruder foreign policy, has also presented a military threat in its dealings with Australia.

A threat, which in fact, has never been made and which has never materialised.

The word ‘threat’ explicitly connotes military aggression or invasion, a threat China has never made against Australia or even implied making.

Chinese tariffs on wine or seafood do not constitute a military threat any more than does China’s intolerance of Hong Kong domestic political management.

Hong Kong and its affairs, do not and cannot be represented as some military threat to Australia – an event that requires from us consideration of a military response. Even Chinese island-pumping in the South China Sea does not represent a military threat to Australia, unwise on China’s part, as I believe it to be.

But this is the construction Scott Morrison and his government have placed on China and its relationship with Australia.

It is a ‘threat’, implying by use of the word, that it is a military one.

This false representation of China’s foreign policy has also been condoned by the Labor Party, if not explicitly.

In her five years as Labor’s shadow foreign minister, Penny Wong, by her muted complicity with the government’s foreign policy and posture, has neutered Labor’s traditional stance as to Australia’s right to strategic autonomy – an autonomy unconstrained by any power, including, that of the United States.

Instead, Wong went along with the stance of Julie Bishop and Marise Payne – calculatedly, with not a cigarette paper of difference between her and them.

And did it with licence provided by Bill Shorten as leader, and now, Anthony Albanese.

Now, that long policy void is exploited by Scott Morrison. At Morrison’s instigation, Australia turns its back on the 21st century, the century of Asia, for the jaded and faded Anglosphere – the domain of the Atlantic - a world away. And Labor is complicit in the historic backslide.

The Sydney Morning Herald and *The Age* have been up to their necks in it also. Peter Hartcher’s bi-weekly froth-mouthed articles about China and its supposed threat, along with Chris Uhlmann and his wicked representation of China as marauding Nazis, has constituted an important part of the climate which has allowed Morrison to now shop the country to the Americans.

China does not attack other states, unlike the United States, which does attack other states, yet the *Herald* and the *Age* have portrayed China as an aggressor power with malevolent intentions.

In a measure of luck, Australians have been vested with a continent of our own. A continent having a border with no one – with no other state. And certainly, not remotely within any territorial contest or claim by China, which is 13 flying hours from Australia’s most northern coast.

The notion that Australia is in a state of military apprehension about China, or needs to be, is a distortion and lie of the worst and most grievous proportions.

By its propagation, Australia is determinedly casting China as an enemy – and in the doing of it, actually creating an enemy where none exists.

So poisonous are the Liberals towards China they are prepared for Australia to lose its way in the neighbourhood of Asia, in search of Australia's security from Asia, by submission to yet another strategic guarantor - 240 years into our history.

This strategy amounts to a massive bet on the United States and its staying power in Asia. Rather than Australia finding its own way around the region, including with China, as we have done so well in the past, Morrison and Labor have tied us to the unknown endurance of the United States and the pain it is prepared to wear in defence of what it believes are its core Asian interests.

I have said before, but it is worth repeating: the United States is a naval power, whereas China is a continental power. A continental power with the largest land mass in Asia occupied by 20 per cent of humanity. And competently served by a modern military.

The United States, by its aircraft carrier fleets, enjoys naval force projection but that projection is fuelled from its bases on the American west coast. Its capacity in a military exchange with China will be limited by the attenuation of its supply lines and the vulnerability of its surface vessels to Chinese submarines and ballistic missiles.

I have also said before but worth repeating, that when it comes to major international conflagration, land beats water every time.

Through this submarine purchase, Australia surrenders its naval forces to the command of the United States, while setting itself into a military position incapable of defeating Chinese land-based and sea denial forces.

It takes a monster level of incompetence to forfeit military control of one's own state but this is what Scott Morrison and his government have managed to do.

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