

Statement by PJ Keating, 9 March 2023

***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.

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