

WAR TALK *– state of play (June 2021)

War preparations accelerate

IPAN submission

By Brian Boyd

"They have an overall goal to become the leading country in the world...That's not going to happen on my watch." (US president Joe Biden at a press conference, March 2021.)

"Be prepared to respond...[and focus on]... combat readiness". (Chinese president Xi Jinping at a meeting of PLA military leaders, March 2021.)

Introduction

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic continuing to rage across the globe, rolling on from 2020 and into 2021, war talk - and more worryingly - war preparations by the great power blocs, is on the increase. The two main economic, strategic competitors, the US and China, are particularly involved in this escalating arms race.

It is more important than ever that an articulate and meaningful pro-peace/anti-war narrative be developed for and by the Australian people. The pro-war hawk elite centred in Canberra, embedded within certain think tanks, sections of academia and most of the monopoly media, are generating almost daily diatribes that beat the 'war drums' on behalf of one particular power bloc, the US superpower.

Clearly the pre-war atmospherics and respective military build-ups being generated by both the US and China, are not in Australia's interests, or the region as a whole.

The intensifying rivalry between the worlds' economic power blocs, especially between the US and China, is now spoken in terms of, when, not if military confrontation will occur. Piecemeal 'open source' reporting by the monopoly, tightly controlled media, is revealing all of the major power blocs- US, China, Russia, Britain and key EU members, are increasing military expenditure.

China's economic success over recent decades, initially heralded as a progressive, welcomed development, is now being painted as an existential challenge to the US's historical, economic domination. Today China's development must not only be rolled back, but resisted. In turn China is taking this characterisation of their national growth as a threat to their economic expansion and subsequent greater involvement in world affairs.

It is crucial that the Australian public become more and more aware of the economic basis of great power rivalry and see through the smoke and mirrors generated by the war hawks around an ill-defined, concocted mantra of threats to 'our national security', 'our way of life' and 'protecting our values'.

The real 'state of play' is the intentional speculation that open military conflict, is inevitable.

'Trigger' scenarios for such conflict are being openly expounded by the so-called experts, such as Taiwan, Ukraine or the South China Sea.

A key response to this war threat - wishful thinking should be the world's middle powers (including Australia), stating categorically they will not go down the path of supporting open hostilities. Instead they agree to develop their own respective, independent stances that have, as a basis, the competing superpowers desist from war preparations and use the United Nations to define pragmatic and workable solutions that maintain peace and stability.

Regardless of who is in the White House in Washington, the fact is that the US has been working hard to reassert its claim to global economic and military hegemony, for some time. In his first 100 days in office speech, in late April, US president Biden stated that United States is "rising anew", and insisted that America 'would win the battle for the 21st century rather than... rivals such as China...the future will belong to America'. (See Appendix 1)

In the same speech, ironically, Biden said he had told the Chinese president Xi Jinping the US would maintain a strong military presence in the Indo-Pacific to prevent, rather than create, conflict in the region!

There are political forces in the US calling for confrontation now. They like to paint a false scenario (See Appendix 2) that the US is in decline and therefore it must act sooner rather than later. The pro-war hawks well know that US military superiority currently remains in place.

What is also true is that all of the major rival power blocs are looking for 'more room' to expand their respective national economic interests in the 21st century.

We witness talk of Russia and China "moving into ever closer alliance". Their "military co-ordination" is being described as demonstrating their "rising military power", including "operating together...in large-scale military exercises", with Russia "increasingly supplying advanced military equipment to China".

At the same time the US is substantially bolstering and re-orientating the so-called Five Eyes 'intelligence' alliance that involves Australia, US, Britain, New Zealand and Canada, to become a more 'military and economic' counterforce.

Those who advocate a multi-polar world, based on peaceful coexistence and strategic balance are being drowned out by a cacophony of orchestrated war hawks pushing pre-arranged, repetitive narratives. Such propaganda is aimed at preparing the population for confrontation. Ironically while promoting the intensifying struggle between the superpowers, some of these same pro-war voices acknowledge that war could turn into a global disaster.

The pro-war hawks in Australia are taking the lead from their counterparts in the US.

All of our Australian politicians are uncritically accept the war trends

Both major political parties in the federal parliament are ignoring the lessons of the Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam wars.

At a recent Indian video linked geopolitical conference (15/4/21) Scott Morrison claimed emphatically that 'there is a great polarisation that our world is at risk of moving towards...the Indo-Pacific is the epicentre of strategic competition'. The next day the Australian government announced it had 'sharply escalated its internal preparations for potential military action in the Taiwan Strait...as part of a broader show of force by the US at forcing China to back down', with its economic and territorial activities.

Sources told selected media outlets that the ADF was "planning for a potential worst-case scenario if the US and China clashed over Taiwan".

"Options include contributing to an allied (sic) effort with submarines, as well as maritime surveillance aircraft, air-to-air re-fuellers and potentially [Australian] Super Hornets operating from US bases in Guam or the Philippines, and even Japan".

Meanwhile the federal ALP opposition is only worried about how war is declared!

At a recent ALP national conference a resolution was endorsed to update the Party's policy to have a "wide-ranging inquiry" into how Australia makes decisions to go war.

War talk getting louder, military preparations accelerating

The essence of the evolving global tension between the United States and China is driven by their respective national economies needing to have defined 'spheres of influence' under their management and control.

The US mastered this necessity, especially after World War II.

China's growth has the White House, the US State Department and the Pentagon reviewing their military posture in Asia, in response. This is being described as a "more dangerous phase of competition with China". In turn there is an acknowledgement that "a miscalculation... could lead to unwanted war"!

In Australia the pro-US war hawks have been activated as real 'agents of influence', pandering to the US global agenda. They peddle a twisted narrative of supporting and protecting Australia's "national interests", "security" and "values", but never provide any details or discernible evidence of the alleged threats.

The examples of this misleading campaign are growing ever numerous.

Without any evidence a particular pro—US war hawk based in the Murdoch press in Australia recently claimed that "China looks ready to start a war as soon as 2027-possibly a world war". He goes on to report that the US Armed Forces have war-gamed a "clash with China", adding that the US Marines

"are already scrambling to prepare for a war against China, last year ditching its Abrams tanks to switch instead too long-endurance unmanned air vehicles and electronic warfare, and any other weapons more suitable for an enemy half a world away".

In late April an unelected bureaucrat, Australian home affairs secretary Michael Pezzullo, wrote an essay that claimed hysterically the "drums of war" are beating and that Australia needs to prepare to send its "warriors" into battle.

The Prime Minister and Defence Minister did not contradict Pezzullo. Yet Prime Minister Morrison went on the record emphasising that he and his cabinet had the objective "to pursue peace", with Dutton adding: "Nobody wants to see conflict".

Former senior intelligence analyst Ross Babbage went public to justify Pezzullo speaking out, claiming: 'There is a serious risk of a major crisis in the next three or four years' and "I think one of the issues for us is how to prepare the Australian public for the challenges that are coming at us".

Hugh White, ANU's professor of strategic studies said while it was right to highlight the "... strategic picture in Asia and risk of major war", he argued that Australia needed to be aware of 'the limitations of such talk'.

Under the heading: 'Prepare for war with China', a major investment consultant to big business in Australia, said he was advising clients that "the probability of major power conflict in the Indo-Pacific had lifted to as high as 50%". He predicted "the prospects for war are actually higher in the next five years... because of how successfully China has closed the military capability gap with the US". He went on to acknowledge that the US, Japan, Australia and Britain "are investing enormous effort to prepare for war".

The investment consultant, seemingly with inside information, reported that the Australian government had recently upgraded the Australian defence departments' procurement processes "in favour of urgent capability decisions, including, among others, the ability to manufacture missiles locally and upgrading Australian military bases to ensure they are operationally ready for the advent of war". He added that experts agree China "will consider targeting strategic military assets located in Australia with its long-range land and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

"Facilities like Pine Gap are, for instance, essential to the [US] war-fighting machine. The [Australian] homeland is therefore, absolutely in the crosshairs". [Note: New Zealand's US linked spy base is the Waihopai Station].

On 1 May the Murdoch Melbourne Herald Sun, in its weekend magazine, ran a sensationalised double spread, headlined: 'Peace in the Pacific hangs by a thread', complete with photographs of warships firing guns, armed soldiers parading in front of armoured vehicles and a soaring warplane.

The journalist refers to a senior Canberra bureaucrat recently declaring that the 'drums of war' were beating. He then reports that the biggest British sea and air military force in a generation, will soon set sail for South East Asia' "ostensibly" to mark the 50th anniversary of Five Power defence arrangement made in 1971. However he concedes the deployment of the British armada, led by a flagship aircraft carrier, "has less to do with an anniversary commemoration are more to do with the biggest deterioration in our region's security".

He further reports: "China has been firmly on the federal government's national security committee agenda for four years, as it continues to expand through the region."

"All sides have the nuclear option and the potential to send missiles fired from thousands of miles away, or even use the still developing hypersonic missile technology. But it would all begin with sea forces."

He also speculates one scenario arising from "an incident at sea", could have the US "place Guam and Okinawa on high alert, and the US Indo-Pacific command on Hawaii would deploy its fleet to the region... Australia's military bases would go to alert, including Top End defence establishments at our RAAF Tindall, HMAS Coonawarra and Robertson Barracks... Australia's warship systems are compatible with those of the US and Britain and others in the region, but would have a limited role... notably of the ports and bases our allies would use".

Some of the views of Professor Stephan Fruhling of the strategic and defence study centre at ANU are also reported on. He suggests that if Chinese and US ships and aircraft are in conflict, Australia's role

will be more as an “enabler” and supporter of ‘long-range operations’, hence the Australian defence departments’ renewed push to extend runways, enlarge military bases and training areas and enhance ports, such as in PNG and on Los Negros Island.

The article concludes by reporting on a warning from Peter Jennings, Executive Director of the think tank the Australian strategic policy Institute (ASPI). Jennings insists: “We must boost domestic production in many areas-but especially the war stocks used by the Australian Defence Force”. The journalist concludes: “That is happening now. But how much time do we have?”

Under the heading: - ‘The gloves are off-the threat of great power conflict is rising fast prompting planners in Canberra to consider the unthinkable’, a recent report in the AFR states in part “... Australia’s military and diplomatic planners are scrambling to beef up preparations should China move against Taiwan as part of President Xi Jinping’s nation-building ambitions... In Washington, a growing chorus of anti-China hawks is beating the drum”.

Well-known Australian war hawk advocate, Senator Jim Molan couldn’t resist joining in the chorus. He called on Australia to ‘reassess how we conduct foreign interventions after the withdrawal... from Afghanistan’, saying that the involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, ‘were not sufficiently resourced to achieve their objectives’.

Molan said he ‘hoped there were contingency plans in place for Australia to join a coalition to deter China... in the region if required’.

“How to conduct the intervention is critical. The key issue for governments is whether the resources that a nation is prepared to allocate to an intervention are sufficient for the task envisioned.

“Nations such as Australia, that are capable of military interventions, must learn how to pick when to intervene, how to get out early if necessary and possible, and how to be effective”.

The conservative think tanks are writing millions of words to ‘assist’ new defence Minister Dutton on how our military should “now prepare for the next conflict... many analysts expect it will be closer to home”.

John Blaxland, professor of international security and intelligence studies at ANU says one of the ‘major challenges for Dutton will be managing the timeliness and cost of the multibillion-dollar acquisitions of military hardware... and managing the US expectations of Australia, as tensions rise with China”.

Major pro war hawk Peter Jennings, of the ASPI, advises taking on China will require “a united, measured and calm response”. He quotes US Indo-Pacific command head Philip Davidson who says conflict with China “could happen within six years”, and notes at the latest Australian defence update has dropped the long-standing assumption of a “10-year strategic warning time for major conventional war”.

Jennings approved of President Joe Biden sailing a US battle group through the Taiwan Strait and noted though “... until quite recently, the US’s edge in hi-tech weaponry meant it easily could have defeated any serious attack, despite China’s proximity. Now, though, US ships and planes would be very vulnerable.

“If it really wanted to, the US remains more than capable of stopping the Chinese invasion [of Taiwan]; but only at the risk of very heavy casualties in a localised conflict and of massive escalation if stand-off weapons were used. Losing Seattle to save Taipei would be a pretty dismal option for even the most forward-leaning US president”.

Every now and again the ‘war talk’ can reveal some of the basic home truths that the wider Australian public need to be more conscious of.

Recently a Murdoch Australian newspaper had an editorial addressing the “geopolitical tensions in the world” that are placing Australia “much closer to the centre” of today’s great power rivalry, when commenting on the Pezzullo contribution.

Clearly accepting there is more to the soured Australia-China relationship than just trade, The Australian acknowledged: “The US has a deep friendship with Australia and a keen strategic interest given its joint [sic] facility at Pine Gap and ground stations such as Honeysuckle Creek outside Canberra and Cooby Creek north of Toowoomba. These are an indispensable component of US defence that enable multi-domain operations including its nuclear submarines and bombers. In the

event of a war between China and the US... we are already on the front line.

"It also needs to be considered that other nations, such as Russia, may use the destabilising effect of offence in the Asia-Pacific as a cover for their own military actions in other parts of the world. This would leave US capabilities severely tested. As a result our defence planners and political leaders must be prepared to ask the difficult questions... how confident can we be that, if called on, our allies will be there to help?... what are the dangers of a regional arms race that would make the Asia-Pacific more volatile and dangerous?"

[It should be noted that as a direct consequence of World War II, US power became entrenched in East Asia and the Pacific basin, as well as in Europe. This was measured by a string of US military bases from the Aleutian Islands, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Guam and other islands in the South Pacific including not least Australia and New Zealand which are specifically aimed at constraining China. China is well aware of this extensive military presence in our region.]

Most of the pro-US war hawks in Australia that The Australian gives almost daily coverage, give scant regard, if any, to the fact that the US secret military bases and increasing military infrastructure in our country, make us a nuclear target and always has, over the decades.

Not all commentators however go the 'All the way with the USA' script.

Some try to carve out a more independent stance with some difficulty, given the power of the monopoly media. For example recently Hugh White at the ANU wrote recently: "The habit of going to war whenever America does is deeply ingrained in the strategic mindset of our political leaders and their advisers..."

"America sometimes makes terrible mistakes as it has done in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is bad for America, bad for Australia...". White goes on to suggest: "US conventional forces can no longer overwhelm China's formidable Navy and Air Force. America shows no willingness to fight a nuclear war over Taiwan, whereas China probably would" [How White can know this, is not explained]. White goes on: "Scott Morrison should be thinking deeply about all this, because if war breaks out between America and China, which is a real possibility, he would face the greatest decisions that any Australian leader has had to make since 1939".

There is a naïveté in White's last comment as he gives no acknowledgement at all to the fact Australia's defence forces are totally enmeshed, integrated and locked into the US war capability globally. The speculation that a military clash between the US and China could stay at the level involving only conventional forces, has currency in some quarters. Why?

White speculates that whoever backed down or was declared the loser in such a conventional clash, would surely have any ongoing economic and strategic role in Asia destroyed. This would be totally unacceptable to neither warring party, and the conflict "would very likely go nuclear", at this point. It is fair to assume that what is happening behind the scenes in Canberra, if known publicly, would be even more worrying. Our politicians must be held to account. The public deserves to know.

Real defence not offence

Australia should have a well- resourced defence capability, with its core purpose, the protection of our continental territory. 'Armed neutrality' is an honourable stance. A good starting point is that all military bases and facilities in Australia should come under Australian control. Currently many of these are not under Australian control and could lead to the Australian mainland coming under long-range missile attack during any future military conflict.

Moving to such a position must be taken from a position of strength and self- respect. There should be no subservience of our sovereignty. We should never be comfortable with the ambitions of any major power bloc competing in our region.

We should call on the US and China to strike a balance in their economic, strategic competition.

It is ironic that the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison suggests that he wishes to find a path where Australia: "can trade, we can interact"... and find a... "way of living together", with China. He harps on about China trying to tell Australia 'what to do' and this is the basis of the trade and diplomatic dispute. This claim is disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst.

He and his intelligence and military advisers know full well that the basis of China's hostility is the fact that his government, and previous governments of all persuasions, have allowed our nation state to

become a centre for a huge US military outpost in the Indo- Pacific region. And that this military role is being further expanded under the current upgrading of the "military posture" of the US, as part of its push back against China.

We shouldn't take sides. In all global forums we should not be seen as a lackey of one of the superpowers. We should be a champion defining peaceful and fair solutions within the evolving global economic framework.

Australia does not deserve to be a client or tributary state of anyone. We especially do not deserve to be considered one on the global stage, as we are.

Genuine independent stance a must

We must determine our own strategies. Our politicians must be made to develop well defined national interests and the starting point should be understanding the world as it is.

The public deserves full disclosure of why we are making China our enemy. If it is to be so, then accurate information that shows it has plans to take over our territory, must be made available. Or, we are making China our enemy because it is the strategic economic competitor of the US and we are automatically falling into line. This must be acknowledged and explained.

We should not fall for 'phony war' scenarios. A shakedown in the global economy is occurring, but allowing this to evolve into real war, is simply not acceptable.

The time has come for a movement to be built in Australia to push back against the forces promoting war.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1

*US president Biden's claim the US deserves the continued right and supremacy to direct the economic global architecture is 'exceptionalism' at its best.

Hyper nationalism is on the rise, especially amongst the increasing rivalry between the other major power blocs. The tension for constant economic growth is being exacerbated between respective economic models-multinational/corporate monopoly capitalism versus state-led industries and crony oligarchs, with increasingly military industries in ascendancy.

Washington's claim to be the 'global stabiliser' and builder of institutions like the International monetary fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation, since World War II, is facing challenges.

While taking credit for the collapse of the old Soviet Union the US allowed a mutant form of capitalism (based on cronyism) to develop in the new Russia. And made sure it became a rival with its decision to expand NATO right up to Russia's new borders, creating the conditions for an anti-US autocrat like Putin to emerge.

The imperial hubris of the US, with its failed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, coupled with the 2008-9 global financial crisis that arose from within the US economy, has shaken global confidence in the US's ability to carry out Biden's new assertiveness.

The demise of the old USSR did not deliver a singular universal economic system as envisaged by successive US administrations. Instead, especially with the exponential economic growth of China, the crony capitalism of an ambitious Russia, a re-asserting of a 'global' Britain and a 're-invigorated EU cabal, a geo-political brawl has emerged.

There is talk of a so-called "new world order".

This global scenario is generating military tensions and threats of actual conflict, that the world can do without.

Appendix 2

*The political forces that are for military confrontation between the US and China, sooner rather than later, are divided on how to achieve support for this in the public arena.

Some like Christopher Pyne, a former Liberal party minister in the Federal government, want to talk up a possible conflict between China and the US, by focusing on China's growing economic and military strengths.

Others like to focus on the speculation that the US is slowly in decline, emphasising its current social and political malaise internally by way of illustration.

Both scenarios justify taking on China now.

Others like Gerard Henderson in The Australian say it is not helpful to be obsessive about China's military strength. Instead, in the short and medium timeframe, there should be more focus on Australia becoming militarily self-sufficient. While the US must enhance its military strength and not be surpassed so it cannot lose in a war!

The economic facts currently, speak for themselves. As at the beginning of May 2021 the 10 most valuable companies in the world and 14 of the top 20 were headquartered in the US. With respect to technology companies the US has 12 the top 20, China has only three; with respect to health, drug and pharmaceutical multinationals the US has seven out of the top 10 globally and 11 out of the top 20, with China having none. The US continues to lead in venture capital worldwide-such investments totalling almost US\$500 billion compared against under US\$400 billion from all of China, Britain, India, Germany, France, Canada, Israel and Singapore.

In summary US multinational companies are globally dominant. Militarily the US also continues to have the upper hand in all aspects. The pro war hawk fraternity in the US and echoed by the pro war subset in Australia, are arguing for conflict now while this joint Economic/military advantage remains in play.

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APPENDIX 3 –