

Who needs enemies? Wong defends USA's right to get Australia nuked

It is now effectively the position of the Albanese Labor government that the United States military has *carte blanche* to bring nuclear weapons to, and therefore presumably deploy them from Australia; and that not only is there nothing Canberra can or should do about it, but it doesn't even want to know. Amid a fresh barrage of propaganda by Sky News, designed to convince Australians against all common sense that partaking in a US-initiated war with China over Taiwan is essential to our national interest and "sovereignty", Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Secretary Greg Moriarty declared last week that this same end is somehow served by allowing the one thing that would guarantee a nuclear strike on Australia. Moreover, Moriarty made the stunning admission that contrary to their repeated public assurances, successive governments of both major parties *may have already been allowing US nukes on our soil for decades*. It would appear once again that so far as Canberra is concerned, Australia's laws, treaty obligations and relations with neighbouring countries come a distant second to US geopolitical imperatives—and if the cost is thermonuclear annihilation, then so be it.

Moriarty made his admission during Senate Estimates on 15 February. Citing Australia's obligations under the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty signed at Rarotonga, Cook Islands in 1985, wherein all signatories agreed to forbid "nuclear explosive devices" from their territories, Greens defence spokesman Senator David Shoebridge asked for confirmation that the US Air Force (USAF) B52 strategic bombers which the Albanese government agreed last November to host at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal in the Northern Territory¹ would not be allowed to carry nuclear weapons. Moriarty initially appeared to agree with Shoebridge's position, stating that "it's clear stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the [Rarotonga Treaty], to which Australia is fully committed", albeit he added that there "is no impediment under this treaty or the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty to the visit of foreign aircraft to Australian airfields or transit of Australia's airspace, including in the context of our training and exercise programs and the Australia and the Australian force posture cooperation with the United States". He immediately muddied the waters, however, with the ambiguous statement that "US bomber aircraft have been visiting Australia since the early 1980s and have conducted training in Australia since 2005", during which time "successive Australian governments have understood and respected the longstanding US policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on particular platforms."

Even more tellingly, when Shoebridge asked if he should take Moriarty's answer to mean "that Defence does not believe that there is a restraint under Australia's current treaty obligations meeting nuclear armed B-52 bombers to be present in Australia, provided it's not a permanent presence", Wong immediately intervened to shut down the line of questioning—in a manner which effectively confirmed his suspicions. "I'm the minister, and I'm responding", she began. (Why *Foreign Minister Wong* was there to run interference, instead of Moriarty's nominal boss, Defence Minister Richard Marles, is another question.) "It is part of ensuring we maintain that interoperability that goes to us making Australia safe. ... And I'm not going to engage in any more hypotheticals because I don't actually think your questioning is anything more than trying to drum up concern, and I don't think it's responsible. *The responsible way of handling this is to recognise that the US has a 'neither confirm nor deny position' which we understand and respect.*" (Emphasis added.)

Splitting hairs

Moriarty is correct to say that the Rarotonga Treaty does not forbid visits by nuclear-*capable* aircraft. Article 5 of the Treaty stipulates that whilst "Each Party undertakes to prevent in its territory the stationing of any nuclear explosive device", each nonetheless "remains free to decide for itself whether to allow visits by foreign ships and aircraft to its ports and airfields, transit of its airspace by foreign aircraft, and navigation by foreign ships in its territorial sea or archipelagic waters in a manner not covered by the rights of innocent passage, archipelagic sea lane passage or transit passage of straits".

His and Wong's apparent position that nuclear weapons aboard "visiting" aircraft would therefore not breach Australia's treaty obligations, however, seems to hinge upon a sophisticated definition of

"stationing". For the purposes of the Rarotonga Treaty, per its Article ¹, "'stationing' means emplantation [*sic*], emplacement, transportation on land or inland waters, stockpiling, storage, installation *and deployment*" (emphasis added) of nuclear explosive devices. The government can call them "visits" all it wants; but the fact, as ABC News revealed last year, is that tenders submitted to the US Defence Department for upgrades at Tindal reveal that "The US has drawn up detailed plans for what it calls a 'squadron operations facility' ... for 'deployed B-52 squadrons'". The ABC also quoted a USAF statement that "The ability to deploy ... [the] bombers to Australia sends a strong message to adversaries about our ability to project lethal air power." (Emphases added.)

In other words, as RMIT University international law lecturer Dr Binoy Kampmark wrote in a 17 February [analysis](#) for the online journal *Oriental Review*, "Australia, in being turned into a US garrison state, is very likely going to be a site where nuclear weapons are hosted, though pedants and legal quibblers will dispute what, exactly, constitutes such hosting."

Sky goes gaga—for a war it admits we can't win



In its attempt to paint China as a threat, Sky News inadvertently showed that the USA is in fact threatening China by surrounding it with military bases. Photo: Screenshot

During prime time on the evening of 15 February, hours after Wong's outburst in Parliament, Sky News fired its latest propaganda broadside at the minds of the Australian public. Titled "Are we ready for war?", the program could just as well have run for two seconds and one word: "No." Instead it spent 54 minutes explaining in detail, at least to anyone not afflicted with a twin case of terminal jingoism and Yellow Peril paranoia (that is, outside of Sky's core target audience), why going to war with China is a terrible idea, and that we would do so only as a blood sacrifice to our "alliance" with the United States—which in turn is the only reason China would ever threaten us in the first place.

Sky predictably paints China as a hostile, aggressive, "authoritarian" force out to rid the world of "democracy", and the USA and Australia as the latter's heroic defenders. Just as predictably, the premises upon which it does so are all lies. "Beijing has held ambitions to reunify Taiwan and China since the two countries separated in 1949", Sky claims—when in fact Taiwan is not nor has it ever claimed to be a country, and its authorities still claim (however delusionally) to be the rightful government of all China. Presenter Peter Stefanovic implies that if the People's Republic of China were to invade or blockade Taiwan, it would catastrophically disrupt global trade because the 160 kilometre-wide Taiwan Strait is "one of the most important shipping lanes in the world"—neglecting to mention that this is because it is on the coast of one of China's most populous and heavily industrialised regions, and that international shipping to and between neighbouring countries already use other less crowded routes that would be far from harm's way. And the biggest furphy of all, via Taiwan's "Director of Chinese Affairs" Dr Lai Chung: that "China won't be able to attack Australia unless they have Taiwan; that's for sure. But once Taiwan is done, then Australia could be the next target."

Rubbish, say former Australian Public Service chief John Menadue and retired senior defence analyst Dr Mike Gilligan. In an [open letter](#) to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese published 18 February in Menadue's online public policy journal *Pearls and Irritations*, co-signed by over 50 eminent Australians including barristers, academics, and retired diplomats and military officers, they note that contrary to the media's fearmongering of recent years, "China has not expressed intent to attack Australia. Nor does it possess the means for conventional assault. *Official intelligence reports in the US show that China's military priority is its periphery ... [whereas] Northern Australia is 5,000 km from China's force development priority areas.* It would be fanciful for an Australian government to plan for threat of conventional assault on our territory, and high-intensity warfare, with China, in the near term." (Emphasis added.) The only real danger is that "China could be forced into nuclear strike on Australia's territory, that being its only means of countering attack from US forces based here. Against which Australia is utterly defenceless."

As, Sky admits, is the United States itself. So says retired Australian Major-General and former Liberal Senator Jim Molan, in what was reportedly his last interview before he died of cancer on 16 January. After candidly admitting that the casualties Australia has suffered in American wars such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and undoubtedly would again in "a future Taiwan scenario" are simply the price we pay for the "alliance" with the USA, Molan also admits that we would only be "collateral [damage]"—that is, that China would attack us only because we were helping the USA attack China. He also acknowledged that if the Chinese decide to pulverise the USA's forces in South Korea, Japan and Guam (to name but a few) with long-range missiles, and knock out all its satellites, to stop it intervening in Taiwan, then "there is nothing the Americans can do" to stop them.

ABC pushes back

The silver lining is that the Albanese government's craven capitulation to the USA's "nuclearisation" of Australia has finally spurred the usually spineless ABC into breaking ranks with the rest of the media pack and for once giving prominent coverage to several powerful voices of reason, in a twopart interview series published 20-21 February by global affairs editor John Lyons (who is perhaps the best and fairest investigative journalist still operating in mainstream Australian media). The first and most forthright was Emeritus Professor of Strategy and former Deputy Defence Secretary Hugh White, previously a staunch advocate of the US alliance but now among its harshest critics. "I do not think

there is any credible chance that America, with or without Australia's support, could win a war with China over Taiwan", White said. "Ultimately, I do not see how America could inflict enough damage on China to force Beijing to concede over Taiwan, without using nuclear weapons. And I cannot see America being willing to risk Chinese nuclear retaliation against the US homeland for Taiwan's sake." Former Chief of the Defence Force (1998-2002) Admiral Chris Barrie excoriated Australia's political leaders for their collective lack of statesmanship. "The contemplation of war can only be justified after all other means of settling differences [between nations] have failed", he said, "and we are a long way from reaching this position. I worry when politicians start to think it is acceptable to use the media to make threats about war. ... We once had a praiseworthy reputation for the quality of our leadership and our officials. Our former role in the establishment of the UN is an exemplar of the kind of country we should aspire to be."

It fell to Allan Behm, a former head of the International Policy and Strategy Divisions of the Defence Department who was senior advisor to then-Shadow Foreign Minister Wong in 2017-19, to bell the cat as to what has gone wrong in the meantime. "In its causation, [war with China] would be no different from any of the wars Australia has participated in since World War II", he said. "In its consequences, it would be profoundly and devastatingly different. ... Australia has a fundamental strategic pathology—to support the interests of the US at the expense of our own. A war with China over Taiwan, awful as that would be, involves no Australian national interests. Yet, as both [Opposition leader] Dutton and [Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence] Richard Marles have indicated in their various pronouncements on the matter, our default position is 'all the way with the USA' wherever and whenever." It is unfortunate for all concerned that Wong is apparently no longer getting such advice today.

Footnote:

1. "[B52s, NATO integration: Albanese courts WWII on two fronts](#)", AAS, 9 Nov. 2022.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 22 February 2023