

The China narrative, part one: War-machine propaganda

Clive Hamilton's books exposing China "interference", *Silent Invasion* and *Hidden Hand*, are important, not because of the quality of the content—paranoid propaganda—but because the influencers behind Hamilton's crusade reveal his role as a cog in a vast narrative-management machine. The public, as well as MPs and other government officials, are being directed how to think about China by a small group of ideologically driven propagandists, funded by institutions of the section of the Anglo-American power establishment that seeks war without end, even risking nuclear warfare that would annihilate mankind. (Part one of a series. Read part two [here](#); part three [here](#); part four; and part [five](#).)

Clive Hamilton is a Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University. His first book on China, *Silent Invasion* (2018), continued the obsession with Chinese spies, dissidents and foreign interference that had been escalating in Australia through 2016-17. Hamilton alleges growing, sinister influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Australian society, his case built with anecdotes from student newsletters and hawkish journalism. Hamilton sees espionage and influence everywhere: the Chinese diaspora can "transform Australian society in a way that makes us all sympathetic to China and easy for Beijing to control. Australia will then assist China to become the hegemonic power in Asia and eventually the world." Hamilton's CCP "spies" include church parishioners and uni students. His argument concludes with his assertion that between 20- 40 per cent of Chinese-Australians are loyal to Beijing first. How does he arrive at this figure? From the "guesses" of some of his Chinese-Australian friends. If Australia "pushes back" against the CCP, China will "mobilise its forces already embedded in Australian society", he warns.

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Hamilton: "China plans to dominate the world, and has been using Australia and New Zealand as a testing ground for its tactics to assert its ascendancy in the West. ... [O]ur own weakening commitment to democratic values, would see Australia become a tribute state of the resurgent Middle Kingdom."

Silent Invasion's references include a litany of militarised sources—representatives of neocon thinktanks, anti-China analysts, US defence papers, and the Council on Foreign Relations, which recently [pushed for a New Cold War with Russia](#). The influence of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is obvious: a number of Hamilton's points are essentially lifted from old ASPI articles. The acknowledgments for his book are a laundry list of ASPI "ghostwriters", who are referenced by name but with no hint they work for ASPI, the institution driving most of the anti-China narrative in Australia. In addition to Australian government funding, ASPI's benefactors include the US State Department, NATO, and the leading American arms manufacturers who profit from the military buildup justified by the narrative that China is a threat. ASPI's influence may explain *Silent Invasion's* preoccupation with "sovereignty"—used as an imperialist buzzword justifying anti-China protectionism—and Hamilton's embrace of a US-centric foreign and strategic policy perspective. He warns of "Beijing's plan to shift Australia away from the US alliance.... A military standoff or engagement between the United States and China is quite possible in the foreseeable future. It may be the only way to stop China annexing and controlling the entire South China Sea.... In these circumstances Australia would be under an obligation to back the United States." A year later, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo echoed Hamilton, insisting the ANZUS Alliance was "unambiguous" in its automatic obligation for Australia to participate in any US conflict. (Pompeo and Hamilton are wrong—ANZUS does not legally oblige Australia to follow the USA into war—but their presumption reveals a profoundly dangerous expectation.)

Hamilton uses the China threat to oppose foreign policy independence: "Since the formalisation of the Australia-US alliance [ANZUS] in 1951, Australia has not really needed US protection because there has been no direct threat to us. Now there is an emerging threat in the shape of a PRC that clearly wants to be the Asian hegemon. Yet powerful voices in this country are calling for us to weaken the US alliance and adopt 'an independent foreign policy'. But what does an independent foreign policy mean when an aggressive new power is determined to dominate the region in which we live?" Hamilton ironically maintains that to defend Australia's sovereignty, we must cede it to the USA—through a binding obligation to follow them into war. Pompeo clearly agrees.

Following *Silent Invasion's* publication, Hamilton toured the USA, where his credentials as a Professor of Public Ethics apparently qualified him to speak to hawkish national security think tanks and testify on the growing threat of China to a receptive US Congress and State Department. In 2019, Hamilton was a guest speaker at Canberra's National Security Summit.

Hamilton's research assistant for *Silent Invasion* was Alex Joske, a Bachelor of Arts/Economics student minoring in Chinese language at the Australian National University (ANU), where Hamilton worked. Joske is fluent in Mandarin and spent his childhood in China where his father, Stephen Joske, was the senior treasury representative at the Australian Embassy in Beijing. Alex Joske wrote for and briefly edited ANU's student newspaper, publishing articles alleging CCP influence on the university campus, which were picked up by mainstream media. In 2017, Joske sensationally quit the student newspaper over the editorial board's "leftist" identity politics, which somehow made the front page of *The Australian* and Andrew Bolt's blog, both loud boosters of Anglo-American foreign policy and regime

change going back to the invasion of Iraq. In the months before *Silent Invasion* was published, mainstream media front-ran the book, publishing anti-Beijing articles by Joske and Hamilton, and interviewing Joske for the ABC's report "Allegations of Chinese government interference on Australian campuses". In 2018, 21-year-old graduate Joske was hired by ASPI as a researcher/analyst and is now an in-demand authority on China for the mainstream press.

Hamilton's follow up book, *Hidden Hand* (2020), was coauthored with Mareike Ohlberg, a former analyst at the Berlin-based Mercator Institute (MERICS), a China-policy think tank which partners with ASPI and numerous other foreign policy think tanks that are all funded by US/foreign governments, arms manufacturers and the non-profit industrial complex. Ohlberg now works for the German Marshall Fund (GMF), a US-based foreign policy think tank, which a [whistleblower revealed](#) works closely with the CIA. Resumes of key GMF personnel list backgrounds at intelligence and defence agencies, NATO, and regime-change agitators the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). GMF is funded by US and foreign governments, NATO, arms manufacturers and powerful think tanks. The GMF's onsite project, "The Alliance for Securing Democracy", was a primary source of Russiagate hysteria "research". The Alliance claims it is independent, but shares benefactors with the GMF, and Alliance leaders have similar intelligence/defence backgrounds. An ASPI report recently recommended closer cooperation with GMF and similar institutions, and current ASPI staff also work for the US think tank.

Hidden Hand evidentially suits the interests of GMF benefactors—GMF posted a writeup of the book on its website. *Hidden Hand* aggressively ratchets up *Silent Invasion*'s McCarthyism, piling on fears of communism and Marxist/Leninist ideology for the benefit of a US audience. Tracing back references reveals Hamilton/Ohlberg's intellectual dishonesty: deliberately-manipulated quotes and misrepresented statistics reveal *Hidden Hand* as war-machine propaganda.

Hamilton's paranoia of Beijing influence is intensified in *Hidden Hand*. In its narrative, even local councils and sister city programs are prey to CCP influence, and Beijing practices the "dark arts of economic statecraft". Starkly obvious is the author's utter contempt for, and ridicule of, any gesture of peace, diplomacy or cooperation from China as "Xispeak". Per Hamilton/Ohlberg, Xi-speak consists of "phrases like 'community of shared future for mankind'... when [CCP] leaders talk of making the international order more 'democratic', 'open' and 'diverse', this is code for an order in which 'authoritarian systems and values have global status equal to liberal democratic ones'.... Western nations need to realise that a CCP-led China is not and never will be its friend. Other than those it controls, Beijing abhors alliances and does all it can to break them up."

The Belt and Road Initiative, which is seen by US neoconservatives as a geoeconomic challenge to US hegemony, is consistently attacked throughout Hamilton's books as "the most powerful vehicle by which Beijing is changing the postwar international order. ... Xi Jinping has repeatedly referred to the BRI as essential to his vision of constructing 'a community of common destiny for humankind'. While the idea might sound good to Western ears, its aim is a Sinocentric world...."

Before his Beijing-is-bad epiphany, Hamilton's work primarily focussed on climate change. Why the abrupt shift? Prior to the months preceding *Silent Invasion*'s release, Hamilton never expressed undue negativity towards China, in 2014 referring to it as a "new and enigmatic superpower".

Hamilton's first book was accompanied by a wave of convenient publicity over alleged attempts by Beijing to stop its publication. Hamilton claimed that *Silent Invasion*'s original publisher, Allen & Unwin, pulled out because of "concerns of retribution from Beijing", although during parliamentary testimony he admitted no actual threats were made. The publisher appeared largely concerned with potential litigation regarding defamatory material in the book, advising Hamilton they wished to delay publication until related matters before the courts were settled, but Hamilton was unwilling to wait. The sensational international publicity over Beijing's alleged influence on an Australian publisher was an explosive boost to *Silent Invasion*'s profile.

China-hawks Senator Cory Bernardi and MP Andrew Hastie threw their support behind Hamilton. Bernardi moved a formal motion in the Senate for the government to assist Hamilton in publishing the book, and Hastie wanted to use his power as Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to publish *Silent Invasion* under parliamentary privilege—an unprecedented suggestion giving Hamilton legal immunity from defamation.

Why the uproar and high-profile support of Hamilton? *Silent Invasion* is inflammatory, but hardly new or secret information, with the majority of it sourced from hawkish journalism, ASPI reports or anecdotes taken directly from Joske's student newspaper articles.

Andrew Hastie called Hamilton an "unlikely ally", declaring dramatically: "What's really at stake here is not just sovereignty, national security and our long-term economic prosperity but our democratic tradition, including free speech, free press and free thought." Hastie is the most notorious China hawk in the Australian Parliament, collaborating with warmongering British think tank, the Henry Jackson Society, to author anti-China reports. He recently compared China with the rise of Nazi Germany—a calculated insult to a country that lost 20 million people at the hands of Nazi Germany's Japanese allies. Interestingly, [Hastie's "awakening" to the threat of the CCP was attributed to a 2017 speech](#) written by journalist-turned government speechwriter John Garnaut, titled "Engineers of the Soul: what Australia needs to know about ideology in Xi Jinping's China". While Garnaut's speech was

clearly persuasive to Hastie, a China expert, [former Australian Ambassador to Beijing, Dennis Argall](#), called Garnaut's speech a curious "ideological argument against ideology ... contorting history to say Stalin=Mao=Xi".

Garnaut also influenced Hamilton, a fellow ANU colleague, which may explain Hamilton's sudden anti-China shift. Hamilton heavily references Garnaut in *Silent Invasion*, acknowledging Garnaut's "strong support" and "excellent advice throughout". This is revealing in light of Garnaut's CV. Garnaut was Fairfax's Beijing correspondent in 2007-13, and its Asia Pacific Editor on his return to Australia. In 2015, he was "hand-picked" as an advisor/speech writer to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and influenced Turnbull's increasingly adversarial attitude towards China. In 2016, Garnaut, enjoying a meteoric rise from mere journalist to foreign policy influencer, headed an inquiry into Beijing's alleged foreign interference operations, following years of his own hawkish reporting on China. On that inquiry he worked closely with ASIO to produce a classified report on the extent of Chinese influence in Australia, which justified Turnbull's controversial espionage and foreign interference laws. [In an interview with ABC](#), former Prime Minister Paul Keating said: "Once that Garnaut guy came back from China and Turnbull gave him the ticket to go and hop into the security agencies, they've all gone berko ever since. When you have got the ASIO chief knocking on MPs' doors, you know something's wrong."

In March 2020, Attorney General Christian Porter replaced the entire Foreign Influence Transparent Scheme leadership team with what [the Herald Sun called](#) a "crack team of experts ... to unmask secret agents covertly pushing foreign interests on our soil", with Garnaut hired to "prepare evidentiary briefs against people suspected of being undeclared agents of influence". Garnaut met with Porter, ASIO and the AFP to discuss the new enforcement strategy. In May 2020 the Department of Defence's Information Warfare Division contracted Garnaut for "Strategic Decision-Making and Capability Development". Concurrently, Garnaut works for ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre and is on the Advisory Board for a project on Russian and Chinese disinformation at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)—a US think tank funded by arms manufacturers, big corporations and US/Australian/foreign governments. CSIS shares donors with MERICS, runs regular dialogues in partnership with ASPI and hosted a talk on "Chinese Influence" by Hamilton on his *Silent Invasion* book tour.

Hamilton's books encompass the current China narrative: espionage, foreign interference, and imminent military escalation. The vast network of powerful vested interests highly invested in maintaining this narrative should be extremely suspect—that, again, we're being lied into war.

By Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 12 August 2020

Read part two [here](#).