

China and Australia's security - the Roggeveen view.

The far-reaching and expensive AUKUS commitment fits the overall conservatism of the major Australian parties excluding a significant minority of ALP members who spoke up at the recent National Conference in Brisbane. This particular two-major party response is a new dimension of the governance systems conservatism that has dominated Australian politics since WWII. However, times and circumstances have changed, considerably. In fact, they are essentially incomparable.

The views expressed by Sam Roggeveen in his new book *The Echidna Strategy*, Black Inc Books, recently published, is a very necessary fresh approach. As the Director of the generally conservative Lowy Institute his ideas come across as distinctly progressive. However, Roggeveen regards himself as a conservative. Although he has not worked in the Department of Defence, as he said in a recent discussion of the book "the debate should not be governed by credentialism" (Hartcher, *Opinion*, SMH 22.8.23). In other words, the accepted status, culture and wisdom of the Department of Defence in respect of the US Alliance could and should be challenged. Apparently, that suggests that Australia is seen as a kind of reliable US partner in the South Pacific, a country which can be used as a significant military base in a conflict with China. The military preparation for that apparently has been in progress for quite some time now but more recently has intensified seriously in the Northern Territory.

Given that China is Australia's most important trading partner the undesirability of this situation should be fully realised. Not surprisingly, the Chinese Government stopped importing a large number of important products from Australia. Finding other markets has not been easy. The apparent principal bone of contention is Xi Jinping's desire to incorporate independent Taiwan, an objective resisted strongly by the US. The latest display of that position was the controversial visit by former Speaker of the US House, Mrs. Nancy Pelosi followed by Chinese air force exercises over and around Taiwan. The military capacity of China has been on display in the Pacific on several other occasions and has

also been experienced by the Philippines, Japan and the Solomon Islands. Although military preparedness for war seems beyond question the Chinese economy has suffered severe setbacks recently. Therefore, the opportunity for Australia to review the possibility and desirability of war with China appears to have arrived.

There can be little doubt that neither the US nor Australia would be served in any way by a war with China, even a so-called limited war. Therefore, a bold independent foreign policy by the Australian Government, has more to offer than the traditional "all the way with the USA" policy. This does not mean weakening military strength insufficient to defend Australia. But it could mean reducing the Alliance with the US to counter real or imagined Chinese aggression in the Pacific.

The minority that made their views on Aukus certainly known at the recent ALP National Conference is politically ineffectual in the short term. However, there are in reality far more people in Australia who are seriously questioning the direction in foreign affairs as regards China and, especially, decision-making resulting in wars. Although formally untested in recent Opinion Polls that could well be a majority already. Certainly, more voices need to be heard and become involved. The position of the *Australians for War Powers Reform* is a group that is actively questioning Australia's participation in several recent wars decided mainly by the Prime Minister and, perhaps, a handful of advisers. Three were US initiated. They proved costly failures, the result of poor foreign policy decision-making. the moment, the ALP doesn't seem to grasp this. How can it be that Australia has just proceeded to purchase 200 (long-range) cruise missiles while, at the same time, seeking to repair and stabilise the relationship with Xi Jinping, the Chinese President?

There is much more to be considered here. Just why exactly would we need to go to war with the US against China, our most important trading partner? Roggeveen argues, in contrast, Australia can make itself militarily strong primarily to defend itself rather than be involved with other powers, based on the Echidna Strategy. Paul Monk, a friend of his for 25 years , argues that the (liberal) conservatism of Roggeveen has

been shaped by the ideas of "John Stuart Mill, Edmond Bourke, the American Founding Fathers and Michael Oakshott" (*Rationale Magazine*). If that makes them more widely acceptable so much the better! But an Echidna is a prickly animal and that doesn't quite match the Australian outgoing national character. Australians should be the peacemakers in the Pacific region and, of course, they can be. Has this been considered?

This current period may well be suited to peacemaking. The political instability in the US currently, even regardless of the outcome of the next Presidential election, is hardly conducive to war with China. Moreover, Americans have actually extensive private commercial interests in China; also, there are growing Chinese business interests in the US.

Albanese and foreign Minister Wong deserve much praise for furthering positive contacts with Indonesia, India, Japan and the Pacific Islands countries. As to the potentially critical issue of Taiwan one wonders if the Chinese Government can be persuaded to consider a federal or confederal relationship with that country. Such suggestions obviously can only be entertained and promoted if a friendly and mutually beneficial trade relationship with China is restored. This can hardly be achieved if the preparation for war in the Northern Territory and AUKUS continues.

910 words.

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