

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/02/08/why-australia-fears-chinas-rise-the-growing-war-consensus/>

DARYL MORINI, FEB 8 2012

“Vietnam’s insults in the South China Sea remained unpunished today...it is probably the right time for us to reason, think ahead and strike first... It seems all the countries around the area are preparing for an arms race. Singapore brings home high-end stealth aircraft while Australia, India and Japan are all stockpiling arms for a possible “world-class” battle... We shouldn’t waste the opportunity to launch some tiny-scale battles that could deter provocateurs from going further... Everything will be burned to the ground should a military conflict break out...”
– Long Tao.[1]

It is with nostalgia that future generations will recall those heady days of the post-Cold War party. The liquor of Western triumphalism was so strong; the dessert of self-confidence so decadently sweet. This historic gathering – the greatest in history, we were told – was the party we hoped would never end. Now it’s 6am, the music has stopped and your head feels as heavy as a watermelon. With some artistic license, this is what it can feel like to follow the evolution of Australian debates on regional security – like a sobering wake-up call.

A Wake-Up Call

An astounding conceptual earthquake is rocking Australian strategic discussions on China’s rise and Asia-Pacific security in general. Strategic competition between the U.S. and China is already observable in Asia, not least of all in the South China Sea. In this context, Australian strategists are no longer asking whether large-scale regional conflict is likely in the coming decades, they are debating how Australia should prepare for war and under which conditions the country should join the fray. As seen from Down Under, the potential for conflict between these powers is increasingly accepted as growing possibility, and one to prepare and plan for. Australian strategists seem to fear that inter-state war, far from dying in 1991, is threatening to make a dangerous come-back. I fundamentally agree.

This piece will explain the intellectual development in Australian strategic debates on regional security, with reference to Australia’s cultural and historical influences. I will justify my interpretation of what I call Australia’s growing “war consensus”, and defend the argument that future great power war is as likely to occur in the Asia-Pacific as it is preventable. For the sake of brevity, I will focus my analysis on the part of Australian strategic commentary discussing the implications of China’s rise.

I will finish by making the case that we should prepare accordingly, by taking seriously the potential for large-scale international conflict being a major disruption in our or our children’s lifetimes – not because it is inevitable (war never is), nor should we make its likelihood greater through self-fulfilling alarmism. Instead, we need the present and future generations of diplomatic negotiators and peace-makers to prepare themselves for the dangerous years ahead through realistic and sober analysis and contingency-planning. This training is essential if we are to successfully translate early-warning into early action and, with some luck, prevention. To tackle this, possibly one of the most dangerous security challenges in the Twenty-First Century, I propose a general disposition of realistic optimism – or enlightened realism. The academic label doesn’t matter, as long as the decision-makers and thinkers concerned strike the optimal balance between vision and caution; between bravery and humility; and between determination and

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

accommodation.

A Very Australian Nightmare

There is something quintessentially Australian about the way in which defence planners, policy-makers, analysts and even the general public construe the potential dangers arising from great power war in Asia, and Australia's possible responses thereto. On the one hand is a remarkably cool-headed, pragmatic style of decision-making which Australia's international partners have frequently noted.[2] On the other hand, Australians' fearful reactions to the rise of China triggering an arms race and strategic competition with the U.S. reflects a much deeper cultural-emotional belief than the rational tenets of *Realpolitik* would dictate.

Read the classic Australian book series which inspired the movie *Tomorrow When the War Began*, and you will get a taste of the cocktail of insecurity from – and bravery in response to – external aggression which Australian school children imbibe at an early age. Couple this with a rich diet of military history, focusing particularly on Australia's sacrifice in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915, and you have an idea of the prominent role which classic patriotism continues to play in Australian society.

Australia is a country with a long history of fear from external threats by powerful Asian giants, with one author even diagnosing Australia with an acute case of "invasion anxiety".[3] Some would explain these observations with charges of Australian society exemplifying post-colonial nostalgia and racism, pure and simple. But this is a crude and intellectually-shallow explanation, which does not explain the profound and extraordinary nature of the consensus currently maturing in Australia.

The rise of China, as such prominent Australian strategic thinkers as Coral Bell, Graeme Dobell and Hugh White have convincingly argued, reaches uncomfortably into the deepest confines of the collective Australian subconscious like no historical event since 1942 quite has. It is in this sense that China's rise, if it continues unabated and grows enough to successfully degrade American influence in East Asia, poses a direct "challenge to Australian identity." [4]

The rise of China, coupled with the perceived relative decline of U.S. power in the Asia-Pacific, challenges Australians at all levels of society to undergo the painful experience of rethinking, and even revising, some of their most taken-for-granted assumptions and self-beliefs: that the Lucky Country would remain so into the foreseeable future; that we would continue to enjoy the fruits of an enduring strategic alliance with the United States – the bedrock of Australians' physical and psychological sense of security – with relatively limited costs to blood and treasure; that Australian military engagements in the post-2001 era would mainly consist of peacekeeping missions, counter-terrorism and asymmetric wars far from our direct strategic environment; and that we had seen the end of industrial-scale, sustained inter-state war between the great powers in the post-Cold War world order.

Today, Australia's strategic understanding of itself and its place in the world has been turned upside down by a debate fuelled by some of Australia's most prominent and far-sighted thinkers and policy-makers, a debate which is overturning political taboos and revealing as much about the future of Asia as it is about that of Australia.

The Rudd Factor

It is always tenuous to attach specific dates and names to debates which transcend the lives and intellects of particular individuals, no matter how great and influential. However, at the risk of over-simplifying for the sake of this short essay, I will mainly focus on the role of two of Australia's most renowned China thinkers – Kevin Rudd, the phoenix Prime Minister-cum-Foreign Minister, and Hugh White, Professor of International Relations at the Australian National University – in shaping the national debate on China. To be clear, I do not claim that theirs are the *only* or even the *most important* views on China available in Australian media, policy and academic circles – countless more names and opinions could be added to the list, and most Australian academics would be loath to accept that two individuals represent or have forged a national consensus. Admittedly, both stood on the shoulders of giants, and their ideas follow a long and bipartisan tradition of an Australian 'hedging' strategy towards China; basically hoping for China's peaceful rise, but preparing for the worst. Nevertheless, ideas espoused by Rudd and White have

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

arguably gained some of the most visible traction in the fledgling national consensus on what China's rise means for Australia.

This intellectual genesis began as early as 2006, according to new evidence, when Australian agencies began warning the U.S. of potential dangers in China's rise.[5] But this trend became most obvious between 2008 to early 2009, when murmurs of war began flowing over the walls of the Department of Defence (DOD) and the Prime Minister's Office, and out into the public domain. This debate occurred in the context of the government's deliberations for the 2009 Australian Defence White Paper, the realist pedigree of which even John Mearsheimer acknowledged.[6] We can even roughly pinpoint the moment when a secluded Canberra debate among policy experts became a public debate in the national contest of ideas.

In April 2009, *The Australian* newspaper leaked details of a deep internal schism within the Australian defence community over how to interpret China's rapid military modernisation: as inherently offensive or defensive. The DOD, according to newspaper reports, took a more hard-line view that Australia had to prepare for a growing Chinese military power challenging U.S. power in East Asia. Meanwhile, the Office of National Assessments (ONA) and the Defence Intelligence Organisation – Australia's civilian and defence intelligence assessment organisations respectively – took the more modest stance that China's military drive was primarily defensive, and that Australia should not base its long-term defence planning around it. The risk of U.S.-China war, according to these agencies, although highly dangerous, was not likely or immediate. The ONA even expressed its concern by directly appealing to then-Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to intervene in the debate. This "bruising debate" nevertheless resulted in "a clear win for Defence hardliners," according to media reports.[7] Rudd had settled the debate and, with it, the tone and shape of Australia's growing war consensus on China.

As a Mandarin-speaking former mandarin posted in Beijing, Rudd was always going to play a strong role in formulating Australia's China policy after his 2007 election. But that domestic event intersected with a much larger international shift in Australia's foreign relations: the year that China officially displaced Japan as Australia's largest trading partner.[8] Rudd came to office with a clear and long-term strategic vision of China's rise, which, courtesy of WikiLeaks, we know to be on the foreign policy realist side of the balance. Whenever speaking to international leaders or on the national stage, Rudd has consistently and vocally warned of the serious and long-term challenge to Australian security posed by China's meteoric rise and, mostly implicitly but increasingly openly,[9] the danger of it sparking direct military conflict between a rising China and a stagnant United States.

But Rudd's rise (and fall, and rise again – but this subject warrants a separate discussion) is only part of the story. Aside from domestic and international developments, this context proved the receptive ferment for the 'Hugh White effect'.

The Hugh White Effect

Hugh White had long developed the ideas which came to their apex in his landmark September 2010 essay *Power Shift*. [10] In this piece, White argued that a Chinese challenge to American power in Asia was no longer a theoretical one, but had become reality, and that Australians would have to begin deliberating about how to deal with this challenge, up to and including the option of abandoning the sacred cow of Australian politics: that the U.S. alliance is the bedrock of Australian security.

In the days and weeks following its release, *Power Shift* sparked a fascinating debate, garnering all imaginable praises and insults from "incisive", "spectacular", an "academic triumph"[11], to "the single, stupidest strategic document ever prepared in Australian history by someone who once held a position of some responsibility in our system", according to Australia's most opinionated foreign correspondent (those were one of the nicer things he had to say about White).[12] Another high profile public rebuke plainly accused White of "appeasing" the Chinese communist dictatorship.[13] More bilious attacks to that effect (laced with more colourful vocabulary) abound in comment boxes on the web.

As one insightful analyst noted, this type of reaction

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

underlines how difficult and traumatic the debate will be about the stark choices ahead of us. It is a debate that transcends the discipline of strategic studies, and plunges right into questions of core values and national identity. As an adolescent nation, Australia is experiencing that identity crisis as we speak.[14]

Despite the vitriolic reactions which White's essay sparked, his actual preferred option was for Canberra to lobby Washington to "share power" with China in leading Asia, and together to create a great power 'Concert of Asia' to decide the region's future. In hindsight, more than any other single strategic piece in recent Australian scholarship, *Power Shift* (and reactions to it) may come to symbolise the *Zeitgeist* of the Australian polity in 2010, caught between the existential fear of China's rise leading to all-out regional conflict, and the hope and belief that the USA, as Australia's largest and most powerful friend, was simply too big to fail. *Power Shift* was the sobering cold shower after the party of a lifetime. American friends of the Australian strategic community clearly discerned that "Hugh White probably sparked the whole debate [about the U.S. not maintaining its Asia-Pacific security commitments] with his prediction that Asia's security and economic architectures will inevitably diverge." [15] One can only imagine American and Chinese diplomats in Canberra following this debate very closely.

As Carlyle Thayer has noted, the debates sparked or developed by Rudd and White – between 2008-2009 and 2010 respectively – began independently of each other.[16] But in the raucous national scrum of ideas which has followed since, they have arguably coalesced into a much larger and more ominous beast: a growing national war consensus. I define this budding national consensus as the growing acceptance among policy-makers, policy experts and the interested public that the increasing economic and military power of China is likely to cause regional instability and even great power war, potentially implicating Australian lives and treasure. I will explain and defend my understanding of this consensus, before drawing some conclusions and suggesting a viable way ahead in managing Australia's own crystallising reflection of itself as a past and future warring nation.

A Growing War Consensus

Today, Australia's most prominent think tankers and strategic thinkers are publicly asking some of the toughest questions at the intersection of defence policy and the basic national interest of survival:

How should Australia respond to a potential U.S.-China War? Which military capabilities would allow Canberra to bring a meaningful strategic contribution to a U.S.-led mission in a future war with China? And could Australia fight China alone?

In the national battle of ideas, the diplomatic niceties are being routed by more concrete military truths. The "challenge posed by the rising PLA [People's Liberation Army] is arguably one of the most serious that has confronted Australia's national security planners since the Second World War," according to Ross Babbage,[17] who is also associated with the famous comment that Australia should have the capabilities to "rip an arm off" any Asian power threatening to attack Australia.[18] Indeed, Australian strategists and even some politicians are no longer debating the exact nature of China's rise, or what it means for Australia – they are calling for rapid investment in submarine capabilities,[19] anti-submarine warfare capabilities,[20] and debating the merit of acquiring a fleet of F-35 fighter planes based on the assumption that "Australia would only ever go to war with China by America's side." [21]

Stepping back from such detailed and hypothetical defence policy debates for one moment, the casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that Australia was already on a war footing. Some, such as Alan Dupont, have called for order and staked out a middle-position in Australia's increasingly polarised China debate.[22] Paul Dibb dismissed White's idea of Australia encouraging the U.S. to accommodate China's rise as "quite premature", and critiqued the school of thought in favour of developing capabilities to 'tear an arm off' China as "downright dangerous". "Let us not frighten ourselves to death," Dibb suggests, "by drumming up the next military threat to Australia and basing our defence policy on the likelihood that we are going to be attacked by China." [23] The very same author nevertheless argued, in a previous article, that in a future response to its bullying in the South China Sea, "China will have to be taught a military lesson at sea." [24] So much for a moderate third way.

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

From an outside perspective, Australian strategists debating China's rise may appear like an unruly mob who cannot agree with each other, let alone on their own positions – little better than the heckling politicians trading insults in Parliament. However, this perspective is flawed. The prospect for a national consensus in Australian strategic discourse certainly looks unlikely and exaggerated if one looks solely at the myriad of nuances and competing views to be found along the White-Babbage continuum of the debate on how Australia should *respond* to China's rise. But more insightful is to summarise what is left unsaid in this debate, what is accepted as self-evident, and what the vast majority of strategic thinkers, the general public and, as far as we know, policy-makers appear to think in terms of what China's rise actually *means* for Australia's long-term future and place in the world.

Australians may disagree on the correct prescription, but very few contest the basic diagnosis which remains consistent from Rudd's stated vision, to the analyses of White, Babbage and a mountain of mainstream strategic scholars in Australia:

- China is rising, fast, and despite its domestic problems there is no convincing reason to expect (or hope) that it will collapse soon;
- unless ahistoric, China's growing national strength and military capabilities will increasingly cause frictions with the pre-eminent U.S. power;
- this process will likely draw the U.S. and China into a classic security dilemma, if they are not already locked into one;
- a future Sino-American war is a very real and growing possibility;
- in this scenario, Australia would have to make a difficult choice between supporting its major U.S. ally or placating its major economic partner;
- if it ever comes to this choice, Australia is in serious trouble no matter what;
- the time has come to draw up plans, and prepare for the worst, to defend Australia's national interests in a potential future Asian war – with or without the United States (but preferably with);

I would only apply three caveats to the above. Firstly, as previously mentioned, I am evidently not claiming that *all* Australian strategic commentators and analysts agree with *all* of these propositions; I claim that the majority would associate themselves with most, to varying degrees. Secondly, a great deal of critical security scholars and others will likely dissent from these mainly realist views, and reject some or all of these propositions, and the assumptions on which they rest. True, but unless a silent majority has kept abnormally quiet, we must assume that they only represent a minority view in the mainstream of Australian foreign and defence policy debates. Thirdly, and finally, accepting the above as empirical descriptions of the way the world *is* does not imply that one necessarily likes it, or hopes and wishes it to be so.

If, as I have argued above, this is an accurate enough depiction of a crystallising war consensus in the Australian strategic community, then we are left with a delicate set of questions and implications. Most pressing is the dilemma of what Australia's self-identification as potential warring nation in a dangerous region portends for itself and for the chances of peace in the Asia-Pacific Century. This final section assesses whether the glass is indeed half-empty or half-full for Australia's future, and concludes by proposing what I view as the ideal balance of visions between self-fulfilling strategic pessimism and the naïve optimism of the Three Monkeys. Australia's security interests will neither be served by over-confidence in the diplomatic persuasiveness of missiles and submarines, nor in the lulling refrain that, when it comes to China, we should hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

A Delicate Balance of Visions

In the final analysis, one's view on matters of war and peace, and everything in between, may ultimately boil down to two binary dispositions: pessimism vs. optimism. These entirely personal, subjective and irreducible frames of mind may help explain the most specialised and esoteric of international relations debates. Take Australian perceptions of China's rise as an example. It is with some nostalgia that Australians might recall a much more optimistic mood with regards to China in the year 2003, seemingly a life-time away, when China was "probably less controversial and provoke[d] less heated discussion in Australia now than at any time since the Chinese Revolution in 1949."^[25]

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

As Hugh White aptly put it, however: “The study and practice of strategic policy is not a field for optimists.”[26] Indeed, defence planning is one of the areas of government hard-wired with pessimism – worst-case scenarios, contingency planning, the narrow focus on a potential enemy’s military capabilities rather than intentions, resilience and recovery in the face of disaster, terrorism, pandemics, nuclear Armageddon, etc.

Whether more optimistically-inclined analysts, including this author, like it or not, we must accept the reality that this historically- and bureaucratically-entrenched perspective remains abundant in the fertile soil of defence establishments worldwide, not least of all around the Asia-Pacific. Chinese and American defence planners have no doubt been busy rehearsing and planning war against each other for decades – at least since their first direct clash in the 1950s. Objectively speaking, both the U.S. and China are preparing militarily for a future war with each other. The only differences are in battlefield strategies and tactics: Chinese planners are making “preparations for military conflict in every strategic direction”, not least of all in a direct clash with the U.S. over Taiwan, and putting more emphasis on an intense, multi-pronged surprise attack against U.S. bases and supply lines in the region;[27] meanwhile the U.S. is preparing for a much more sustained Cold War with China.[28] This should perhaps come as no surprise, at least to strategic pessimists involved in the unavoidably ‘glass half-full’ work of preparing for the worst-case scenarios.

Canberra is no exception to the rule, and follows a foreign and defence policy even more faithful to realism than the more values-based tradition of its American allies.[29] Hence, we should not over-dramatise the Australian war consensus as somehow unprecedented or a sharp break from past tradition. As Ric Smith noted, Australian defence planners were already cognisant, in 1974, and despite optimism surrounding the Sino-American thaw in the wake of Nixon’s visit to China, that “China’s regional policy is probably long-term. It can afford to wait for US disengagement.”[30] What is perhaps surprising, at least to those with a more optimistic disposition, is how predictably the crescendo of tensions is being fed by Cold War-style posturing and mirror-imaging between hawks in both Beijing and Washington – driving both powers to lock horns in direct strategic competition.

‘Have we not learned the lessons of the Cold War?’ an optimist might ask. ‘Have you not learned the lessons of history?’, the pessimist would respond. ‘We got lucky in 1962’ – ‘Deterrence and peace through strength; that is how we prevailed against the Soviets’. ‘Détente and cautious leadership in times of crisis and tension’ – ‘Nukes’. ‘Diplomatic accommodation’ – ‘The balance of power’. ‘Carrots’ – ‘Sticks’. This, in simplified short hand, is the age-old debate between hawks and doves. In the year 2011, at least in Australia, it seems that a more hawkish view is crystallizing as self-evident truth: war with China is increasingly possible, if not highly likely. The only prudent policy option, if we accept the starting premise, is to prepare for war. Indeed, a security dilemma is already evident in Chinese and American defence measures and counter-measures; evidence of an arms race in Asia is accruing. Pessimistic scholars (chiefly realists) are explicit about what this trend portends for Australia and the Sino-American relationship: “Australians should be worried about China’s rise because it is likely to lead to an intense security competition between China and the United States, with considerable potential for war...To put it bluntly: China cannot rise peacefully.”[31] From this perspective, war is largely inevitable.

As an optimist, one might express indignation at this hawkish view, and could shout familiar arguments from the rooftops: war is *not* (indeed, is *never*) inevitable, and always remains a political choice; we can prevent it; the pessimists risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. I have voiced similar concerns.[32]

Some authors, from an even more optimistic perspective, argue that the very act of *talking* about potential war will contribute to its outbreak. “The more Australians worry out loud about the instability of the country’s China-US balancing act,” Geoffrey Garret argues, “the less stable it is likely to become.” Agonising over China’s rise is “bad public diplomacy.”[33] Focusing on “all the doom and gloom”, he warns, “could become a self-fulfilling prophesy that would be very bad for everybody.”[34] If the hawks are over-pessimistic about the chances of peaceful accommodation between the U.S. and China, this position is arguably over-optimistic about the chances of economic inter-dependence, as the main win-win aspect of the bilateral relationship, trumping political-strategic interests in the event of heightened tension. “Better to focus on the good news and hope for the best,” as White summarised this view.[35] The problem with this idea, as he uncomfortably demonstrates, is that although war may be entirely avoidable and is never inevitable, neither is peace:

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

When peace lasts a long time like this, it becomes easy to take for granted. We see it as natural, indeed inevitable, and the misfortunes, mistakes, and malice that caused wars in earlier times could not recur now because the international system has evolved beyond such things. We find the idea of war—large-scale war directly affecting Australia—almost unimaginable. We come to believe that it is about maximising trade, expressing values, and increasing our influence for its own sake.[36]

I hope White is wrong on this point, but I fear he is not.

Finally, what this discussion suggests is that peace in the Asia-Pacific Century will depend as much on the cognitive balance between alarmism and optimism – and the domestic perception of threats – as it does on diplomatic initiatives and on the material balance of power between competing states. I would propose that the ideal balance to strike falls roughly between the darkest thoughts of the strategic pessimists, and the naïve hopes of some of the most optimistic commentators. No, war is not inevitable, but yes, it is a possible scenario.

I can only concur with Michael O'Hanlon and Richard Bush:

Just because there are good reasons why war *should not* break out does not mean that it won't...just as the fact that there are reasons why war *could* occur does not mean that it will.[37]

Conclusion

A rising wave of fear and insecurity has washed over the Australian debate on China's rise. Those riding this wave should exercise extreme caution, both the professionals and experts contributing to the debate, but also by populist politicians who may be tempted to use popular fear and feverish patriotism for their own electoral ends – perhaps fatally for Australian lives and interests.[38] As we are reminded, we should not complacently assume that we are any smarter, more sophisticated, or less prone to sparking and fighting a stupid and senseless war than our grandparents were.[39] Indeed, nobody in 1914 thought that having a war with Germany was a smart idea. “The question is never whether anybody is dumb enough to let a strategic confrontation escalate into major conflict; it is whether they're smart enough to avoid it happening.”[40] The good news, amidst all this dark discussion, is that great power war can be prevented. A panoply of specific policies of preventive diplomacy[41] could be deployed by politicians, diplomats, military officials and other actors in the conflict prevention community to help mitigate the danger of two large, unwieldy Leviathans dragging the international community back to the Dark Ages.

The crystallising Australian consensus on the risk of war breaking out from China's rise is much more than a bogus 'China threat' theory based on ideological thinking, as seen in some alarmist American publications. This is the kind of consensus which existed in the warring democracies of the Twentieth Century; a fine balance between heated, democratic discourse and a hard-nosed, realist view of the national interest and how to safeguard it in a violent world. In many ways, this is a more durable and pragmatic type of consensus than the sensational images of a belligerent China often peddled by the media suggest. Australians are in it for the long haul – Asia is their home. In fact, many of the strategists, politicians and other public commentators expressing fear of future war between the U.S. and China do not necessarily assume that China is the bad guy, and the U.S. the good guy. The picture is more nuanced. Despite his detractors' impassioned critiques, Hugh White is not alone in fearing that the United States miscalculates by either overestimating its ability to contain China by force, or underestimating China's ability to defend its perceived national interests.

In many ways, the bilateral agreement on bolstering the U.S. military presence in Darwin during President Obama's November 2011 trip to Australia was “historic”. [42] It was not only strategically significant, but potentially a very risky move, as Hugh White argued.[43] The much-touted U.S. pivot to Asia, fully supported by Australia, may play an important role in deterring future conflicts in Asia; or it may do just the opposite, by encouraging Chinese threat perceptions and reinforcing competitive dynamics. The Chinese leadership has made its displeasure with the U.S.-Australian basing deal abundantly clear – including what some interpreted as a veiled threat to Australia's economy.[44] Canberra should certainly greet U.S. reengagement in Asia, but it should exercise any remaining leverage in Washington to help achieve a smooth transition of America's strategic reengagement in Asia. Concretely,

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

this means continuing to engage in frank consultations with the U.S., but warning it of the danger of strategic competition sliding out of control, and suggesting ways to limit the risk of violent conflict, which Australia has now associated itself with unambiguously.

The time has not yet come, as some argue, to sharpen the bayonets. But neither should we play deaf, blind and mute in the face of rapid and increasingly assertive Chinese military modernisation and U.S. reactions in the region, especially in the South China Sea. Instead, this historical moment calls for deep contemplation, critical thinking, and relentless questioning of our own views on regional security. Successfully managing a dangerous and competitive U.S.-China relationship, certainly for Australians and hopefully for both parties, will first and foremost require negotiating domestically, finding a suitably balanced consensual disposition towards the risk of future war, and calmly deliberating on how Australia should act and react at each given stage of the escalation of such a dispute. Cautious diplomatic planning should also be developed, congruent with the preventive mindset that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. War is never inevitable; neither is peace.

—

Daryl Morini is Deputy Editor of *e-IR*. He is a second-year PhD candidate in International Relations at the University of Queensland, Australia, with a research focus on preventive diplomacy in Europe and Asia.

[1] Long Tao, 'Time to teach those around South China Sea a lesson', in *Global Times*, 29 September 2011, available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/677717/Time-to-teach-those-around-South-China-Sea-a-lesson.aspx> (accessed 4 November 2011). [2] See for example Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan Campaign* (2011). [3] Examples include: Canberra's near-permanent quest for 'great and powerful friends' in, first, the colonial British metropole and, after the fall of Singapore in 1942, the mighty United States of America; the 'Brisbane line' – the red line which Australian defence planners had drawn above Queensland's capital, preparing to abandon all resources and population centres north of Brisbane to the invading onslaught of Japanese hordes; and Australia's fear of the 'Yellow Peril' and the 'Red Hordes' extending to other Asian societies during the Cold War, including Indonesia and China. The reference to Australia's invasion anxiety is drawn from Anthony Burke, *Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). [4] See Hugh White, 'China's challenge to Australian identity', in *The Interpreter*, 20 September 2011, available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2010/09/20/Chinas-challenge-to-Australian-identity.aspx> (accessed 23 October 2011). [5] Brendan Nicholson, 'Canberra warned of risks in China's rise', *The Australian*, 2 September 2011, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/defence/canberra-warned-of-risks-in-chinas-rise/story-e6frg8yo-1226127660814> (accessed 4 November 2011). [6] See John J. Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, 2010: 381-382. [7] See Cameron Stewart and Patrick Walters, 'Spy chiefs cross swords over China as Kevin Rudd backs defence hawks', *The Australian*, 11 April 2009, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/spy-chiefs-cross-swords-over-china/story-e6frg6n6-1225697020657> (accessed 1 November 2011). [8] Chris Zappone, 'China turns trade tables on Japan', *The Age*, 19 November 2008, available at: <http://www.theage.com.au/business/china-turns-trade-tables-on-japan-20081119-6b1d.html> (accessed 1 November 2011). [9] See Sam Roggeveen, 'Rudd raises the China rhetoric', in *The Interpreter*, 18 October 2011, available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2011/10/18/Rudd-raises-the-China-rhetoric.aspx> (accessed 1 November 2011). [10] The founding ideas underpinning *Power Shift* were all clearly elaborated in a 2005 paper. Hugh White, 'The limits of optimism: Australia and the rise of China', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 4, December 2005: 469-480. Compare this piece with Hugh White, 'Power Shift: Australia's Future between Washington and Beijing', *Quarterly Essay*, No. 39 (September 2010). [11] These are drawn from the fascinating debate launched by *Power Shift* on Lowy Institute's Interpreter blog. These were evidently countered by a good deal of critiques and counter-arguments. *Debate: Hugh White's Quarterly Essay*, available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/?d=D%20-%20Hugh%20White's%20Quarterly%20Essay> (accessed 1 November 2011). [12] See Greg Sheridan, 'Distorted vision of future US-China relations', in *The Australian*, 11 September 2010, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/distorted-vision-of-future-us-china-relations/story->

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

e6frg6zo-1225917582189 (accessed 1 November 2011). [13] Michael Danby, Carl Ungerer, Peter Khalil, 'No winners by appeasing China', in *The Australian*, 16 September 2010, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/no-winners-by-appeasing-china/story-e6frg6zo-1225924276179> (accessed 1 November 2011). [14] Crispin Rovere, 'Reader Riposte: Hugh White's achievement', in *The Interpreter*, 21 September 2010, available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2010/09/21/Reader-riposte-Hugh-Whites-achievement.aspx> (accessed 1 November 2011). [15] Mike Green, 'On China, Are America and Australia Two Allies Divided by a Common Language?', 27 June 2011, available at: <http://cogitasia.com/on-china-are-america-and-australia-two-allies-divided-by-a-common-language/> (accessed 1 November 2011). [16] See Carlyle A. Thayer, 'China's Rise and the Passing of U.S. Primacy: Australia Debates Its Future', in *Asia Policy*, No. 12, July 2011: 20-26. [17] See Ross Babbage, *Australia's Strategic Edge in 2030*, Kokoda Paper No. 15, February 2011, 4. [18] See Ross Babbage, 'Learning to Walk Among Giants: The New Defence White Paper', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 13-20; and the responses contained in 'Debate: On "Ripping an Arm Off"', in *Security Challenges*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 2008): 147-164. [19] See inter alia David Johnston, 'Australian Defence Force: Submarines', *Senate Debates*, 14 September 2011, available at: <http://www.openaustralia.org/senate/?id=2011-09-14.29.1> (accessed 2 November 2011). [20] Senator Hon. David Feeney, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, 'Launch of the Kokoda Foundation's "Under the sea air gap: Australia's anti-submarine warfare challenge"', 25 May 2011, available at: <http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2011/05/25/launch-of-the-kokoda-foundations-under-the-sea-air-gap-australias-anti-submarine-warfare-challenge/> (accessed 2 November 2011). [21] Sam Roggeveen, quoted in Eddie Walsh, 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Bethesda: RAAF F-35 Deal, Up in the Air?', *Foreword*, 11 September 2011, available at: <http://foreword.com.au/2011/09/the-ones-who-walk-away-from-bethesda-f-35-deal-up-in-the-air/> (accessed 2 November 2011). See also Hugh White, 'Could Australia fight China alone?', in *The Interpreter*, 27 September 2011, available at: <http://lowyinterpreter.org/post/2011/09/27/Fighting-China-Alone.aspx> (accessed 2 November 2011). [22] See for example Alan Dupont, 'Living with the Dragon: Why Australia Needs a China Strategy', in *Lowy Institute*, June 2011, available at: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1614> (2 November 2011). [23] See Paul Dibb, 'China: Not about to attack Australia', *East Asia Forum*, 9 August 2011, available at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/08/09/china-not-about-to-attack-australia/> (accessed 2 November 2011). [24] See Paul Dibb, 'If China bullies on the high seas, it may have to be taught a naval lesson', *The Australian*, 8 November 2010, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/if-china-bullies-on-the-high-seas-it-may-need-to-be-taught-a-naval-lesson/story-e6frg6zo-1225949105866> (accessed 2 November 2011). [25] Anthony L. Smith, 'Banking on a Constructive China: Australia's China Debate', in *Asia's China Debate*, Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies, December 2003: 5-1. [26] "It requires steady attention to the potential risks that an imaginative pessimist can find in even the most promising events. For those of a sunnier disposition, this can seem perverse. Worse, it can create dangerous self-fulfilling prophecies. Better to focus on the good news and hope for the best, they say." White, 'The Limits of Optimism', 469. [27] See Peter Foster, 'China preparing for armed conflict "in every direction"', in *The Telegraph*, 29 December 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8229789/China-preparing-for-armed-conflict-in-every-direction.html> (accessed 3 November 2011); see also Patrick Winn, 'Hypothetical attack on U.S. outlined by China', in *Air Force Times*, 21 January 2008, available at: http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/01/airforce_china_strategy_080121/ (accessed 3 November 2011). [28] See Stephen Glain, 'Washington Is Preparing for a Long War With China', in *US News*, 31 March 2011, available at: <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/stephen-glain/2011/03/31/washington-is-preparing-for-a-long-war-with-china> (accessed 3 November 2011); see also Zhiqun Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century: Power Transition and Peace* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 162. [29] For example, Mike Green observed that it seemed "as though our friends in the Australian strategic community are more bound by realist international relations theories than the we are in the States." In 'On China, Are America and Australia Two Allies Divided by a Common Language?' [30] Richard Smith, *The Long Rise of China in Australian Defence Strategy*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, April 2009: 4. [31] Mearsheimer, 'The Gather Storm', 382. [32] See Morini, 'Preventing U.S.-China War: Towards Multilateral Preventive Diplomacy in the South China Sea', in *Foreword*, 31 July 2011 available at: <http://foreword.com.au/wp.../09/Preventing-U.S.-China-War-Morini.pdf> (accessed 4 November 2011); see also Morini, 'Paradigm Shift: China's Rise and the Limits of Realism', in *Security Challenges*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 2011): 91-112. [33] Geoffrey Garrett, 'Why this love triangle works', in *The Australian*, 13 August 2011, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/why-this-love-triangle-works/story-e6frg6ux-1226114041986> (accessed 4 November 2011). [34] Geoffrey Garrett, 'US-China: Talking ourselves into

Why Australia Fears China's Rise: The Growing War Consensus

Written by Daryl Morini

trouble', in *The Interpreter*, 19 July 2011, available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2011/07/19/US-China-talking-ourselves-into-trouble.aspx> (accessed 4 November 2011). [35] White, 'The Limits of Optimism', 469. [36] White, 'Power Shift: rethinking Australia's place in the Asian century', 81. [37] See Richard C. Bush and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *A War Like No Other: The Truth about China's Challenge to America* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 182. [38] On popular fears of China's rise, it is instructive to follow the steadily increasing percentage of the Australian public who perceive China as a present or future threat (either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this proposition): from 16% in 2004, to 65% in 2010, and circa 62% in 2011. See Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century*, 152; 'Australians fear war with China, says Lowy Institute survey', 31 May 2010, *News.com.au*, available at: <http://www.news.com.au/national/australians-fear-war-with-china-says-lowry-institute-survey/story-e6frfkvr-1225873299967> (accessed 4 November 2011); and Fergus Hanson, 'Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy', *The Lowy Institute Poll 2011*: 10. [39] As argued by Andrew Davies and Mark Thompson, „Known Unknowns: Uncertainty about the Future of the Asia-Pacific“, *ASPI*, no. 35 (October 2010). [40] See 'Hugh White: The US, China and Australia - How does it end?', *Youtube*, 10 August 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCVYqzFZC14> (accessed 4 November 2011). [41] Specific proposals for practitioners of preventive diplomacy are too detailed to discuss at length in this paper, but can be found in Morini, *Preventing U.S.-China War*, 2011 (See link above). [42] See Rory Medcalf, 'Buildup Down Under', in *Foreign Policy*, 17 November 2011: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/17/obama_australia_trip_china_marines (accessed 20 November 2011). [43] Cited in 'US Marine base for Darwin', in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November 2011, available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/us-marine-base-for-darwin-20111110-1n9lk.html> (accessed 20 November 2011). [44] See 'Beijing questions US military boost in Australia', in *People's Daily Online*, 17 November 2011, available at: <http://english.people.com.cn/90883/7647437.html> (accessed 7 February 2012); see also Minxin Pei, 'Is it China's Turn to Pivot?', in *The Diplomat*, 28 November 2011, available at: <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/11/28/is-it-china%E2%80%99s-turn-to-pivot/> (accessed 7 February 2012).

About the author:

Daryl Morini is an editor-at-large of E-IR. He is pursuing a PhD in preventive diplomacy at the University of Queensland, Australia. Follow him on Twitter @DarylMorini