

Australia: “Silent invasion” book advocates war against China

Mike Head
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A much-promoted book published this week calls for Australia to join a US-led war against China, supposedly as the only way to stop the country from becoming a “tribute state of the resurgent Middle Kingdom.

“*Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*” is written by Clive Hamilton, a former Greens candidate, now university professor. The book suggests that the majority of Australia's 1.2 million people of Chinese descent are not “loyal” to Australia; casts suspicion over many of the country's 130,000 Chinese students, as well as many individually named academics, scientists and researchers “of Chinese descent,” and alleges that numbers of prominent business and political leaders are “fifth columnists.”

The book even claims that China plans to stake a formal territorial claim over Australia, on the spurious basis that former Chinese President Hu Jintao, addressing the Australian parliament in 2003, said a Ming Dynasty voyager “discovered” and “settled” the continent in the 1420s. “China is using fake history to position itself to make a future claim over Australia,” Hamilton insists.

The danger is extreme, Hamilton declares, because “the two main political parties have been severely compromised by their links to Chinese benefactors and their infiltration by people whose loyalties lies in Beijing.”

Hamilton also asserts that his “usual publisher,” Allen & Unwin, pulled out of a contract to publish his book because “they were afraid of retaliation from Beijing,” thus painting a picture of a sinister Chinese assault on free speech in Australia. In reality, Allen & Unwin said it was concerned about possible defamation suits.

Hamilton's extraordinary claims can be understood only in the context of preparations—military, political and ideological—being made for a US-led war against China. The Australian ruling class is being increasingly pressured to ramp up its involvement in these plans, as underscored by Prime Minister Malcolm's Turnbull's trip to Washington last week.

Hamilton insists that Australia has no choice but to join what would almost certainly be a nuclear war by US imperialism to assert its hegemony over China.

“A military standoff or engagement between the United States and China is quite possible in the foreseeable future,” Hamilton states. “It may be the only way to stop China annexing and controlling the entire South China Sea right down to the coast of Indonesia. A conflict in the East China Sea is perhaps even more likely, as China pushes its demand to incorporate Taiwan and take islands claimed by Japan. In these circumstances Australia would be under an obligation to back the United States.”

Hamilton goes further, accusing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of seeking “global domination” by “eclipsing the United States as the dominant economic, political and, eventually, military power.”

The book's language closely resembles that of the Trump administration's new National Defense Strategy, which signals war against both Russia and China. The Pentagon document alleges that

“China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea.” It accuses China of seeking “Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global pre-eminence in the future.”

Hamilton's book first and foremost targets Chinese Australians. Only 20 to 30 percent of them are “loyal to Australia,” he declares—a guesstimate supplied by a couple of unnamed “Chinese-Australian friends.” Hamilton warns that in the event of a war with China, local Chinese people, “citizens and non-citizens alike,” would “create ongoing and potentially severe civil strife” orchestrated by “the Chinese embassy in Canberra.”

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that many thousands of Chinese Australians should be rounded up and detained arbitrarily, as were Australians of German, Italian and Japanese descent during World Wars I and II.

Hamilton's reliance on a handful of anti-Beijing sources typifies the book's methodology. In similar unsubstantiated slurs, he brands Australia's “elites”—including business leaders, former prime ministers, university vice-chancellors and journalists—as China's stooges who are robbing Australians of their “sovereignty” for economic gain.

Anyone with a commercial link to China's massive economy, or who even voices concerns about the ever-increasing pressure from Washington for an unconditional alignment behind war preparations against China is labeled a “panda hugger.” Former Foreign Minister Bob Carr is branded “Beijing Bob” for urging the US to accommodate to China's rise and for heading a university Australia-China Relations Institute that takes a “positive view” of the relationship between the two countries.

Those accused include a string of former prime ministers. Labor's Bob Hawke allegedly laid “the foundations for Beijing's plans to have Australia conform to its wishes” by granting asylum to Chinese students after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Hawke's successor Paul Keating “frequently echoes CCP propaganda.” By signing a deal to export gas to Guangdong province in 2002, Liberal-National Prime Minister John Howard shot “the starting gun for the ‘China is our future’ craze that now dominates elite thinking in this country, exactly as Beijing planned it.” Another, Kevin Rudd, is among “frequent flyers to Beijing.”

Australia's “corporate fifth column” features mining magnate Gina Rinehart, who was “the greatest advocate” for a 2013 northern Australia development plan that Chinese President Xi Jinping later said Chinese companies would be encouraged to participate in. Other “powerful pro-Beijing voices” are mining billionaire Andrew Forrest and Seven West Media proprietor Kerry Stokes. Stokes is condemned for a 2015 editorial in his West Australian newspaper that criticised the US for “blatantly provocative” so-called freedom of navigation operations inside the territorial waters of Chinese-held islets in the South China Sea.

Whipping up anti-Chinese chauvinism

Hamilton's book is part of a broader political and media campaign, which has escalated over the past 18 months against alleged Chinese "interference" in Australia. This offensive has already claimed the scalp of one Labor Party senator, Sam Dastyari, who was forced to resign over his links to a prominent local Chinese businessman. Based on this witch hunt, Turnbull's Liberal-National government is currently pushing through parliament a package of five draconian bills to outlaw any political activity connected to an overseas person or organisation, which would eviscerate basic democratic rights and prohibit many forms of anti-war dissent.

The tone was set in September 2016, when Fairfax Media senior journalist Peter Hartcher charged many business and political leaders with being pro-Beijing "rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows." Likewise, Hamilton denounces "capitulators," "appeasers" and "amigos."

Hamilton's book is laced with bigoted language. Chinese newspapers have "fishy smells." Universities that accept donations from local Chinese businessmen are "stained" by "dark money." "Cashed-up Chinese bidders" are "taking homes from Australians." Too many Chinese immigrants are being allowed in, "so that parts of Sydney no longer feel like Australia."

The book's purpose is evident. It is to whip up anti-Chinese chauvinism to prepare for war, brand any dissent as treasonous and insist on unconditional commitment to the US, whatever the damage to economic relations with China, Australia's largest trading partner.

Drawing on unverified allegations by US and Australian intelligence agencies and think tanks, Hamilton paints an absurd picture of Australia, whose military, economic and political establishment is closely integrated into that of the United States, being well on the way to becoming a puppet state of China.

"We are being robbed of our sovereignty," the book claims. "Australian institutions—from our schools, universities and professional associations to our media; from industries like mining; agriculture and tourism to strategic assets like ports and electricity grids; from our local councils and state governments to our political parties in Canberra—are being penetrated and shaped by a complex system of influence and control overseen by agencies serving the Chinese Communist Party."

This stands reality on its head. The Australian ruling class has been militarily dependent on the United States since World War II. The US, not China, has Marines rotating through Darwin, bases such as central Australia's Pine Gap satellite facility, which directs US bombings and other military activities from the Middle East to the Pacific, and access to all Australia's air force, naval and army bases.

Washington, not Beijing, has intervened repeatedly in Australian politics, including by triggering the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975, orchestrating the ousting of Rudd in 2010 and barring Chinese telecommunications company Huawei from supplying equipment to Australian networks. Hamilton actually concedes US "meddling" in Australian politics but dismisses it as "child's play" compared to China's "full court press."

Likewise, according to Hamilton, "the flood of Chinese capital into Australia" is "the real threat to our sovereignty." Yet the US far outweighs China on that front also. The Department of Foreign Affairs calculates that, as at 2016, of the \$3.2 trillion in the total stock of foreign investment in Australia, 27 percent was from the US and 16.1 percent came from the UK. This dwarfed China and Hong Kong combined, on 5.9 percent, even though Chinese investment had grown in recent years, from a low base.

Hamilton claims that Chinese investment is different because "whatever their faults," American companies are not dictated by US strategic

interests and, in any case, are constrained by a "vigorous" American democracy and "inquisitive media" holding them to account. What a lie! The US corporate and financial elite, aided by a complicit media, has been at the centre of unending wars, coups, assassinations and regime-change operations around the world for decades, and is increasingly turning to military and authoritarian methods to try to shore up its position.

Echoing Washington, Hamilton demonises the Chinese regime as a "communist" dictatorship. In fact, it is a capitalist government, representing the interests of billionaires, and maintaining a police state over the country's super-exploited working class.

However, while claiming to favour "freedom" over "authoritarianism," he calls for anti-democratic measures against Chinese workers and students in Australia. These include bans on permanent residency in Australia for anyone who "engages in political agitation" that favours Beijing, and the disbandment of Chinese student associations in Australia.

Moreover, in the name of "democracy," Hamilton demands "foreign interference" laws that are even more repressive than those proposed by the Turnbull government.

Hamilton's book displays the political trajectory of an entire social layer, particularly associated with the Greens and their increasingly wealthy upper middle class constituency. The Greens once postured as an anti-war party in order to politically exploit the widespread opposition to the criminal 2003 US invasion of Iraq. But the Greens' opposition to Australia's involvement in that war was always based on insisting that the troops were needed in the Asia-Pacific region to defend the interests of Australia, which is an imperialist power with predatory corporate operations throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

This milieu has since continued to shift sharply to the right, openly embracing the drive to war by the US and its allies against Washington's rivals, particularly China. Hamilton's book, and its promotion in the media, is a warning of the type of wartime hysteria that the Australian ruling class and its political servants, including the Greens, will seek to foment as the US moves to eliminate China as a "strategic competitor."



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