

Australian government, media join hysteria over Chinese balloon

Oscar Grenfell
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Even after it was shot down by the US Air Force on Saturday, the corporate media in America and around the world continues to churn out hysterical commentary on the purported Chinese “spy balloon.” The slow flight of the object across parts of the US prior to Saturday is still being presented as a major attack on US sovereignty, with sinister motivations.

There is no attempt to substantiate what is an utterly implausible official narrative. According to the story, the Chinese government decided to secretly spy on US military facilities, including nuclear sites, with a slow-moving research balloon that was without an engine and easily visible to the naked eye.

A Chinese defense ministry statement on Sunday declared: “The US used force to attack our civilian unmanned airship, which is an obvious overreaction. We express solemn protest against this move by the US side.”

China’s foreign ministry, which has lodged an official protest with the US, stated: “The Chinese side has repeatedly informed the US side after verification that the airship is for civilian use and entered the US due to force majeure. It was completely an accident” The force majeure in this instance was a strong wind. The foreign ministry noted that senior US military officials had publicly admitted their assessment that the balloon did not pose any threat to the US before it was shot down.

Despite all this, the campaign persists. The right-wing commentary has turned its attention to a similar balloon flying over Latin America, which Beijing has acknowledged is also Chinese.

The confected hysteria has been aimed at fostering a pro-war atmosphere, to legitimise the escalating US-led war drive against China, which is viewed as the principal threat to American imperialist hegemony.

This has been evident, not only in the US, but among its closest allies such as Australia. They have also used the balloon incident to again highlight their full alignment with the Biden administration and its provocations against China.

At a press conference yesterday, the Australian Labor government’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong branded the balloon’s flight as a “violation of international law” and an infringement of “US sovereignty.”

The comments were as ludicrous as those emanating from Washington. Exactly twenty years after the US and its allies touted lies about “weapons of mass destruction” to justify the illegal invasion of Iraq, a war which claimed up to a million lives, they would have the public believe that international law is breached by a weather balloon.

As the WSWS has noted, such research balloons are used by a host of countries, including the US. The American government, moreover, does not limit its violations of sovereign airspace to harmless meteorological balloons. For the past decade, it has conducted intensive drone warfare, routinely violating the sovereignty of countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen and killing thousands of civilians in the process.

In reference to the shooting down of the Chinese balloon, Wong praised the US response and presented it as restrained. “We appreciate the measured way in which the US ensured that this was brought down safely and over its territorial waters,” she said.

In reality, the US inflamed the situation as much as it possibly could. What might have been a minor curiosity, a research balloon blown off course and meandering around, was elevated to the level of a national security crisis. The destruction of the balloon, moreover, praised by Wong, could well be construed as

an act of aggression. There is no question that if the shoe was on the other foot, and China had shot down an American research craft, that is how it would have been presented.

Having thus explicitly endorsed a major escalation of hostilities, Wong then issued a few weasel-words about continued “engagement” and the danger of “competition” becoming conflict. None of the journalists present bothered to draw attention to this glaring contradiction, or the absurd nature of the claims about the Chinese balloon.

Their publications have been every bit as gung-ho as the Labor government.

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* led the charge, publishing an editorial depicting the balloon as a demonstration that war between the US and China may already be underway. The editorial promoted comments by Douglas Wise, a former deputy director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). He had told the *Australian* that “the crisis over the balloon showed China already saw itself as being ‘at war’ with Australia and the US, even if we did not.”

Citing Wise, the *Australian* opined: “A former intelligence official’s warning that Australia and the US are being targeted in ‘the largest intelligence operation in the history of the human race’ underlines the importance of Sunday’s shooting down by an American warplane of a Chinese surveillance balloon.”

Elevating the incident to China’s “balloon operation,” Wise warned of its purported “brazenness.” Wise worked not only at the DIA, but also the CIA, the intelligence agency renowned for assassinations, coup plotting and other nefarious actions. All of this paled in comparison to the balloon, which demonstrated that the Chinese “don’t have accountability and don’t operate under the rule of law or a moral frame of reference.”

Wise acknowledged the supposed sky balloon would be easily “found out,” and was of little “intel value” thus contradicting the entire US narrative, only to conclude that China was being especially “provocative.” Even more inflammatory, Wise declared without a shred of evidence that the balloon could have been testing “a potential weapons delivery or advanced sensor system.”

The tone of the coverage in every other official Australian publication was the same.

While they are thrown into a state of apoplexy over a

research balloon, the media reported matter-of-factly and without a hint of concern Australia’s rapid acquisition of actual offensive weaponry.

Alongside its hysterical coverage of the balloon yesterday, the *Australian* reported: “One of Australia’s most potent fighter jets, the EA-18G Growler, will become even more capable with the commencement of a \$2bn program to upgrade the electronic attack aircraft and hone the skills of its pilots.

“In the first phase of the ‘Advanced Growler’ program, Defence has signed a \$277m contract with Australian-owned CEA Technologies to provide advanced radar capabilities at the nation’s electronic warfare training ranges. Subsequent contracts will deliver the next-generation Jammer weapon system, sensor upgrades, and new longer-range missiles to destroy enemy radar systems.”

Meanwhile, Wong has recently returned from talks in Britain alongside Labor’s Defence Minister Richard Marles. The discussion centred on Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, which are among the most lethal assets for modern naval warfare. Marles then went on to Washington, for further talks on the Australian military build-up.

Under AUKUS, the militarist pact with Britain and the US, the country is also set to acquire hypersonic missiles, along with a range of other missile systems, and will host an ever-expanding array of American military infrastructure including its most advanced fighter jets.

This militarisation is the physical and logistical preparation for an aggressive war with China. The confected hysteria over the balloon is part of the ideological preparation, aimed at fostering a pro-war climate.



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