

Statement by PJ Keating – 28 September 2021

Reply to Marise Payne – *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, Monday 27 September 2021

Marise Payne, who has made an art form of hiding her light under a bushel, dashed onto the national stage on Monday, completely unfazed by the blazing footlights.

The purpose of this daring appearance was to attack me for having the temerity to say that the government's AUKUS agreement re-staples us to the Anglosphere – the world of the Atlantic, while stridently turning its back on our geography, Asia, in the same awkward movement.

Payne and the Prime Minister were bedazzled by the grand reception they were afforded in Washington – a reception any strategic client of the United States would have received had they turned over control of their armed forces to the US. But in our case, turning over effective control of our foreign policy into the bargain. Any prime minister that shops Australia's prerogatives and interests to another power will always be feted and celebrated by that power. And this is precisely what Scott Morrison and Marise Payne experienced.

The US submarine decision was not just about under-sea warfare, it was about donating eight submarines paid for by us to the command of the United States, as an integral part of its Pacific fleet. Try and think of another country that would do anything this submissive.

But more than that, in the doing of it, rudely affronting Europe's sole international power, France – the one European state which possesses a sophisticated military, nuclear submarines and nuclear weapons. And along with that, real Pacific national assets. A genuine Pacific power. One could have hardly dreamt up a more adequate or a more appropriate military partner than France. But Scott Morrison, who has spent but a dogwatch thinking about strategic issues and the arraignment of international power, did the French in, to ideologically console himself, preferring instead, the safety of the sweaty armpit of the United States. When should we stop clapping?

But with Broadway well and truly part of America's DNA, the White House hosted the first meeting of the so-called Quad, with decorated desks in its East Room.

The Quad has only one objective and that is to contain China. The fact that somehow, the rise of twenty per cent of humanity from abject poverty into something approaching a modern state, is illegitimate – but more than that, by its mere presence, an affront to the United States. It is not that China presents a threat

to the United States – something China has never articulated nor delivered - rather, its mere presence represents a challenge to United States pre-eminence.

How dare a state, just on as large as the United States so represent itself. But not just represent itself, possess the wherewithal to possibly become twice as large. Nowhere is such an eventuality to be found in the American playbook. But this is what the Quad is all about. And naively, we are in it.

The moment a loud shot was fired, the Indians would lock themselves in their peninsula and the Japanese would do what they always do, negotiate from under the table. That would leave the United States and mugs like us carrying a military fight to the Chinese all by our righteous selves.

India is having us all on. India enjoys the impenetrable wall of the Himalayas on its north and the protection of two oceans around its distended peninsula. And it has a population younger and as large as that of China. It is in an undefeatable position. And no power would try to defeat it – certainly not the Chinese.

Henry Kissinger said to me on a number of occasions that he and I shared an important strategic view. And that view, in Kissinger's words, was that India 'would never be part of the East Asian system'. A view I have always firmly held.

It is impossible to imagine the Indian navy attacking Chinese military or civilian assets in the South China Sea – an area completely remote from the safety and comity of India's waterlocked peninsula – notwithstanding the odd skirmish each has every decade or so on their Himalayan border.

India is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The other states include China itself, Russia and Pakistan. India will turn up as large as life to the next meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, after it has turned up, as large as life, for America's Quad follies in the White House.

India, a founder of the non-aligned movement, has historically been allergic to alliances, having no desire whatsoever to put all its eggs into one basket – something it will never do. But here we are in Australia, at the strategic casino, putting all our money on black, thinking the Indians will turn up for a major showdown with the Chinese. While the Japanese know, in such a fight, China will obliterate them.

But the prophet from the Shire has wandered into all this, unable to comprehend the vector forces of the subtleties at play, when Australian foreign policy had the complete capacity to manage relations between China and the United States, as we have done so successfully for decades before.

Personally, I singlehandedly talked two American presidents into sitting down annually with the president of China, the prime minister of Japan and the president of Indonesia and in China's case, persuading them to sit beside the representatives of Taiwan and Hong Kong. That is what I did in developing the APEC Leaders' Meeting. Could you imagine Morrison or Payne or the growling policeman from Queensland achieving such a thing? But now, according to Payne, I am not up to date, I am too long out of it, a relic of a bygone age. Well, I might be, but one thing I am not – an Australian defeatist who, at the first sign of tension would sell the country out to another power.

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