

# China less of a threat to democracy than the mainstream media

By William Briggs

8 March 2023



The mainstream media continues to beat the drums of war, ignoring the real issues affecting the nation (Image via [Twitter/@QuentinDempster](https://twitter.com/QuentinDempster))

**The mainstream press is unashamedly beating the drums of war while deliberately turning away from what is actually happening, economically and politically in the region, writes Dr [William Briggs](#).**

[THE AGE](#) and [The Sydney Morning Herald](#), with their ill-considered trumpet-blasting call to arms against China, have crossed a line between journalism and propagandism. That line has become more and more narrow as the anti-China hysteria has been whipped up, but this effort would warm the cockles of [Goebbels](#)' black heart.

'Red Alert', with its lurid title filled the pages of the two papers and ran for three full days. One of the key figures behind this "alert" is [Peter Jennings](#). He was the executive director of the Right-wing Australian Strategic Policy Institute ([ASPI](#)) for the last ten years.

This influential group pours out its views and advice on a daily basis in its dubious online journal, [The Strategist](#). It is a guide to government, but is tireless in its promotion of anti-China rhetoric, advocates for continued arms build-ups and readiness for war. [Peter Hartcher](#), political and international editor for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, has provided the key journalistic input into this "work".

Wars are started by political forces and almost inevitably have an economic focus. Wars need soldiers but without a propaganda machine that successfully wins the hearts and minds of the people, wars would be inconceivable. The role of the media is vital. A simple message is repeated and in Goebbels' world, a lie, if big enough and repeated loudly enough, will be believed. That is what is happening with China today.

[John Pilger](#) once [interviewed](#) one of Hitler's chief propagandists, the filmmaker [Leni Riefenstahl](#). She told him that the patriotic messages of her films were dependent not on orders from above, but on what she called the "submissive void" of the German public. This is enormously significant. After a time, we simply lose the capacity to question.

Soon after winning his Nobel Prize for Literature, playwright and author [Harold Pinter](#) eloquently pointed out that *"the brainwashing is so thorough; we are programmed to swallow a pack of lies. If we don't recognise propaganda, we may accept it as normal and believe it. That's the submissive void"*.

The assault that was launched by *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* cannot be regarded as journalism, despite the rather pompous stance that

it assumed.

*The Age* editorial of 7 March declared:

*'In publishing the Red Alert series, The Age believes that discussing Australia's level of preparedness for war is responsible journalism and important for democracy... we simply wish to bring the public along with us in understanding the questions that confront our nation.'*

This 'responsible' journalism uses the most inflammatory language and puts a date to be ready for war at three years. The editorial speaks of understanding questions but none of the Red Alert team or many within mainstream journalism seem prepared to ask questions. The most pressing of these might be, what has China actually done to make it such a threat? Where is the evidence of this threat? How are we endangered by China? Why has the USA declared China to be such an enemy that it felt obliged to deploy [60%](#) of its fleet and air force to the region some years ago in order to "contain" China?

These same 'responsible' journalists might, if they looked, see a link between U.S. threat perceptions about China and the phenomenal rise of China's economic power. They might see, with a sense of alarm, that many countries are prepared to view the success of China as something that might bring benefit.

While the Red Alert warriors were pouring vitriol onto paper, they might have paused to acknowledge the most recent economic news coming out of Beijing. The global economy is teetering on the abyss, but [China's economy](#) has righted itself and is set to record a growth rate of more than 5%. This is lower than it used to be, but no Western economy comes close to such a figure.

Inflation continues to ravage the entire Western world. The [inflation rate for China](#) remains below 2%. That low rate meant that [real wages rose in China](#) by about 6% in 2022 and a similar rise is

expected this year. We all know the story of declining wages in the west due to inflation.

The average real rate of [GDP growth in China since 2008](#) has been 7.6% *per annum*. The figure for the U.S. for the same period is just 1.7%.

When all of this has been going on, 800 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty.

All of these figures keep U.S. leaderships awake at night and make 'responsible' journalists work harder to demonise China. This is not said in any sense of proclaiming that the East is Red or that internal policies of the Chinese Government are beyond criticism. Certainly not. But, regardless of how anybody might feel about internal domestic policies, it does not alter the fact that China is not now and never has been a threat. The same cannot be said for our American ally.

None of those figures and economic statistics are difficult to come by. They are all on the public record. They are not the work of the Chinese propaganda machine or of any "fellow traveller" in the West. These figures and the truths they represent are routinely ignored, glossed over and misrepresented by a media that is first and foremost part of a propaganda war to ensure the continued hegemony of the United States.

The lack of integrity of so much of the media should concern us all. So few voices are raised against the lies and deceptions being enacted on a daily basis. There are virtually no voices in the mainstream media that are prepared to speak out. They cannot. The propaganda machine that they serve has made such reporting impossible. We are left with a version of the official line. That is not journalism. That is not reporting.

Those who speak out are so easily reviled and sidelined. Leni Riefenstahl's "submissive void" has all but stopped free thought. It is time to think, speak and refuse to submit.

**[Dr William Briggs](#) is a political economist. His**

***special areas of interest lie in political theory and international political economy. He has been, variously, a teacher, journalist and political activist.***