



## **Prof. Kuznick: China Balloon Incident & the Missing Context of US Provocations**

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza and today I will be talking to professor of history and the director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at the American University, Professor Peter Kuznick. Peter Kuznick also co-authored a book with Hollywood film director and producer Oliver Stone called 'The Untold History of the United States'. We've done extensive interviews on 'The Untold History of the United States', so if you missed that, be sure to check the link in the description. Peter Kuznick, thank you so much for your time today.

**Peter Kuznick (PK):** Glad to be with you.

**ZR:** Last year, US trade relations took a hit when Nancy Pelosi, serving as the speaker of the House of Representatives, visited Taiwan. Then tensions seemed to ease a little bit when President Biden and President Xi Jinping of China met in Bali and underscored that both countries must work together to address transnational challenges such as climate change. The two leaders agreed to empower key senior officials to maintain communications and also deepen constructive efforts on issues facing humanity. Now, relations have taken a strong hit as a balloon, which the Pentagon claims is a surveillance device, entered the US and was shut down later. China claims it was just a meteorological device intended for research purposes and that the US is overreacting by shooting it down. How do you assess the situation and what significance does it have on US-China relations?

**PK:** The biggest consequence really is that Anthony Blinken, the US Secretary of state, canceled his trip to China. And he was supposed to meet with Wang Yi, he was supposed to meet with other Chinese officials, including Xi Jinping. That would have been a very important positive step in trying to ease relationships between the two countries. The

relations are terrible right now. Both sides see it in very, very different ways. The United States looks at China as an aggressive power that's trying to establish hegemony over much of the Pacific. China is already the biggest trading partner of almost every country in the region and many countries in other parts of the world. So the US sees it as its principal security threat. And the US has been doing everything it can to contain China. So the US has declared a trade war against China. The US has banned selling microchips to China, thinking that it could slow down Chinese weapons and other advanced technological developments. The United States has been increasing its military presence throughout the region. We established the quad, which includes India. Let's look at the situation overall from the Chinese perspective. The United States is being very aggressive. It's working closely with the new Yoon government in South Korea. Now, much of that seems to be a confrontation with North Korea and possibly partly a response to North Korea's heightened missile tests over the past year. But it's also directed toward China. So that's been a collaboration. Yoon is extremely right wing, increasingly unpopular inside South Korea. But as he becomes more unpopular domestically, he becomes closer to the United States. So unlike the previous Moon Jae-in administration, which reached out to North Korea in a friendly way, South Korea has been increasing its military operations with the United States and seemingly more alarmingly, toward China, China and North Korea. Now we've got the situation in Japan. We're Kishida, the Japanese Prime Minister, also very unpopular, effectively going to double Japan's military spending. So Article nine in Japan's peace constitution, which is the bedrock of Japan's international role in post-World War Two, denying the legitimacy of any offensive nuclear forces, that already is a dead letter. Even though many, much of the Japanese public still wants to retain it, it is mostly window dressing. Because the reality is that Japan will then have the third biggest military in the world and is working on interoperability with the United States military and saying it is going to come to United States support if something happens in Taiwan. So that's the second leg of this. The third leg, we can look at what just happened with the Philippines. So back in October, the United States announced it was giving \$100 million to the Philippine military. Just this past week, the United States announced that it's going to have use of nine bases in the Philippines. They can't officially become American bases because that would go against the Philippine constitution. But it is very real that the United States could be able to use those bases to send US troops there. That's very, very close to what? Taiwan! Meanwhile, the United States continues its troop build up in Okinawa and tightens its relations with Taiwan. So you began by talking about Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and the Chinese response to that. Well, Kevin McCarthy also says he's going to visit Taiwan. The Chinese are furious about that. So why would the United States deliberately inflame the situation with Taiwan again? Well, that's what's happening. In addition, if we look at some of these other things that are going on in terms of the United States and China; US Air Force General Minihan, less than two weeks now said that the United States and China will likely be at war in 2025. What is this guy talking about? And he says, let me give you an exact quote, if I can find it, because he says there about how wonderful it will be... He says: "Lethality matters most. When you can kill your enemy, every part of your life is better, your food tastes better, your marriage is stronger." This is exactly this insanity that we heard from

General Jack the Ripper in Dr. Strangelove. Okay. So your sex life is going to be better if you can kill more Chinese in this war. But the United States is preparing to be able to do that. And what does the United States look at? China's nuclear policy was always lean and effective. The idea that 200 Chinese nuclear missiles would be sufficient as a deterrent against a United States attack. And at one point against a Russian attack, but now they're close friends again. But then, according to the Pentagon, China doubled its nuclear capabilities, went from 200 to 400 missiles, new intercontinental ballistic missiles last year. The Pentagon is projecting that China will have a thousand nuclear weapons by 2030 and 1500 by 2035. So the US official projection is that China is trying to build toward nuclear parity with Russia and the United States. What do they base this on? They base it on the fact that China now has 20 missile silos, but that China is in the process of building 300 more missile silos. The US assumption is that China is going to put a missile in each one of those silos and probably three nuclear warheads on each missile. And that's how they get to this projection. We know that historically, throughout the Cold War, the US intelligence was inflating this idea of threat inflation. The US was dramatically inflating the number of missiles, of weapons that the Soviets had, that the Chinese had; we know about the missile gap based on completely bogus intelligence. And that's probably what's happening again. But we don't know. There's not a lot of transparency. But what China sees is the US increasingly tightening relations with China and encouraging other US allies to do the same with Taiwan, tightening relations with Taiwan, increasingly going against its one China policy. You know, the idea, according to the agreements the US has, is that we recognize there is only one China and that Beijing is the capital of this China. And we maintain this, pose a strategic ambiguity as to what we're going to do if China goes to war with Taiwan, if China tries to retake Taiwan, which it considers part of China. But Biden has said on several different occasions that the US will militarily come to China's assistance if war breaks out. So unlike in Ukraine, where the US is not directly getting involved- it's a US proxy war- in China the US is threatening that it will. And then Biden walks it back each time. But the signal is quite clear and alarming to the Chinese. So the Chinese see the West preparing for war. The Chinese see the West tightening this vise around China's neck, building up all these military assets to contain China. And China says, Well, we need to be in a position where we have to make it clear that even if the US strikes China first, then China will have the ability to retaliate and enough missiles to get past America's missile defense. Nobody believes America's missile defense is really going to be effective against a first strike by China or Russia. But what they believe is that if the US strikes first and knocks out most of those Russian or Chinese missiles, then China will have enough of a second force to retaliate, is what they're hoping. But they see the US increasing its surveillance, the US increasing its technological military capabilities, because, again, it's a world in which not only is China modernizing and expanding its nuclear arsenal, all nine nuclear powers are modernizing their nuclear arsenals. Russia went in first because when the US abrogated the ABM Treaty in 2002, Russia says, Well, all bets are off. And they began modernizing. And on March 1st, 2018, Putin announced that Russia now has five new nuclear weapons, all of which can circumvent US missile defense. Well, the United States has been modernizing, also. Beginning in 2010, when the US signed the New START Treaty,

Obama promised we were going to modernize every aspect of our nuclear arsenal and our delivery systems. And so what has the United States been doing? Exactly that. And they're in the process right now spending \$2 trillion to do it. So the Minuteman ICBM is being replaced by the new Sentinel ICBM, far more capable. The Ohio-class sub is being replaced by the Columbia-class sub, much more capable. B-2s and B-52 bombers are being replaced by B-21 Raider Stealth bombers, under construction as well. Lots of money being poured into missile defense to improve that as well. So the United States is on this vast modernization program and trying to catch up to Russia and perhaps China and hypersonics also. And so China sees this and they see how hostile the United States is, and they see that Biden came to office, now breaking with Trump's aggressive policy toward China, doubling down on it, instead reinforcing it. Biden was there when Obama, or Hillary Clinton for Obama in November 2011, announced that the United States is going to have this Asia pivot and we're going to pivot toward China as the main enemy. In 2018, the US new security strategy says that the main threat to America's security is no longer international terrorism. It's Russia and China. And then Biden comes to office, surrounds himself with 18 top advisers from the Center for a New American Security; these are the China hawks. And so what we're seeing now is this growing sentiment in the US: Get Ukraine over with so we can focus on the real goal and that's stopping, that's containing China. And which is what Biden wanted to do from the beginning. So I'm not sure that they are going to abandon Ukraine so quickly- we'll talk about that. But the balloon that you began the question with, there's so much spying that goes on. We have got these low flying satellites that gather intelligence on each other all the time. So what is the point of this? It's a mystery. We don't know. But domestically, Biden has got to act like a tough guy, right? Because even when he shot down this balloon, the Republicans are already claiming he's so weak, he should have shut it down immediately. Donald Trump screaming: "Oh, we should have shot it down", just shows how inept, how weak Biden is. Biden knew he had to be a tough, macho guy or else he'd be pummeled by the Republicans and by US media. And so he gave the order on Wednesday to shoot it down. They shot it down on Saturday when it went over the water. But the Republicans are still saying this is evidence of how weak he is. That's what the dialog is in the US. It's crazy. It's ridiculous. And the media is very, very complicit in all of this. That it gives the Chinese any new intelligence? Maybe the tiniest bit of intelligence, but nobody took it very, very seriously as an intelligence threat or as a military threat. Why the Chinese keep doing this? That's another question that I don't have the answer to. But it did sabotage these very, very important high level negotiations between Blinken and his Chinese counterparts and Xi Jinping. We know what happened two years ago, two years ago next month, when Blinken and Sullivan met with Chinese top officials in Anchorage, in Alaska. And it was a disaster. So there has not been real high-level talks between the US and China. Biden and Xi Jinping did talk in Bali in November, and that was a first step. We need so much more dialogue, especially in this situation, because the possibility of misunderstanding and now provocations of the US sending McCarthy to Taiwan and then the Chinese again, the PRC again, will increase their flights and their surveillance and their buzzing of Taiwanese airspace. The dangers are quite, quite substantial.

**ZR:** The question begs, given all of what you've explained, the aggressive posture of the United States in surrounding China in its own backyard, that China might be doing this. But why did the US simply not capture this balloon and present it to the international community to evaluate what it actually was? Because it seems that the US is perhaps justifying its expansion and the media is parroting all of this 24/7 without even providing a bit of context like you are doing.

**PK:** I know there's no context in the media at all. I mean, that's part of the problem with the American media. It is being posed as another act of Chinese aggression. Just like China's actions in the South China Sea are construed as aggression, just as the Chinese treatment of the Uyghurs is construed as genocide. Just as the crackdown on political rights in Hong Kong is seen as Chinese repression. Xi Jinping is not quite viewed as negatively as Vladimir Putin is in the United States, but he's a close second. And there is no understanding of the Chinese standpoint. The Chinese economy was growing at an unbelievable record pace. Many, many times faster than the United States ever grew, that Britain ever grew, that Germany ever grew, that India, any country. And the United States saw the prognostication was that China would, before very long, surpass the US in terms of economic strength. And the United States decided it had to slow that down. China sees that as a direct threat, a US effective declaration of war. And NATO, which I didn't mention before, has also been expanding. NATO has been saying in its recent statements that it has to be dealing with China as well. Why is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization dealing with China as an enemy or a threat? I mean, this is a sign of growing US hegemony and militarization of the planet. I don't like a lot of things China is doing. I'm not saying that China is innocent in all of this. I would love to see a less aggressive stance by China in the South China Sea. I would love to see a more open policy toward the Uyghurs. That is, there hasn't been nearly as much discussion of that recently, which makes me think that maybe that is easing a little bit. I don't like to see that kind of repression. I would like to see much more democracy inside China. You know, 300 million surveillance cameras. What are they so afraid of? But that's the reality in China and I can't control what China does. But from the standpoint of the world and this ramping up of tensions globally that I do have some say about and that I'm condemning as the US being the number one initiator of this. And China, for understandable reasons, abandoning- you know, China still has a no first use policy when it comes to nuclear weapons. The US and Russia should adopt the same. But it is developing a launch on warning approach. And, you know, and it's just getting more dangerous as it's responding to what it sees as an existential threat being posed by the West.

**ZR:** Peter Kuznick, author and professor of history, thank you so much for your time today.

**PK:** Thank you, Zain.

**ZR:** And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube is no longer recommending our videos to our own viewers, like they used to a few years ago. So if you want our information to reach you, be sure to join us on these platforms. The links are in the description below. And also to donate if you're getting value and if you're building your own perspective on these issues, then make sure to return the value by donating just a few dollars or euros a month via a Patreon, PayPal or bank account. I am your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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