

# JOHN ANDREWS

Contributing Editor to *The Economist* and *Project Syndicate*

**Douglas Paal, Distinguished Fellow at the Asia Program Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, former Senior Director of Asian Affairs and Special Assistant to the President in the US National Security Council**

Why do we not start with John?

## John Andrews

There is absolutely no doubt that the UK will do whatever the US wants. If you go back to the days of – we have had lots of Prime Ministers recently – but, if you go back to the days of David Cameron, the idea then was a golden era of relations between the UK and China. That golden era is now long gone. Britain caved into American pressure over Huawei.

When I say ‘caved in’, I mean, that is a pejorative phrase and I think, in the end, probably the security people in the UK were happy to have their arms twisted.

I mean, basically, the UK is always going to follow the US lead and I think that is also true, essentially, of all the countries in NATO. I think, if you look at China, the People’s Republic, and the USA, the fact is that the US has lots of allies but China has lots of trade partners.

I was shocked the other day when Carl Bildt pointed out that there are only 20 countries in the UN who name the US as their number one trading partner. Essentially, that means Canada; Mexico; a few Caribbean islands and so on. Whereas, if you take the reverse, you take how many countries name China as their lead trading partner, it is at least 120.

If you were to look at the sort of rivalry as a potential conflict, then you are tempted to use the phrase ‘might is right’. Well, how do you define ‘might’? Is it economic pressure, economic links; or is it military pressure, military links? That may be something that we can get involved in later.

However, I think what lies behind your question, Douglas, is, if push comes to shove, which way will countries, what choice will countries make? Of course, none of the countries want to have that choice – they want to avoid it. I think common sense should indicate that the choice never has to be made, but that is what we are saying now with the benefit of common sense. Common sense does not always work. You look at, you have the First World War; Second World War, and so on.

I think that if you look around the world at the moment, if you take NATO out and say, ‘Okay, all the NATO members will follow an American lead’, if you look at Africa – I mean, there are now something like 10 000 Chinese firms operating in Africa – you have got the Chinese



military base in Djibouti; you have got potential bases also and I think China now is developing something like 50 different ports in Africa. That is not necessarily a bad thing.

If you take the whole BRI initiative – which is obviously not just Africa, it is Europe; and Central Asia, and so on – that really does bring real influence to bear. The downside of that, of course, is that you get a sort of debt imperialism. If you take Sri Lanka, for example, the Rajapaksa government went into some dodgy deal and has suffered for it. However, it means that the main port is now basically taken over by China.

If you take Greece, when I was in Athens last week, I mean, Piraeus – one of the best ports in Europe – is now Chinese-owned, effectively. It works very, very efficiently; very effectively.

Therefore, one should not see this in a Manichean way. There are reasons why countries should accept largess from China – but the largess also does come with some strings attached.

I thought it was interesting that Xi Jinping is maybe even now still in Saudi Arabia. I mean, they may be leaving tonight, I am not sure when. Perhaps he is waiting for the soccer matches to finish in Qatar, but Xi Jinping is making good friends with Saudi Arabia and really with the whole Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Remember that Saudi Arabia has been a faithful American ally really since the foundation, 1932 – so, we are talking 90 years. Now, that is all up for grabs.

I do not want to ramble on too much, but I think that Africa really does not want to make this choice, and I do not think it really has to. It can be independent.

A much more difficult choice, I think, is in South-East Asia and South Asia. I mean, Pakistan is, I think, really in hock to China, thanks to the CPEC – the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. If you take the countries of South-East Asia, they all depend on China for their trading links, their economic growth.

The challenge will be over Taiwan and what may happen there. I am actually fairly optimistic. I do not think Xi Jinping is a madman – nor incidentally do I think Vladimir Putin is a madman. However, you cannot really meditate too much against what can happen when people make decisions which then lead to other consequences.

I think we – when I say 'we', I sort of mean the West here – I think we were lulled into complacency in the era of Deng Xiaoping; and that carried on with Jiang Zemin; and with Hu Jintao. I think, with Xi, it is a different ballgame and we do not really know how to assess him; how to treat him. I think that means that the possibility of miscalculation does exist.

A final thought – if there were a war, remember that American military really is battle-hardened. Therefore, if there were a war between China and the States, regardless of who is on what side, I suspect America would win. However, that is sort of a catastrophic concept which I do not think is going to happen.

One lesson I think that Xi has taken from the Ukraine war is that the American military, and NATO in general – but especially the American military – is really very, very good. I suspect



that, if you look at the Chinese military, even though it has invested an enormous amount into modernizing the military – the navy is supposedly now bigger than America’s navy – nonetheless, it does not have much battle experience, and what it has had has been pretty poor. For example, in Vietnam.

Let me leave it there.

**Douglas Paal**

Thank you, John. I think there are a number of things I would like to probe on that.