

# Australian Icon EXPOSES Real Threat Is USA | John Menadue

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## #M1

There is no sign, in my view, that China is a threat. But it's the basis on which so much consideration and debate rests in Australia. China has not had a war for over 40 years. It had a border skirmish with Vietnam, teaching Vietnam a lesson, I think, in 1979, and since then has not been involved other than occasional border skirmishes. In that time, America has had war after war after war.

## #M2

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies, and today I'm talking to John Menadue, one of Australia's most prolific publishers and public figures. Born in 1935, John worked in Australian media, served as head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet from 1974 to 76, and was Australia's ambassador to Japan from 1977 to 1980. He was appointed head of the Department of Trade in December 1983, and after returning to the private sector, he became the CEO of Qantas airline from 1986 to 1989. After several more positions in and out of government, John founded the influential public policy journal Pearls and Irritations at [johnmenadue.com](http://johnmenadue.com) in January 2013, on which he's now publishing, together with his colleagues, various reports and critical analysis on current affairs. John, it's a great honor having you online. Welcome.

## #M1

Thank you very much, Pascal.

## #M2

John, you've been active in politics, active in business, and you have a lot of memories about how international politics used to work ever since the '60s, I suppose. How do you make sense of the current state of affairs in Australia, but also in the world, and generally just the West as we know it?

## **#M1**

My concern goes back quite a way. I was very active as a student in opposition to White Australia and our lack of interest and competence in dealing with Asia, which was our nearest neighbor. We're a settler colonial country, first dependent upon the United Kingdom and later the United States. And we've seen what I often call the Americanization of Australia on so many fronts, not just military, but in many other areas as well. From those early days and working with Gough Whitlam, I developed an interest in what the media was doing and, frankly, was pretty disappointed with it. I worked with Rupert Murdoch for seven years. In what I call his better days, I managed his Sydney operations, and it was quite exciting.

Rupert was open to new ideas. He was in South Australia and, in fact, a thorn in the side of the Adelaide establishment, and he went on to establish The Australian. So I've been interested in the media, I guess, ever since, and particularly in recent years, with trying to come to terms with our own region. We are more intent in almost everything we do to draw upon our history with the UK and, more recently, the United States, than establishing relations with our own region. And of course, that's now almost reached debacle point with the Trump administration. But we are tied so much, both major parties, to the American coattails, it'll be very hard to pull back. It is so deep-seated, but I think there might be a way in the future.

The prospects at our next election are that the third-party vote will be much higher and will keep growing. We used to have about 90% of Australians voting for the two major parties, the Labor Party, which I've traditionally always supported, and the Conservative Coalition. About 90%. But now their vote is down to about two-thirds, 65%, 66%. And so third parties are growing. And I think they're going to be very important come the next election on issues such as our relationship with the United States and, I guess, more locally, the concern of our Palestinian Muslim communities about what's happening in Gaza. So that broadly, I think, describes the political scene.

It's not very encouraging at the moment and requires some strong leadership. We had it in the past. John Curtin in the early 1940s decided that a major change was necessary, that we could no longer rely on the United Kingdom to look after us in the attacks by, invasions possible by Japan. And he, in fact, made it clear that we had to look to America for guidance, for protecting us in the future. And at that point in time, he was probably convinced. Right. And I think we're looking for new leadership now that will grasp the nettle and decide that we have to be more independent and less reliant on the United States. That's, I think, the central problem we face politically and internationally.

## **#M2**

I had previously Professor Hugh White on this channel and also an ambassador, and probably, I suppose you know him, Geoff Raby, who both said very similar things to you. It's like Australia's and New Zealand's failure to integrate into their own region and realize that they are, you know, kind of the southernmost tip of Southeast Asia. I mean, it goes all the way down there, right? This is clearly one geographical region. And both of them also come to the conclusion that Australia, particularly, is very much afraid, irrationally afraid of being abandoned by the US, by the UK, to which they feel closer, much, much closer than, let's say, to Indonesia or Malaysia. Do you see it that way as well? And where... Is it only history that explains that and the settler colonial experience? But if we look at the mix, the ethnic mix of Australia at the moment, there should be more history, right, and more preferences on the ground, shouldn't there?

## **#M1**

That's right. We're still a frightened country. We're frightened of our region. And being a settler colonial country, we look to former empires, the United Kingdom, and now the United States for protection. There's a high degree, historically, of racism in that. The yellow peril, being frightened of Asia. And that's the origin of White Australia, which we had in this country for about 100 years, just frightened of Asia, that we're a small Europe, or we were a small European community, very vulnerable, frightened of our own region.

So we've always looked for an outside protector, and that's the central issue that we face now. How are we going to break out of that, be more independent, recover our sovereignty, and play a much more active role—not an overbearing role—in our own region, particularly with Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world on our doorstep and more important to us strategically than any other country in the world? But we still are frightened. We want to cling to an outsider.

## **#M2**

And this mentality, actually, it's more a psychological problem, isn't it, than it is a real strategic problem? Because, I mean, Indonesia has no ill intentions toward Australia, nor do Japan or ASEAN countries. You have to go to a very far stretch of the imagination to think that China would have ill intentions. Now, China has maritime forces, but the view that China will go all the way down, skip all of ASEAN, and go and occupy Australia is very far-fetched. Where is that psychological discomfort coming from?

## **#M1**

I mentioned it. I think it comes initially from racism, being frightened of the yellow peril, and then later attacks of a political strategic form. So there's a history for it. We're slowly growing out of it. We were once a white European country. Now, of course, we have had massive refugee flows and migration from Asia and, of course, before that, Italians and Greeks from Europe. We are not the British outpost that we used to be because our population has changed quite dramatically, and

White Australia has been abolished. So things are changing. It would change more quickly if we became a republic and could drop the Queen as our head of state.

That keeps a sentimental attachment to the United Kingdom. But I think there are some changes in attitude, but it is still ingrained now because of what I described as the Americanisation of Australia. We just rely so much on the United States, and we think and act in regard to what America's interests would be. The American media is reflected in our media. They frame our attitudes by continually projecting American views and news out of Washington, influenced by their agencies, which, of course, influence the Washington Post and New York Times.

And we still rely on our media from those outlets. Our papers are full of material from the United Kingdom and, more recently, of course, the United States. That's a major problem. Adding to it, we have Rupert Murdoch, who used to be an Australian citizen and is now an American citizen. He owns, in terms of broadsheet readership in the morning, newsprint and newspapers, over 60% of news outlets in Australia. So we have a major problem with the Americanisation of our media. Our major companies, like the Commonwealth Bank, are very largely American-owned.

Our resource companies, RTZ and BHP, are largely American-owned. Our culture and our films come not exclusively, but a large amount, out of the United States. Our politicians will invariably line up with the United States in every situation. They reflect being frightened of the region, and they assume that their voters are frightened of the region, so they play to that, to the anti-China industry, which is so rabid at times in Australia. The threat from China is like a dodgy butcher putting a sly hand on the scales when he's weighing meat. He always wants a view and response that's favorable to the anti-China group. And it's there almost every day in our media, and it is followed. There is no sign, in my view, that China is a threat.

But it's the base on which so much consideration and debate rests in Australia. China has not had a war for over 40 years. It had a border skirmish with Vietnam, I think, in 1969. Since then, it's not been involved other than in occasional border skirmishes. In that time, America has had war after war after war. China's got enough problems domestically and economically. Its 1.4 billion population has land borders with 14 countries. It wants to attend to those concerns and interests. There is nothing in the history of China, unlike the United States, that suggests they are going to imitate the United States as their own power grows increasingly year by year.

But unfortunately, Australia and others, and Americans, keep what I call sort of looking out of the rear vision mirror and assuming that this coming Chinese power will grow and will act internationally like we have, like the Americans, with the Monroe Doctrine: keep out of our space. We're going to have 800 bases around the world, but don't you dare intrude into our space. Colonial empire. So we have a fabricated view of China and that threat. We clearly have to be mindful and careful in relations with all countries, and particularly China, which is growing rapidly in military power, although nowhere near the scale of the United States. So we need to be aware and establish our own independence and protect our own sovereignty, which we are not doing at the moment.

## **#M2**

You have a beautiful way of putting these things. And I want to go to the whole media situation in a moment. But you're touching upon something that's very dear to me, which is this propensity of not just Australia, but of Europe as well and the United States too, to on the one hand claim and portray themselves as being done with racism, being done with colonialism and having gotten over, you know, autocratic tendencies, all while still admiring the queen or the king, all while still implementing neocolonial policies left and right, wherever they can establish dominance over foreign countries. And of course, the race question seems to be still at the heart of a lot of foreign policy and of psychological fears, right, about the other.

Now, on top of that, this projection of the self—what we did, the reason Australia today is the outcome of a white settler colonial enterprise—the fear of somebody else imitating that and projecting that fear onto China, all while proclaiming that that's not what's happening, that something else is going on, nefarious foreign forces. Is it a failure of us, white Europeans, to reconcile with our own bloody history and recognize the damage we have done that causes this? Or how do you explain this? Because these are facts like China: 40 years, no major wars—skirmishes, yes, but no major wars. These are these blunt facts that then the other side will laugh at and will call you an ideologue or me an ideologue for being so narrow-sighted as to not see what a big threat that is, all while ignoring the 40 years, 50 years, 80 years of constant warfare on the other side, just explaining it away.

## **#M1**

I think the West, including Australia, has a moral or a belief in moral ascendancy, that we have better values, more attractive values, perhaps stemming from the Enlightenment. And they were great experiences and determining interests for Australia and other countries. I think the West has contributed quite a great deal. But unfortunately, it is largely ignorant and prefers to be that way about the challenges in the Global South and in Asia. We are finding it very hard to come to terms with these countries that are different from us and, in some instances, maybe have superior institutions. They certainly have very different histories. I think that's a major problem, that we see ourselves as superior.

I think it shows very much at the moment in the Middle East, in Gaza, 50,000 people. Palestinians killed, probably many more than that still under the rubble, at least not that number, but over 50,000 killed, hundreds of thousands injured, their country almost razed to the ground, their buildings, but yet we stand back from that. It obviously seems to be a racism in that, that somehow Christian white people are more valuable than brown Muslims. I think Gaza shows that dramatically, that superiority that we have towards people that are different. It's shameful and disgraceful. But I think that's the epitome and illustrates most graphically how we see other people. That will need to change, but the change is coming very slowly.

## **#M2**

It's just so incredibly sad because many people, not all, but many in Europe and North America, are unable to perceive this part of global reality and how international relations work. This feeds into the continuous trajectory of using and wanting to use violence in order to resolve problems, anything that stands in the way of this morally good way. We see this now in Europe, where they are re-arming or talking about re-arming.

The Germans, for the first time, are not afraid anymore to talk about needing strong leadership, you know, because the word "leader," of course, carries in German that horrible connotation going back to Adolf Hitler. But they're not afraid of that anymore. And they're not afraid of talking about, you know, needing to re-arm because now they feel justified and will protect Germany. And usually what the Europeans do when they say that is they go outside. They protect themselves by going to Afghanistan, by going to Iraq. They protect themselves by going anywhere in the world and calling others enemies. Are you afraid of that as well?

## **#M1**

It is very worrying, but we shouldn't despair. Graham Greene's comment that the only unforgivable sin is despair. And there are good reasons to despair at the present time, but we mustn't allow it to overcome us. There are people concerned about the sorts of issues that you and I are discussing in every country. They're in Australia, Germany, the Middle East. People are concerned, but their institutions, their leadership is not serving them. So we've got to hang in there, although it's pretty tough going at the moment and very disappointing on so many fronts. But there is that group, that core of people concerned throughout the world. And countries like China, for example, are showing a much more sensible attitude than I think the West and America are at the present time.

I think what could change that situation? I remember, it must have been about the 1960s, Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, was asked, well, what really determines how you govern and what happens? And he said, "Events, my boy, events." And I think there's a lot of truth in that. And the event now could be Trump. The view, I think, probably characterizes the bit as sort of blow the place up and see where the pieces fall. Hopefully, the pieces fall in the right places. But he is such a disgrace in so many respects. But I think his approach to the present system needs shaking up. I hope that the pieces fall in the correct places, as I mentioned.

But it's interesting in Australia, as a result of Trump, there has been, in the recent poll that I've seen by the Australia Institute, a quite significant shift in attitudes. More Australians believe that Putin and Xi are less war-minded than Trump. Trump was regarded as a great threat to peace, and Putin and Xi trailed off behind that. I think 45% of Australians thought that we should reduce our dependence on the United States and be more independent. These are only occasional or first signs of change,

but Trump could just be the element that will shape the system, the event, as Harold Macmillan said, that will change things, hopefully for the better. We can't be certain of that, but there may be some positive signs out of Trump yet.

## **#M2**

And I suppose what you mean is not just the people who believe that Donald Trump is doing right, but also the people who think that what he's doing is wrong, that he's shaking both of these groups up enough. Because, again, the lunacy of the moment is, of course, that Donald Trump is the president, the guy and the candidate who has been saying and still says, I want peace. I want peace. I want peace. I want to bring peace. And he is now regarded as the warmonger because what he does is he negotiates by threatening others, whereas Mr. Biden and a lot of the Democrats have been saying, well, we will do war and we will implement whatever we want. But they cushioned it into lovely, fluffy, cute rhetoric, right? And somehow that stuck, didn't it?

## **#M1**

I think, as I mentioned, the Trump event will have, and is already having, results internationally. I think it will also have results domestically in the United States, that they might shake their complacency, excuse me for saying it, but their ignorance on so many matters that America is great, it's going to be great again. Well, it's not going to be great again. And all the evidence is that the growing inequality, racism, and reduction of domestic programs, people in the United States hopefully—there'll be that core of people who will, in fact, not suddenly, but come to the view that things have got to change in the United States.

That's not there at the moment by any means, with a very disappointing Democratic Party and a Trump administration, or the takeover of the Republican Party. But I think what he's doing will shake up the United States domestically, and I hope that will produce a better outcome domestically for the American people. But it's early days yet. I think that shake-up, internationally and domestically, could have some pluses, despite all the unsavory features of the Trump administration.

## **#M2**

I very much also appreciate that you said we must not despair because there are always things we can do. One of the things that's going on, and that you've been working on for a long time, and that I am working on, is to inject viewpoints into the public discourse through publishing and broadcasting. Can you maybe speak to how you view the change of the big media houses and the media sphere in, let's say, Australia, but maybe more generally also in the West? Somehow, my impression is that the public space, the media space, used to be more open, used to have more viewpoints, used to compare more, and used to analyze more, whereas now we are in a very narrow point of publishable analysis. Is that perception correct, or do you view it differently?

## **#M1**

It's certainly correct that the traditional legacy media are contracting. Their advertising revenues are falling, their readership is falling. More independent media, although small, such as Pearls and Irritations, are growing. Social media is growing, and more and more people go to social media for their news and information, which is pretty risky, by the way. I think that anyhow it's happening. In the United States, we see now that the Washington Post has decided its editorial policy that it wouldn't support the Democratic Party at the last election. Bezos is clearly instructing what the company can do.

Journalists are leaving, and the New York Times will be the same. Murdoch is clinging on, of course, with Fox, pursuing his right-wing disruptive agenda. So the modern legacy media, or what I call the white man's media, is contracting, and it will continue to do so. That's why independent media, such as us and many others, are slowly filling in the vacuum. What we would like, of course, though we're not quite sure how to do it, is that we're, I think, a successful niche publication. But how do we break out into a larger audience and readership? I think our influence is growing, opinion leaders...

## **#M1**

We've still got a long job ahead of us. My wife and I started Pearls and Irritations about 13 years ago as a blog. We did all the work ourselves. I wrote the stories, and my wife handled all the production, technical, and financial matters. So we've grown from a very small operation, but we're delighted—and in some senses concerned—that we've been able to pick up market share. Writers write for us without pay. We're a different model. But we know that there are a large number of people out there concerned, as we are, about the trends in public life and media in Australia. We're not despairing, and neither are they. But we've got a big job ahead of us.

## **#M2**

But we won't give up. Why is it, in your opinion, that maybe in the 1970s and 80s, it was possible to publish a lot of these individual analyses and opinions in the large newspapers and have them, you know, cover this? How was it possible that somebody like Seymour Hersh in the US was completely able to work in mainstream media back in the day, and today it's not possible anymore? How did that political process of weeding out alternative analysis take place?

## **#M1**

I think the major impetus or trigger at the beginning was social media. The powerful role that it played with younger people who were technically equipped, and they went to social media in millions, hundreds of millions. And that affected the advertising revenue of the traditional white man's media or legacy media, like the New York Times, Washington Post, and in the United Kingdom, the Times, and others. So I think that was the trigger. Social media caused advertising



revenue to fall off. They cut back on journalists. The quality of their content deteriorated, so they lost readership. And then other media, smaller media, niche media have come in.

But I think it was social media that was really the trigger that started the decline of Western media. Many people just shunned it now that it is so reflective of business interests and security intelligence interests in the United States. It seems like musical chairs for senior people in the security industry, upon retirement, to go and work for the New York Times, NBC, CBS, or one of those companies. As a result, the quality of those papers has deteriorated. People pick up on that, not every day, but slowly they realize that these papers are not what they used to be, so they go elsewhere. I don't see anything really stopping that process.

## **#M2**

There was, of course, Herman and Chomsky, who wrote that book about manufacturing consent, which implies that there is, on the one hand, a little bit of intention behind this, right? Political intention behind shaping a media environment. But on the other hand, there's this self-selecting process and basically a self-selecting group of people in the media, in academia, in the military environment, and then ultimately pushes into politics, and that all of this blob, this bubble, then basically just steams ahead and gets to shape policy. Is that also part of what is going on, or is social media the main driver behind the deterioration of intelligent discussion in the media?

## **#M1**

I think it's both. Social media, I think, is the real trigger, and it continues to grow. But certainly, the decline of the legacy media, and we have it in Australia as well, is that they are in the business of manufacturing consent. And so they're catering to a shrinking demand, readership, and support base. In Australia, we have it in the Murdoch organization and some of their fringe television, with quite dishonest and disgraceful coverage of the news, particularly now on Gaza and Palestine. They have no sense of context regarding how the October 7 breakout by Hamas occurred and why it occurred. They never delve into the context of Russia feeling concerned about a possible NATO base on their border. They pick up the news of the day and run with that without giving any context. And sooner or later, people come to the view that they're not being told honestly what is happening in the world.

And they want to manufacture consent. In our next election, there'll be overwhelming media direction against the party, which I think a lot of people are disappointed with. But the alternative of Peter Dutton would be horrific, I think, for Australia. The media will be about manufacturing consent, not just on behalf of business interests, which have always been there, but in favor of political interests, which they support. It's getting pretty grim. The News Limited, Murdoch organization influences, it projects not only its own point of view, but the ABC, our national broadcaster, seems to

read The Australian every morning and decide what's news and then run stories accordingly. I think the ABC has lost its bearings as a result of these developments in other parts of the media. Our media is disgraceful in Australia, and I think elsewhere.

## **#M2**

It's disgraceful in Switzerland too. It's disgraceful in a lot of places. It's basically, at this point, just downstream media, trickle-down media from The New York Times and The Washington Post, and then it goes through several outlets until it arrives at its endpoint where it's so shallow that you can't do anything with it anymore. But the antidote to that, of course, is then to pick up the pieces and start serving the underserved public, which I think is what you're trying to do, what I'm trying to do by saying, like, look, here are proper discussions of what's going on.

And people pick that up, as you said, on your end and on my end. But the question is how to make that economically viable. One of the big problems with media, of course, is that a lot of people want access to it, but you can only pay tiny little amounts for it compared to what it costs to run a media operation. A newspaper is a very, very expensive affair. What is your recommendation on how to build an economically viable alternative media structure that could help course-correct the big legacy media, who still, unfortunately, have a lot of political weight in the public discussion?

## **#M1**

In Australia, the best prospect would be for the public broadcaster, the ABC, to re-establish itself as a credible media organization. It has the resources to do it. It's not in print, but it's in television and radio and has considerable resources, although they have been cut back over the years, particularly by conservative governments. But that is, I think, the quickest way to get acceptable media in Australia. It has the resources to do it, like the BBC, and I think that's been also corrupted by its particular anti-Palestinian view over the last few years. But I think public broadcasting is important.

As for independent media, I hope that we're able to cooperate further and share our resources, what we do, give each other marketing support and assistance, and perhaps in some ways help in sharing production costs. But I think we also need to accept that social media is what people read overwhelmingly, and we need money and good marketing sense to access social media and, in fact, tell the story of media such as yours and such as ours, of what we're doing so that increasingly people will hear about us and respond to what we're doing. But I think promotion in social media is the key to what we are addressing at the moment.

But we've got to be lively. We've got to have good content every day. We don't accept advertising because we don't want to be dependent upon advertisers. We don't have a paywall. We will not accept money from fossil fuel companies, from arms manufacturers, or from the gambling industry. That sounds like being a bit purist perhaps, but we think that policy ensures that we maintain our independence, and we won't accept anything from governments or their agencies. But it makes it

tough going. We'd like to grow faster, but I think we need just to hang in there and pursue some of those things that I just mentioned earlier.

**#M2**

How do you keep the lights on? Is it purely through subscriptions?

**#M1**

Yes, entirely through donations.

**#M2**

Donations.

**#M1**

We call it subscriptions. I get the free daily media and access to johnmenadue.com. But we have been delighted with the financial support that we get because there are so many Australians concerned about what's happening in mainstream media and want to support an outlet such as ours. I'm not the youngest person in the world, and it will involve a sort of transition to other people to build what we have. But we're determined to do it, and we're not going to despair.

**#M2**

It's very good to know. I just would like to run an idea by you because one of the things we do have on social media is the possibility. We have now the tools to broadcast ourselves, right? And social media, in a sense, like your homepage, your webpage is, of course, part of that, right? It's just there and it's accessible, and it costs like, what, \$100 a year or so to run a homepage if you do it yourself. I mean, it's accessible to everybody. But one of the things we don't have yet that the legacy media has is this syndication through a lot of these agencies, Reuters and AP and so on, which do a lot of work for these outlets, right? And then you just pick an article you want and you put it into your paper and you're done with it. We don't have an equivalent of that on social media. We don't have a pool of stories that everybody agrees on, here, go and serve yourself and make out of it whatever you want. Would it make sense to try to build something like that, a Reuters for sane media? Or how do you view that?

**#M1**

It would be very helpful, that question of sharing that I mentioned before, between independent media to establish a pool of stories. We carry, for example, probably about a quarter of our articles, our posts from other magazines, other journals, and they are widely read. But we do that on an ad

hoc basis, one-on-one from time to time. And other media are very cooperative on that, but I think it would be useful to go a step further and make it a pool of articles that are available for companies, journals that contribute. I think that would be very important. I think there are organizations like that, but they become very concerned about their own territory and don't want to share. We're prepared to share anything.

## **#M2**

It would, of course, need to be a very well-thought-through model because it would need to allow individual outlets and people to contribute to it while still having some form of quality check without being a censorship mechanism. Right? So it's actually a tricky affair. Yeah. But also, if it was possible then to give that content so it can be transformed into different media, that it can go from text to video, from video to text to audio. We lack that, don't we? We don't have that. No, we don't.

## **#M1**

I think many, and this is probably a fault of independent media or small media, want to keep it restricted, not for them to share, as if somehow we've got better resources than others. But there is that reluctance to share. It's hard to break out of that, but I would like to see that change, and we would certainly be part of pooling resources and sharing costs. So that's one example we're looking at the moment, for example, with Al Jazeera, which I think is one of the best media outlets in the world, looking at ways in which, with their cooperation, we could carry five or six daily stories from Al Jazeera.

Because our journal is largely about opinion, we follow the news perhaps a couple of days afterwards. But if we had that sort of ability, and we hope we can with new technology, we could provide daily news on important matters coming from around the world. Al Jazeera, I think, is probably one of the best to consider. So that's another option that we might be able to consider. But we're open and willing to discuss many areas of cooperation because we know there is a serious need and interest in filling the vacuum left by our legacy media.

## **#M2**

There is, and that's the good news. I mean, the good news to me is that despite, or just because of, the massive amount of propaganda, a lot of people just don't buy it anymore. It's like you don't need to... you don't need to teach people how to be critical. They're critical by themselves. At some point, people start blinking and thinking, "Can this, does this still make sense?" Do you also see it like that, or are you more worried about the ability of the general public to see through manufactured narratives?

## **#M1**

I think they are. I think we don't credit our readers with sufficient knowledge and skill to sort things out. In elections, I've got a view that we don't often make mistakes. Occasionally, we think that, you know, my party, our party is superior, but I think there is a good general sense in the community. Sorry about that telephone. A general good sense in the community. And I think those figures that I mentioned a few minutes ago, that the result of Trump, Australians are now saying, gee, that American alliance, it's not as good or as strong as we thought it was. And I was surprised when I saw that most Australians in that survey thought that Trump was a greater threat to peace than President Xi or President Putin.

So I think if there's leadership and opportunity, people do respond. The public is not stupid, as many suggest, but there are powerful instruments, powerful forces, elites, money, and business that want to continue to dominate the media space. But given leadership and given opportunities, I think people do respond. And what we're seeing with Trump may be the beginning of a reassessment of the hegemony of the United States and the danger it poses to the world. And I think America is the greatest threat to peace in the world, not China, not Russia. And I think the Australian community is picking up on that fact, as maybe unattractive and surprising to so many people.

## **#M2**

I think these are very hopeful words to end the discussion on. And just as a point of information, I know that people are working on initiatives. Warwick Powell is one of them, who's working on pools of information. Jeffrey Sachs is working on a broader information sphere. So we will see things develop, but we need time and we need good ideas and then the institutional ability to actually go through with it. And we learn a lot from people like you, John, who have done so much already before. And I look forward to more cooperation with you.

## **#M1**

Thank you very much. I agree. Let's end on that note. I would certainly like to see other opportunities for more collaboration, production, and editorial work between independent media, which is growing up right across the world. And I think we need to look at how we can cooperate further by supporting each other.

## **#M2**

Wonderful words, everybody. If you want to read more from John and his outlet, it's Pearls and Irritations, correct?

## **#M1**

That's right. Yes, yes. It comes from my background as an ambassador in Japan. The grain that's necessary in the oyster produces the pearl, but you need the irritation to produce the pearl. My wife

used to say that she was the pearl and I was the irritation. But that's the background to why we're called Pearls and Irritations.

**#M2**

Well done.

**#M1**

Irritating people in power.

**#M2**

I was about to ask—I wanted to ask you about that, but thank you. So you need to irritate in order to get to the pearls, right? Yes.

**#M1**

And we'll keep doing it.

**#M2**

John Menadue, thank you very much for your time today.

**#M1**

Thank you.