

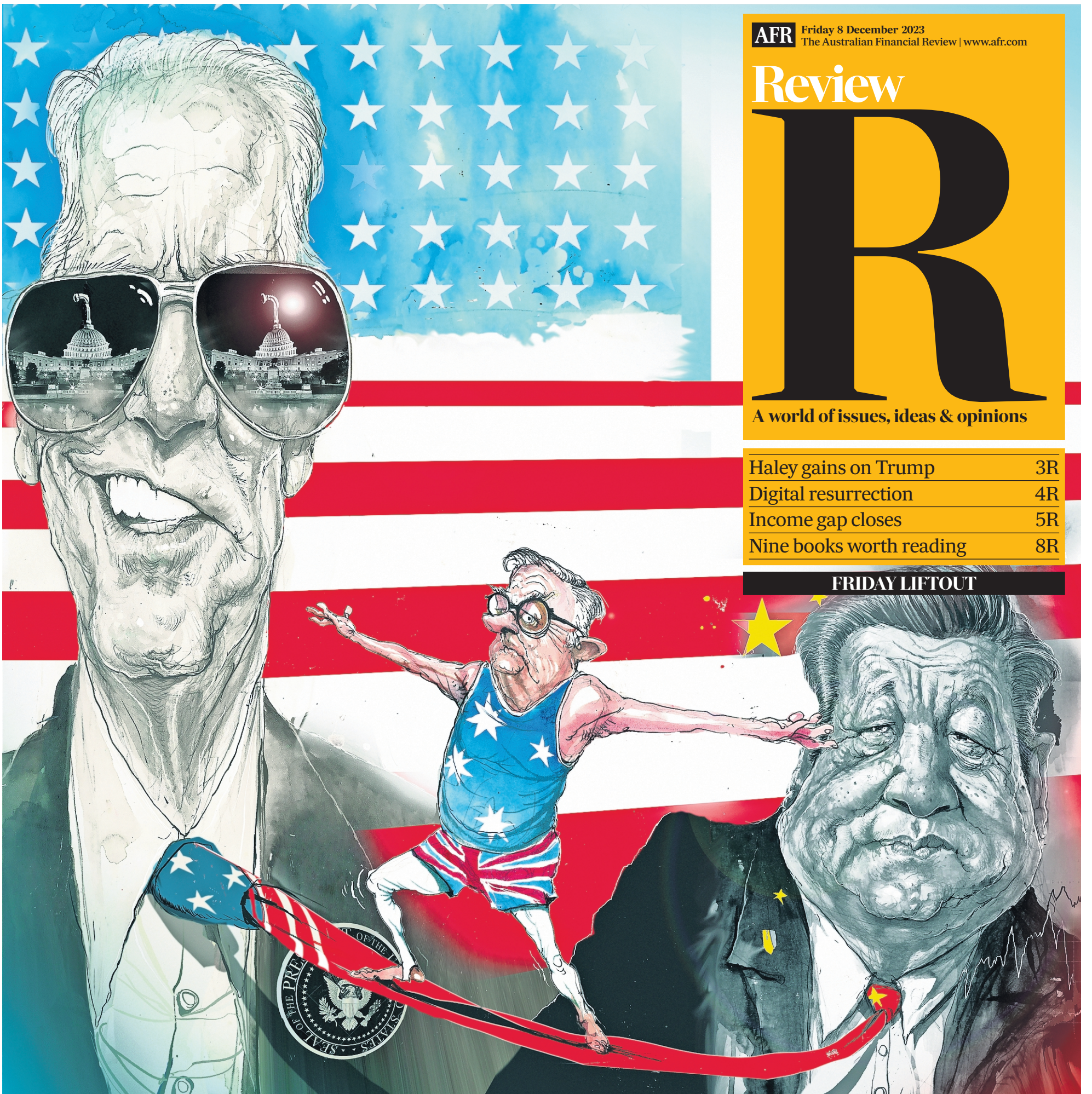
# Review

# R

A world of issues, ideas & opinions

Haley gains on Trump	3R
Digital resurrection	4R
Income gap closes	5R
Nine books worth reading	8R

## FRIDAY LIFTOUT



**Security** Not everyone in the Australian policy community is a true believer in the certainty, and longevity, of US alliance protection, writes Gareth Evans.

## Australia can't rely on US to save it from China

**W**hile there is a measure of agreement among Australian policy-makers, and those who influence them, about the severity of regional security challenges we will face in the years ahead, serious divisions persist between government and opposition, within the wider think tank, academic and media policy community, and to some extent within the Albanese government.

They relate to the extent and imminence of the security threat posed by China under Xi Jinping; the wisdom of further deepening Australia's alliance dependence on the United States; how we should be prioritising our defence preparedness; and how much weight we should be giving to diplomacy over defence.

And they persist notwithstanding the Albanese government's successful stabilisation of our deeply fraught bilateral relationship with China, culminating in the prime minister's visit to Beijing in November, and

the easing of US-China tensions accomplished by Xi and US President Joe Biden in their meeting at last month's APEC summit.

Not all is discord. There is little disagreement within the Australian policy community that the Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific regional security environment in 2024 and beyond will continue to be fragile and volatile; that negotiating a course between the two neighbourhood giants, China and the US – our major economic partner and security ally respectively – will continue to be our most formidable international chal-

lenge; and that the situation demands a defence and foreign policy response that is better resourced than has been the case in more complacent decades past.

The particular security concerns that are broadly shared across the Australian policy community are familiar enough, shared as they also are across most of our wider region. In the case of China, concerns extend to its international law-defying territorial ambition in, and militarisation of, the South China Sea, with its "nine-dash line" this year expanded to 10; its repeatedly stated determination to unify Taiwan with the mainland, not excluding the use of force, in a context where its repressive actions in Hong Kong have made reunification on a "one country, two systems" basis a non-starter; its continued assertiveness on other territorial fronts with Japan and India; its efforts to increase its presence and influence in smaller but strategically significant regional players, including the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste; and its transition from a bystander to regular spoiler role in the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral contexts.

Above all, there is anxiety – compounded by Beijing's manifest determination to challenge the nature and extent of the US security presence in the region – about the very significant expansion and modernisation of its military, including nuclear, capability.

**Continued 6R**

