

Comment by Michael C H Jones
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And so the Global Economic Relations contest heats up.

Not only do we have bilateral relations re Australia - Japan/South Korea/China and soon India, and Regional Economic Relations re US TPP and China SCO and just recently a EU inspired proposed future Australia FTA, but also Regional/country Relations re Africa - Japan/China/India/US. Later this month, October, India convenes its 3rd forum with Africa re 50 nations even though it maintains only 29 diplomatic missions on the continent whereas the USA and PRC maintain approximately 50 each.

Add the traditional ex-colonial Powers of the EU and the former communist Soviet Union links of Putin's Russia to the mix of economic courtship and the old 19th century carve-up of Africa is on again.

The leading Economy of Africa, South Africa, is a member of BRICS with India, China, Russia and Brazil. None are members of the newly signed TPP with the US and Japan as the dominant partners and Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia in ASEAN, and Colombia, Peru and Chile in South America. Indonesia at this point in time is a member only of the G20 with USA, PRC, Japan, India and South Africa. It is a smorgasbord of global economic relations.

ASEAN is critical for Australia and therefore New Zealand, as well as the Pacific Islands Forum where the China/India economic rivalry has in recent years intensified. Critical in the sense of diplomatic stability re a buffer for ANZ in terms of North East Asia regional rivalries, not only economic but potentially military.

Is Africa too far away similar to South America for Australia to be concerned with intra-regional events? Not so if our military engagements in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are justifiable. Certainly not so when Australia received about 140 national votes to join the UN Security Council, or for our next contest to join the UN Human Rights body.

Maintaining Australia's diplomatic influence in Africa, particular in the Indian Rim countries, means a multifaceted strategy, directly bilaterally and indirectly via the major Great Powers. Therein lies the rub for the interests, and therefore strategies economically, of the Big 5 differ - US and Japan and EU re China and India. Australia, like India and to a lesser extent the US, has a maritime border with Africa - East Africa for both India and Australia. Does this matter given global technologies limiting boundaries and distances? Obviously national governments think so if recent years Defence White Papers and joint naval exercises are any indication re Japan and India, and China and Russia - all directed in major part to submarine warfare.

In this context, both Indonesia and Australia are indefensible - Indonesia because of thousands of islands and Australia because of its relatively small population. Divided the two countries can not cope, united there is a chance to meet any challenge. A naval facility, other than the US, in East Timor or Fiji would certainly be destabilising if not threatening. This would just bring the economic and naval jousting across the sea lanes of the northern Indo-Pacific to the ANZ South West Pacific Region. China already has that as part of its Silk Road and Maritime Agenda, and India is responding - how will Indonesia and Australia respond?

Australia's diplomatic policies need to be integrated globally as responses in one region have consequences in others. Bad mouthing Putin in the Ukraine via the UN Security Council brings the

Russian fleet, their rust buckets carry nuclear weapons, to the coast of Brisbane during a meeting of the G20. And the PM Howard days of sailing an Australian military vessel down the Taiwan Straits are long gone.

Africa, East Africa, South Africa are just aspects of this need for a globally integrated Australian diplomatic policy. The economic and security competition is fierce.