

Comment by Michael C H Jones
28th November 2013

Just over a month ago on the 28th October 2013 The Australian newspaper ran the headline "Asian Century plans consigned to history" with the introduction: "The centrepiece of the Gillard government's foreign affairs strategy - the Australia in the Asian Century white paper - has been largely jettisoned by the Abbott government".

The article espoused the thoughts of new Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and advised "a note on the white paper website says the site was archived on September 20, a fortnight after the federal election that brought the Abbott government to power". So goes the work of over a year by former Treasury Secretary Ken Henry and over 100 experts and officials and the 25 objectives for Australia to take advantage of growth in Asia. It obviously did not contain a sufficient number of sexy slogans, Abbott Style !

New Foreign Minister Julie Bishop was critical of its contents as not "consistent with the Coalition's policy of economic diplomacy and deeper engagement with the region through soft-power diplomacy". She claimed it did not have a "strategic vision", or address "critical issues" or provide "new funding".

Never under-estimate the ignorance and stupidity of the Australian electorate, they can always go lower and consistently do so. They now have what they voted for in spades and I hope they enjoy the widening holes in their pockets. The boats will not be turned back, the debt will not be ended, and some form of ETS will remain - no thanks to Abbott.

But more importantly Australia's Relations with Asia are in free-fall due to the brilliant strategies of Abbott and Bishop in less than three months since 5th September - what a foreign policy Christmas present Big Julie is delivering. I predict abrupt policy U-turns and diplomatic/economic concessions everywhere.

Abbott is trying to work out which faction of the Republicans he is running with - theologically with the Tea Party fundamentalists or politically with the "just hate Obama" moderates. I have not read anywhere praise for the President. He was wrong on the Israeli Settlements, the Iran Nuclear Agreement, Sri Lanka Human Rights, apology to Angela Merkel for US spying and so on. Australia remains "All the way with the USA" but it is Abbott's USA - the Anglosphere of Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Jnr. No apologies for the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan "invasions" and the fruitless deaths of hundreds of Australians. And now the blatant disrespect for Indonesia, SKY is not fooled by platitudes and it will be interesting to digest Indonesia's "new relationship" with Australia; and current presumptuous reprimand to China - "opposition to any coercive and unilateral actions" and thus China's angry rebuke of "irresponsible remarks". Is Australia really the United States and defence treaty guardian of Japan?

I am waiting for another "invasion" - perhaps Abbott/Bishop will pick on a more digestible target in the Pacific Islands. Australia could reboot friendship with Indonesia by suppressing the malcontents in West Papua, or unilaterally take over the PNG police force. Bougainville and/or the Solomons are worth another try. But Fiji is the litmus test for our diplomacy and force projection capabilities certainly if their 'Look North' foreign policy results in Chinese

patrol boats and a maintenance facility akin to East Timor? Personally I recommend that we just give all Pacific Islanders who can prove three generations nationality residency/work rights in Australia - it would increase our population by about 10 plus million and hence bring significant productivity gains, underwrite the island economies through remittances and most importantly end any meddling by China and others. The complete extension of the ANZ CER regionally is well overdue.

The ACCCI Submission to the Australia in the Asian Century Inquiry amongst other things urged a massive educational campaign directed at Australians - the ones who cannot find Asia on the map let alone Indonesia outside Bali, or the suburbs beyond the Singapore shopping centers, and still do not understand that the HONG Kong SAR and Taiwan are parts of China.

In fact that was one of our key points - the definition of Asia and the propensity of Australian governments to define it any which way. The Australia in the Asian Century white paper excluded Russia re North Asia despite its hosting of the APEC in Vladivostok and membership of the East Asia Summit (EAS), and ended with India, ignoring West Asia and Central Asia. The Asian Geographic in July this year issued its Collector's Edition celebrating 100 issues since launch in 1999. Entitled 100 Voices of Asia and subtitled "Asia Without Borders", the publication focuses on 100 languages and dialects found across Asia arranged under the headings in order: Central Asia - the "stans"; East Asia - surrounding Pacific China; North Asia - Russia from the Urals to the North Pacific; Oceania (I prefer Australasia) - including a section on East Indonesia, Palau, Guam and Marshall Islands to Pitcairn Islands; South Asia - including Iran to Bangladesh and Seychelles; South East Asia (I prefer ASEAN) - but including Timor-Leste; West Asia - including Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman. I wish Australian governments and Australians could get it right.

But 'make believe' is one of our strongest and most endearing characteristics - the Monarchy and Murdoch forever.