

Comment by Michael C H Jones

England conquered Wales, then Scotland and made a hash of occupied Ireland to form the United Kingdom. It used its moat, the English Channel, to defeat potential invaders Spain and France from the 16th century, and its 'divide and rule' diplomacy of supporting different regions - a declining Spain against a rising France, a rebellious Netherlands against an expansionist Austria-Hapsburg Empire, any country opposed to Napoleon, a decrepit Ottoman Empire against a rampant Imperial Russia. It all went belly-up with the First World War - the one that couldn't happen because the Workers of the world wouldn't allow it.

A hundred years on and a multi-polar world, arising from a Pax Americana in relatively rapid economic decline, witnesses all sorts of national ambitions articulated by academic strategists in countless Think Tanks. China and India are now on the main stage with the EU in deep economic trouble and ASEAN still inching towards fundamental economic cooperation. Brazil in South America has barely emerged economically and South Africa in Africa is still too brittle in all aspects - political, economic and social.

Both China and India have their "threats". China must for the time being acquiesce with the US in the Pacific and to a lesser extent with Japan, Russia and ASEAN. India still confronts Pakistan and the amorphous challenge of the Muslim States to its west, particularly the fundamentalisms of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and perhaps Egypt and Turkey in the future.

But military men think long term as this article shows. Perhaps it is the remnants of the British Imperial tradition in both Pakistan and India. At any rate the author states growing economic power "induces New Delhi to perceive the Indian Ocean as "India's Ocean". Being a rising power not only India's energy needs, but also its reliance on energy imports will increase. For achieving this, India plans to secure its sea-lanes of communication and choke points in the Indian Ocean including: the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Cape of Good Hope, Mozambique Channel and the Malacca Straits". In this context why not also the Arafura Sea and Torres Strait as well as Cape Leeuwin?

This is not so far fetched. India feels threatened by growing Chinese influence from the Bay of Bengal to the East Coast of Africa. There are voices in the Government and Military that talk about India being the third largest military power after the USA and PRC by 2025 with four aircraft carrier battle groups, a fleet of nuclear submarines and an air force of 35 squadrons. With uranium sales as well as other resources the sea-lanes to the North West of Australia including the Indonesian Straits are as important to India as to China.

Australia is now a member of the two major international clubs namely the UN Security Council and the G20. Two other regional international groups are also vital for their membership and impact on the Indian Ocean - the East Asia Summit and CHOGM. Through these bodies Australia faces a complicated and delicate diplomatic smorgasbord of overlapping issues. Despite the "pivot" to Darwin, US and Australian interests may well conflict. A global power has Grand Strategy wherein there are "trade-offs" involving Israel and Iran, North Korea and Taiwan, the Antarctica and so forth. Secured by their Atlantic and Pacific defences, and emotionally mauled by their recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American voters are unlikely to countenance major land wars over

several decades - drones yes, limited incursions perhaps but not troops on the ground over any significant period of time. In this context the Australian ONA (Office of National Assessments) is no doubt already coordinating Australian Security Organisations in their Risk assessments of countries, institutions and NGO throughout the Indian Ocean Region.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office\\_of\\_National\\_Assessments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_of_National_Assessments)

Where would Australia draw the line on Indian influence and/or intervention in the affairs of countries in the region? If Great Powers have Monroe Doctrines re spheres of influence where do those of India and China intersect? Is the securing of sea-lanes and choke points to protect vital resource flows acceptable to Australia? Given Australia's vast continent, enormous resource wealth and small population what assistance, and from where, would we be prepared to accept, and on what terms? Should America's political "overlordship" of Australia loosen as did Britain's in an earlier period, could we economically stand alone? Clearly the trilateral relationship between ASEAN, India and China becomes central to our diplomacy in the so-called Asian century. The diplomatic experience of our British founders may indeed become of some value again. The economic resurrection of the EU, and its political re-engagement in the region, could be an asset.