

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Speaking generally, and without details at this stage, Kenya ought to be a central policy focus and therefore diplomatic priority for Australia in Africa. As the delegates to the 2011 CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) continue their debate in Perth, Australia, the diversity and challenges of Africa are front and central in all aspects of current global issues. For example the first two non-Commonwealth member countries are Mozambique and Rwanda (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations_membership_criteria) whilst the USA, which itself is eligible for membership, speedily forges agreements to station substantial military installations throughout Northern Australia and particularly in WA and NT, not only for 'security' in the South China Sea but additionally to support capabilities throughout the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Its all about China.

Concerning Kenya the country is a front line 'cultural' state in opposing Muslim fundamentalist expansion in Africa, and will possibly become even more important if the outcomes of the Arab Spring go 'pear shape' for Western/Commonwealth Democracies over the next decades. The historical roles and reach of Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan are no guidance for future government political directions and peoples social trends. As Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki made clear when leaving for Perth his government's priority was for "securing the country's territorial integrity and to contribute towards regional peace and stability". Hence the military excursions into southern Somalia. <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2011/10/kibaki-heads-to-australia-for-chogm-meeting/> The USA military training role of the Kenyan forces needs to be noted for future events in the region.

Back in Australia Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd's speech to the CHOGM Australia - Africa Foreign Ministers' Mining Breakfast on 27th October highlighted the role for economic development of our mining companies and their 'corporate responsibility/good citizen' image - "the reports I have had from foreign ministers across the continent, is that the experience of the Australian mining industry so far has been a very positive experience, in contrast to the experience of certain other investors in the continent". China amongst others again. http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2011/kr_sp_111027.html

Two days earlier the Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard stated in her address to the Opening Ceremony of the Commonwealth People's Forum, on the theme *Driving Change for a Dynamic Commonwealth*, that "our ambition is nothing less than to change the world" and committed her Government to "urging members to implement all major international human rights instruments". She commended it's Civil Society Statement which was a foundation stone for the recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group directed to "improving human rights, good governance, economic development, and responding to climate change" - http://www.chogm2011.org/Resources/Latest_News/australian-prime-minister-julia-gillard-speech-commonwealth-peoples-forum-open - it would be interesting to be a fly on the wall of Chinese Communist Party policy forums.

Next to South Africa Kenya is arguably Australia's most important ally in Africa, certainly East Africa. At least through the old British Empire and recent Commonwealth we have about 120 years of dialogue - the First World War concentrated the diplomatic minds of those in the UK Government at Whitehall. Sadly the history of Kenya has not been without turmoil to say the least but developments since the election of 2007, and specifically the agreement signed by President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga in February 2008 for a Coalition Government has brought relative social stability with the Economy growing at around 7 per cent. That is a genuine achievement for Africa - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya>

However an extended military commitment or even war with Somalia would put all these recent successes in jeopardy. Australia's interests in the Indian Ocean are potentially affected and it is hoped that wise diplomacy is brought to the debate at CHOGM.