

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Neil James has over the years been very vocal and forthright in defence of the Australian armed forces and particularly their welfare when operating in 'trouble-spots' overseas. Therefore it is noteworthy when he made the statement in the attached link/SMH article re:

'An Australian Defence Association spokesman, Neil James, said yesterday that it was in the commandos' interests for the charges to be heard at courts martial. "It's not only fairer for the Diggers, it's better for the reputation of the army and of Australia," he said'.

There are however four not three issues as he articulated. How to find the balance is going to be a monumental task. Justice for both the commandos and the family members killed will not be easy to attain, but maintaining both the reputation of the Australian Army and the Australian people almost impossible. There will be no winners in this trial whatever the outcomes.

Yet it is vital for all concerned that any Australian Government is seen by regional and global communities to be implementing without fear or favour the rule of law, human rights best practice and democratic procedures. At a time when the US image is considerably tarnished, and that of the UK likely to be given current investigations, Anglo-Saxon heritage countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand have a very significant example-setting role to play in our global society of rapid communications. Both friend and foe not only in Afghanistan but throughout the Muslim world will be watching.

Even more importantly China will be watching. As will State-less transnational communities whether Chinese or Indian ethnic and others. This is a chance to put the 'racist' ghosts of the Vietnam War and the excesses of the Iraq American intervention/invasion to rest. Leadership is in the hands of the Australian Government, lets hope that unlike so many times in the past Australia does not drop the ball. There is a place in history, indeed global history, for Prime Minister Gillard and her Foreign Minister Rudd and Defence Minister Smith if they handle correctly the political aspects of this forthcoming courts martial.