

Comment by Michael C H Jones

It is inevitable - there will be future problems in this area of 'prisoners' in an undeclared war. Australian Government policy will need to be clear and precise, otherwise Australian military and government officials may find themselves accused by the International Court of Justice on 'crimes against humanity' issues.

In Australia's growing role as an Indauspac 'enforcer' of political systems whether Afghanistan or Solomon Islands very strong rules of engagement including for ancillary non-military personnel need to be set - certainly the privatisation of the domestic illegal migrant detention centers does not augur well for the future international image of Australia. Increasingly thinking has to be 'outside the square' of past procedures.

Historically Australia imposed a harsh quarantine of German settlers during the First World War. The USA adopted an even more draconian policy towards its Japanese citizens during the Second World War. Precedents set by the USA during the eight years of President George Bush regarding torture as well as by the Australian John Howard Government concerning the mistreatment of Australian citizens by foreign governments, including China, are like landmines in international diplomacy - set to explode at any time and very unpredictable.

The bottom line is that stronger military opposition in any future theatres of war may place Australians as 'prisoners' under administration by other political systems, official or unofficial. Think of the Korean Civil War of the early 1950s and McCarthyism in the USA, and the way in which the famous/notorious Australian communist journalist Wilfred Burchett has been treated as a 'non-person' by all past governments in Australia - all to do with the question of the mistreatment of Australian prisoners of war.

Speed forward 10/20 years to a possible/likely military confrontation between the USA and PRC whether directly or more likely in third countries. Under current alliances, and given history, Australia will be operational anywhere in Indauspac with its American allies. Hence the questions of firstly 'rules of engagement' overseas and secondly 'national loyalties' domestically on the "home-front" with all its implications for Australia's ethnic Chinese communities.

Australians in our multicultural society need to think now about these trends. The Communist Party of China needs to think about its methodology internationally. Operating within the borders of China is one thing but attempting to extend that political system overseas will inevitably imperil the welfare of all ethnic Chinese throughout the business sectors of Indauspac. The Americans are still learning/failing their lessons.