

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Recently I wrote a Comment on Indian Naval Strategy and their perspective on how far their writ extended, perhaps from the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to Cape Leeuwin in southern Western Australia. Subsequently US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly encouraged the Australian Government to conduct larger and more regular naval excises with India. Was China in her thinking, and is China the focus of Indian Government thinking. The Australian Government officially refutes any suggestion that our military strategy is either directly, or indirectly, related to our biggest trade partner, China?

Perhaps some contribution to thinking on these Governance questions involving national security can be made by reference to the general and evolving situation in West Asia or the Middle East. Definitions and terminologies of Regions are confusing as it depends on your geo-strategic situation re EU, USA or Australia. Also it depends on how you perceive Regions and draw maps. Recently the Australia in the Asian Century terms of reference defined Russia out of Asia even though in 2012 Russia was hosting APEC in Russia's Far East. Similarly recent books on the "Rise/Return" of China define India as being part of East Asia? For Chamber India is the dominant country in most ways for West Asia as is China for East Asia. We tend to talk about ASEAN rather than South East Asia.

At any rate if we analyse the "shifting sands" of West Asia politics and excluding perhaps wrongly what is known as Central Asia, the Region to the North of India bordering Russia and China, the key countries - the minions of Global Economic Relations as I have previously stated - are Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel. The USA, EU, Russia, PRC, India as Great or "Greater" Powers all have an interest in both the region and each country for different reasons historically, current and future. Civilization questions involving religious confrontations have profound significance in all these societies of West Asia, not just the Jewish-State issue in Israel but the fundamentalist sect disputation in the four Muslim countries, and also with secular interests. Hopefully the US has again learned the bitter lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan which it should have learned earlier from Vietnam and to a lesser extent in Korea. The Soviet Union in part collapsed because of its Afghanistan intervention. The old European colonial/imperialist traditions have long gone and further interventions wherever should be resisted strenuously, and at present this means Syria and Iran.

Turkey has a very stabilising secular tradition since the 1920s which may now be changing, the military no longer holds the balance of power or prestige it once did in Turkish society with a creeping "Islamisation". Similarly in Egypt military rule has ended and a new variant of the Muslim Brotherhood has emerged to power, the current riots could end in relative "democratic" compromise or a new form of Muslim dictatorship with Egyptian "characteristics" rather than of the Saudi or Iranian models. All four however have vested interests in the question of Israel, whether a Two-State or One-State Solution. On issues of Governance a broad brush approach is not, and probably never has been possible. Each Government and Society must be researched individually and then connections made where appropriate according to the analyses. The Iranian strategic position, as central to the Mediterranean and India, Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, is particularly important particularly for Australia in the Indauspac Maritime Region. Arguably Australia should be making representations for Iran, and perhaps later Egypt to join Turkey and Saudi Arabia as member countries of the G20? Their two Economies have the potential, at least population-wise, to dominate West Asia.

But to the current military issues. Israel/Gaza, Israel/Iran, Turkey/Syria are the hotspots. The US is heavily involved diplomatically and militarily primarily with Israel and to a lesser extent and in different ways with Turkey and Egypt. The Russians and Chinese are involved with Syria, perhaps begrudgingly because of British/French actions in Libya under the UN Mandate, and to a lesser

extent, particularly China, with Iran due to energy supply and maritime security reasons. There are too many "flashpoints" both internal domestic and external international for there to be any confidence in peaceful outcomes or even a de-escalation of military adventurism. Israel will continue to build its "settlements" on Palestinian territory and "monster" Gaza, the Muslim militants supplied by Iran will continue to fire their rockets at urban centers in Israel. Israel, and its lobby groups around the world, will place relentless pressure on the USA to "take-out" Iranian alleged nuclear sites. Ultimately Turkey, supplied with the US Patriot missiles for protection, will intervene in Syria and bring on at least a diplomatic confrontation with Iran - Russian and Chinese diplomacy will be interesting to watch. The EU intervention will overall support the USA but India's role is not so certain - their policies have been emerging very slowly/carefully over the last decade.

From Australia's perspective the US Alliance remains front and central to government thinking whether Labor or Liberal Parties. But again the uncertainties are emerging quickly with potentially diverging interests between our two countries, in part geo-strategic but I would also agree "ethnically".

The Australia/China, Australia-indonesia/ASEAN, Australia-Indian Ocean, issues are more immediate for Australia with its 23 million people than for the USA. Japan because of its continuing "sick-economy" cannot play the potential decisive role of the past, the 'failed-State' of North Korea will inevitably crash when China decides to withdraw the economic supports with massive structural implications for South Korea beyond in my view the German Re-unification of the 1990s, Taiwan could go either way - peaceful or confrontational depending on the evolution of CPC "power-factions" on the Mainland and in the "Province". The historical cultural stresses in ASEAN are not resolved and will become greater with the movement towards a more integrated economy/society. These countries are Australia's major trading partners. Their governmental stability and military cooperation are vital for Australia's prosperity.

However Australia is no longer, if it really ever was, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Our present ethnic diversity is both a strength and a potential danger for governance at all levels whether Local, City, State, National, Regional or Global. On the most basic level just consider the avalanche of "drive-by" shootings in the Western Suburbs of Sydney over recent years, the blatant day-time killings, the drugs and civic corruption, and the virtual total inability of the law authorities whether police or courts to control the situation. It is not politically correct to talk openly about the problems with various ethnic communities but they do have very strong international connections to West Asia. Another indication is the number of articles appearing in leading newspapers such as the Australian Financial Review on the failure of the Australia in Asia White Paper to address the question and ramifications of corruption. Transparency International has been campaigning for years with unfortunately varying success.

These are issues related to Turkey and whether or not it intervenes in Syria with whatever domino effect?