

OBSERVATIONS 2

On Peoples Diplomacy in the Cities of China and the Right to Interfere

Announcements

Three new and very significant items have appeared this week.

Firstly, the announcement of the opening of the new NSW Shanghai Business Office by Premier Nathan Rees on 11th December 2009 is a most welcome decision as Chamber for over a decade has advocated an official State Government presence in Shanghai. The work of the Sydney Shanghai Friendship Society established in 2005 has been an important element in focusing business attention on this issue.

Secondly, we have highlighted the Contents of the ATI October/November issue "ASIA2010: RISKY BUSINESS" because there are some very thought provoking articles on China including Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as concerning India, Japan, Indonesia and other countries. The trade and investment summaries by Austrade's Senior Trade Commissioners across Asia are particularly worthwhile as they assist an understanding of the growing economic competition and their security implications throughout the Indauspac Maritime Community – China in the Indian Ocean particularly Africa and India in the Pacific Ocean specifically Latin America, Indonesia as the leading Economy in ASEAN trying to balance both nations, whilst Japan's new Government seems determined to "re-negotiate" that country's US relationship and a new global role beyond Asia.

Climate Change in China

Thirdly, the Lowy Institute for International Policy has published three new papers on Climate Change that are very timely in the context of Copenhagen and the new Tony Abbott leadership of the Australian Federal Opposition. For Chamber the paper, "China and the Global Environment: Learning from the Past, Anticipating the Future"¹ is especially relevant as it adopts a whole-istic approach to the analysis of China's Environmental Policies.

A statement on page 10 stands out re:

"Clearly, any assessment of China's potential role in international environmental cooperation requires a deeper understanding of what is taking place inside China. Equal attention also needs to be given to the ways in which China's environmental challenges are linked to global developments. Interdependence matters, both ecologically and politically. It is no longer possible to view environmental governance in China purely from a domestic perspective and, likewise, outsider accounts that ignore developments within China are of limited value".

¹ Available at: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1186>.

In our view this re-enforces the Chamber's dual Australia-China strategy namely:

- China-Domestic – Peoples Diplomacy through Australasia-China Key Cities
- China-International – Global Economic Relations and Governance with Special Reference to the Indauspac Maritime Community

The paper's author Katherine Morton makes a number of assertions and judgements which are worthy of serious consideration:

"China is by no means an environmental laggard. On the contrary, relative to its stage of development it has put in place an impressive framework of environmental regulations and legislation that is being further strengthened by new developments taking place in the corporate sector and within civil society". (pp12)

"There is no single panacea for dealing with disruptive climate change and large-scale environmental degradation. To propose one policy solution is to imply that there is one single pattern of behaviour underlying environmental degradation. The historical evidence in China and globally suggests otherwise. Solutions are multiple and likely to prove just as complex as the problems they aim to resolve. Although win-win scenarios are politically seductive in the short term, they often mask difficult trade-offs. What is the optimum balance between energy security and carbon emissions reduction? How is it possible to promote a more sustainable form of industrialization while at the same time protecting those who are most vulnerable to worsening environmental conditions? These questions are at the centre of many intense intellectual debates, but we simply do not have many of the answers. Climate change itself is characterised by complexity, interdependency, and uncertainty, and therefore it is important to acknowledge that uncertainty is a condition with which decision makers need to come to terms". (pp112)

"With the exception of the Karakorum, warming temperatures are leading to an accelerated melting of the Himalayan Hindu Kush glaciers that feed Asia's great rivers — the Yellow, Yangtze, Mekong, Salween, Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra. Glaciers in northwestern China have shrunk by 21 per cent. And data from the International Commission for Snow and Ice reveal that the Himalayan glaciers are shrinking faster than anywhere else and could totally disappear sometime between 2035 and 2050". (pp 86)

"From a regional perspective, climate impacts have a profound influence on how we perceive future stability in the most populated region of the world that is already prone to cross-border tensions and ethnic conflicts. The serious transboundary implications of melting glaciers highlight the current deficit in regional environmental cooperation. It is precisely in the space between the national and the global that institutions for governing the environment are sorely lacking". (pp 92)

"Given that the sources of all the major rivers in the region are located in China, support from Beijing will be a critical determinant of the extent to which environmental cooperation beyond borders is possible" (pp 93)

“As yet, it is unclear as to whether a modern form of statecraft can develop in China that is more inclusive and less dependent upon state intervention. What is clear is that a more sustainable future cannot be arrived at by design. Central planning is not a viable substitute for private enterprise and public participation. Today in China there exists a fundamental tension between top-down planning and implementation. It is not only a political mandate from above that will determine China’s environmental future. Ensuring checks and balances on the concentration of power in the hands of the few, and further unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity of the Chinese people, are equally if not more important” (pp 114)

This again is justification for the Chamber’s decision to establish on the ACCCI Website Monitor sections for China’s Political System, Legal System and Foreign Policy – in our view the three “inter-connects” of Good Governance in an increasingly Global Society.

The PRC is a Party-State

It must always be remembered that the PRC is a Party-State. The Party, Society and the Law are always in that order of priority. In my Sydney address to a St George Bank sponsored seminar on 5th July 2007, entitled “An international economic relations role for Municipal Government: a career path for Young Professionals” I made a number of comments concerning the nature of the Chinese Communist Party and the issue of the projection of Chinese influence beyond the East China Sea to the far-reaches of the Pacific Ocean. That would obviously bring Australia and China into at least economic “competition” and is the reason, in part, for my speeches throughout 50 odd Chinese cities during the years 2002/04.

For example in April 2002, as part of the “Invest in Australia” seminars in Fuzhou, Wuhan, Nanjing, Jinan and Beijing, I made comments on:

- GEOGRAPHY – Australia dominates the Indauspac Region
- SECURITY – Australia is an economically very powerful country
- STABILITY – Australia is a multicultural constitutional democracy

This brings me to the question of “Peoples Diplomacy through Australasia-China Key Cities”. In Observations 1 I wrote - “During the years of China’s isolation from 1949 to 1973 in Australia’s case and to 1979 in that of the USA, the concept and practice of ‘Peoples Diplomacy’ was developed by the PRC’s famous Premier and Foreign Minister, Zhou Enlai. In a sense, and almost a case of reverse engineering, the Chamber continued that tradition throughout the 1980s. This approach was re-enforced by the Western Trade Sanctions post 1989 and during the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. The question of why it continues post WTO 2002 will be discussed in the next Observations column”. Let me now respond to that question.

The Right to a Voice and to Interfere

Peoples Diplomacy is more than “Cultural Diplomacy” which is a form of State “soft-power” directed to promoting both a nation’s civilization and arts in the broader sense. Peoples

Diplomacy since the Vietnam War of the 1960s has evolved beyond just an instrument of government policy. Indeed 20 years earlier the Trials and Judgements of Nuremberg had had a profound impact on the thinking of western intellectuals whether ideological or theological. The desire to live in peace, decolonisation and campaigns for racial equality, more universal higher education and the movement for greater participation in government, together with the pace of communications technologies, all helped to revolutionise the power structures of States and therefore the international order within which States operate, such that no government in the 21st century can ignore the wishes and aspirations of its people – economically in the USA or politically in the PRC.

Globally, Nelson Mandela summed up this movement to a “transnational public sphere” where there is a “transborder unity of action in order to guarantee respect for human and civil rights”, when he accepted the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award in November 2006 and said: “People living in poverty have the least access to power to shape policies - to shape their future. But they have the right to a voice. They must not be made to sit in silence as ‘development’ happens around them, at their expense.”

When there is a government “diplomatic deficit” for whatever reason, people will take up their right to a voice including the shaping of conventional foreign policies. But their energies will be directed not only to their governments. It will bring about increasing connections between the institutions of International Civil Society and the rewriting of the norms and structures of international governance. Eventually these connections will become intra-national. The Right to a Voice will bring a Right to Interfere in the internal affairs of countries. The recent lessons of Rwanda are well documented in international academic literature.

Global Pressure of Civil Society

However these traditions of Peoples Diplomacy are not new, just the names and the facilities to influence have changed. When my late wife Janice in 1971 ran onto the Sydney Cricket Ground to sit-down in the middle of a Springbok-Wallaby rugby scrum in protest against Apartheid in South Africa, this was just one single incident in a worldwide peoples’ movement that changed US, EU, Australian and other governments’ foreign policies. As I sat in the Sheridan Stand that day “body-guarding” Bishop Edward Crowther in his purple vest I knew this civil disobedience was part of a global movement to end racial discrimination. We just did not realise the successes would be so great and so quickly.

In this context the continuation of a 19th century Leninist structure within the Chinese Communist Party is not possible. An elitist top-down “Democratic Centralism” decision making process for 70 million members, let alone the 1.3 billion Chinese people, is unsustainable in an increasingly educated, affluent, urbanised and globally integrated China. During the 21st century the CCP will either evolve into a genuine modern Social Democratic Party, obviously with Chinese characteristics, or pass into history with its fraternal brothers in Eurasia. Deng Xiaoping is alleged to have said Tiananmen gave the Party 20 years “breathing space”. Well time is up. The challenges of policy formulation and implementation both domestically and internationally are simply overwhelming the CCP such that “factionalism” is becoming more and more open. It is likely these pressures will dramatically increase during the first term 2012/17 of the next PRC President and Premier.

But the PRC like the USA is just not another country. Today, no binding decisions on significant global issues can be made without the mutual agreement of the post GFC G2 irrespective of what the EU, Russia, Japan, India or other regions/countries might think. Hence the concept of “non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries” is fast becoming dated in terms of a globalised peoples demand for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. Already international “alliances” of fundamentalist/capitalist Conservative Parties, and to a lesser extent social democratic oriented Progressives, backed by transnational media empires such as Murdoch’s News Corporation, regularly interfere in the decision making processes of governments – the current orchestrated campaign of denial on Climate Change across the world is just one example. The reaction of those groups who feel domestically disenfranchised and organising through Peoples Diplomacy direct-action globally will accelerate in future decades. The confrontations with governments, internally and externally, are likely to be a feature of our times – interesting times as the Chinese would say.

From a Chamber perspective we believe these issues of global concern whether directly or indirectly involving Diplomatic Economic Relations are best addressed at the lowest levels of government structure, the municipality and even districts. Firstly because it is less provocative for China’s Central Government in Beijing, and secondly because it is closer to the needs and aspirations of the peoples of China and Australasia. However in the case of China, obviously due to its size, we have always and will continue to advocate a Key Cities Strategy, although representative of the range of cities within the official 660 plus. The ACCCI Website in the two sections on Key Cities contains a great deal of worthwhile thought and advice.

China-International

Finally, I would like to make a last comment for this Observations column. My reading of history tells me that *Times change, people don’t*. Conservatives will oppose reform because they do not want to pay for it, and Progressives will bring it quickly and worry later about who pays for it. Greed and personal aggrandisement usually wins out in both cases. Similarly national governments have a self-interest in the formulation and implementation of their foreign policies. Despite China’s protestations about a “harmonious society” and a “harmonious world” I have little doubt the CCP-group in power will pursue the “national interest” not unlike their forbears in Europe and the USA. The tendency will be to “export” domestic systems and experience to other regions – the Socialist Market and the Beijing Consensus. The economic horse-trading is already well advanced in Latin America and Africa with fierce competition for resources throughout the Indauspac Maritime Community, the focus of Observations 3.

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