

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Some people actually do respond to my Comments. Generally they like the overall sentiments but often query the reasoning.

For example why the concentration on articles in the Sydney Morning Herald on the Homepage when elsewhere there are a multitude of different global sources? The answer is simply that I wish to give our international readers a flavour of what is thought relevant in Sydney, the SMH does that in a way that the Australian with its overseas media connections does not. Moreover the SMH can link the governance issues about which ACCCI is focused whether City/Local, State/Provincial, National/Regional and Global/Institutional. Greater Sydney is the Chamber base.

The three SMH links in this Comment are related across the wide range of our Australia China interests, although at first this may not be obvious - a question of reasoning.

Firstly the ACCCI geo-political-strategic focus is Economic Relations in our region - Indauspac. The Asia-Pacific concept is dated, perhaps by a decade or more since China joined the WTO but certainly since the 2008 GFC. West Asia and Africa are now of equal importance for Australia in the age of terrorism.

Secondly the issues of pre-emptive strikes, state sanctioned assassinations, financial sanctions, trade boycotts, corporate bannings, and unilateral actions of all types are now commonly discussed as a result of the actions of various USA governments as well as the EU and Israel. In my email contribution to the White Paper on Australia in the 21st Asian Century I asserted that it was only a matter of time before other countries such as China and India adopt similar tactics. Most major countries can claim threats from terrorism.

And so consistent with the rumours that have been circulating for years the SMH on its front page today confirmed that elite Australian SAS units were active across Africa, specifically Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Kenya, purportedly to collect intelligence? The general rationale is to flush out "second-tier al-Qaeda fighters and leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan". The inference seems to be that this task is being performed with neither the knowledge nor support of the governments of these countries. In my view this is a significant escalation in global lawlessness. What is to be our reaction when it is likewise confirmed that China, India and others may also have joined the US, EU, Israel and Australia in these types of actions? More importantly what happens when any of these illegal incursions bump into either home forces or other national intelligence terrorist chasing illegal operations and there is the inevitable fire-fight with most likely civilian casualties?

Thirdly whilst we have offensive actions for Australia's national interests, at the same time we appear to have had for decades a dysfunctional Australian Defence Force, particularly the Navy, despite our "\$26.5 billion annual defence budget and the 60,000 men and women in the Defence Department" - the country according to a range of experts quoted is not capable of being defended and its sovereignty protected. Apparently its of little concern because no country at this point in time wants to attack Australia - its just a pity about the money. The 2009 White Paper on Defence identified possibilities, rightly or wrongly, more than 20 years into the future. However it is claimed that the Force 2030 project is currently a

"shambles" in terms of its implementation and resourcing. If China were ever to have any intentions they would have little worry with Australia.

Finally we have one of Australia's foremost economic commentators openly accusing the leaders of both the Federal Labor Government and Federal Liberal Opposition of "treason" against this country in terms of their dereliction of duty for economic policy concerning the resources rent tax and pricing carbon. This is strong language and I presume not used without proper reflection. The fact that it mirrors the feelings of the broader electorate as reflected in opinion polls is not relevant. In the old days people - even national leaders - got shot for treason. It is a charge that should never be made without profound consideration, and in this case I do not think it has been. In an era when journalists have become personalities and entertainers, and most politicians irrelevant, the quality economic media is one of the few institutions that tries or is forced by its complicated nature to maintain standards for rational discussion. It may be that the EU disease is also alive and well in Australia - the will to power and pleasure trumps all.

Welcome Bob Carr - the new Australian Foreign Minister.