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The global security outlook: concluding remarks

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I feel a little like a fat kid in a lolly shop surrounded by many delectable types of lollies. Our speakers have given us a smorgasbord of lollies, making my task difficult – which topic to choose. Indeed, they have given me a plethora of issues from which to now select.

One overarching topic, however, stands out – strategy. I used to teach strategy at the United States Army Command and General Staff College. The College has a strategic analysis model, which demands that you look at everybody's interests. It is important to consider national power, national interests, and the power and interests of your allies. I think what the Royal United Services Institute has done with this Inaugural International Defence and Security Dialogue today, is to highlight the importance of

understanding strategy and interests.

Let us look at the other topics which have helped us keep the whole day in perspective. Ross Babbage has made a couple of comments about climate change. They are important, but I do not intend to canvass the related issues now. Ross' car has the number plates Sun Tzu. You would all know that Sun Tzu wrote about knowing yourself, knowing your enemy and being successful in a thousand battles. We have been helped immeasurably today in considering the complexity of the future by what Admiral Singh has told us about India and the Pacific. Frankly, India, for many of us, is a place we really do not know much about. We have a great deal of confusion, but not much knowledge.

In my summary of the afternoon I am going to cover five points. First – strategy. Second – the need to think about how we counter the potential for nuclear war. Third – how to deal with the ‘now’ problems as well as the future problems. I think Admiral Singh has been very polite in that he did not talk about fixing a significant ‘now’ problem – Pakistan. Fourth – what are the implications for Australia? Fifth – how do we look at the issues of governance and good order in the world so that we make room for India and China? I for one am concerned that we will find it difficult to understand and accept the growth of India and China.

Strategy

We have been talking about the time scale from 2030 to 2050. We have talked about demography and the problems of food, water and energy shortages in the future. We have to think about the big long-term issues, because they are what are going to shape the future. Admiral Singh has given us some really significant matters to ponder. The rise of India so far has not caused alarm and I do not think it will cause alarm in the future. This is because India is thinking strategically. He has also encouraged us to think not just about the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, but the Indo-Pacific Region. His advice is sound.

We need to understand, however, that India and China are likely to be opponents on strategic issues. So there is an imperative that India and China understand each other. That might be a little difficult because, as we have seen in Australia’s recent Defence white paper, we are looking for a hedge against China. I for one hope we do not pick India as a hedge against the growth of China. We should not be encouraging that kind of negative behaviour.

Nuclear War

We have heard of concern about nuclear war. This is a nuclear neighbourhood. As a non-nuclear nation, we do not naturally think about nuclear matters. It is sobering, however, to think about what nuclear war would mean given that India, China and Pakistan are each nuclear powers. What are we going to do to counter these developments which could be quite dramatic? We need to be thinking now not just about the problems, but about the solutions. I am not going to tell you the solutions today. But one of them, I think is to make my third point – the ‘now’ problem.

Pakistan

Pakistan could well be the first brick in the wall that falls and brings it down. It is polite not to mention Pakistan too much. But it is almost inevitable that we have to think about it very closely from multiple angles – religion, the weakness of the Pakistani state and its ability to govern itself, and its ability to create an economy that is sustainable and able to generate wealth for the country. Given the events of the last few weeks, we need to consider its ability to provide for its own security. The recent attack on a Pakistani naval base is unacceptable.

I think India has a role to play in helping achieve a stable Pakistan. I have visited the Indian Northern Army – a force of some 450,000 men then commanded by General Harry Prasad. Pakistan has an army of some

800,000. India has an army of some 1.3-1.6 million. The array of forces aligned along the border between India and Pakistan consumes enormous resources and limits Pakistan’s ability to deal with its internal problems. I think we need somehow to encourage an easing of this tense relationship between India and Pakistan. I would like to suggest that, with India being the larger country and with perhaps the less to lose, that generosity from India might just be the way to solve this problem.

Implications for Australia

The Fourth point – what does this mean for Australia? There has been a really good discussion today in terms of Australia decoupling from its ‘big brother’, the United States. I am not sure we can do that. We have talked about strategic culture. Our strategic culture is based on a ‘great and powerful friend’. A decoupling would be difficult for us.

But we also need to be able to maintain a relationship with all regional players. That is why I have a problem in this afternoon’s ‘lolly shop’ – a shop that offers the United States, China, India and Japan. At some stage, decisions will be needed. I think it is probably going to be a ‘real politics’ decision in favour of the ‘big brother’, the one that we know well, and which has the same hopes and aspiration as us. But at the same time, as we look at globalisation, the economy, security and increasingly at human security (and there is much more to consider there), we have to think how Australia, as a middle power, can add substance to the rhetoric of what middle-power action really means. Let me repeat, I do not think we have to be confronting China.

Making Room for India and China

My last point – as part of that middle-power discussion, the rhetoric is in terms of the instruments of control of the world. For example and topical today, who is going to be the new leader of the International Monetary Fund? That is one of the instruments of monetary control that came out of Breton Woods and those other institutions developed after the Second World War. In the past, the United Nations has talked futilely about reform of the Security Council. With the growing power of India and China, maybe it is now time to think very seriously about some form of reform that makes room for India and China within some of these instruments of global power and influence.

The Author: Professor Peter Leahy is the Foundation Director of the National Security Institute at the University of Canberra. A career soldier who served the nation with distinction for 37 years, he was Chief of the Australian Army for six years before assuming his present appointment in 2008. His period of command was marked by the continuous global deployment of Australian soldiers on high-tempo, complex and demanding combat operations. He oversaw the rapid expansion and development of the Army, including the Special Forces, to provide a hardened and networked Army with increased adaptability and flexibility and the ability to provide government with a broad range of domestic and expeditionary options. For this service he was appointed a companion in the Military Division of the Order of Australia. [Photo of Professor Leahy: Colonel J M Hutcheson, MC]