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(amended)

The Ardern Government's Foreign Policy

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As Jacinda Ardern's government looks outward a kaleidoscope of extensive change permeates the world landscape. The impacts of the Presidency of Donald Trump in the US, and the fall out in Europe and more widely from the UK BREXIT decision feed multiple uncertainties. Crisis and disorder continue to brutalise the Middle East. North Korea threatens to employ newly acquired nuclear weapons, but in the last 36 hours, developments in the wake of the South Korean winter Olympics suggest a new episode is in the making. This renders comment here on that subject, foolhardy.

On top of all else, the rise of Asia, especially of China, continues to shape the global economic landscape as well as NZ's prospects, as it also rearranges the international pecking order. And much closer to home, increasingly self-assured, independent and assertive, Pacific Island leaders perceive NZ, and Australia, in a changing light at a time of real social and environmental adjustment (especially climate change) within the region, and of the presence there of other outside interests.

Any snapshot right now of the way things are, involves much guesswork and almost certainly merits quick despatch into the dustbin of history. NZ has of course minimal influence in shaping the external landscape. It journeys internationally below the radar screens of the powerful. While it is undeniable small countries must always strive for fitting relations with the powerful, NZ has learnt under a succession of governments that impalpable status backed by authentic soft power - as a small, law abiding, unthreatening democracy - plus nimble footwork (politically and commercially) and avoidance of megaphone

diplomacy, confer scope for independent thinking and manoeuvre in the modern world.

It also of course prompts a search for coalitions with likeminded countries. In practice that often means NZ keeps company with different countries at different times on different issues. NZ international relations are more multifaceted than in earlier and different times when we were a loyal, dependable but distant extension of the trans- Atlantic world. Then we feared marginalisation. But in the modern world marginalisation is an act of perverse choice, not the inevitable fate for a small internationally minded country. The need of course to possess and consistently cultivate external relations machinery fit for purpose is vital.

The US Position

A brief look at the wider picture sets the tone. Over the past 10 weeks the US has released either side of Christmas, three grand policy documents, the first of the Trump Presidency - the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defence Strategy (NDS) and the so-called Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) which defines American nuclear weapon policy. In combination these proclamations present a decidedly dark American view of present destiny.

They depict “an extraordinarily dangerous world”. They specifically dismiss the idea of a community of nations striving through international institutions for mutual benefit. They assert that reality in the world, is one where large nations are competing strenuously for advantage. The US is determined to master that challenge and assert forceful leadership through yet further expansion of formidable military supremacy; and through robust competition in financial, economic and trade institutions and by bilateral action including trade protectionism to restore fairness because the US has been exploited by others taking unrequited advantage of US prosperity and security.

Sections of the policy resonate with the doctrines of President George W. Bush which, for example, characterised the multilateral system as the refuge of the weak, asserted international security depends upon whether one is for or against America, and elevated the operational practice of ‘preventive war’ -

epitomised by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, still the source of so much present strife in the Middle East.

New US policy insists strongly that others must raise levels of arms expenditure, while it recognises the potential of military alliances and partnerships and their importance for adding strength to US leadership - and by extension therefore to its world view. It is however precisely the world view of the present US leadership which animates lively concern elsewhere.

For many countries who hitherto have been ready to partner coalitions of support for US security objectives, and this includes NZ, (which is described as 'a key partner in contributing to peace and security'), the overall strategic policy direction of the Trump administration - disregard for the rule of law, preference for unilateralism, reliance upon supreme hard power - creates real unease. Countries which share values with the US are confounded too by the extensive domestic dissonance inside the US - racism, deluded gun laws, militarisation of law and order, demonisation of Islam, ideological paralysis of government and capricious exercise of Presidential influence.

Reaction inside the US itself to the new policy papers, is mixed. For some they are proof of renewed US strategic confidence and an unapologetic repudiation of Obama's irresolution, because he suggested America should share leadership given that US relative power is diminishing in the face of structural change in the world. We live after all in an age of "catch up". For example, enduring US superiority in the intrusive use of cyber space, and long established capability for encroaching to secure political change in other countries, are now being emulated by others at America's own expense. The Trump vision emphatically refutes any sense of sharing. It equates America First with superlative technology, unmatched military power and unilateral conduct.

Critics inside the US dismiss the zero sum thinking according to which US success can only be secured at the expense of others. The policies are considered incoherent and contradictory. They emphasise importance of rules based international economic order then in the next breath advocate bilateral mercantilist trade transactions that conflict directly with that order. The

administration also supports actions to enfeeble the WTO. It calls for more robust US diplomacy while it purposefully strips back the State Department, reduces levels of US foreign aid and leaves vacant key government positions.

Both China and Russia are censured because they challenge American power, influence and interests. They intend to erode American security and prosperity.' Of direct relevance to NZ, China (along with Russia) is defined as an opponent determined to make its economy less free and less fair, to repress its society, to grow its military, to control information and threaten critical US infrastructure including military command and control architecture. Some of these perceived impairments identified by America's national security and intelligence community sit however oddly with President Trump's personal expressions of regard and respect for Chinese President Xi Ping.

Some observers seek solace in a belief that eventually "things will pass". In other words, President Trump will, one day, depart the scene. But any serious expectation that everything will then revert back to 'normal' - to the way things once were - is too credulous. The forces within America which the President mustered to secure his office, are fundamentally changing the sense of American liberal internationalism. Moreover, policy makers in the rest of the world cannot simply stand still waiting and hoping to see what happens.

Jacinda Arden herself suggests the NZ is now navigating a level of uncertainty not seen for several generations. Three current issues illustrate the complexities of present navigation There are several more.

1.Nuclear War Dangers & North Korea (DPRK): The world has been gravely alarmed by DPRK acquisition of nuclear weapon capability and its political rhetoric of brinkmanship, involving threats against the US, to which the US has replied in kind. The vehemence on both sides has been troubling, but in the last 36 hours an apparent notable change of tone on the DPRK side, has entered proceedings. Whether this signals a real change in substance however it is too early to foretell.

NZ concern springs obviously from a fear of a catastrophic conflict for Asia Pacific and the world, as well as the example DPRK sets for others who might be similarly disposed to nuclear arm themselves. With its non-nuclear commitment in law, and reinvigorated dedication by the new government to the cause of nuclear disarmament, NZ has an obvious principled interest in what is now happening. It is resolutely opposed to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by any country - great or small. Any eventual success in denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula would after all, moreover have to apply to everyone involved - including to the US with its longstanding targeting of DPRK through extended nuclear deterrence and its extensive forward military presence, as well as to China and Russia.

As a proponent of the universal nuclear weapons prohibition treaty, agreed by a significant majority last year in the UN, NZ reaction to unfolding events should include urging recognition of the direct relevance to the broader nuclear disarmament background of what transpires if or as, diplomatic process emerges on the Korean Peninsula. In the past perversity, unpredictability coupled with domestic ruthlessness, have been hallmarks of DPRK behaviour. But the regime is not irrational and is displaying adroit diplomatic skill as revealed in events surrounding the winter Olympics, and by an apparent change of heart or of tactics, in Pyongyang. The opportunity for all this was supplied entirely of course by South Korea (ROK), now led by a new President committed to unity on the Korean Peninsula. It is not clear actually whether that is also DPRK's objective - regime survival and sovereign recognition by the US have driven Pyongyang's policies hitherto.

ROK has a difficult line to walk. Support and encouragement from ROK friends and partners will be important. Its military alliance with the US is bedrock, and Washington will understandably be watching the ROK President's every move. For his part the Korean President needs solid lines into Washington. Clear understanding and language will be at a premium. For example, the US position on eventual talks with DPRK has been strongly conditional upon Pyongyang first renouncing its nuclear weapons, before talks can commence. Is Pyongyang's readiness to include denuclearisation as a topic for any discussion sufficient however for US purposes? DPRK has condemned traditional large scale joint

exercises between US and ROK military forces, will the US and ROK cancel, or prolong postponement, of scheduled imminent exercises? Incidentally NZ has previously accepted invitations to observe such exercises.

Credit for an apparent change of heart by Pyongyang is claimed by some to be a consequence of the latest economic sanctions imposed upon DPRK. Possibly. But interminable sanctions against the regime dating back over half-a- century have not swayed Pyongyang. Whatever the explanation, one thing is clear, there is still a very long way to go if a real process of diplomatic negotiation is to get off the ground, let alone to produce effective results.

Iraq: NZ must decide by the end of 2018 whether to withdraw, its deployment of a defence force contingent which has, since 2015 in conjunction with Australian forces, been training and mentoring Iraqi army personnel for their war against Jihadi extremists, whose aim has been to create a new destabilising geographical reality in the Middle East - a radical Caliphate that would envelop part of Iraq as well as its neighbours. However, as the result of effective coalition military action led by the US and involving the Iraqi army, the Caliphate project has been destroyed.

The NZ contribution played a part in that success. With the original mission completed however the case for withdrawing the NZ contingent when its present term expires, is solid. Others will doubtless pressure NZ to remain. Iraq's government and army are preoccupied now however with thwarting separatist ambitions of its Kurdish minority - a longstanding challenge but one where outsiders should avoid involvement.

It is interesting to reflect just how extensively NZ military forces have been engaged in the distant Middle East/ Mediterranean region over the past century. There is a sense that NZ defence planners seem almost to regard it as a semi-permanent fixture. After the exemplary contributions in World War Two NZ support in the Middle East was directed to provision of UN and other peace keeping, but more recently in the past decade and longer, support for US/NATO led combat coalitions has emerged as a decided preference of defence planners. Changes in coalition leadership policies like the recognition of

Jerusalem as Israel's capital, direct confrontation against Iran and its nuclear deal, and support for Saudi Arabia which is engaged in a gravely inhumane war in Yemen do not seem to lead to reconsideration of NZ commitment to coalition involvement.

One consequence is that NZ has slipped to 82nd in the list of contributors to UN peace support/peacekeeping, a steep fall from a previous commendable record. Despite multiple faults, the UN still embodies the core of international rules based system which NZ fervently supports, but which is now questioned from many sides including the Trump administration. There is need here it seems, to reinforce NZ foreign policy consistency about international peace support and international rules behaviour.

If the considered view is that NZ should maintain a peace support role in the Middle East, then there is a solid case for replacing the Iraq commitment by one to a UN operation. South Sudan is a case in point where protection is needed against warring factions that seriously endanger a beleaguered UN effort, led by NZer David Shearer.

South China Sea (SCS). In the SCS, two separate but connected controversies prevail. First, sovereignty disputes between China and ASEAN states, and between ASEAN states themselves, over ownership of certain islands and rock formations. Second, a contest about freedom of navigation (*fon*) between the US and China. A judicious NZ diplomatic approach to both is indispensable.

The sovereignty issues are, first and foremost for resolution by the different claimants. Outsiders should not take sides particularly in our case because the parties concerned here all represent valued partners for NZ. However, the manner in which the claims to sovereignty are pursued is a concern to others, if regional stability is menaced.

An arbitration decision under the UNCLOS sought by the Philippines found in 2016 that Chinese historic claims to rights and jurisdiction in the SCS are contrary to UNCLOS, and that SCS rocks/and outcrops are maritime features which do not under maritime law generate territorial rights over surrounding

seas. China rejects the findings and the Philippines, under new political leadership that seeks improved relations with Beijing, seems for the present disposed let matters rest. NZ supports the tribunal findings.

In regard to the second dispute over *for the* fact that China depends upon two-way trade including seaborne trade for nearly 40% of its immense GDP, and has ownership of the world's largest container shipping line, strongly suggest China has no interest in interfering in the freedom of commercial navigation. US asserts that by claiming and militarising rocks and outposts in the SCS, China endangers the free flow of trade. There is no evidence that commercial trade is affected. The issue is more correctly understood therefore as one over freedom of military navigation, although the UNCLOS makes no distinctions.

The US practice of sailing USN warships and other vessels right up to continental China's territorial sea limit (12 miles), is a legacy of cold war times. Washington considers American national security interests demand that it continuously asserts the right. It encourages others like Australia, to join patrols of the SCS. Beijing on the other hand considers China's national security interests demand that the US desist. Chinese activities in the SCS are intended to reinforce that point. The controversy revolves in effect around whether the national security of the one, trumps the national security of the other. Given all the realities in Asia Pacific, this is decidedly delicate. NZ should keep powder dry and politely decline invitations from whatever quarter, to join in SCS *for* patrols.

Number One Priority

In its relatively short time in office so far the Arden government has made clear its priority concerns rest with the Pacific Islands Region (PIR). Foreign Minister Winston Peters has promised "to shift the dial" on NZ policy in the region, especially aid policy in order to reinforce understanding, friendship, mutual benefit, collective ambition and better diplomacy. Effective cooperation is important with Australia which has also, but separately, promised a "step change" in Australia's PIR policy. That policy traditionally contains a clear "defence of Australia" security dimension which reflects Canberra's relationship with the US that PM Turnbull presently describes as being one of "joined at the

hip”. The best efforts of both countries are vital to improved policy delivery, so that the ‘shift ‘of the NZ dial corresponds to the Australian ‘change of step’. As the Foreign Minister crisply summarised it, if the two countries are to succeed together it cannot be a matter of “the country cousin and the senior soldier” going about the business.

Policy renewal by NZ and Australia in the South Pacific occurs against a background of a growing inclination amongst islands governments themselves to a more exclusive brand of regionalism involving interaction and dialogue amongst themselves, without NZ and Australia necessarily in the room. In trade and development, in management of tuna fishing resources, in airlines policy, in caucusing at the UN this more exclusive trend is in evidence. Moreover, the recent decision of the two largest PIR countries, Fiji and PNG, not to sign up to the so-called enhanced Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Agreement (PACER Plus) concluded in June 2017, after lengthy resolute NZ and Australia persuasion, is a mark of how the preferences of the two metropolitan governments for further regional economic integration between themselves and the PIR, no longer carry the day in the region.

There are here as ever intricate foreign policy considerations behind trans-Tasman trade policy relating to outside interests in the South Pacific, particularly Chinese but also Japanese, Indian and others. When those island countries for which NZ had responsibility as sovereign power, gained independence and/or self-government all those years back, we actively encouraged their new leadership as well as leadership in other islands countries, to join international institutions, to search for additional partners, to diversify and broaden relationships. This was done expediently out of a recognition that NZ pockets are not deep enough to bear all the costs of new economic responsibilities the islands were now assuming. We are now witnessing the logical conclusions of that advice. We must ourselves adjust accordingly, in a big way. What goes around comes around!
