



18/05/2015 15:57

To <nra@taoiseach.gov.ie>  
cc  
Subject Comments on Draft National Risk  
Assessment 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to respond to certain aspects of geo-political risk that do not receive special attention in the *Draft National Risk Assessment 2015: Overview of Strategic Risks* document.

>>(ii) Have the correct risks been identified or are there significant risks that have been overlooked? If certain other risks should be included, why are they considered as warranting inclusion?

The document refers to “significant changes afoot globally where there is likely to be an ongoing significant shift of political and economic power to countries in the East and South. These shifts are challenging the existing international order in which liberal democracies have played the dominant role. They will necessitate deepening engagement with Asian, African and Latin American countries, if Ireland is to protect its interests in promoting trade, tourism and investment”.

My own work deals with East Asian Studies, with special regard to China. I have on occasion been an adviser to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the development of Spain’s *Plan Asia-Pacífico* , to the European Commission on communicative strategies with China, and most recently, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the UK on the development of values-based diplomacy with regard to Japan and China. I work with think tanks in Spain and in China and have begun working closely over the last year or so with a think tank of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on political reform and Party discipline. I am also a member of the advisory committee of the Asia Europe Foundation Higher Education Programme (part of the ASEM process). I have published material on risk assessment with regard to China. Although I work at a Spanish University, I am in fact Irish, but have never been involved directly in any way with the Department of Foreign Affairs. I have, of course, had contacts with various Irish ambassadors in Spain.

I offer this explanation of my professional background simply in order to explain why I think it important to include developments in East Asia in any process of risk assessment for Ireland. As the Draft document suggests, the international order is shifting and the trans-North Atlantic sphere will no longer dominate the establishment of norms and rules in

the emerging world order. As a member state of the EU, Ireland should to a certain extent benefit from the geo-political weight that could be exercised by the world's largest (current) trading block, but the EU has difficulties in the realm of developing a coherent and unified approach to the development of a common foreign policy. (Javier Solana is the Honorary President of the CIDOB think tank I work with in Barcelona and we organise with him a yearly closed door seminar on the risks the world order is facing, so I have been privy to serious discussion on this topic over the years.) Ireland is a small country, but size need not impede Ireland's playing a role in some of the issues involved in the changing world order and in the changing distribution of power in East Asia. Sweden became a major geo-political player in the second half of the 20th century and Qatar is trying to develop a similar role today.

I would like to illustrate a possible role for Irish diplomacy with reference to one of the major issues affecting the distribution of power in East Asia, and by extension, in the emerging world order. This is the issue of "history and reconciliation", with regard to Japan's relations with the rest of the countries in East and Southeast Asia that suffered Japanese aggression during the first half of the last century. Every year the publication of Japanese textbooks provokes international controversy in East Asia because they do not recognise a series of facts or events that the neighbouring countries insist they should. The Japanese government has even gone so far, recently, as to put pressure on the US publisher McGraw-Hill to modify some of its history textbooks in accordance with the official line of the Japanese government on such issues as the "comfort women" or the "Rape of Nanjing". There have been some attempts to promote the joint elaboration of history textbooks by teams of Japanese, Korean and Chinese historians, but with very limited success. It has become commonplace for experts to cite Germany's policy of dealing with history and reconciliation as a model for what Japan should do, or as a best practice or benchmark that Japan should follow, suggestions rejected out of hand by the Japanese authorities. It became clear to me in the recent seminar I was involved in with the British FCO that people and governments need to broaden their horizons and open their minds and use their imaginations and lateral thinking when they try to approach the thorny issues involved in processes involving history and reconciliation. Upon hearing from various high-ranking officials of the FCO that there was nothing that the UK could contribute to this issue, I was taken by surprise, because I took it for granted that the peace process in Northern Ireland was, among other things, an on-going exercise in dealing with the issues of history and reconciliation between two sovereign states with a complicated past. When I suggested that The Queen's official visit to Ireland or President Higgins official visit to the UK were in fact very important examples of ways in which states could try to resolve outstanding issues of history and reconciliation, I was further surprised to learn that they could see no parallels between the Anglo-Irish context and the Sino-Japanese context.

I have had occasion to comment on the peace process in the North with various advisers to the Chinese government and they have shown great interest in the innovative approaches that emerged, seeing the concept of "joint sovereignty" as a possible angle to be considered with regard to Taiwan, for instance. Ireland has the advantage of not being a former imperial metropole –just the opposite. And Ireland has the advantage of being small and neutral, a geo-political threat to no one. I think that Ireland could take on an interesting role in the realm

of history and reconciliation by offering, in a discrete way, its own experience of colonisation and decolonisation, and resolution of conflicts and reconciliation, not as a road to be followed but simply as an alternative example. This might be done in an unobtrusive way by organising a conference on the subject of history and reconciliation that would include a number of different examples. We have done this here in Barcelona with closed doors seminars involving Israelis and Palestinians, and with the opposing sides of guerrilla wars in Central America that eventually settled their conflicts through peace processes. I think that the key to this approach lies in the involvement of practitioners as well as academic experts, and by practitioners I mean diplomats, government authorities, people from the communications media, the business community, civil society, etc. As we learned long ago with the European Commission, it is more important to be able to reach the Senior Officials, and to get a proposal onto the agenda of a ministerial meeting through the SOs, than it is to deal directly with the Ministers. That is why we promote exchanges among think tanks, between China and Europe, on the assumption that the advisers in think tanks will have a real impact on their government's policies. There are alternative forms of diplomacy that the diplomatic corps cannot undertake. People speak of Second Track and Third Track diplomacy. I could give examples of some things we have done from Barcelona that might be called "off-the-grid" diplomacy.

I think it is in Ireland's interest to play a role, small though it may be, in the emerging order in East Asia because whatever happens in East Asia will affect the entire world order and that will have an impact on Ireland. I think that Ireland's own experience in the realm of history and reconciliation has given Ireland a degree of moral authority sufficient to be able to have something to say on the subject, and that this could open the door to Ireland being seen as a kind of honest broker. At the very least, I think it might be a way of bring Ireland to the attention of the major players in an area of potential conflicts that could affect the world order, bring Ireland to their attention in a positive and non-threatening way.

>>(vi) Are there any significant general mitigants, such as improving human capital and public institutions, to which attention should be paid?

I would suggest that the Department of Foreign Affairs identify those Irish people around the world who are knowledgeable about East Asia (in this case), who have experience of living and working in situ, and who could advise the DFA on an informal basis. I think that there is a crying need to develop East Asian Studies in Ireland in order to have experts on hand. I was able to inaugurate East Asian Studies at university level in Spain because I was able to demonstrate to the government the added value of having people trained, not just in languages and literature and history, but also in the application of disciplines from the social sciences to Area Studies. There should be a kind of "revolving door" policy that would allow academic experts to be seconded to government ministries and for civil servants to be sent to think tanks or to research centres for training or recycling, on a regular basis. At the very least, I would highly recommend the organisation of periodic brain-storming sessions involving civil servants and experts.

If I may be of help in any way with regard to any of these suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

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