

PROSPECTS FOR 2011

The year 2011 ushers in the second decade of the new millennium after a decade of continued rapid transition in international relations. The main sea-change that continues to emerge is that of a power shift from West to East with the ever more active roles of China and India in their respective regions and beyond. The global economic recession since September 2008 has also further highlighted the different economic dynamics playing out in the West and East with the latter continuing to register impressive growth.

This year will be the tenth anniversary of the military campaign launched on October 7th 2001 in retaliation to the terror attacks against New York and Washington DC on September 11th 2001. The sustained American intervention coupled with support by its NATO allies has not succeeded in eradicating the Taliban movement. The future direction of Afghanistan thus remains uncertain despite a decade of military intervention and billions of dollars in economic assistance.

The future of Iraq also remains unclear despite a relative improvement in the political and security outlook of this country. The key question in 2011 will be whether the scheduled withdrawal of American troops after a seven year military campaign goes ahead as planned? If this does take place what geopolitical reality will emerge as a result of this withdrawal? What will the implications for the future of Iraq and this region be after 2011?

Another country that will continue to attract the attention of the international community is Iran. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East neighbourhood remains a major concern. If the concerted effort of international diplomacy, including sanctions, does not deliver the desired outcome and Iran acquires the nuclear capability, then a showdown with Israel, the United States and most of the international community will be all but inevitable. Iran's possession of nuclear weaponry would also trigger an arms race across the Mediterranean area with Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt already declaring their intention to pursue such a path if Teheran does not change course.

Instability across the Middle East and North Africa will continue to provide conducive terrain for extremists. The continuous security challenge of terrorism will thus continue to be a priority. This has become a permanent feature of our everyday lives and will not disappear.

The G20 and G8 grouping of states that are seeking to steer the international political economy away from recession towards growth will be led by the French Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy. France's ability to manage and lead this international forum will serve as a major test for President Sarkozy and will have a major bearing on the French Presidential elections due in 2012. Just as tension increased between the two Koreas at the end of 2010, it appears that a further escalation of hostilities should be expected on the Korean Peninsula. The gradual leadership succession in North Korea seems to be coinciding with a deliberate strategy of military force projection with the North continuously seeking to provoke militarily its southern neighbour. An escalation of violence also runs the risk of engaging the United States and China into the equation.

The year 2011 will see President Barak Obama commence the second half of his term in office. Following the Republican victory in the mid-term elections, President Obama will have to make

use of all his political skills to regain momentum ahead of the primaries that will commence in earnest towards the end of 2011. In order to be able to dedicate more time to his foreign policy agenda President Obama will have to build upon his Health Care, economic reform and START agreements that are the hallmark of his first two years in the Oval Office.

Turning to the Middle East there is little to indicate that a way out of the current political stalemate between Israel and the Palestinians can be found. If such a reality becomes permanent then one should expect a further increase in instability in the region, including riots and terror attacks as witnessed in the first week of 2011 across the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

The year 2011 also sees two recent EU members, Hungary and Poland, assume the rotating Presidency. Both the Hungarian and Polish Presidencies have already indicated that they will primarily focus on central and eastern European security challenges and seek to promote further the so-called Eastern Partnership of the EU.

One will have to watch closely and ensure that such an eastern policy shift does not take place at the expense of the already functioning “southern partnership” which is better known as Euro-Med Partnership and the more recent Union for the Mediterranean initiative. The setting up of a UfM Secretariat in Barcelona can add further coherence to management of Euro-Med relations. The project driven nature of the UfM in key strategic areas will ensure that more tangible results are achievable. But the Partnership has to constantly strive to avoid become hostage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

During the second decade of the new millennium more of a focus on multilateralism and good governance is essential. As the world commences this new phase in geopolitical relations managing the plethora of sources of instability, insecurity and uncertainty will require a strategic rethink that so far has alluded the global community. The emerging more multipolar world of several power centres must find a way to cooperate with one another if the task of managing security challenges is to be achieved.

**Professor Stephen C. Calleya, International Relations Analyst,
extends his very best wishes for the New Year to all readers.**