

In a recent article in Foreign Policy magazine, Niall Ferguson, Lawrence A Tisch Professor of History at Harvard University and the author of "War of the World" and "The scent of money" made the following predictions:

Just as the Great Depression led to global political crises, so could the latest financial crisis. He argues that three factors made for lethal organised violence in the last century: ethnic disintegration; empires in decline: and economic volatility.

In the greater Middle East, two of these have been present for some time, and are now joined by the third. Globally the economic crisis will cause a substantial increase in unemployment, a painful decline in incomes; and hence geopolitical consequences. Some of the parts of the crisis would probably have happened anyway:

- Democratic Republic of Congo back to civil war.
- Anarchy and piracy around Somalia.
- Hyperinflation in Zimbabwe.
- Mexico's drug wars (on which Defence Viewpoints reports frequently courtesy of our friends at Stratfor).
- Gaza

But the latter, together frustrated gang men with nothing better to do than fanaticize about jihad and falling US troop levels will bring back further violence to Iraq. The most likely recruits to radical Islamist organisations are not the dirt poor, but the relatively well off educated who have glimpsed prosperity which is dashed away. "The revolution unfulfilled expectations" as our patron General Lord Guthrie once told us.

The Asian "tigers" are turning into mangy cats. Thailand is likely to be worst affected. The prospect for the new Government are bleak, especially as the majority opposition has remained popular through all sorts of jerry mandering.

Former communist countries of Eastern Europe are under the cosh. Is the wrangle over Ukrainian gas supplies the first step in a Russian bid to destabilise and break up the Ukraine?

With US federal debt likely to reach 100% of GDP in ten years, their resources available for policing the world will be reduced. Perhaps the speed with which President Obama has peopled the upper reaches of the State department is an indication that he realises the potentially lethal geopolitical cocktail now being shaken and stirred.