

The post-Cold War consensus appears to be breaking down. Trust in multi-lateral bodies to mediate international disputes is being replaced by assertive regional powers. Developments in Asia, the Middle East and Europe demonstrate the return of 'strong man' politics. The 'Brexit' vote and the possibility of a Trump presidency in the US are seen as evidence of 'nativism'. Internationalism seems to be in retreat. Such is the view of the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) at the launch of their annual Strategic Survey for 2016, which Nick Watts attended for Defence Viewpoints.

Across the world, international relations seem to be increasingly influenced by assertiveness; either from regional actors jostling for influence, or Russia seeking a renewal of 'respect'. International organisations such as ASEAN in Asia, the EU and NATO in Europe are all frustrated by an inability of powers to co-operate. The same appears to be the case with the US and its attempts to impose its will in foreign policy.

China's actions in the South China Sea have seen it, in effect, annexing territory whilst the ASEAN powers are divided about how best to respond. The US has conflicting interests in Asia, as it needs China's co-operation to deal with North Korea. Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict has assured the Assad regime, whilst complicating international efforts to achieve a settlement. The US has been able to achieve a deal with Iran which has neutralised what threatened to become a major source of de-stabilisation in a region already in turmoil. Turkey's action in Syria seems as much about neutralising the Kurdish separatists, as dealing with the threat from Da'esh (ISIL). Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen also seems to be aimed at limiting Iranian influence in the region, as it is about dealing with Daesh/ISIL supporting militias.

The vote by Britain to leave the EU and the prospect of a possible Trump presidency in the US show the resurgence of 'nativism' a renationalisation of foreign policy. The consequences of 'Brexit' for both the UK and the EU are still to become apparent, as the details of the separation have yet to be negotiated. If the UK manages a 'successful' Brexit, it could pose risks for the integrity of the EU in its present form.

The very fact that one of the major US parties has nominated a candidate like Donald Trump demonstrates how trust in 'the establishment' has diminished. Trump's attitude to NATO is 'a lot of money to protect other people' which will resonate in the US. In a magazine interview earlier in the year president Obama referred to 'European free riders' sheltering under the US nuclear umbrella. European members of the Atlantic Alliance will be watching the results of the US elections in November very closely.

However, there was some good news: The ending of a conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas after 50 years, the rapprochement between the US and Cuba and the signature of the UN brokered COP 21 environmental accord in Paris.

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