

by the TNI and national police. GAM should also not be allowed to get away with egregious propaganda. This will be a hard 'row to hoe' for Australian diplomacy. Meanwhile it is probable the civilian casualties will continue to mount and the world will continue to take notice. It remains more than likely that elements of the TNI will again shoot Indonesia in the foot — perhaps mortally.

In the longer term, especially if, as seems probable, the TNI campaign continues to harden rather than weaken Acehnese resolve, Australia faces the same fundamental moral and strategic dilemmas posed by the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. In the case of East Timor, our de facto and subsequent (unique) de jure recognition of the territory's forcible incorporation into Indonesia because of supposed 'realpolitik' eventually collided with our other enduring national interests. These included Australia's moral conscience, pervasive democratic outlook and burgeoning international pressure for resolution. Just as importantly, 'realpolitik' eventually dictated the strategic need to finally heal a continually festering and worsening wound infecting the overall bilateral relationship. As many observers have noted, even a threatened or actual short war with Indonesia in support of East Timorese independence in 1975 might have caused far less bilateral damage in the long run. Even more to the point, these collisions over enduring national interests were driven more by Indonesian blunders and wider international consequences than by our own shrewd diplomatic navigation.

By the early 1990s, as Falantil resistance in East Timor strengthened rather than weakened after a long colonial occupation, some perceptive Indonesians realised the game was up. Indonesia had by then lost even the option of achieving a compromise solution, such as provincial autonomy within the republic, because of central government intransigence and loss of moral authority through repression. It seems such a great pity that a harsh lesson of Indonesian history seems about to repeat itself over Aceh.

As in East Timor (and West Papua), Indonesia faces the continuing paradox of colonialism eventually faced by all colonial powers. That most Indonesians cannot even begin to see themselves as colonisers only exacerbates the fundamental problem of confused national identity. True democratisation of Indonesian society would help such national self-realisation, but even if this occurs it seems probable it will not happen quick enough to forestall another disaster.

More Indonesians need to study French history. The French were unwilling to acknowledge the lessons of their forced withdrawal from Indo-China in the mid 1950s. In the late 1950s too many of the French could not accept that Algeria was not a department of France itself but an overseas colony yearning to be free. As with Indonesia's continuing colonial dilemma in West Papua and elsewhere, the parallels in Aceh with French colonialism in Algeria remain striking.

While Australia obviously cannot be seen to be encouraging the dismemberment of its largest neighbour, some contingency consideration needs to be undertaken. If some measure of Indonesian disintegration becomes inevitable, would it not be better for both our countries to assist Indonesia to manage such a transition. Despite the lessons of East Timor (and many other examples with other countries), Australian policy, at present, often seems to be based on an assumption that Indonesia is an immutable polity, and that if we ignore secessionist pressures in Indonesia they should, and will, simply go away.

Japan strikes in

In the light of continued North Korean brinkmanship Japan's Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has finally said openly what many Japanese leaders have said privately for years. Mr Koizumi made his remarks to an upper house parliamentary committee in late May examining proposed war contingency legislation that has already passed through the lower house of parliament. The bill is intended to provide the government with greater powers to forestall or react to potential attacks on Japan.

Mr Koizumi's preparedness to consider pre-emptive action against aggressors (most notably North Korea) echo similar remarks by Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba earlier this year. To exemplify the change of stance Mr Koizumi has also proposed renaming the Japanese Self-Defence Forces as a navy, army and air force. These latest changes to Japan's defence posture are understandable steps along the progression that really took off with Japan accepting the responsibility in the mid 1980s to protect its sea lanes of communication out to one thousand nautical miles from Japan itself.

Japanese participation in US plans for theatre missile defence now seem certain, as does Japan's acquisition of cruise missiles for a first-strike capability. Japan is, however, not proposing any reconstitution of the large force projection and strategic mobility capabilities that allowed it to conquer much of the Pacific Basin in the early 1940s.

The reaction of China and South Korea to these latest comments will prove very interesting. Japan's neighbours have known this day would eventually come but are nonetheless not comforted by the forecast. Japanese diplomats are no doubt working overtime in Seoul and Beijing. In the latter capital, they are no doubt alluding to China's part in forcing the decision through its failure to satisfactorily influence North Korea to be a responsible international actor.

While the two generations of Australians with personal experience of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 1940s grow ever smaller, a strong degree of strategic suspicion concerning Japan also lurks in the Australian national psyche. This has not been alleviated by Japanese official and popular reluctance to face up to its past in the same manner as Germany or even Russia. Contemporary

Japanese school history texts still incorrectly dismiss many Japanese war crimes as myths, including major atrocities such as the Rape of Nanking and Japanese biological warfare experiments on Chinese prisoners. The texts also do not cover Japanese mistreatment of Australian (and allied) prisoners of war in anywhere near appropriate detail. Many young Japanese tourists visiting Australia are consequently surprised to discover that Japan attacked Australia during World War II.

That said, however, it seems unlikely that Japan will again pose a military threat to Australasia. Like Australia, Japan is now a major ally of the United States and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Japanese governance is also fairly democratic by international standards. Furthermore, free-trade agreements and general peace guarantee access to raw materials a lot easier and cheaper than conquest. The becalmed Japanese economy suffering from prolonged deflation also acts as a firm brake on substantial Japanese rearmament and a recurrence of a foreign policy driven by sabre rattling.

While nations have only enduring interests rather than enduring friends, a potential threat from Japan also remains unlikely for even more prosaic reasons. The modern, joint-focused ADF, and the Australian population at large, are surely most unlikely to again embrace a modern version of the 'Singapore strategy'. Such a disastrous strategy was foisted on us in the late 1920s and 1930s by narrow-minded civilian bureaucrats in the Department of Defence and complacent politicians unwilling to pay for effective national defence. It couldn't possibly happen again could it?

The eccentricity of hermits

The hermit kingdom of North Korea continues to provide the epilogue of the Cold War. While there appears to be no rational reason for a war to break out, especially from our viewpoint, the biggest problem remains in understanding how the North Korean regime views its international and domestic predicaments, and in how it might react.

North Korea remains an enigma wrapped in a riddle governed by what we think is a joke (individually and ideologically). At least superficially, the North Korean State could be described as a 'would-be Roman Empire' celebrated in bronze instead of marble. Even more than their North Asian neighbours, the North Koreans appear to value the oriental game of 'Go' in strategy formulation. Put simply, they do not always share our predilection for linear logic and therefore often appear unpredictable within our frames of reference.

Throughout the Cold War, North Korea was occasionally a worry but not a significant threat outside the Korean peninsula. In a similar manner to Iraq, the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and consequent regional instability has fundamentally changed the equation. Recently there has been an upsurge in the

numbers and seniority of North Korean defectors. As well as providing further evidence of the regime's unravelling, these defector reports apparently indicate that the concept of 'regime change' and the recent collective intervention in Iraq have concentrated the minds of the North Korean leadership. No doubt the example of the 'decapitation strikes' launched against the Iraqi leadership at the beginning of the intervention in Iraq has not assuaged their concerns. Accurate assessments of the real North Korean reaction are still being compiled but more than mild paranoia appears to be endemic.

For Australia, the detention of the North Korean ship Pong Su for alleged smuggling of illegal narcotics with official blessing simply adds another unwanted layer of complexity. As a signatory to the 1953 Korean armistice Australia is legally, morally and strategically bound to assist South Korea and the US should North Korea initiate hostilities again. Our ability to assist is limited, but no doubt some contingency planning is occurring for air and maritime options.

The biggest problem with the North Korean regime is not so much in determining when its inevitable collapse will occur. The key dilemma remains in assessing what its leaders understand to be their situation, and what they might resort to in attempting to avoid or survive the regime's death throes (if they can recognise them). Furthermore, the paranoid nature of North Korea's totalitarian regime and its tendency to strategic brinkmanship provide obvious limitations to dialogue and crisis management through conventional diplomacy.

The death throes of communist dictatorships thus far have not followed a uniform pattern and the Asian versions have, as yet, all survived. The Soviet juggernaut slowly bogged down in internal corruption of all types until it eventually tottered to a complete stop. The externally imposed communist dictatorships in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria crumbled quickly when their ruling cliques realised the game was up. The unwilling communist federation of Yugoslavia crumbled through a mix of secessionist and democratic pressures, but not without a decade of war provoked by Serbian communists trying to prolong the inevitable. In only one case, Ceausescu's Romania, probably the closest equivalent personality cult to North Korea, did the ruling clique attempt to repress widespread popular dissent and thereby trigger a violent confrontation that it swiftly lost.

No one outside North Korea really knows what effect the half-century of cradle-to-grave, all-pervasive propaganda and mystical twaddle about the two Kims has really had on most North Koreans. It may have, even if only subconsciously so far, nurtured the type of underground cynicism and desperation that only awaits the right trigger as in Romania. On the other hand, the North Korean people may be as broken in spirit as many Iraqis.