

up a storm to fling the hammer as far as it can go ... knocking everyone, or everything, down in its path! I delved a little further ...

Definitions vary enormously and are often a bit open-ended. For example, Sovereign Right or *sovereignty*, equals: '*character of service conducive to the public good*'; or '*the power of a state to do everything necessary to govern itself*'; even the '*supreme, absolute and uncontrollable power by which an independent state is governed*'. (the *uncontrollable* bit began to worry me!) Yet perhaps more concerning is: '*a right that a state possesses which allows it to act for the benefit of all of its citizens, as it sees fit*'. More astoundingly: '*the power to do everything in a state, without accountability*'. Wow! Is this really what we know and revere as democracy? And does this big stick of Sovereign Right suddenly make it so much better than autocracy?

But anyway, okay, that all sounds quite straight forward: any state can do anything, within its borders, to its citizens and its environment – built, or otherwise – with impunity! But interestingly, in addition: '*sovereignty is the full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside*'. So, one can do unto one's own, whatever it is deemed needs to be done within one's borders, but this cannot be affected in any way by an entity from elsewhere. Turning that statement around, it must be safe to assume that Sovereign Right does not include trying to interfere or impact on the territory of another nation (which also has its own *sovereignty*). Curiouser and curiouser, as Alice once said.

So how on Earth can Trump and his rampant entourage impose their will (with seeming impunity) on other nations and their enterprises, or the people, within those nations? This is really not so much to do with Sovereign Right, as with economic and military might. Iran refers to the Trumpian approach as US terrorism. Not the first time of course, that a president of the most powerful nation on the planet has directed its military power to browbeat and shackles a smaller state. If we consider terrorism as a premeditated and violent attack on unsuspecting peoples, then we can cite (amongst others): Vietnam under Kennedy, Johnston and Nixon, Nicaragua under Reagan, Iraq under Bush and

Bush, and now Iran under Trump. And it all appears to be carried out, quite illegally it would seem, in the name of that good old pillar of justice: Our Sovereign Right!

But as we move into the third decade of this 21st Century, the rules of the game appear to be changing. No longer is the USA the undisputed superpower that it once was, back in those heady, oil-fired days of the 20th Century. It remains the undisputed leader in terms of military power, but the US is beginning to fall short of the front runners, when judged against the fast-awakening economic might of Asia, and in particular the emerging dominance of China as the number one global economic superpower.

The broader Asia - stretching from Turkey in the west to Japan in the east, and Russia in the north to Australia in the south - hosts a population of five billion people (two thirds of the global population) and accounts for half the world's GDP; that percentage increasing annually as a result of astute business sense, coupled with intra-regional collaboration on aspects such as manufacturing, trade and geopolitical stability. Asia today is an economic powerhouse which is fast taking on the guise of a runaway steamroller: it is becoming unstoppable! As a vast consortium, Asia is more interested in pragmatism, than populism; unity rather than division, and looking forward to a new era of stability and growth, not backwards to the past century, as the West tends to do.

At the end of the Cold War the presence of the United States in Asia was unquestioned, but just 25 years later it plays little part in the intra-Asian institutions that have been formed to steer a common ownership, as the region moves forward. Bodies such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are essentially Asian, with little external influence. The USA remains for the time being a military power in the region ...and nothing much else.

The world order that we have been conditioned to assume - with America in the lead and everyone else hanging on to its tail - changed significantly with the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), launched in 2017 and led by China in conjunction with more than 60

other countries from Asia, Europe and Africa. BRI has introduced a new way of doing business, based on considered diplomacy, collective enterprise and enormous investments, both public and private, from all those involved. This is a far cry from the old post-colonial format of multilateral and bilateral drip-feed diplomacy, dependent to a large extent on the brew conjured up by the rich (Western) donor countries.

Thus, to take up the cudgel against Asia in general, and China in particular, looks like an increasingly foolhardy option: one based on a 20th Century history of domination by the West, rather than today's reality of equality, if not superiority, of the East. For Trump and Co. to think of this as a wrestling match, where they can browbeat China, or Iran, or whoever else is their flavor of the moment, into submission, is to repeat the mistakes made by former US leaders in Asia, The Middle East and Latin America. But this time the stakes are much higher, and the USA is operating increasingly as the underdog, when juxtaposed against the collective might of Asia.

For the US to uphold Sovereign Right in this current context, apart from being unconstitutional and illegal, is an extremely dangerous path to tread. To date, Asia cannot boast the military power of the West, though that age-old scenario is rapidly changing, with air, land and sea power of the East growing stronger every year (particularly for China of course) and now at least four Asian powers possessing nuclear capability, as an added menace.

But the real challenge to the imposition of Sovereign Right, by the USA, is the economic power that has been built up via a vast intra-Asian trading system, plus an East-West relationship where we now see a two-way reliance by the West on: (1) Asian-based manufacturing for western consumption, and (2) a pan-Asian marketplace for western products. In a new era of Asian domination, Sovereign Right could well be turned on its head, to invoke an reverse imposition of *sovereignty*, based on economic supremacy, that the West – and indeed the rest of the world - will be unable to withstand.

.....