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Introduction to the Issue

The Second String

*Stephen Aguilar-Millan
Director of Research
European Futures Observatory*

We have all become accustomed to the idea of the relative decline of ‘the West’ – the developed nations of North America and Europe. The relative decline must be matched by the relative rise of other nations. So far, our attention has been dominated by the relative rise of the BRIC nations – Brazil, Russia, India, and China. In placing our focus on the BRICs, we have neglected the other emerging nations whose rise, whilst less spectacular than the BRICs, is also a feature of our future development that we ought to take into account. We call this group of neglected emerging nations ‘the second string.’ In this piece, and the related pieces, we shall develop the idea of the second string and examine the future challenges of some of its members.

The idea of the second string originates in sports terminology. A second string team is a team of substitutes for the first team. Likewise, the second string of nations is those whose economic performance is not as stellar as the BRIC nations, but whose performance nonetheless outpaces the performance of the more developed nations in Europe and North America.

The second string consists of a large group of nations that fall into four areas of the world. First, there are the newly emerging economies of Eastern Europe, predominantly consisting of former Warsaw Pact nations and former Soviet Republics. These nations see their future through closer relations with the EU. Then there are also the newly emerging nations of the Far East, primarily the members of ASEAN. Their development is largely fuelled by the Sinic diaspora living within those nations. Propelled by trade and the advance of globalisation, these nations see their future as a great trading bloc.

The third group of emerging nations lies in South and Central America, mainly organised around the core of Mercosur nations. These nations take their lead from the United States, but are in the process of finding their own way into the future. Finally, there are ‘The Stans’ of Central Asia. These are principally energy republics with a low capacity to absorb their energy revenues that see their future in terms of well endowed Sovereign Wealth Funds.

Within the classification of the second string, we could identify a group of over fifty nations. This is too large for our purposes. In narrowing our focus, we wanted to identify more than one particular challenge

that the group faces as it moves into the future. In particular, the idea of boundary states quite appealed to us. A boundary state is one which finds itself astride two or more competing forces as it moves into the future. These forces could be religious, cultural, historical, or geographical. The important point is that they have created an internal tension within the nation that will play out in the future.

As the nation moves into the future, these internal contradictions will need to be resolved one way or another. We hope that their resolution would be peaceful and consensual, but many of the second string of nations lack the capacity in civil society to achieve this. In this case, it is important to be forewarned of the potential of trouble ahead, and it is in the boundary states that tensions manifest themselves.

In selecting the nations to focus upon, we were guided by a desire to select interesting examples from around the world. With over fifty nations to choose from, and with a desire to limit our selection to four nations, we were obviously going to be selective. In the end, we settled for the SATIN nations (South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia, and Nigeria). We took a focus of 20 years (i.e. out to 2030) because that gives us an appreciation of how those nations will develop over the next generation.

Some may see South Africa as a surprising choice. One could argue that it has many characteristics of a modern developed nation. And yet, this modernity co-exists with large areas that are almost completely undeveloped. The boundary between the rich and the poor is quite acute in South Africa, and a consideration of this issue tells us quite a lot about how we could tackle the issue of global poverty over the next generation. The country also occupies an interesting geo-political position at the western end of the Indian Ocean – which is seen by many as being a key geo-political focus for the twenty first century – and at the southern end of the Atlantic Ocean. South Africa has the potential to become a key entrepôt for the trade between Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Sub-Continent, and the Far East. And yet, to develop such potential South Africa will have to overcome a number of key challenges. These are outlined in the briefing by J. P. Landman and Tanja Hitchert.

The inclusion of Turkey on our list would come as no surprise at all. The nation is a bundle of contradictions, all of which need to be resolved over the course of the next generation. Turkey sits astride Europe and Asia. Yet is it a European or an Asian nation? Turkey occupies a key position between the energy republics of central Asia and their customers in Europe, and yet Turkey is relatively energy poor. There is the contradiction of the ‘westernised’ areas such as Istanbul and relatively underdeveloped areas such as Anatolia. Perhaps, more importantly, the boundary that may gain most attention is that of religion. Turkey occupies one of the points where the Islamic world comes into contact with the Christian world. This tension is usually, incorrectly, distilled into the question of whether Turkey is a European or an Asian nation. It ignores the Islamic population of the Balkans and the Christian population of Asia Minor. The next twenty years is one in which this contradiction may well resolve itself. Adrian Papaiani is our guide into the Turkey of the next generation.

Indonesia is a nation that doesn’t attract too much attention, but which, when we start to consider it, really does merit consideration. The country has the largest Muslim population on earth; it is a young and dynamic population, and one which may face a troubled path into modernity. The question of finding suitable means of occupying those in the ‘youth bulge’ is one that has grabbed our attention forcibly in recent months. We see this as a boundary between generations. Indonesia also occupies an interesting geo-political position at the eastern end of the Indian Ocean and at the southern end of the South China Sea. In many respects, it acts as a gatekeeper between the two and is seen by both China and India as within their key strategic interests. This strategic importance is given a sharper edge by the oil and gas energy deposits in the South China Sea and by Chinese claims to these deposits. In this respect, Indonesia sits on the boundary between the energy rich and the energy poor. It is these issues that are addressed in the briefing by Craig Stevenson.

Nigeria is a country of great promise. It is an energy rich nation and a high absorber of its energy revenues. And yet, it hasn't quite managed to achieve its development potential over the past decades. Many observers point to endemic corruption and chronic governance as the handicap which faces Nigeria. To this extent Nigeria sits on a boundary as both an emerging nation and a failed state at the same time. It represents an example of the chronic problems that face many African nations. In 2009 the country was home to about 78 million Muslims and about 76 million Christians. This division falls along regional and ethnic lines, and has the potential for a very explosive conflict in the coming years. The country aspires to a regional leadership role and to fulfil this particular destiny it will have to resolve the contradictions of poverty, ethnic and religious strife, and poor governance. Robert Bood examines how these contradictions might resolve themselves in the next twenty years.

As mentioned previously, there is a case for including a number of compelling members of the second string, but we finally opted for the SATIN nations. This is not to say that those nations not selected are unimportant. It is simply that the SATIN nations contain a number of complex and interacting issues that will unwind in the next twenty years. We can hope for a favourable outcome to most of these contradictions. Experience suggests that it would also be prudent to consider the dark scenarios where we do not achieve such a happy outcome, but that is another story.

Stephen Aguilar-Millan is the Director of Research at the European Futures Observatory (www.eufo.org), an independent not-for-profit organisation based in the UK, and is a Director of The Greenways Partnership, a firm of consulting futurists also based in the UK. He consults widely for a range of clients based across the globe. In addition, he is a member of the Royal Economics Society, a fellow of the RSA, and a member of a number of other professional bodies in the UK. He is a Board Member of the Association of Professional Futurists and serves on the Global Advisory Council of the World Future Society. Stephen is currently engaged on a variety of projects ranging from 'The Age of Scarcity 2010-50' (to be published in the summer of 2010) to 'An Asian Love Affair – China, India, and the US 2010-2030' (to be published early in 2011).