

No room for fear, greed in Sino-Australian ties

By Callum Smith

During last Friday's exclusive Australian live broadcast of the Rio 2016 Olympics opening ceremony, Channel 7 managed to offend Chinese nationals across the globe in what has been described as a series of systematic attempts to sabotage the Chinese Olympic effort. In a case of inept judgment characteristic of the broadcaster, the anticipated entrance of the Chinese team clad in vibrant red-and-yellow attire was abruptly interrupted by an advertisement for the similarly tinged McDonalds – unimpressed Chinese viewers were not “loving it.” Channel 7 super-sized tensions with another segment later in the broadcast, confusing the Chinese and Chilean flags in a medal tally.

Most recently, the Australian swimmer Mack Horton caused outrage after referring to his Chinese competitor Sun Yang as a “drug cheat” just hours before the race, and was hailed in media at home as a representative of “the good guys,” refusing to apologize for his un-sportsmanlike comments.

Recently, tensions in the Sino-Australian relationship have been unusually apparent. Having ratified a free trade agreement with China less than a year ago, the relationship has seen positive and mutually beneficial development in areas of trade, tourism and education. As the benefits of this coopera-

tive relationship continue to be realized economically, however, the official response of the Australian government to Hague's mid-July ruling and its ongoing intervention in the South China Sea disputes have evoked a widespread sentiment of aversion and sensitivity to the independent nation's actions.

It is not altogether surprising, then, that the ongoing Olympic debacle has been perceived in China as an affront to its honor and evidence of a prevalent “anti-Chinese” sentiment in Australia.

What does Australia have to gain from falling out with China? There are of course considerations of alliance

behind the official stance adopted by the Australian government over South China Sea disputes. As bilateral territorial disputes, however, Australia has little place in these negotiations.

As has been previously pointed out by former foreign minister Bob Carr, Australia would be wise to consider whether it wants to be seen as an aggressive “deputy sheriff” in a dispute outside its jurisdiction concerning its largest trading partner. The fact of the matter is that The Hague ruling does not have international jurisdiction, nor are there realistic means for resolution other than negotiations between the directly concerned parties.

The recent conflicts in the Sino-Australian relationship are largely attributable to misinformation and misunderstanding, promulgated by media beat-ups and increasingly xenophobic discourse. Two-faced politicians trumpet the benefits of foreign investment and trade, while at the same time indulge the fallacious association of complex domestic issues, such as unemployment and inflation in the housing market, to the growth of China's economic presence in the country.

With the rise of ultra-nationalist politicians such as Jacqui Lambie and Pauline Hansen, xenophobic and racist views are increasingly justified as diversification of opinion and protection of national interests, on the grounds of freedom of speech. There is, however, as an International Olympic Committee spokesperson stressed this week, a line between freedom of expression and outright disrespect, which many onlookers believe Horton has crossed.

Unlike Channel 7, which has apologized for what it describes as a “mistake,” Horton has proudly admitted that the smear campaign was an intimidation strategy appropriated from his mentor John Bertrand, and ruled out an apology. Horton ignores the fact that the positive testing he refers to was ruled to be unwitting and attributable to medication.

Channel 7's “mistake” has proven it to be an unprofessional broadcaster, unable to even recognize the flag of one of the world's sporting powerhouses. Horton's aggressive statements have been similarly detrimental to his international reputation as a sportsmanlike Olympian.

Domestic tabloids, which have labeled the Chinese response as jingoistic, have fuelled the ongoing controversy with bombastic front-page headlines such as “Champ versus Cheat.” In a nation that parades good sportsmanship as an imperative virtue, the widespread support for tactically motivated verbal abuse is astonishing.

The Australian paragon of xenophobia and former prime minister Toby Abbott once characterized the nation's relationship with China as being driven by a mixture of “fear and greed.”

It is time for Australia to do away with this unsustainable foreign policy, to be independent and China-literate in its actions, and put an end to unnecessary tensions with its largest trading partner.

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Illustration: Liu Rui/GT

Turkey prefers staunch ally to shaky critics at critical juncture

By Shi Chun

After months-long rift over the downing of a Russian warplane, leaders of Turkey and Russia stepped up to mend ties to levels beyond what they were before November's crisis, according to local experts.

The two leaders' meeting in St. Petersburg was in the wake of Turkey's ties with the western bloc having strained.

At the joint press conference, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan particularly thanked Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin for calling him up in solidarity the day after the July 15 failed coup attempt ahead of any NATO member countries.

He underlined that it was one of the reasons why he made his first visit abroad to Russia after the coup attempt.

“Not a single Western leader has visited Ankara to offer condolences and display solidarity. This has raised questions in the minds of ordinary Turks about whether or not the coup attempt was supported by the

West,” Ilnur Cevik, the former president adviser wrote on Daily Sabah.

Turkey's rapprochement with Russia also comes amid accusation of Ankara against the US for hosting Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who the Turkish government claims the mastermind of the coup attempt.

The deepening gap between Turkey and its Western allies has a role in this convergence, Gila Benmayor, the Turkish columnist said.

Ankara and Moscow also need to cooperate in Syria, Cenk Balsamis, a journalist expertised on Russia said.

In an interview with Russian media before his visit to St. Petersburg, Erdogan described Russia “as the most important and primary actor in bringing peace to Syria.”

“Turkey and Russia should take steps together to resolve this issue,” Erdogan stated.

Ankara and Moscow have been at odds due to differences on the Syrian issue as the latter lends support to Syrian Presi-

dent Bashar al-Assad, however Turkey insists the Syrian leader should step down for a solution in the war-torn country.

“I don't expect a long-term security cooperation between Turkey and Russia, but the West should understand the message given by the visit itself,” Ahmet Yukleyen, associate professor of international relations at Istanbul Commerce University said.

Economic loss is another main dynamic in Turkish-Russian rapprochement.

Turkey, to compensate its economic loss, wants removal of Russian restrictions on Turkish agricultural products and on Turkish construction companies in Russia.

Ankara also wants reinstating charter flights in order to recover loss in its tourism revenues, Baslamis said.

The rift between Turkey and Russia has badly damaged Turkish tourism this year, tourism professional Ender Alkoclar said.

The total number of Russian tourists in 2016 visiting Turkey

is 250,000 so far, while last year's figure from February to June was 2,800,000. Turkey's total revenue from tourism has decreased 40 percent compared to 2015, he added.

“The period of rift in bilateral relations did not help for both Turkey and Russian. Both countries have suffered in economic terms. Interests of them need bilateral cooperation,” Balsamis stressed.

Having been in economic crisis since two years, Moscow wants to realize Turkish stream gas pipeline to sell energy to the West since this project is the optimal one, according to Baslamis.

The Turkish Stream, announced in December 2014, was suspended in late 2015 after Turkey downed a Russian Su-24 jet. The pipeline's expected annual capacity is 63 billion cubic meters. Russia also wants to guarantee its investment on the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, which has been stalled since the crisis erupted between Ankara and Moscow, Baslamis said.

The two countries sealed an agreement to construct and operate Turkey's first nuclear power plant at the Akkuyu site in 2010. The plant is expected to produce some 35 billion kilowatt-hours per year.

Turkey remains a part of the Western defense system but wants strong ties with its neighbor Russia, according to Ilnur Cevik.

“We have commercial, economic and energy interests that require strong ties between Ankara and Moscow. We also want to be a part of the Shanghai five. But this does not mean we will give up our NATO membership,” Cevik wrote.

“In this new world order, we have seen that you should not keep all your eggs in the same basket,” he added.

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