

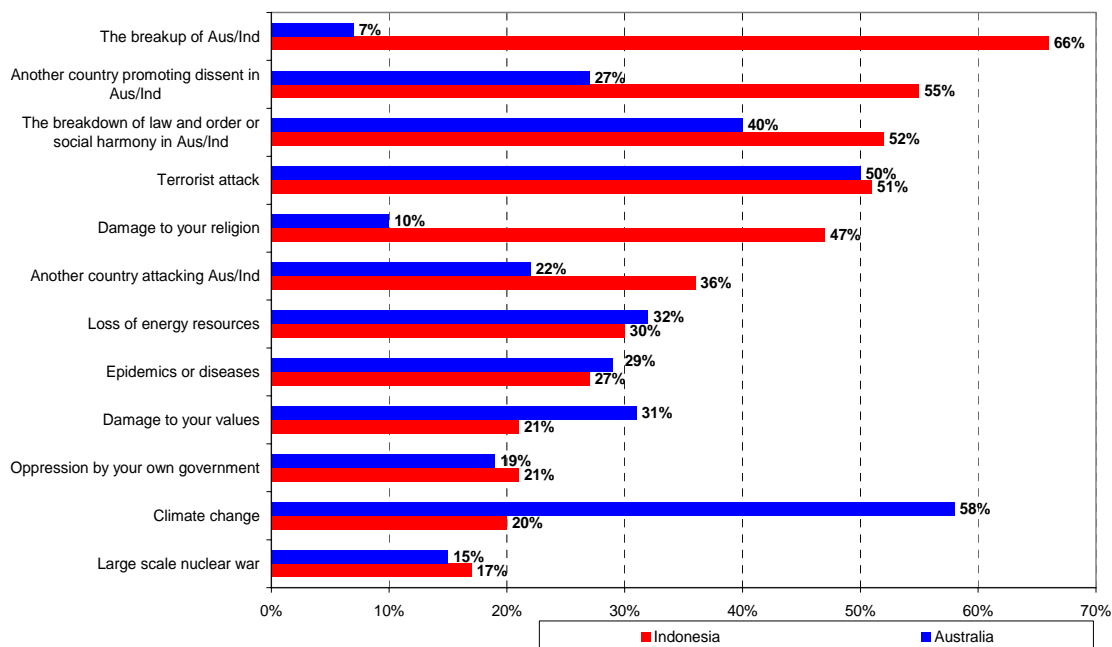
Without security, business remains fundamentally threatened.

Invited to attend a 2-day seminar hosted for the Australian chapter of the 22-country regional security body CSCAP, I was privileged to present the findings of a 2-country survey to the forum in Melbourne. Commissioned by the Asialink unit of Melbourne University, Roy Morgan Research recently conducted a mirror-image survey among 2000 respondents each in Indonesia and Australia. Suffice to say that world peace will remain elusive if these two peoples are unable to work together, celebrate their cultural differences and become a shining example of good neighbourliness to the rest of the world.

No two neighbours anywhere are more different. No two neighbours have more divergent fears. More than any other concern, two out of three Indonesians worry about “the breakup of the country”. Only 7 per cent of Australians have similar concerns, with 58 per cent worrying about “climate change” instead. Half of Indonesia fears “another country promoting dissent” and though the question wasn’t asked, Australia would likely be top of mind among most Indonesians. Only 27 per cent of Australians are similarly concerned. Half of Indonesia worries about “damage to your religion”, while only one in ten Australians share the concern.

But there are several concerns felt equally by both peoples. Half the population in each country is afraid of “a terrorist attack” occurring. One in three worry about the “loss of energy resources”, almost one in three fear “epidemics or diseases”. About one in five worry about “oppression by your own government”, even though the nature of such oppression maybe different in each country. Only one in six fear a “large scale nuclear war”. There isn’t much captains of industry anywhere can do to address these concerns, but yet another tragedy now playing itself out in the world of business deserves their attention.

The Fears of Two Neighbours



Whether actively involved or innocent bystanders, we are all witnessing a black comedy of epic proportions. Except that it isn't remotely funny. The US 'sovereign fund' last week spent over 600 million dollars of taxpayer money 'nationalising' the pillars of Wall Street. It has in essence exposed itself to a trillion dollars in bailout funds, adding to an unprecedented national debt of 11 trillion dollars. It is plain to see that the leaders of the free market are making it all up, one day at a time. Lehman is out, but AIG is in. One minute the world's most powerful leader is reassuring his people that "the fundamentals of the economy are strong", the next he's telling the world it is a "pack of cards". His lieutenants want the domestic audience to believe there was no other option, and the rest of the world that we have all once again been spared a global disaster. Sounds familiar? That's because similar noises were made after the savings and loans debacle of 1990, the internet bubble of 2000.

Each time, morally bankrupt leaders have left regulatory codes as loose as ever, inviting unbridled greed to reign supreme. Business as usual, time after time. Who deserves harsher punishment, who should be more despised? Is it the traffic cop in Jakarta who pockets a bribe the equivalent of a dollar to put food on the table at home? Or the board member who allows the CEO to cross ethical boundaries so they can feather their burgeoning nests together? A drought-stricken farmer who has toiled from dawn every day is given a pittance if anything; a CEO jumping off his burning balloon enjoys the benefits of a golden parachute. The inequalities can no longer be ignored by the privileged, if only for their own preservation.

Security comes in many forms. On its own, no 'War on Terror' can ever provide real security. War needs to be declared simultaneously on other threats as well. Like poverty, hunger, disease, climate change. Everywhere, businesses can profit from efforts made in these arenas. But the most powerful weapon of all to fight these wars is education. While it is no guarantee against terror it is certainly the cheapest. It is also the easiest campaign to prosecute, with the highest potential for return on investment. That war on ignorance requires 20 per cent of Indonesia's annual budget to be spent on education. Neighbouring Australia is contributing 2000 schools to that laudable pursuit. The rest of the world should note the madrassas mushrooming across the archipelago, reportedly funded by Wahhabi Saudis.

There is no other country with a Muslim majority better equipped to recapture a hijacked religion for a billion-strong diaspora around the world. A little help would go a long way. Are leaders in government and captains of industry, particularly in Indonesia and Australia, addressing the opportunities? Australia is a minor investor in Indonesia, suspicious of its neighbour for decades. Now, reflecting winds of change, one in three Australians below the age of 35 consider Indonesia a potential troublemaker, as opposed to 61 per cent of older Australians. Only 30 per cent of Indonesians, young and old, echo that sentiment.

While the giants of the resources sector need no introduction to each other, SMEs engaging across the waters would build stronger bridges among the two peoples, more enduring than governments or corporations can. The climate has never been better. We have the evidence.

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