



Royal United Services Institute of Western Australia

Newsletter

March, 2011

Promoting National Security and Defence

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Editorial



The Defence Minister, Stephen Smith, recently made a public speech in which he angrily criticized the leadership of the Royal Australian Navy over their mismanagement of the Navy's three amphibious ships, all of which are currently out of service due to maintenance problems. That the normally mild mannered Stephen Smith should make such a trenchant public criticism is some indication of his frustration, not only with "the admirals", but also with the Defence Department itself.

The nub of the Defence Minister's criticism would appear to be the Navy's "can do" and "make do" approach, in this case to the ongoing maintenance of its three amphibious ships, HMA Ships, *Tobruk*, *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*.

Whether the Minister's criticism is valid is impossible to judge, without a detailed insider knowledge of the whole history of these three ships since their introduction into service with the RAN. Certainly, *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* were reputedly "rust buckets" when purchased second-hand from the US Navy in the mid 1990s.

Finance, or lack of it, for ship's maintenance activities, and, the organization of the Defence Department with its divided responsibility between Service and civilian divisions may also be at fault, with "the admirals" merely being "the meat in the sandwich".

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Program

Luncheon Tuesday, 8 March 12 noon

The topic for this month's discussion is still "open", but will probably follow last month's impromptu discussion which went off brilliantly thanks to the skills and ability of Phillip Skelton who stepped into the 'leader' role with just 30 seconds notice! Thank you, Phillip.

The cost per head for Otto's tasty light lunch will be \$10.

Lecture Thursday, 17 March 5.30 for 6 pm

Egypt: Looking into the Future

By Dr Robert Bowker

This lecture, which will be held in conjunction with UWA's Centre for Muslim Studies and the Australian Institute for International Affairs, will be in lieu of our normal 24 March lecture. It will be held in the Alexander Lecture Theatre (located between the Reid Library and the University Club at the University of Western Australia)..

Dr Bowker, a former Ambassador to Egypt and currently Adjunct Professor at the Australian National University's Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, will offer a unique insight in the momentous events that are currently rocking Egypt and the wider Arab world.

A small fee of \$10 will be charged at the door.



For Your Diary

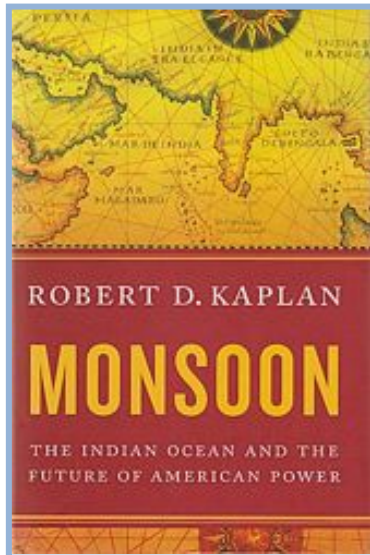
Tuesday, 12 April – Luncheon Discussion

Thursday, 28 April – Lecture evening

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Book Reviews

By Norman Ashworth



Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power, by Robert D Kaplan

In the May 2010 newsletter I reviewed two books on the Indian Ocean: *Such a Full Sea*, by Greg Copley and Andrew Pickford; and, *Our Western Front*, by Sam Bateman and Anthony Bergin. These two works gave an Australian perspective on the Indian Ocean and marked a revival of academic interest in Australia in the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean.

Our Western Front opened with a reference to an article on the Indian Ocean by noted American journalist and academic, Robert Kaplan. Since then, Kaplan has expanded his article into a book titled *Monsoon*, which is a reference to the monsoon winds that did much to shape the early development of trade across the northern Indian Ocean, and sea trade between Asia and Europe by way of the Middle East. Trade, both ancient and modern, is one of the key themes running through Kaplan's book.

Monsoon is part travelogue, part history, part current affairs, all bound together as a strategic analysis of the future of the Indian Ocean region.

During 2008 and 2009 Kaplan visited a string of key places across the northern Indian Ocean. In each place he uses particular personal experiences to illustrate local issues and as a springboard to a history of where that place fits within the overall context of the history of the Indian Ocean itself.

Kaplan's visits start with Oman, then move on to the south coast of Pakistan (Gwadar and Karachi), the north-west coast of India (Gujarat), Bangladesh, Kolkata (Calcutta), Sri Lanka, Burma, Indonesia (Ache) and Zanzibar.

Underlying all the commentary on local issues is the underlying strategic theme of the future interest and involvement of China in the Indian Ocean, of its rivalry with India and the part that the United States might play in the projection of maritime power into the Indian Ocean,

One of the more important chapters of the book covers Kaplan's analysis of China's Two-Ocean Strategy. China's naval strategists see China as being bounded, and constrained, by two island chains. The First Island Chain runs from Japan and Korea in the north, through Taiwan, The Philippines and on to Australia. The most important link in this chain is Taiwan, which stands close off the Chinese mainland and which, in hostile hands, could block vital sea routes in and out of China. Thus the "reconnection" of Taiwan and Mainland China is

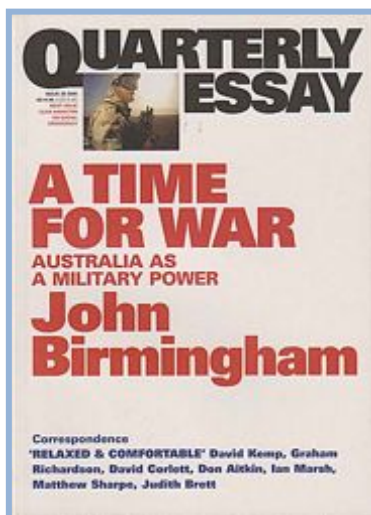
more than a matter of prestige, it is a matter of strategic necessity. To date the prime focus of the PLA Navy has been on the First Island Chain

The Second Island Chain covers the US held territories of Guam and the Marina Islands as the gateway to Oceania, itself a region of increasing interest to China.

A third area of interest is the complex maritime region covered by the South China and Java Seas. This region is plagued by piracy and Islamic fundamentalism, and the rise of Indian naval power. The region is also vital to China's mercantile trade, including its vital link with the oil-rich Middle East. Also, this region includes strategic bottleneck of the Malacca Strait, long an area of deep concern for China.

China's "Malacca dilemma" as Kaplan calls it, has led China to seek alternative routes by means of such things as: a canal or a pipeline across the Kra Isthmus; and/or a land pipeline between the Middle East by way of Central Asia to China. Other options under consideration are road and pipeline links from places like Gwadar and/or Burma to inland China.

In Kaplan's analysis Australia gets only passing mention. Indeed all of his attention is directed to the northern half of the Indian Ocean which he sees as critical for future stability.



A Time for War: Australia as a Military Power, by John Birmingham (Quarterly Essay No 20, 2006)

In this wide ranging essay John Birmingham, Australian writer and former research officer with the Department of Defence, looks at changing attitudes in Australia towards the Defence Force and its use in support of foreign policy.

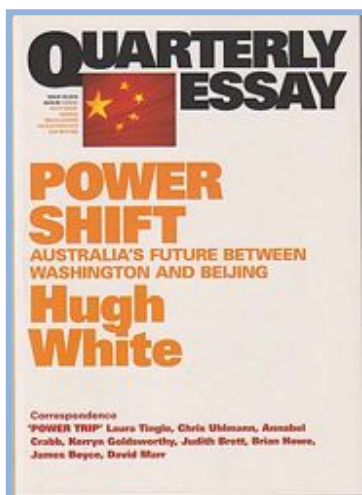
One sentence in particular from the essay caught my attention: "But apart from a small, ongoing feud among a clique of strategic policy wonks over the never ending question of forward versus continental defence, the mainstream media remains largely free of systematic debate, as opposed to episodic, usually issue-based commentary."

Being a "strategic policy wonk" myself I was taken by the irony that Birmingham's essay is itself largely a question of forward versus continental defence, or to put it into contemporary terms, overseas deployments in support of "friends and allies", and force projection into our region versus the defence of Australia.

- Some of the particular issues covered by Birmingham include: SAS involvement in the Battle of Shahikot in Afghanistan in early 2002 as an illustration of the professionalism of the SAS.

- The INTERFET deployment to East Timor in 2000, with particular focus on General Cosgrove's handling of the media. This in turn marked a watershed in public support for the ADF after the low point reached during the Vietnam years.
- The advantages of policy making in a democracy versus that under an authoritarian regime, including the need to encourage critical debate even within democratic governments.

While Birmingham's essay is at times somewhat disjointed, he does draw heavily on Australian, and American, "strategic policy wonks", like Hugh White, Paul Dibb, Michael Evans, Kim Beasley and Graeme Cheesman. Thus it is a synthesis of views on issues that underpin the defence debate in Australia. And, while I do not agree with all of the views expressed (no surprise there!) I do commend it to you as a basis for a better understanding of the defence debate.



Power Shift: Australia's Future between Washington and Beijing, by Hugh White (Quarterly Essay No 39, 2010)

In the October 2010 Newsletter, I wrote an article on the future of US-China relations. This article was inspired by an article by Hugh White published in *The Australian* and based on his essay, *Power Shift*, in the latest edition of *Quarterly Essay*; and on several follow up articles in *The Australian*, some in support and some against White's thesis.

Now that *Power Shift* has been published, along with comment by several leading commentators published in the following edition of *Quarterly Essay* (No 40, 2010) it is possible to focus on just what White had to say about where Australia might stand in the several various possible narratives for the future of relations between the United States and China.

The theme for White's thesis is set in the opening paragraph:

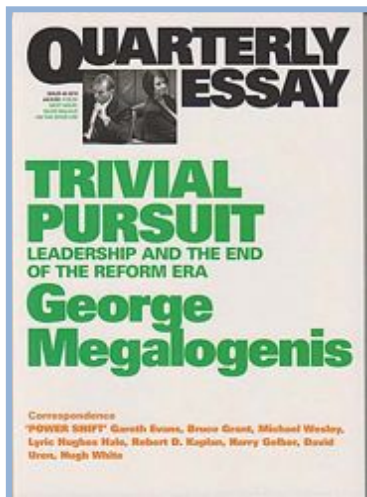
"There is a problem with Australia's vision of its future. On the one hand, we assume that China will just keep growing indefinitely, buying more and more from our mines at higher and higher prices. On the other hand, we expect America to remain the strongest power in Asia, the region's natural leader and Australia's ultimate protector. We will have a very nice future if both these things happen. The problem is that they cannot both happen at once. If China grows fast enough to keep our economy buoyant, it will overtake America to become the richest country in the world sometime around 2030. That will make it too strong to live under American leadership in Asia. It will look to lead in its own right and challenge America's position."

White sees three future possibilities:

1. That the US might withdraw from Asia. This could leave China in a dominant position, or, more likely, it could lead to a disruptive rivalry between China, India and Japan.

2. The US might decide to contest the leadership of Asia with China. This could lead to turmoil, or even war, in Asia and force Australia to choose between the US and China. Being aligned with the US and against China would certainly cost us dearly, both in economic and security terms.
3. The US, China, India and Japan might decide to share power in a “concert of Asia”. While this may well be the “best of a bad deal” for Australia, the difficulty here will be to persuade the US and China to share power rather than dominate Asia.

White readily acknowledges that none of the likely possibilities will be attractive to Australia. However, rather than put our heads in the sand and hope that the current state of affairs will remain, he recommends that we face up to and fully debate the issue. As we do have some influence in both Washington and Beijing we should attempt the admittedly difficult task of getting both the US and China to forego their leadership aspirations and accept the power sharing option.



The commentary on White’s essay as set out in Quarterly Essay No 40, 2010, adds depth to White’s thesis. All agree that the rise of China does pose a problem and that the issue is too important to be ignored. Here the point made by Harry Gelber is pertinent: in the 2010 election campaign, none of the parties had a single word to say about anything outside Australia’s shores. As to the content of the essay, while most agree in general with it, all have points of difference.

One particular point of difference was over the inevitability of China’s rise to world economic power. China could still stumble, although such an event would be unlikely to be in Australia’s economic interest.

Another point related to the significance of other powers in Asia, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia. While none could match China alone, together with the US they could mount a formidable counter to China. Any Chinese belligerence towards any one of these Asian powers would make the others nervous and maybe drive them into alliance with the US. Today, the only close allies that China has in Asia are North Korea and Burma.

Hugh White has raised an important, if somewhat uncomfortable, issue that could have serious ramifications for Australia’s future wealth and security. Let us hope that our political leaders are listening to what the academics are saying.

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Occasional Booklists

No 16 - Counterinsurgency

Aylwin-Foster, Nigel. Changing the Army for counterinsurgency operations. (Reprinted from the Military Review, November-December 2005).

Bergin, Anthony and Sam Bateman. Future unknown : the terrorist threat to Australian maritime security. (Strategy/ASPI). 2005

Blaxland, John. Revisiting counterinsurgency: a manoeuvrist response to the 'War on Terror' for the Australian Army. (Land Warfare Studies Centre. Working paper No 131)

Borgu, Aldo. Australia's defence after September 11 : a quick guide to the issues : an ASPI public debate initiative. (Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Operations and Capability Program). 2002

Borgu, Aldo. Beyond Bali : ASPI's strategic assessment. 2002. (Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Operations and Capability Program). 2002.

Copley, Gregory R. Australia's national security: considerations for planning defence and security capabilities well into the 21st century. (FDI occasional paper 2). 2008.

Croser, Caroline. Organising complexity: modes of behaviour in a networked battlespace. (Land Warfare Studies Centre. Working paper; No 133). 2007.

Kainikara, Sanu. Air power in the protection of territorial areas. (Papers/ Air Power Development Centre; No 21). 2006.

Kilcullen, David. The accidental guerrilla: fighting small wars in the midst of big ones, 2009

Kilcullen, David. Counterinsurgency. 2010.

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No 17 – Defence Industry

Australia. Dept. of Defence. Building defence capability: a policy for a smarter and more agile defence industry base. 2010.

Australia. Dept. of Defence. Defence capability plan: 2006-2016.

Copley, Gregory R. Papers : I Special report - Can Australia survive the next 50 years? II Australian Defense and Parliamentary system looks at issue of developing major warship industry: Submission to the Australian Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into Naval Shipbuilding, 3 April 2006.

Mellor, D. P. The role of science and industry. (Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series Four, Civil ; Vol. V). 1958.

Thomson, Mark. A trillion dollars and counting: paying for defence to 2050. (Strategy/ASPI). 2005.

Thomson, Mark. War and profit: doing business on the battlefield. (Strategy/ASPI). 2005.

Thomson, Mark. Your Defence dollar: the 2005-07 Defence budget. (Strategy/ASPI). 2006.

Thomson, Mark. Your Defence dollar: the 2006-06 Defence budget. (Strategy/ASPI). 2005.

Yule, Peter, Derek Woolner. The Collins Class submarine: steel, spies and spin. 2008.

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