

SOUNDINGS



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Australian Rendezvous: Maritime Strategy and National Destiny in the 21st Century

Michael Evans

*In order to thrive in the twenty-first century, a country with an interest in the use of the sea needs to develop and implement a coherent maritime strategy – galvanizing the sea power of the state and society.*¹

In national security affairs what often marks Australia's experience is an insular imagination, a feature that is most striking when it comes to understanding the importance of the sea. Despite being an island-continent dependent on seaborne trade, Australia has undergone a two-century long adolescence in appreciating the significance of the sea in strategy. This situation is largely due to the historical circumstances of European settlement and the dominance of first Britain, and then the United States, at sea in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. The great umbrella of British and American naval power has long allowed Australia to adopt an attitude of *mare incognitum*. As a result, although the country is 'girt by sea', the most important aspect of Australian identity is not a sense of island-awareness but a continental consciousness that manifests itself through a literature that celebrates landscape and a martial tradition that upholds the exploits of soldiers.

Yet, in the first quarter of the 21st century, there is growing evidence to suggest that Australia's historical indifference towards the significance of the sea is being eroded by the geopolitical transformation of the Asia-Pacific region into the world's new economic heartland. In January 2013, the Gillard government's national security strategy reflected this transformation in global power by stating, 'we are entering a new national security era in which the economic and strategic change occurring in our region will be the most significant influence on our national security environment and policies'. Similarly, Australia's 2012 Asian White Paper notes that, 'as the global centre of gravity shifts to our region, the tyranny of distance is being replaced by the prospects of proximity'.² More recently, the 2016 Defence White Paper affirms that 'the geography of the archipelago to Australia's immediate north will always have particular significance to our security'.³

Regional strategic change and Asia-Pacific proximity mean that Australia will have to develop a new appreciation of the importance of a maritime environment - a process which will require a revolution in Australian geopolitical thinking. To paraphrase Leon Trotsky: Australians may not be very interested in the sea, but the sea is increasingly interested in them. In the decades ahead, the combined forces of global networks, the economic dominance of Asia and its Indo-Pacific trade routes - alongside the emergence of a powerful China as a strategic competitor of the United States - will demand of Australia a maturity of outlook in maritime security matters that has, to date, been missing in the national psyche.

This paper argues that, if Australia is to ensure both its future geopolitical interests and its economic prosperity, the country must make a strategic and philosophical compact with its Asian oceanic domain. A rendezvous between cultural history and physical geography must be forged on the anvil of enhanced maritime awareness. Such a process will be both challenging and unpredictable, and will require a difficult and protracted journey of geopolitical re-orientation throughout the course of the 21st century. Given that Australia's strategic history is so firmly based on an ideology of 'great and powerful friends' and on the physical isolation of the island-continent, it is a journey that is by no means assured of reaching a successful destination. Any national re-orientation in geopolitical thought will need to involve two vital maritime facets. First, Australia must acquire a greater understanding of the workings of maritime strategy - an awareness that embraces a systemic view of sea power - and one that is appropriate for an age dominated by the international political economy of globalisation with its interconnected trade, financial and information networks.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, Australia must seek to underpin a maritime strategic outlook with a national narrative on the importance of the sea to the country's destiny in a globalised age. If

the nation is to undertake a geopolitical re-conception of itself not merely as a vast continent but as an island-nation at ease with the promise of economic prosperity emanating from Asia then, it must view the seas around it as highways to a prosperous future. It is through embracing full-blooded maritime thinking that Australia can best shape its future as an open society. This is a challenge that will surely test the Australian people's capacity for re-invention by accelerating a long-delayed rendezvous between continent and island and between history and geography.

The Burden of the Past: Australia's Need for a Systemic View of Sea Power

The enduring paradox of modern Australian history is one of an island-continent inhabited for over two centuries by a largely Anglo-Celtic people without a significant maritime identity. A popular book by the Australian writer, Tim Winton, perhaps unconsciously captures this paradox in its very title, *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* and celebrates 'how the land makes who we are'.⁴ While most Australians reside on the littoral and an effective Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has existed for over a century, neither a coastal lifestyle nor possession of an array of warships, is synonymous with a historical appreciation of the strategic value of the oceans. Unlike its mother country Britain, a natural sea power, Australia possesses no cultural affinity with the sea. Instead, a pervasive sense of sea-blindness - 'the inability to connect with maritime issues at either an individual or political level' - is evident in much of national life.⁵

The timelessness of the 'immortal sea' as celebrated in England's literature by writers from Wordsworth to Conrad has no counterpart in Australia. Rather, in Australian literature, the sea is replaced by the vast interior of a 'timeless land' as described in the work of writers as varied as Eleanor Dark and Ion Idriess. The Great South Land's dependence since 1788 upon the dominant liberal Western maritime powers, first Britain and then the United States, has long acted to absolve Australians from developing both significant naval power and a mature appreciation of sea power. The poet, AD Hope, writes of a vast continent in which Australians resemble, 'second hand Europeans [who] pullulate timidly on the edge of alien shores'.⁶ It is an outlook that facilitates both strategic dependence and philosophical insularity - both of which reflect the impact of the Federation era ideal of 'a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation' - by which '[Australia] seemingly forgot that it was an island that the sea both isolates and joins to the wider world'.⁷

In the 19th and 20th centuries, given that maritime security was assured by Western great power protectors, Australia's contribution to upholding a favourable international order - from the Boer War through the two World Wars to Vietnam was based on deploying mainly land force contingents. The Australian experience of war has long been defined in the national imagination by volunteer soldiers at Gallipoli and on the Western Front and is symbolised by the power of ANZAC mythology. While army-centric expeditionary warfare of the kind seen in Afghanistan and Iraq is unlikely to disappear from Australia's 21st century defence arsenal, the country needs to consider the maritime component of strategy in much greater breadth. This is because the tide of global economic development towards offshore Asia - with its checkerboard of archipelagos, peninsulas and island chains - is increasing the imperative for a sophisticated grasp of joint forces employing a maritime strategy. While this approach is still in its infancy, the importance of the maritime domain has been conceded by the strategic direction and force structure imperatives of recent defence documents including three Defence White Papers in 2009, 2013 and 2016.⁸

The May 2013 Defence White Paper concluded that, 'Australia's geography requires a maritime strategy. Such a strategy is seen as essential in deterring attacks against Australia and contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood and the wider region'.⁹ Accordingly, since 2009, long-term capability acquisition has concentrated on re-equipping the RAN for a larger blue-water role - including a welcome return to capital ships in the form of two large amphibious ships. The combination of new destroyers and amphibious ships for the RAN and a new combined arms amphibious approach by the Army through Plan BEERSHEBA - alongside plans for new submarines - can be seen as an attempt at generational change towards the use of the sea in Australian strategic thinking.¹⁰ The 2016 White Paper attempts to give flesh to the bones of future

capability by setting out ‘the most ambitious plan to regenerate the Royal Australian Navy since the Second World War’, pledging a revived naval shipbuilding industry and promising that defence spending will reach 2 per cent of gross domestic product by 2020-21.¹¹

To bring RAN capabilities into the 21st century, an estimated A\$195 billion will be required to refit the Australian fleet over the next decade or more - including a commitment to building 12 new ‘regionally superior submarines’, nine new frigates and an array of patrol vessels - and all of this funding must be found from within a national budget under severe pressure from falling revenues, rising debt and increasing social welfare and health care costs.¹² Although the latest Defence White Paper is accompanied by a ten-year investment plan designed to culminate at 2 per cent of gross domestic product over the next five years, it remains to be seen whether funding can be sustained at the political level in the years ahead. In Australia’s defence discourse, the beginning of wisdom for any analyst is an ability to discern between rhetorical aspiration and consistent policymaking. In this respect, the omens are not encouraging for the latter. As the country’s leading defence budget specialist, Mark Thomson, bluntly puts it, ‘planning defence spending on 2 per cent of GDP is a horse’s arse’.¹³ Air Marshal Sir John Slessor’s pithy warning on defence spending is highly relevant to Australia: ‘it is customary in democratic countries to deplore expenditures on armaments as conflicting with the requirements of social services. There is a tendency to forget the most important social service a government can do for its people is to keep them alive and free’.¹⁴

Compounding the challenge of defence spending is the operational malaise that has gripped the Australian political system since 2010 - a malaise which has led not just to five prime ministers in five years but to the appointment of six defence ministers in eight years. Given such flux, and the publication of the 2016 Defence White Paper notwithstanding, there is no guarantee that domestic political economy will be capable of matching Australia’s strategic ambitions over the next decade.¹⁵ If the demands of a difficult budgetary and policy environment were not enough to test Canberra in defence matters, Australia is further challenged by two other crucial issues: a rapidly shifting geostrategic environment in the Asia-Pacific region and increased American expectations of Australia’s role as an ally in that region.

Australia is located in an Asia-Pacific geostrategic environment that reflects the most dynamic economic region in the world. Led by the rapid rise of China, the region currently accounts for 40 per cent of global gross domestic product and two-thirds of global economic growth. By 2050, it is estimated that Asia will represent half of the world’s global economic output. Eight of the world’s ten busiest container ports are in the Asia-Pacific region with almost 30 per cent of the world’s maritime trade passing through the South China Sea annually. In 2014, two-thirds of Asia’s oil passed through the Indian and Pacific oceans and Asian seaborne trade is likely to double in volume by 2035. By 2040 there is expected to be a 56 per cent increase in global energy demand, so making the security Asia’s sea lines of communication such as the Malacca and Lombok straits vital to the global commons of the 21st century.¹⁶

In Australia’s ‘front yard’ of Southeast Asia, the ten countries of ASEAN now number 620 million people with a combined gross domestic product estimated in 2012 to be worth US\$2.2 trillion, a figure that is estimated to double on present trends by 2022.¹⁷ Both Australia and the countries of Southeast Asia vividly reflect the rise of China as an economic behemoth. China takes 29 per cent of Australian exports and is the nation’s largest trading partner. Meanwhile, direct Chinese investment into the ASEAN countries is over 60 per cent - a situation that when combined with China’s growing military strength - is likely to make Southeast Asia a zone of global strategic importance for the first time since the middle of the Cold War. A new and uncomfortable equation of Chinese economic influence and growing military might is likely to face Australia and the ASEAN nations over the next three decades with unknown consequences.

Not surprisingly, the economic and strategic transformation of the Asia-Pacific has attracted sharp attention from Australia’s key defence ally, the United States as reflected by a clutch of recent documents.¹⁸ In March 2015, the US Department of Defense released *A Cooperative Strategy for*

21st Century Seapower which seeks to address a shifting Asia-Pacific balance of power. The document notes that Asia's defence spending now eclipses that of Europe and that American security and prosperity are 'inextricably linked to the immense volume of trade that flows across the Indian and Pacific Oceans'. The document calls for a 'global network of navies' both to ensure *mare liberum* (freedom of the sea) and to hedge against China's emergence as a maritime rival.¹⁹ In an interconnected world that pivots on Asia-Pacific trade, the *Cooperative Strategy* seeks to embed American and allied sea power into a 'cooperative systemic strategy', one that integrates allied and partner naval forces into the guardianship of the liberal political economy of globalisation as symbolised by the countries of the American-inspired Trans Pacific Partnership. A systemic approach to sea power embraces deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security and 'all-domain access' and seeks to link US and partner naval capability to the realms of political, diplomatic and economic influence.²⁰

This systemic approach is further reinforced by *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* of August 2015 which outlines a comprehensive approach to enhancing America's efforts to 'safeguard the freedom of the seas, deter conflict and coercion, and promote adherence to international law and standards'.²¹ Four lines of effort are highlighted: strengthening US capabilities in the maritime domain; building the maritime capacity of allies and partners; leveraging military diplomacy to reduce risk and build transparency; and strengthening the development of an open and effective regional security architecture.²² The report is a clear response to what the document calls 'China's rise as a political, economic and military actor [as] a defining characteristic of the 21st century'. Between 2012 and 2015, China's defence budget doubled making it the second biggest spender in the world after the United States. From 2001-11, China's average annual defence spending increase was over 10 per cent with a 12 per cent increase for 2014-15.²³ In the face of such statistics, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* sketches a broad, complex Sino-American relationship that falls short of incipient conflict but one that contains both elements of cooperation and competition.²⁴

The most novel aspects of the American desire to reinforce the regional balance of power involve a commitment by Washington to a new Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative designed to build the capacity of ASEAN countries alongside the notion that there is a 'strategic convergence' between India's 'Act East' policy and the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region - that will assist in hedging against the growth of China's influence in the Indian as well as the Pacific oceans.²⁵ Since the publication of *The Asia Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, there has been a November 2015 joint statement creating an ASEAN-US Strategic Partnership aimed at upholding a rules-based regional architecture in the Asia-Pacific. In February 2016, a US-ASEAN special leaders' summit meeting was held at Sunnylands in California during which President Obama declared the US relationship with Southeast Asia to be on 'a new trajectory' of security and economic cooperation.²⁶

The final American document that must be considered is the January 2016 bipartisan report by Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies entitled, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025*. The latter is an exhaustive study which argues that, despite announcing a 'pivot' to the Asia-Pacific in November 2011, the United States has not yet crafted an effective strategy towards the region that aligns ends and means.²⁷ The report simply accepts China's rise as a *fait accompli* noting that by 2030, the PLA Navy is likely to acquire multiple aircraft carrier strike groups, a situation that may well transform the geopolitics of offshore strategic Asia. As the authors rather bleakly acknowledge, it is likely that, within 15 years 'the South China Sea will be virtually a Chinese lake, as the Caribbean or the Gulf of Mexico is for the United States'.²⁸ To counter a swiftly shifting balance of maritime power, the report envisages an enhanced role for American allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific such as Australia. Referring specifically to Australia the report notes, 'as the United States rebalances to the Asia-Pacific and redistributes its military presence, Australia's value as a political ally and military partner - combined with its geographical location - are reinforcing its strategic importance to the United States'.²⁹

The unmistakable message for Canberra is that Australia's regional role - rather like that during the maritime campaign in the South West Pacific in World War II - is likely to become more important to the US than at any time since 1942. Australia is seen both as a maritime sanctuary against long-range ballistic missile attack on US fleet elements and also as a safe launching pad for rapid deployments by American joint forces to critical areas throughout the Asia-Pacific.³⁰ The report notes that Australia is the key geostrategic link between the Pacific and Indian oceans with ports such as Darwin in the Northern Territory, HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia and northern air bases at Tindal and Scherger providing potential facilities for American naval and air assets. As it puts it, Australia's geopolitical importance is 'now more central to the US [and] Washington's expectations of Canberra are growing'.³¹ For the first time in 40 years, these expectations are centred on the region:

Canberra's assistance is increasingly required in the Asia-Pacific region itself... As maritime security challenges in the Asia-Pacific intensify, the US-Australia alliance is likely to have more of a regional focus than it has in recent decades and a stronger emphasis on cooperation in the maritime realm. To help manage shared challenges, the United States will increasingly rely on Australia for some critical capabilities.³²

Such capabilities are likely to embrace support for an expanded Marine presence in Darwin to include a Marine Air-Ground Task Force; use of counter-air and surveillance assets; expanded strike roles and an array of unmanned systems.

The conjunction of strategic change in the Asia-Pacific and pressures of Alliance burden-sharing are likely to act to put pressure on a greater Australian contribution towards a forging a systemic maritime strategy. As Geoffrey Till has written, Australia must support a collaborative and contributory strategy simply because the country 'is thoroughly enmeshed in a global sea-based trading system, not least as a major supplier of commodities to China. A threat to the system's operation represents an indirect threat to Australia's interests'.³³ While the 2016 Defence White Paper concedes the importance of naval capabilities and of working with the US and other allies to uphold an interconnected rules-based global order with free access to the global commons, it falls short of embracing a conceptual framework for a systemic maritime strategy.³⁴ Indeed, most of the strategic content of the document is descriptive rather than conceptual with no mention of the term maritime strategy in its pages.

Instead, the document prefers to embrace what it calls three interrelated strategic defence interests (a secure Australia; a secure region; and a global rules-based order). 'Australia's security and prosperity', the document states, 'is directly affected by events outside our region and is not just linked to our geography or confronting threats solely in our maritime approaches'.³⁵ An optimist might argue that such a statement is evidence that, like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who was astonished to discover he was speaking prose, the authors of the White Paper are articulating the basics of a systemic maritime strategy but without acknowledging such a situation. Given the serious lack of balance between resources and capability in its 2009 and 2013 precursors, the 2016 White Paper's focus on investment and modernisation over strategy is understandable. As the document concedes, what really matters is that 'modernising our maritime capabilities will be a key focus for Defence over the next 20 to 30 years'.³⁶

Unfortunately, the by-product of such a strong capability commitment is that it perpetuates the long Australian tradition of confusing naval warfare with maritime strategy. Put bluntly, embracing a systemic maritime strategy poses an intellectual challenge to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in general and to the RAN in particular. Like many Western peer navies, Australia's naval profession has long been geared towards operational warfighting and platform management rather than maritime thought and strategy. In the RAN it is seamanship, engineering skills and technological mastery of a complex naval profession that determines careers not strategic knowledge and the intricacies of sea power theory. The words of Winston Churchill when First Lord of the Admiralty apply as much to the RAN as to its parent, the Royal Navy: 'the seafaring

and scientific technique of the naval profession makes such severe demands on the training of naval men that they have very rarely the time or opportunity to study military history and the art of war in general'.³⁷

As a result, too much of Australia's current sea power debate is concentrated upon statistics and technology - on numbers of submarines, the uses of large amphibious ships and the huge financial expense such capabilities entail. There is far less appreciation of the intersection between political economy and strategic rationale in terms of ends, ways and means. It is unclear to anyone but a specialist where an undersea warfare capability and amphibious operations actually fit in modern naval warfare - and more importantly, what these capabilities mean in a broader strategic context. For example there has never been a strategic analysis in the public realm justifying the requirement for 12 conventional submarines - the number outlined in the 2016 Defence White Paper. This is a remarkable situation given that the next 30 years are likely to witness rapid technological developments in robotic submersibles, sensor systems and mine warfare at sea alongside 'mix and match' naval vessel modularisation, space-based surveillance and open-systems architecture. What these new capabilities may mean for long-term national maritime strategy is largely missing in Australia's strategic debate.³⁸

If, as one leading sea power analyst has suggested, 'in the second half of the century, it is possible that the majority of warfare and routine operational tasks will be conducted remotely by unmanned and robotic applications' then the long-term implications need to be carefully debated in Australia over the next few years simply because their strategic and economic implications may be transformative.³⁹ The rise of machine warfare at sea has profound consequences for a country like Australia given the realities of low demography, budget restraints and a vast seaboard of 36,000km. In the public interest, there needs to be a campaign of intelligible debate that is designed to relate political economy to technological development and national strategy. Future naval capabilities from platforms through to robotics and unmanned underwater vehicles to ballistic missiles and precision strike regimes must all be viewed in the context of a systemic approach to maritime strategy. Discussion of Australian maritime affairs must not be allowed to continue as strategy by slide rule in a blur of capability statistics and naval jargon that is incomprehensible to the educated citizen.

Yet another reason for the lack of maritime strategic thinking in the ADF emanates from RAN complacency. With the possible exception of the loss of carrier aviation in the 1980s, the RAN has never faced the strategic crises of the Australian Army in the 20th century. In the bleak inter-war years of the 'Singapore Strategy' and again in the difficult 'Defence of Australia' strategic era of the 1980s and 1990s, the Army came close to losing national relevance - in the form of being denied, or stripped, of a combined arms capacity - the acme of professional status in any effective land force.⁴⁰ An equivalent situation for the RAN would have been a history marked by notions that no naval vessels were ever required beyond coastal patrol craft. In general terms, the near-death experiences of strategic relevance experienced by the Australian Army in the 20th century, have given its officer corps a far keener interest in strategic affairs than RAN counterparts. This is surely one explanation for the historical weakness of Australian maritime strategy.

What has been said about the US Navy from the Cold War to the dawn of the new century can easily be applied to the RAN: 'The Navy saw its purpose as being contingent operationally, and not instrumental strategically'.⁴¹ Indeed, the contemporary RAN shares the crisis of identity that naval analyst Geoffrey Till identifies as afflicting most of the navies of the world's liberal democracies. It is a crisis of identity that arises from two contending views of naval development: a traditional modern, or operational model on the one hand, and a more systemic postmodern strategic model on the other hand. The modern model of a navy draws on a narrow Mahanian reading of warfighting to the effect that peer competition between navies will always determine a contest for command of the sea because what matters is hardware and firepower.⁴² In contrast, the postmodern model involves a broader geostrategic reading of Mahan's writings on sea power in which leading Western navies

view themselves as collaborative defenders of a favourable global system.⁴³ Neither model is mutually exclusive nor new to naval history, but in 21st century conditions which one to prioritise depends on a combination of philosophy and resources.

In the new millennium, if a given navy's leadership views American-led globalisation as impermanent, a temporary phase of cooperation that does not invalidate great power rivalry, then it is likely to emphasise the modern model based on operational warfighting. If however, a country's naval leaders view American-led globalisation as something more permanent - in effect a beneficial interconnected geopolitical order that must be upheld - then navies are likely to shift toward a more postmodern outlook based on a cooperative strategy that is designed to maintain a successful system.⁴⁴ Ideally, of course, a navy should seek to embody both mastery of naval warfighting and a systemic view of sea power in its intellectual arsenal but given the realities of resources that limit scale and force structure such a synthesis is often elusive. This is true of Australia where investment in maritime capabilities and shipbuilding is now focused on repairing the past neglect of previous White Papers and enhancing modern naval warfighting skills rather than on refining a cooperative maritime strategy. In the years ahead, much of the energy of the contemporary RAN will be absorbed by the task of mastering innovation in the form of new ships and submarines. As one observer notes, for the first time in its history, the RAN 'is on the verge of being able to generate a maritime-task force-similar to that which the Royal Navy can currently employ'.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Plan PELORUS, the Australian navy's vision of the future, describes its main mission as being 'to fight and win at sea'.⁴⁶

Over time, however, Australia will need to increasingly embrace the details of a systemic maritime strategy simply because it has an existential stake in helping to uphold the American-led global order that has produced seven decades of security. Like their American counterparts, one of the main tasks facing 21st century Australia's uniformed professionals will, in the words of Admiral Mike Mullen, to 'rid yourselves of the old notion - held by so many for so long - that maritime strategy exists solely to fight and win wars at sea, and the rest will take care of itself'.⁴⁷ In Australia, a similar view has been echoed by a recent Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs (currently Vice Chief of the Defence Force) who in 2012 called for the creation of 'a maritime school of strategic thought' in Australia.⁴⁸ The fact that such a school was considered by a naval chief not to exist is stark testimony of an immature appreciation of sea power in the Australian defence community. Grigg's successor as Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, has continued the initiative to cultivate a maritime school of strategic thought by reinforcing Plan PELORUS and suggesting that a modern RAN needs to be 'a national enterprise, bringing together the private and public sectors of the economy to deliver a fundamental security objective - security above, on and under the sea'.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the forging of a strategically-sophisticated approach to the use of the sea - an anticipatory maritime strategy - is likely to be a protracted test of the intellectual resources of both future ADF professionals and the small Australian maritime strategic studies community. Given the tectonic shifts that are occurring in the Asia-Pacific strategic environment, it is a task that is so important to the national interest that it can no longer be avoided or delayed without incurring risk.

Developing a National Maritime Narrative: Australia's Need for a Geopolitical Re-conception

In 1957, the geopolitical thinker, Saul Bernard Cohen predicted that Australia's destiny was to become the southern anchor of offshore Asia. Revisiting this proposition 40 years on in 1999, Cohen had not changed his mind writing, 'the question now is not whether Australia *is* Asian but how it can best adjust to *being* Asian'.⁵⁰ Cohen's proposition was not aimed at diminishing Australia's history of European settlement or at demeaning its Anglo-Celtic cultural identity. Rather, he sought to signal Australia's need to find a synthesis between history and geography - an approach that is surely best facilitated by cultivation of an outward maritime outlook. Australia can only prosper if it helps to uphold an open world economy with access to international trade and investment; the nation must simultaneously engage in Asia but also exploit its extensive cultural-

historical ties with the US and the British Commonwealth. In short, there needs to be a reaching-out strategy not a drawing-back strategy, and one based on a sense of national confidence not parochialism.⁵¹

Reflecting on Australian economic history, a former Labor government adviser, John Edwards, observes that the resilience of the Australian economy has always depended 'not on Australia's distance from the world economy or caution over foreign borrowing, but precisely on its integration into the global economy and particularly its integration into a global financial system'.⁵² Edwards goes on to ponder the changes wrought by the long economic boom of the 1990s and first half of the 2000s:

What happened [in Australia] was an economic expansion so sustained, so deep and widespread in its impact, so novel in its characteristics, that the lives of Australians, their hopes and plans, their work and leisure, their wealth and incomes, *the way they saw themselves and their country and the ways it related to other countries, even the way they thought about their past, began to be changed by it.*⁵³

Edwards is surely right that an economically transformed Australia faces the challenge of forging a new national narrative in the decades ahead. It is unclear when and how this will occur. Some contemporary observers of Australia such as the British writers, Nick Bryant and Simon Winchester, register scepticism on the subject; others, such as the Australians Michael Fullilove and Asher Judah, are more optimistic and promote the idea of an outward-looking 'larger Australia' as being more than possible.⁵⁴ For Bryant and Winchester, Australia remains in thrall to a past drawn from a history of European settlement marked by apprehension about the forbidding size and harsh interior of a continental-island and a tendency for a small Anglo-Celtic population situated in the vast Asia-Pacific to fear abandonment from its European antecedents. The result has been an ingrained attitude of dependence - internally on state and federal government largesse and externally on the great Western naval powers. Both writers identify a national outlook that is insular - what the poet James McCauley once styled as 'a faint heart within a fair periphery' - creating a penchant for self-doubt tempered only by a spirit of resilience.⁵⁵

Bryant argues that, with the shift in global economic power from the Atlantic to the Pacific, for the first time in its history, Australia is situated nearer the centre rather than the periphery of global economic and geopolitical activity. While the country 'is in the right place at the right time', its future prospects remain hampered by the chronic insularity of a political class whose approach inhibits any sense of national vision from emerging. Bryant cites the view of the leading international historian, Niall Ferguson, who after a visit to Canberra, compared the tone of the capital's political proceedings to that of a municipality: 'More like Strathclyde Regional Council than a debate for the leadership of a major power in the Asia-Pacific'.⁵⁶ The national narrative remains archaic - hamstrung by parochial interests and by an obsolete 'vocabulary of periphery' - which recalls an older and much smaller Australia of the 20th century rather than the cosmopolitan and larger country of the 21st century.⁵⁷ Similarly, Simon Winchester identifies 'an awful undertow' of complacency and small-mindedness at work in the political life of contemporary Australia - a situation that keeps the country 'pinioned and fettered' to a past that has largely disappeared - but whose long shadow acts as form of stasis so preventing any serious contemplation of the challenges of the future.⁵⁸

Some of the above criticisms by foreign observers have been confronted by Australian writers such as Michael Fullilove and Asher Judah both of whom have called on Australians to confront the future with greater boldness and imagination. Like Bryant and Winchester, Fullilove bemoans the 'small country politics' that bedevil Australia and which elevate personalities over policies so diminishing the domestic intellectual foundations of both foreign and defence policy-making at a time of global strategic change.⁵⁹ He calls for a 'larger politics' based on greater sense of Australian self-confidence that welcomes greater immigration, a more muscular military and a more assertive foreign policy. 'Australia', Fullilove contends, 'is not a middle power. Australia is a significant

power with regional and global interests - and we should act like one'.⁶⁰ For his part, Asher Judah suggests that in the early 21st century, Australia is at a crossroads. The country faces the choice of becoming a dynamic Euro-Asian state engaged in region and globe or of facing the fate of a state that failed to live up to its potential - namely Argentina. In 1910 Argentina was the most vibrant country in Latin America and the tenth wealthiest country on earth. Over the next half-century the country's political class degenerated creating an insular spiral of debt, bureaucracy and dysfunctional government that crippled its potential. A century later, in 2010, Argentina was 62nd in the world in terms of wealth.⁶¹

Surveying an Australia in which a combination of growing debt, low demography, unresponsive government and unsustainable welfare payments risk eroding prosperity, Judah writes, 'in Australia today, we find ourselves in a position similar to Argentina in the first quarter of the 20th century'.⁶² It is significant that Judah believes that Australia's salvation lies in re-conceiving itself as an island state - less as a partially settled continental country - than as 'an archipelago of population islands', an urban aorta of coastal centres and hinterlands that generate 62 per cent of national economic activity. Australia masquerades as a continental nation when, in fact, it is 'an efficiently organised and arable archipelago' boasting the 12th largest economy in the world; the ninth largest international stock exchange; \$2 trillion worth of investment and the fifth most traded currency on the planet. Trade with Southeast Asia totalled over \$100 billion in 2014 and almost two-thirds of Australia's exports now pass through the South China Sea. The national challenge is to overcome a legacy of continental inwardness and inhibition in favour of a confident and outward vision that is more relevant for an island-nation intimately connected to the world economy.⁶³

It is not necessary to accept Judah's bleak Antipodean Argentina analogy to appreciate the importance of his call for a geopolitical re-conceptualisation of Australia as an 'archipelagic powerhouse'. Like Fullilove, Judah believes the latter vision can only be achieved by a combination of skilled immigration, engagement in the Asia-Pacific region and a culture of dynamic entrepreneurship - a mixture that will create an outward-looking Australia of perhaps up to 48 million people by 2045.⁶⁴ The engine of prosperity for Australia is likely to be a new global middle class tripling in number from 1.8 billion in 2015 to 4.9 billion by 2035 and much of this growth - fuelled by urbanisation, maritime trade and educational demand - will be in the Asia-Pacific. To exploit such a lucrative mass market Australia must look outward, towards the sea while the country will require a political class capable of both the vision and the confidence to overcome the current policy challenges of demographic weakness, productivity decline, and faltering governance.⁶⁵

While preparing Australia to meet the challenges of an Asia-Pacific economic future will require a statesmanship and policy sophistication that transcends the realm of maritime strategy, the reality of oceanic geography will increase the importance of a national maritime awareness. There are two areas in which those concerned with Australia's maritime identity and geopolitical destiny can make a major contribution in explaining the role of the sea to both policy-makers and the electorate. The first area concerns the need to create an Australian National Institute for Maritime Affairs (NIMA). It beggars belief that a country with Australia's huge exclusive economic zone of ten million km² (10 per cent of world's oceans); a search and rescue zone of 53 million km² - alongside dependence on foreign trade, offshore territories and borders and sea lines of communication - does not possess such a national body. Such an Institute is necessary in order to tackle the malaise of national 'sea-blindness' and to assist in defining a long-term future relationship between the nation and the sea in a manner which integrates diverse naval, commercial and shipping activities together. A national institute could serve as a centre for excellence on all matters connected to the promotion of Australia's maritime domain from state issues and shipbuilding through border protection to an array of economic links with Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

It would be also be a major asset in developing a 'conversation with the country' to highlight the importance of all the elements that constitute the maritime domain. As one Australian maritime analyst has written:

Perhaps the most outstanding task [in Australian maritime affairs] is for a narrative to be developed that explains the importance of the safety and security of Australia's maritime domains to the nation's broader national security interests and economic well-being. These matters have not been well-articulated to the broader public in a comprehensive and comprehensible way... [What is needed] is a story that draws the strands together.⁶⁶

What the 2012 Asian White Paper calls the 'prospects of proximity' in Asia must become part of a broader maritime narrative embracing the political establishment as well as diverse security analysts, scholars, business and industry groups. The aim must be to explain to the nation how long-term engagement and cooperation with the economic players of the dynamic Asia-Pacific rim will enhance both national prosperity and physical security in the 21st century. In maritime affairs, the most pressing challenge for Australians is one of imagination; to confront what might be called Australia's second self as an island-nation. The need is to articulate an over-the-horizon perspective that grasps that the future stability of the regional geopolitical architecture is directly related to seaborne trade and national prosperity. 'The starting point for such a project writes Paul Battersby, 'is not simply to reconcile Australia's history with its geography but to *re-imagine* them'.⁶⁷

A second area of attention concerns the role of the Defence establishment in providing expertise and knowledge that promotes an effective maritime dimension in national strategy. There is a need for the ADF in general, and the RAN in particular, to explain in clear and compelling terms the advantages to Australia of a maritime-systemic strategic approach and to explain the character of sea power and the role of joint forces in the new millennium. It is a major weakness that the current ADF lacks a central joint service and futures analysis centre along the lines of the successful British Ministry of Defence's Doctrine Concepts and Development Centre (DCDC) located at Shrivenham. For too long, the ADF has been content to rely on single-Service studies centres, which no matter how useful they may prove at the operational level, are too narrow in their focus and have little impact on higher-level joint strategic analysis.⁶⁸

In a globalised security era, when the RAN has returned to capital ships, the Army is busy converting itself into an amphibious force and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) is re-equipping with the F-35 joint strike fighter, the Service studies centres need to be carefully linked to a new joint studies organisation dedicated to the strategic level of research and analysis. A joint studies organisation is required to help promote two important strategic realities: the first reality is that a national maritime outlook involves more than a navy and embraces all of the armed services. The second reality is that a maritime strategy must strive to be 'whole-of-government' in character and include not only the military but other instruments of national power ranging from diplomacy to the market economy. As one analyst explains:

A maritime strategy that translates into real political, diplomatic and economic benefit nowadays is one that enables a country to exploit the advantages of globalisation in all its forms. As well as providing the ways in which threats to the country are deterred and defeated, armed forces are actively used to further a country's commercial and national interests in the wider world.⁶⁹

It is this holistic, joint service approach that needs to be vigorously pursued by the Australian armed forces. 'A maritime strategy', the American naval strategist, Peter D Haynes reminds us, 'has always been more directly concerned with the relationship between the state and global markets ... A maritime strategy ties [together] economic, political and security interests'.⁷⁰ To help bring about such unity of effort, the creation of a DCDC-style research and analysis organisation, suitably adapted for Australian conditions, is surely a critical defence requirement in the years ahead.

Conclusion

In August 1950, during a visit to Australia the British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, urged Australians not to be shackled by their past or to 'acquiesce in the comfortable certainty of a moderate competence' but to pursue a splendid enterprise 'inspired by a golden vision of a possible

future'.⁷¹ The Australia of today is, of course, very different from that of 1950 but at a time when much of the political class is trapped in a coma of suspenseful indecision, Russell's 'golden vision' seems more relevant today than 65 years ago. The first half of the 21st century is likely to see a transformed world and to yield a complex and globalised seascape - one that is at once competitive and unpredictable with the global population expected to reach nine billion by 2045.

The central region of economic and strategic activity will be the maritime geography of Asia-Pacific. Increasingly, Australia's history and geography will require synthesis not separation - for in terms of geopolitics and economics, if not in cultural values - Australia's future lies north through the seas of the Asia-Pacific. Australia is not by identity and history an Asian country but in geography and economics it is drawn inexorably towards an Eastern orbit. Such a situation requires a statesman-like diplomacy of careful balance that melds core civilisational values with the economic needs of prosperity. The alibi of cultural kinship with the West that has facilitated so much of Australia's strategic dependency must, in the decades ahead, become tempered by a much greater spirit of strategic independence - an independence that is facilitated by a rendezvous with an Asian geopolitical destiny conceived in outward maritime terms. It is a rendezvous that is in all its essential features a philosophical challenge - one that must blend a number of opposites into a new national tapestry: an Anglo-Celtic history with an Asia-Pacific geography; regional defence imperatives with the demands of globalisation; a cherished American security alliance with closer Chinese economic relations; and the integration of older continental and expeditionary military traditions within a more integrated maritime strategic framework.

In the Asia-Pacific century ahead, navigating and balancing such competing demands will require inspired political leadership. While the latter may seem unlikely given the insular politics of the present, it is not beyond the ingenuity of future generations of Australians to forge a 21st century country that unites the enduring cultural values of the West with the new economic wonders of the East. Such an endeavour will require an outward national spirit of maritime activism - and perhaps even a spirit of Antipodean buccaneering - in which the surrounding seas are seen less as draw-bridged moats for security and more as open highways to prosperity. In 1912, the poet, Bernard O'Dowd, in a celebration of continental consciousness, called Australia the 'Eldorado of old dreamers' - at once a temple to be built, a scroll to be written upon and a prophecy to be fulfilled.⁷² The challenge before Australians in the new millennium is both different and similar: it is to recognise its continental *alter ego* in the form of island-consciousness and yet still to seize the O'Dowdian vision of Eldorado - only this time in the rhetorical form of a younger dream - one of a maritime destiny with its promise of limitless horizons.

¹ Chris Parry, *Super Highway: Sea Power in the 21st Century*, Elliot and Thompson Limited, London, 2014, p. 320.

² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security*, Canberra, 2013, p. ii; and *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, Canberra, 2012, pp. 1, 105.

³ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, Canberra, 2016, p. 56.

⁴ Tim Winton, *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir*, Hamish Hamilton, Sydney, 2015.

⁵ Duncan Redford, 'The Royal Navy, Sea Blindness and British National Identity', in Duncan Redford, *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World*, IB Taurus, London, 2014, p. 62.

⁶ AD Hope, 'Australia', in Nicholas Jose (ed), *The Literature of Australia: An Anthology*, WW Norton & Co, London, 2009, pp. 523-24.

⁷ Cindy McCreery and Kirsten McKenzie, 'The Australian Colonies in a Maritime World', in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia: Vol 1, Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2013, p. 584.

⁸ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 and Defence White Paper 2013*, Canberra, (2009 and 2013 respectively); and *2016 Defence White Paper*.

⁹ Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, pp. 28; 58

¹⁰ See Michael Evans, 'The Essential Service: The Future of the Australian Army in a Global Age', *Quadrant*, October 2012, pp. 10-19 and *The Third Way: Towards an Australian Maritime Strategy for the Twenty-first Century*, Army Research Paper No 1, Canberra, May 2014, www.army.gov.au/our-future/publications/research-papers/army-research-papers/arp1.

¹¹ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, pp. 9-10, 113.

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- ¹² Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 69.
- ¹³ Cameron Stewart, 'Coalition to Drop Abbott Defence Funding Pledge', *The Australian*, 10 February 2016, p. 2. *2016 Defence White Paper* states that by 2020-21, defence spending will increase to \$42.4b from \$32.3b in 2015-16 to reach 2 per cent of GDP.
- ¹⁴ John Slessor, *Strategy for the West*, William Morrow and Company, London, 1954, p. 330.
- ¹⁵ For recent critiques see Harry Gelber, 'Australia's Geo-Political Strategy and the Defence Budget', *Quadrant*, June 2012, pp. 11-19; Major General Jim Molan, Rtd, 'Why Our Defence Force Faces Terminal Decline', *Quadrant*, March 2013, pp. 8-15; James Brown and Rory Medcalf, 'Fixing Australia's Incredible Defence Policy', Lowy Institute for International Policy, 8 October 2013, www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/fixing-australias-incredible-defence-policy; and Stewart, 'Coalition to Drop Abbott Defence Funding Pledge'.
- ¹⁶ See Parry, *Super Highway: Sea Power in the 21st Century*, pp. 80-105.
- ¹⁷ Parry, *Super Highway: Sea Power in the 21st Century*, p. 80.
- ¹⁸ Department of Defense, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, Washington DC, March 2015 and *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, Washington DC, August 2015; Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships. An Independent Review of US Defense Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, Washington DC, January 2016.
- ¹⁹ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, pp. 3-5.
- ²⁰ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, p. 2.
- ²¹ *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, p. 19.
- ²² *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, p. 19.
- ²³ *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, p. 19.
- ²⁴ *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, p. 29.
- ²⁵ *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, pp. 26-28.
- ²⁶ The White House, 'Joint Statement of the U.S-ASEAN Special Leaders' Summit: Sunnylands Declaration, February 15-16, 2016', www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/30/statement-press-secretary-us-asean-summit.
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- ²⁸ CSIS, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships*, p. 19.
- ²⁹ CSIS, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships*, p. 66.
- ³⁰ See Michael J Green, Peter J Dean, Brendan Taylor and Zack Cooper, *The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia*, Centre of Gravity Series, Paper No. 23, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2015, p. 12.
- ³¹ CSIS, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships*, pp. 71-72.
- ³² CSIS, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships*, p. 71.
- ³³ Geoffrey Till, *Outgoing Australia?*, Centre of Gravity Series, Paper No 14, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2014, p. 4.
- ³⁴ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, pp. 17, 44-46, 77.
- ³⁵ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 77.
- ³⁶ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 89.
- ³⁷ Winston Churchill, quoted in Peter D Haynes, *Towards a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2015, p. 22.
- ³⁸ In April 2016, as this book was going to press, the Australian Government announced a decision to purchase twelve French-designed Shortfin Barracuda conventional submarines to be constructed in South Australia over the next three decades at a cost of some \$50 billion.
- ³⁹ Parry, *Super Highway: Sea Power in the 21st Century*, pp. 178-181, 182.
- ⁴⁰ See Evans, *The Third Way: Towards a Maritime Strategy for Australia in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 26-27.
- ⁴¹ Haynes, *Towards a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 7.
- ⁴² Geoffrey Till, 'Maritime Strategy in a Globalizing World', *Orbis*, vol 51, no 4, Fall 2007, p. 570.
- ⁴³ For Mahan as a geopolitical thinker see John Tetsuro Sumida, 'Alfred Thayer Mahan, geopolitician', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol 22, no 2-3, June 1999, pp. 39-62 and *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1999.
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- ⁴⁵ Nick Childs, 'The Measure of Britain's New Maritime Ambition', *Survival*, February-March 2016, vol 58, no 1, p. 140.
- ⁴⁶ Royal Australian Navy, *Plan Pelorus: Navy Strategy 2018*, Canberra, 2016, p. 2.
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- ⁵² John Edwards, *Quiet Boom: How the Long Economic Upswing is Changing Australia and its Place in the World*, Lowy Institute Paper No 14, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 2006, p. 68, www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/quiet-boom.
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- ⁵⁴ Nick Bryant, *The Rise and Fall of Australia: How a Great Nation Lost its Way*, Bantam Books, Sydney, 2014; Simon Winchester, *Pacific: The Ocean of the Future*, William Collins, London, 2015, chapter 7; Michael Fullilove, *A Larger Australia: The ABC 2015 Boyer Lectures*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 2015; Asher Judah, *The Australian Century*, Connor Court Publishing, Ballarat, 2014.
- ⁵⁵ James McCauley, 'Envoi', in Jose, *The Literature of Australia: An Anthology*, p. 619.
- ⁵⁶ Niall Ferguson cited in Bryant, *The Rise and Fall of Australia*, p. 80.
- ⁵⁷ Bryant, *The Rise and Fall of Australia*, pp. 2, 14-17, 44, 51-52.
- ⁵⁸ Winchester, *Pacific: The Ocean of the Future*, p. 303.
- ⁵⁹ Fullilove, *A Larger Australia*, pp. 41-44.
- ⁶⁰ Fullilove, *A Larger Australia*, p. 60.
- ⁶¹ Judah, *The Australian Century*, pp. xi, 3.
- ⁶² Judah, *The Australian Century*, p. 6.
- ⁶³ Judah, *The Australian Century*, pp. 99-100, 112, 121-23, 123-30.
- ⁶⁴ Judah, *The Australian Century*, p. 147.
- ⁶⁵ Judah, *The Australian Century*, pp. 7-8.
- ⁶⁶ Brett Biddington, *Girt by Sea: Understanding Australia's Maritime Domains in a Networked World*, Kokoda Foundation Paper No 20, Canberra, November 2014, p. 60.
- ⁶⁷ Paul Battersby, *To the Islands: White Australians and the Malay Archipelago since 1788*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2007, p. 10. Emphasis added.
- ⁶⁸ For the high-quality of DCDC strategic-level analysis see the evidence submitted to the United Kingdom House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee. *Who Does UK Strategy?*, First Report of Session 2010-11, Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence, October 2010, by Professors Peter Hennessy, Hugh Strachan and Julian Lindley-French, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/.../713.pdf.
- ⁶⁹ Parry, *Super Highway: Sea Power in the 21st Century*, p. 326. It is interesting to note that Parry, as a Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy, previously served as Director General of the British DCDC from 2005-08.
- ⁷⁰ Haynes, *Toward a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 3.
- ⁷¹ 'Bertrand Russell's Impressions', *The West Australian*, 19 August 1950.
- ⁷² Bernard O'Dowd, *The Bush*, Thomas C Lothian, Melbourne, 1912, pp. 63-69.

SOUNDINGS