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Introduction

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July 1966 saw the founding of The Australian National University's Strategic & Defence Studies Centre (SDSC). Fifty years later, the Centre celebrated its half-century of research, publication, teaching and informing government decision-makers with a two-day conference entitled 'New Directions in Strategic Thinking 2.0', the numerical designator being a tip of the hat to a similar event conducted, as noted in Dr Brendan Taylor's foreword, in 1980. That pair of days saw the podium graced by many of the world's premier thinkers in the strategic studies field. The evening between them brought together academics, practitioners and other honoured guests at a commemorative dinner held beneath the widespread wings of the 'G for George' bomber in the Australian War Memorial, an event privileged by speaker Brendan Sargeant, Associate Secretary of the Australian Department of Defence, and Professor Desmond Ball making one of his last public appearances.

The essays comprising the remaining chapters herein summarise the remarks provided by the conference's speakers. The sequence of their presentation maintains the thematic flow of the two days, all but the keynote speaker both providing initial remarks and later serving on a panel with colleagues addressing the themes noted in the agenda (see Appendix 2).¹

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1 Five speakers were unable to provide written contributions for this volume.

Sir Lawrence Freedman, the conference's keynote speaker, addressed the decline of classical military strategy during and in the aftermath of the Cold War. Two fundamental elements of this decline were the diminishment of non-combatants' non-involvement as subjects of combat and the degradation of state acceptance of war's results in light of battle outcomes. In World War II, the first of these had become well established. Despite recognition of nuclear war's consequences, investigations of how such a conflict might be won continued, adaptations in conventional forces largely being in the service of supporting objectives during a nuclear exchange. So too non-state actors came to avoid confronting forces so equipped by turning to irregular warfare and thereby lengthening conflicts. Freedman concludes:

The challenge for the West in all of this is that wars have come to lack borders and endpoints. The idea of conflict as something contained in time and space, where there is a sharp demarcation between peace and war and between the civilian and military spheres, is consistently undermined. The classical model of warfare, of decisive campaigns, remains a beguiling ideal, but the real challenge for Western strategists is to come to terms with wars of continuing political struggle where military action ensuring a satisfactory political outcome have proved to be elusive.

SDSC's own Amy King followed Sir Lawrence and opened the 'Strategy and Power' panel presentations with her consideration of the relationship between economics and strategy. Economic growth, she observed, leads to growing demand for energy resources among states and thus can become a source of competition spurring international conflict. Similarly, economic decline can be a source of insecurity; states perceived to be in a state of decline might be more likely to take preventive military action in order to bolster their power position. Somewhat balancing these negative influences: recent international relations research points to an increasing linkage between economic interdependence and security. We find political-security tensions and thriving economic relations between China and Japan are not a contradiction but rather two sides of the same coin. Dr King observed that the world's most powerful state, the United States, is locked in a (albeit at times somewhat inconsistent) technological embrace with two rising competitors: China and India—this despite theoretical predictions that the United States should distrust and shun collaboration with these rival powers. She concludes that understanding such complexity requires avoiding previous approaches to analysis that separated economics and

strategy while also suggesting that such studies must incorporate not only international considerations but also those internal that affect relationships between economics and security.

The Australian Army's Major General J.J. Frewen provided the first morning's third offering. He warns against conflating policy and strategy while noting that while strategy might have its historical origins in military affairs, it has evolved to become relevant to achieving broader national aims. Resultantly, the best national strategies are those that integrate all the elements of national power within a nation's means. Unfortunately, the United Kingdom's Chilcot Report² on that country's involvement in Iraq concluded that recent national leaders can at times still rely too heavily on military capabilities alone, employing them in costly and uncoordinated ways. Major General Frewen concludes that Australia's situation is less dire than that of the United Kingdom. He nonetheless suggests that it would be wise to create an Office of National Strategy for, in the absence of a formal mechanism for national strategy, the potential is there for its military being deployed without clear definition of the intended purpose or being fully integrated with the other elements of national power, a situation unlikely to deliver an enduring solution to strategic challenges.

Professor Evelyn Goh concluded the 'Strategy and Power' panel presentations with her 'Grand power grand bargains: Myth or reality?', considering whether a US–China or Japan–China agreement to alter current negative relationships might be possible and what the character of those agreements might entail. Recognising that such bargains have historical precedent, Goh concludes that the post–Cold War emergence of US–Chinese economic ties constitutes the 'most important systemic context for a new bargain'. Yet Chinese perceptions that Japan and the United States have reneged on previous grand bargains undermines Chinese faith in such bargains, perhaps explaining to some extent what underlies China's reconsideration of its former 'biding time' policy and its recent willingness to challenge the existing order's status quo. Professor Goh concludes that compromises could conceivably facilitate a US–China grand bargain while recognising that the result will 'entail sea changes in attitudes and expectations on every side'.

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2 United Kingdom Cabinet Office, *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry* [Chilcot Report], 6 July 2016; www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry (retrieved 16 January 2018).

Professor Robert Ayson opened the first day's afternoon session regarding 'Strategic Thinking: Concepts and Challenges'. His 'Old wine in new bottles? The continued relevance of Cold War strategic concepts' considered adverse partnerships: partner relationships formed despite the parties being serious rivals. He cites Washington and Moscow. Although each defined strategic stability differently, the United States and Soviet Union recognised mutual survival during the Cold War as a core interest. Ayson questions whether the US–China relationship has a similar shared interest. He goes on to identify five factors underlying the Cold War partnership, concluding that US–China economic interdependence alone fails to meet this handful of factors, a cause for no little concern.

The legacy of the Cold War also underpins Nicola Leveringhaus's consideration of nuclear strategy in the aftermath of that conflict. Strategies from that period constitute 'conceptual hangovers' that strategists today struggle to improve upon. Her argument considers a series of post–Cold War time periods. The first saw nuclear deterrence lose its primacy given the emergence of weapons control and non-proliferation. The later 1990s saw a re-emergence of such primacy given detonation of devices by Pakistan and India while both countries also chose not to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Regional rather than worldwide nuclear strategies joined an arena previously limited to those of global scope. More recent strategic perceptions influencing strategic thought include the emergence of new technologies and attempts to delegitimise the weapons themselves.

Paul Dibb introduced discussion of Session 3—Strategy and Domains—with 'The return of geography'. His essay cites the historical foundations of Russian perceptions that the 14 newly independent states formed out of the Soviet Union's collapse had long been considered part of that country while also serving the critical role of securing its perimeter. Moscow therefore believes that these must be recognised as falling within Russia's sphere of influence. Geography also influences Russia's self-perception as not only a vital Asian power but also solidly a member of the European community rather than being but peripheral to its expanse. Not Europe and Asia then, but rather a post–Soviet Union Russia that conceives of a single Eurasian continent. Dibb then turns his attention to China, concluding that recent assertiveness by that country demands the United States and its allies—including Australia—demonstrate that such behaviour is unacceptable. Concerns regarding China's territorial bellicosity underlie both recent Defence White Paper elevation of South-East Asian security as Australia's most important strategic interest

and emphasis that the country's 'relationship with Indonesia is vital', an importance reflected in Australia's upgrading of military facilities in its own north.

Day 2 opened with contemplation of 'Strategic Studies in Practice', the penultimate conference session. SDSC Professor Hugh White's essay provides the Australian perspective on the topic. He begins with a sweeping review of Australia's history from the first British landings to the present, thereby establishing a foundation for the country's present strategic options. He relates slippage in confidence regarding willingness of the United Kingdom and the United States to guarantee Australia's security, first when the United Kingdom failed to respond to German occupation of northern New Guinea in the 1880, and later with its 1968 'East of Suez' announcement. Questions arose regarding US commitment after Richard Nixon presented his 1969 Guam Doctrine. Although political stability and economic progress somewhat shielded the country from these shocks, Australia's leaders perceived the necessity for increased self-reliance and the emergence of 'Defence of Australia' as the underpinning of its security policy. US hegemony after the Cold War signalled a return to closer ties with the United States, ties reflected in increased military force interoperability and contribution of contingents when the hegemon led coalitions. The result, White concludes, is an Australia 'more comfortable relying on our allies for our security than we have been at any time since 1880'. Can this reliance continue in the face of Chinese assertiveness? The answer greatly relies on how seriously the United States is challenged in the region.

Singapore's Peter Ho next addressed the session topic, stressing the importance of the symbiotic relationship between history and security studies. While much of strategic studies rely on hindsight and historical insight, history's past cannot be relied on to demonstrate the future's trajectory. Perceptions in part explain this variance. Ho introduces the concept of a 'black elephant', a linkage of sorts regarding black swan incidents and the elephant in the room: events seemingly obvious that nonetheless surprise owing to an unwillingness to consider the possibility of their outcomes. How then can governments create plans and policies for the long term? Adopting methods aiding in the reduction of strategic shock are critical, methods strategic studies can assist in developing. Among their elements are maintaining a systematic view of the future, applying techniques such as looking for emerging issues and trends ('horizon scanning') that seek to better distinguish weak signals and emerging issues

otherwise likely to be overlooked. Only with a more interdisciplinary approach than has been the norm, Ho assets, can strategic studies meet the demands of 21st-century security challenges.

Four speakers addressed the conference audience on the fifth and final session's topic of 'New Directions in Strategic Studies'. Hal Brands' 'US grand strategy in the post–Cold War era' includes the author's 'three pervasive misconceptions': (1) that the country executed a dramatic break from its previous strategy; (2) the US post–Cold War grand strategy was ineffective; and (3) the world is seeing the end of US primacy, which will precipitate a fundamental retrenchment. Support of international peace and promotion of open and liberal economies were no less a priority post-1989 than before, goals consistent with long-standing US objectives. Brands highlights the prescience of the 1950 National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) outlining US efforts 'to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish', which constituted 'a policy which we would probably pursue even if there were no Soviet threat'.³ Nor do analyses decrying the failure of US strategy stand up to scrutiny. Promotion of democracy, a notably aggressive element of US policy after the Cold War, provides but one example. The world saw the number of electoral democracies increasing from 76 in 1990 to 120 some 15 years later. Addressing the third 'myth' of declining US primacy, Brands notes that such claims tend to overstate the significance of narrowing economic and other gaps. The United States' global military power, for example, remains unchallenged. While powers such as China might assert themselves regionally, no country can compete on the worldwide scale. US primacy might not last forever, but its disappearance—should it occur—is distant. The country should therefore seek to sustain a grand strategy in an era in which primacy remains, if perhaps in more contested environments. Brands concludes by offering five principles to support that sustainment.

Professor Sir Hew Strachan considered 'The future of strategic studies: Lessons from the last golden age'. Strategy in the aftermath of World War II underwent a dramatic shift from a focus on force employment to its containment. History saw a diminution in the eyes of strategists as a result, the importance of armed force in the 'golden age' now taking a back seat

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3 National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68), 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security', 14 April 1950, fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm (retrieved 30 January 2018).

to consideration of how to bring about its limitation. Technology gained importance in the eyes not only of tacticians but also strategists. Strachan advises that it is the historian's responsibility to deal with discontinuities in history by accepting and dealing with 'contingency and shock' in an era during which, in Bernard Brodie's words, 'strategic studies were no longer focused on the waging of war but on its avoidance'.⁴

Amitav Acharya poses the question of whether the time has come for creation of an Asian school of security or strategic studies akin to the Copenhagen and English schools. Any such school is justified if it explains not just what happens in a country or region but additionally generates ideas that can travel beyond them to offer general or universal applicability. Unfortunately, he commiserates, current candidates do not qualify given this standard. It is a situation derivative in no small part due to 'entrapment', which Acharya describes as the links between states and think tanks or academics that undermine independent thought and expression of views incompatible with those of state sponsors. Those failing to adhere to state positions find themselves without funds and generally excluded from opportunities to continue presenting their research. He concluded by citing SDSC's Desmond Ball as 'the exemplary combination of academic rigour, scholarly independence and policy relevance' who could stand as an example to Asian scholars in overcoming such obstacles to creation of an Asian School.

The responsibility of concluding two days of session presentations and spirited exchange fell to Professor Robert O'Neill. He began his remarks with the observation that Australia's 'national record in the past for developing strategic policies has not been a distinguished one'. In the years immediately following World War II, this was in part attributable to strategy's development being solely an internal process with its military creators showing little interest in contributions from journalists, diplomats or academics. This changed somewhat in the 1960s, but political contributions were—with the notable exception of Percy Spender—confined to resource considerations: statements of what could and could not be afforded. The founding of SDSC in the late 1960s saw tentative steps towards offering advice, advice that drew on centre leaders' broadening experiences at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies. From those years, O'Neill identified 'necessary ingredients for the

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4 Bernard Brodie, 'The absolute weapon', in *Strategic Studies: A Reader*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken and Joseph A. Maiolo, Routledge, London, 2008.

flourishing of strategic thought today' in organisations such as the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre: expert people, breadth of intellectual and field experience, a supportive underlying institution such as The Australian National University and bringing to bear both national and international perspectives. Nor, he warned, should academics alone be the source of advice, having 'found that a high proportion of our best contributions in debate, in conferences and in advice generally came from the civil service of the United Kingdom, other European NATO states, the United States and Canada'. Regardless, history is fundamental to strategic studies, offering as it does a past providing a basis for assessing new policies and warnings for those who might succumb to over-optimism, too great a reliance on technology and other shortfalls. So also do academics potentially have a notable role in bridging divides between countries as did Australians with Soviets in the Cold War years of the 1970s. Such observations are no less relevant in the 21st century as security environments are ever evolving.

Paul Dibb provided the conclusion for this proceedings. It appears as the final chapter.

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