

COMMENT ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF MIXED PERILS

David Wroe, "US Strategy Could Result in Nuclear War", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 2013. Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/us-strategy-could-result-in-nuclear-war-20130414-2htn8.html>.

Peter Hartcher, "Nightmare Side to China Dream", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 2013. Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/nightmare-side-to-china-dream-20130415-2hw1h.html>.

and

Peter Hartcher, "We Rely on the US at Our Peril", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 2013. Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/we-rely-on-the-us-at-our-peril-20130506-2j3ds.html?rand=1367872307683>.

Both David Wroe and Peter Hartcher comment on a document by Benjamin Schreer¹ by discussing the potential role of the US air-sea battle concept, which, according to Schreer is "aimed at defeating China's might by withstanding an initial Chinese attack", followed by (1) a campaign to "blind" the PLA's "command and control networks, (2) a missile suppression campaign against China's land-based systems, and (3) a distant blockade against Chinese merchant ships in the Malacca Strait and elsewhere." I commented previously on the likely viability of the air-sea concept.²

My comment here is not directed specifically at the reasonableness or otherwise of the assessment by Schreer, but rather at the way in which the assessment was made; that is, this comment is on the legitimacy of the information system that formed the basis of the assessment. I raise questions about such legitimacy, but I do not attempt to find definitive answers to them. What is the purpose of raising questions? It appears that neither David nor Peter raised them and it seems appropriate that someone should.

The first question to pose is where did Benjamin Schreer obtain most of his information. That is fairly obvious from the citations in his report. A large part of it came from the Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), which is a Washington-based think-tank engaged in national security, defence planning and "military investment for the 21st century."³ And where did CSBA obtain most of its information? From the Office of National

¹ Benjamin Schreer, "Planning the Unthinkable War: 'Air-Sea Battle' and Its Implications for Australia," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 2013. Available at: http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=356&pubtype=-1.

² The earlier comment was in reference to the issue of US interest in HMAS Stirling with participation by Michael J Green (Centre for International and Strategic Studies) and Andrew Shearer (Lowy Institute). At: <http://www.accci.com.au/CommentonASB.pdf>.

³ Their Internet site is at: <http://www.csbaonline.org/>.

Assessments (ONA) of the US Department of Defence. So the Wroe-Hartcher information would appear to be third-hand, and perhaps we should start with the first-hand.

ONA was established in 1973, which places it in the last portion of Richard Nixon's term as US President. The Secretary of Defence at that time was James Schlesinger. The founding director of ONA was Andrew Marshall, who had previously worked with Schlesinger at the RAND Corporation, which many consider to be the grandfather of American strategic think-tanks. Andrew Marshall, at the age of 92 this year, remains the director of ONA. Some people suggest that since he out-lived eight presidents of the United States and 14 secretaries of defence, he is obviously very good at his job. Others say that he was clever enough to remain "under the radar" so that he ruffled no feathers and tarnished no brass. The truth probably lies somewhere between. Marshall pushed the notion of long-term reliance on technology in defence hardware and on strategic planning to achieve a convergence of current weapon systems with those that are expected with a reasonable probability to be developed in the future. He received some attention for this, but not a lot.

Then came Obama's "pivot to Asia", which was later renamed, "rebalancing in Asia". Marshall's air-sea battle concept seemed to be ideally suited for the pivotal objectives. All of Marshall's computer simulations were based on his belief that China would become a major power in the Asian region and would gradually build up its military presence for the purpose of protecting the integrity of its territory, as the Chinese traditionally defined it. That definition may differ from the one used by China's neighbours and by the US. Initially, the air-sea battle concept was part of a general strategy that Marshall developed more than 20 years ago, but as a war-game it needed to be specific in terms of what was to be avoided militarily, and what could (but not necessarily would) trigger an action. This was assumed to occur through territorial protection in the form of anti-access and area-denial of the air and sea space that China claims. This has been popularised with the use of Pentagon nomenclature "A2AD" and it has recently been extended to include cyberspace.⁴

To gain support for the concept Marshall needed a window for public exposure to the computer simulations that the ONA made, but all of these results were reported as confidential documents to the US Secretary of Defence. The opportunity to open a desired window arose earlier with the establishment of CSBA in 1995 under the leadership of Andrew F Krepinevich Jr, who until then was Marshall's military assistant at ONA. One of the first "spins" by the centre was to capitalise "air-sea battle concept", to make it a proper noun, and to remove the hyphen and the space it occupied to make it a fully fledged Web entity. Then the word "concept" was conveniently dropped to make it simply "AirSea Battle" which, presumably puts it into the same general category as other battles, such as Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. The spin was successful and the phrase "AirSea Battle" is now widely used. Perhaps of greater significance, a search of the publications made available by CSBA on their Internet site revealed that the now-iconic name appears in 190 documents that were made available to the public since 2007. Hence,

⁴ Chris Scott, "Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2AD) in Military Domains and in Cyberspace," Ctovision, 17 December 2012. Available at: <http://ctovision.com/2012/12/anti-access-area-denial-a2ad-in-military-domains-and-in-cyberspace/>.

we have Spin + Exposure and we shall see what that sums to in a moment. For the present, note that the result remains as window dressing even if it is surprisingly extensive dressing. Air-sea battle has not changed substantially from a generic concept that may or may not have applications to the placement of US ships and aircraft in the Asia-Pacific region.

According to the *Washington Post*⁵ Marshall's influence grew in proportion to his study budget, which in recent years has varied between \$13 million and \$19 million and much of this is frequently allocated to think-tanks, defence consultants and academics with close ties to his office. More than half the money typically goes to six firms. Among the largest recipients is the CSBA:

In the past 15 years, CSBA has run more than two dozen China war games for Marshall's office and written dozens of studies. The think-tank typically collects about \$2.75 million to \$3 million a year, about 40 percent of its annual revenue, from Marshall's office, according to Pentagon statistics and CSBA's most recent financial filings.

Krepinevich makes about \$865,000 in salary and benefits, or almost double the compensation paid out to the heads of other nonpartisan think-tanks such as the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and the Brookings Institution. CSBA said its board sets executive compensation based on a review of salaries at other organisations doing similar work.

The war games run by CSBA are set 20 years in the future and cast China as a hegemonic and aggressive enemy. Guided anti-ship missiles sink US aircraft carriers and other surface ships. Simultaneous Chinese strikes destroy American air bases, making it impossible for the US military to launch its fighter jets. The outnumbered American force fights back with conventional strikes on China's mainland, knocking out long-range precision missiles and radar.

How seriously are these war games taken in the US? The same *Washington Post* article suggests that senior Pentagon officials privately concede that AirSea Battle's goal is to help "US forces weather an initial Chinese assault and counterattack to destroy sophisticated radar and missile systems built to keep US ships away from China's coastline". As such it has appeal. It is generally known that a major task of military planners is to assume worst-case scenarios for the purpose of highlighting weaknesses in security. In this case large bases and groups of aircraft carriers were seen to be vulnerable to the capacity of unfriendly powers to "see deep and shoot deep" with a high degree of accuracy. They become targets, so survival depends upon redeployment to "austere airfields on remote Pacific islands with bomb-resistant aircraft shelters and with rapid runway repair kits to fix damaged airstrips". All that may be a sensible precaution. Problems did not arise until the concept became public knowledge with sufficient spin to make the worst-case scenario seem inevitable.

The process is clearly faulty. The pivot to Asia was intended to stabilise power positions in the Asia-Pacific region but achieved the opposite. Long-term strategic planning was intended to prepare "ways and means" for coping with possible future outcomes without contributing to excessive expenditure on military hardware. AirSea Battle moved it in the

⁵ Greg Jaffe, "US Model for a Future War Fans Tensions with China and Inside Pentagon," *The Washington Post*, 2 August 2012. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-model-for-a-future-war-fans-tensions-with-china-and-inside-pentagon/2012/08/01/gJQAC6F8PX_print.htm.

reverse direction. It will require some time to bring about repairs – with, perhaps, a revival of old fashioned diplomacy and statecraft.

Dwight Eisenhower warned in 1961⁶ of the dangers with the Cold War military-industrial complex. Perhaps we should warn against the post-Cold War military-and-independent-think-tank complex, and insist that greater transparency be shown in the extent to which those research organisations are dependent upon government research grants and how closely one think-tank is linked to another.⁷ Whatever Marshall's many computer simulations in the form of war games might add to strategic planning, excessively cosy relationships will almost always prejudice perceptions that are formed in matters for which we have no clear knowledge of current circumstances, let alone future ones. It is also possible to stir up a lot of unnecessary fuss by passing along information that emerges from faulty processes. For example, we now know how "whispers" on the racetrack can raise small storms unless someone takes time to trace the layers of words. This helps to complete the equation:

Spin + Exposure = Henny Penny's Folly (aka the sky is falling).

Peter Hartcher (in the China dream article) was adamant that Canberra "needs to treat us as adults and explain the yin as well as the yang of China's rise". But does anyone in Canberra know the "yin as well as the yang"? Does anyone, anywhere know them, especially if we accept the Taoist metaphysical approach and take good-evil, high-low, water-fire, etc., as being perceptual rather than real, and treat them as parts of the interconnected cyclical flows from *I Ching (Book of Change)*. Andrew Marshall may have known both the yin and yang of China's rise, but what-if, at age 92, he forgot them?

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⁶ Available in the form of the television broadcast: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRtY>.

⁷ A second Washington think-tank is involved. Peter Hartcher mentioned Captain Peter Hendrix from the Centre for a New American Security in connection with the reduced effectiveness of aircraft carriers in modern warfare (in his article about relying on the US at our peril). A quick check of Captain Hendrix's biography indicates that he also served on the staff of ONA with Andrew Marshall. Is anyone surprised?