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Transcript of presentation:

Summation of Dialogue

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Commander, Australian Fleet, and Vice-Patron of the Royal United Services Institute

Thank you. ...The *irony* of the last speaker today being a *Rear Admiral*...

- While we're all assembled here in the Australian National *Maritime* Museum... I noticed that, whilst we started with the Blamey Oration, every photograph from every Strategic Summary we've looked at, has been *of islands and water*. - And even *harbours* that we see here.

[Background slide showing Port Moresby Harbour, shanties and CBD towers.]

We talked today about the *Asian Century*; we've heard about the *Asia-Pacific Century*.

- To some extent we may have heard about the ***Maritime Century*** as well. (Which, as a Naval Officer, is clearly very close to my heart.)

It's a relevant point that comes from the discussion today: it's not a 'Naval' century, it's a ***Maritime*** Century. I think the continuing reference to the Geography of the area we're talking about; to the nature of problems that arise because of the Geography – all indicate that there is a strong presence around a 'Maritime Strategy'.

(I have to admit, I was out of the room when Michael Shoebridge gave the Defence position, but I can only suggest that if he *didn't* say it was a *Maritime Strategy*, that's indeed what he *meant!*)

[Audience laughter]

He also raised the issue about *my* experience, and any who have read my biography would understand that my last job was as Commander of *Border Protection Command* (which was a role that I won't say I 'endured' for two years, but certainly, looking back, it was a politically 'challenging' position.) - Managing not just a *Defence* response but a *whole-of-Government* response to issues that were arising in our Region. The things that struck me, day by day (in this organisation called *Border Protection Command*), I saw the same issues:

- Within the region
- Within the Pacific
- And to our North

There was a proliferation of like-minded organisations within the Region:

- Call it the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.
- Call it a 'Coastguard' somewhere else, be it in Vietnam.
- Be it the organisation for Marine Affairs and Fisheries within Indonesia.

- Or be it, as we've heard, quite often today, those surveillance attributes that were needed to protect the economy of individual island nations, formerly serviced by *Pacific Patrol Boat Programme* and those sorts of things.

Today, we had a broad discussion on the issues that affect us. We might not have solved every problem, but I use that one aspect (the previous role that I had) as a mechanism of how we *can* engage in the Region, in a way that we might not have done so, forcefully, in the past few years.

So my task...

Which is very difficult, having sat through the **Panel Discussion** - because I feel my role was really to stand here and confirm whether you *understood* what you were told today. [Audience laughter.]

- [The Panel Discussion] was a summation of *all* those things that we've heard. Quite frankly, with the *quality* of questions that were asked, I believe that comprehension was *sound*.

So, it is *not* my intent to walk you through, prospect by prospect, every speaker and let you know what was said. But I would like to raise a few things that stuck in my mind. Hopefully they will be used as the **keys** that you might remember when you think back across what we have learnt today.

In doing so, I'd just like to test a theory here, we met today (and I would thank the Royal United Services Institute for convening this 2nd International Defence and Security Dialogue) - to raise *Strategic Policy awareness in the Community*. Now I think we've *achieved* that today.

As usual, the opportunity to present facts, opinions and commentary is an important step in understanding certain issues. We didn't set out to solve all the problems of the Region, but I think we gave a fair crack at being able to contribute *appropriately* to the debate.

I'd just like to go through a few key points from those that did speak; things that did define important aspects of the day's events.

I would like to start with the **Blamey Oration**. I think that, Professor Herr, you set the tone when you said that Australia has "**lost the plot**" and that was really, in your words, 'a statement'. But I think it then highlighted a couple of important areas that we needed to hear - and we needed to challenge - throughout the day, to confirm that we had an *understanding* and a fair discussion over issues that are effective in the Region.

You said that General Blamey's view of the strategic significance of the Melanesian Arc (as a base from which an external threat could reach Australia) is very much alive today, as it was then. - But the *circumstances* in which we place *that* are significantly different. That's the issue you went on to explain: States now being independent; responsible for their own security - both internal and external. *Interests* that are not necessarily those of Australia.

In the absence of us [Australia] understanding these changes, island states will look to **alternative solutions to meet their own needs**. This was a common theme that stood out to me from a number of the Strategic Views we looked at.

If Australia *does* seek to engage: in your presentation you said we needed to **adapt**. We needed to use things like the Pacific Patrol Boat Program; contact with the MSG [Melanesian Spearhead Group] and the FRSC [Forum Regional Security Committee]. We needed to engage at the Regional level, **appropriate** to the needs within the particular region, not a one-stop shop. You also ended with another statement, about 'insanity' this time, saying if we continue to apply the **same policy** looking for a **different result**, our efforts would fail.

We then moved on to the Strategic Outlooks.

We started with Timor-Leste - *friends to everyone*, I understand! Professor Kingsbury, you provided a cautious but encouraging view. You demonstrated, with great insight, the needs of a newly-independent Nation; the natural alignment of domestic and international needs, and the prominent theme of a State seeking their **own means** to achieve their own needs. (Be it through **alternate means**, not just through those who may have helped in the past.) Importantly, you said: 'Security **with** the Region' **not from** the Region. I think that's a very relevant point, Professor.

We then spoke about PNG and Dr. May provided an 'optimistic' view, in your words, of where PNG is. I think we teased that out to some extent in the question period. - Whether that level of optimism still exists after those discussions, is for each of us to walk away and consider.

It was important to note the issue of '*no external threat*', but what I found interesting was where that places *us*, considering what is happening in PNG, particularly when we feel we know how others should respond to issues like:

- people smuggling,
- transnational crime
- terrorism

And whether that truly does affect what happens in those individual countries, and how they would apply that to us.

Given that I was Commander Border Protection Command, I would like to point out that the *Suspected Irregular Entry Vessel* (the S.I.E.V. that you mentioned) that did get caught and didn't go to PNG and was looking for Queensland...

- I *do* know for a fact that the maps and charts on board did indicate it was going to *New Zealand*. [Audience laughter.]

Importantly, you talked about Papua New Guinea not having a sense that [Australia] were as influential as maybe we thought we are. And the fact that it was looking to 'the North' [China].

We then had a firm view presented of the Fiji position today. I thank you very much Major-General Rabuka, for how you presented that. I also very much enjoyed the way that you presented some of the issues as a *geological* rather than a geopolitical statement. - That is: the Earth was still settling and so was Fiji's diplomatic and

democratic processes. I think that was important. You made the point that Australia needs to accept this. In the absence of [Australia] filling our position in Fiji's relationships, it will be filled by others - 'non-traditional' players in the Region.

The important point that I took away from that, as you said, ***the longer the isolation the harder the restoration***, should Australia choose to take that view. - An important quote that hit me between the eyes. I thank you for that.

John McKinnon from New Zealand then presented a like-minded view of where we are. Interesting, the first point; you said New Zealand was three hours from anywhere. That sounds like a good tourism plug actually! [Audience laughter]

Importantly, whilst indicating that New Zealand was isolated but not isolationist, I think that was an important point that we could take away. You did introduce the aspect of '***not the Cold War Mark Two***', but the aspect of China and US involvement in the Region. (The first speaker to mention the US presence in this area.) That was important for us. Out of that, you did clearly state that a '***containist***' policy of China is ***not feasible***. The reality is that ***collaboration and competition*** is the outcome we should be seeking. I think that was an important message to take up.

I am then told (because I had to leave the room for a period of time) that a number of points were made on Foreign Policy Implications from Jenny Hayward-Jones; also Defence Policy from Michael Shoebridge. However I am told that there was a discussion of the changing Region. A representation from Jenny that ***Australia cannot do without the Pacific and the Pacific cannot do without Australia***. A strong issue that we needed to consider more broadly, within the political context and the policy context of where we go at the moment.

There were a number of ways that she represented that Australia should seek to change that, including helping ***forums*** within the Pacific ***benefit*** from the Asian century.

In terms of Defence Policy, Michael Shoebridge spoke on how the National Framework would be developed and gave a strategic overview. I don't intend to delve further, because I think that the Panel Table questions today elicited much of that, as to ***why*** and ***how*** we could expect this Government, and any future Government, to take this Defence Policy and move it forward, in this particular Region at the time.

Lastly we had Alan Ryan, who spoke to us about Security and Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Policy within the Region. As a current serving Naval Officer.... (And as a proud member who was at the naming ceremony for the first of our LHDs. - Landing Helicopter Dock - which is a 28,000 tonne ship. The first of two that this country's Navy will operate and the largest ships that we have operated in our existence. It is a ship that has been designed with a ***policy statement*** in mind. - But the aspect of 'how' we might end up using that hull, in the full spectrum of what the Military is expected to deliver, in ***concert*** with the rest of Government, is being tested and thrown around in the halls of Government as we speak.)

I have spent a fair amount of time travelling the Region in the last couple of years. As with the proliferation of organisations like Border Protection Command, I have seen a growing interest from all nations to engage regionally, through the medium of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercise. It is the way that people currently talk. It is the language that allows people to **join together** and look at each other's issues and problems, despite the fact that it's based around some fairly tragic circumstances. (That we have seen evident in the Region over the last few years; at Nias, in Japan, in Fiji, in Christchurch.) It is evident that our means, in the Military spectrum, of being able to use our equipment, to be able to engage regionally through those things, is a positive statement. I can only think that it will get better into the future.

So at the end of my time, those who know me will know that I've spoken far longer than I had intended. - That's what you get when you ask to speak.
[Audience laughter.]

I thank those in the audience who attended today. I think we've achieved the mission we set out to do. I think we have raised a level of interest in the debate. I can only hope that it comes to some good.

Thank you for your attention.