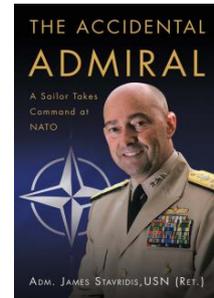


Continuing the comparisons, he contends that General Stanley McChrystal ‘evokes hard-bitten Matthew Ridgway, come to energise a floundering war effort’; General George Casey ‘conjures up thoughts of the stolid Ulysses S. Grant’; collegial General John Allen mirrors Dwight Eisenhower’s ‘overriding regard for the alliance’; and General Raymond Odierno, ‘schooled in this hard war he rose to run’, compares to Omar Bradley.

For himself, General Bolger identifies with ‘Vinegar Joe’ Stilwell of the China-Burma-India theatre in World War 2 who, according to Bolger, ‘told it like it was, eventually got sent home for it, and deserved a better war’.

The Accidental Admiral: a sailor takes command at NATO

James Stavridis
Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, 2014, 288 pages
ISBN: 978-1-6125-1704-9
US\$32.95



Reviewed by Craig Beutel

As James Stavridis never expected to advance past lieutenant, in his newest book the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) claims status as an ‘Accidental Admiral’. Seeing only a future for himself in a law school, he was convinced to continue in the US Navy by the future Admiral Mike Mullen, with an offer to study at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, which specialises in international affairs.

Stavridis, now Dean of the School, writes his part-biography, part-manifesto reflecting on a naval career unbehind to the expectation of higher rank. The first Admiral to be appointed SACEUR, the professed innovator is cut from similar cloth as other warrior scholars of his era, such as James Mattis, H.R. McMaster and Stanley McChrystal.

The Accidental Admiral is in part a chronicle of Stavridis’ time as SACEUR, with particular insight into the genesis of security challenges still relevant to the ADF. He showed early concern with the policy of NATO expansion into what the Kremlin considered ‘greater Russia’, as he predicted it would be a ‘hard sell’ to defend Georgia and Ukraine. Russia casts a long shadow in the former Soviet satellites he warns, and perpetual ‘old skeletons of history rattle in the wind’ all over Europe.

The Admiral constructively lobbied European partners to support General McChrystal’s troop surge and underwrote the International Security Assistance Force’s handover of security responsibility to the Afghans. Stavridis advocated a Libya-style approach to Syria, questioning whether the current operations in Iraq against ISIL would have been better focused against the Assad regime. He foresaw an outcome in which either Assad survived and retaliated further against his own people, emboldening Iran, or partially prophetically, radical elements in the opposition would ultimately overthrow Assad and establish an al Qaeda mini-state. However, he does see benefit in an Iran focused on a fractious Iraq, instead of fixing on the destruction of Israel, of which he is very fond.

Building on lectures he delivered in the TED Conference forum (run by a non-profit organisation, under the slogan ‘ideas worth spreading’), Stavridis advocates a form of ‘smart power’ for the 21st century based on ‘international, interagency, and public-private connections in creating security’, asserting that:

No one of us is as smart as all of us thinking together—no one person, no one nation, no one alliance, no one organisation. Our combined knowledge is vastly greater than our individual inputs. So ideas must be shared, and strategic communication—our self-talk—matters deeply.

The former operational commander of the West's oldest security alliance advocates open strategic communication that transparently advocates its shared 'enlightenment values'. The convergence of security threats outside of their traditional stovepipes drives Stavridis' argument but he does little to address the disparity in public-private agendas or how the 'enlightenment' ideas of democracy, liberty, freedom of speech, and religion are applicable in a 21st century world.

Nevertheless, this is an important conversation for Australians to lend an ear to, not least as the US Government considers the affordability of its traditional 'hard power' predisposition across the world and seeks alternative policies. Stavridis' 'smart power' concept, which has lineage through Hillary Clinton and Joseph Nye, would continue to be a part of US foreign policy should a Democrat succeed President Obama. Concurrently, Australia also has strategic interests that we alone cannot secure, suggesting that Stavridis' charter is also worth contemplation closer to home.

A key method of his approach, Stavridis defines strategic communication as providing audiences with truthful and timely information that will influence in a precise way. However, he struggles to employ an application framework to the concept. After discussing 14 somewhat contradictory 'golden rules' and four recommendations, he admits that strategic communications are fraught with false starts and mistakes. However, he does point to the Arab Spring as a reason why mastery of strategic communication is an important endeavour to pursue.

Perhaps of most interest to the planner, Stavridis suggests that long-term strategic forecasting is erroneous in the modern world and that, far from the predictability of the late 20th century, we are now 'entering a very tactical world'. Within his time as SACEUR, he points to an operational environment which was hard to assess due to rapid change. He offers justification through examples of the Arab Spring, the Global Financial Crisis, Iran nuclear issues, Snowden, global oil markets and the fact that Facebook and Twitter respectively now have the third and fifth largest populations on earth.

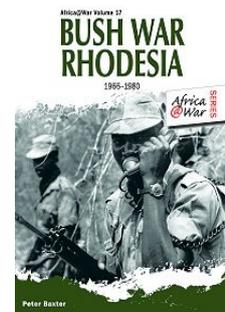
In his office, Stavridis aptly has a picture of the battleship USS *Maine*, whose sinking sparked the Spanish American war, to remind him that 'life has a way of sending us down hidden paths'. In attempting to face the challenges of this tactical, dynamic world, he warns that slow-burn issues of strategic importance get lost as the 'iron law of politics' is to manage crises as they emerge.

While one might consider Stavridis' ideas to be overly 'blue sky' and ungrounded in the 'tactical' world, readers should consider the book as broad strategic guidance and not a manual for success. *The Accidental Admiral* aims to dilute a lifetime's worth of observations into concepts that Stavridis believes are worthy of consideration by a new generation of leaders.

Stavridis writes with a career's worth of confidence in never being too concerned with rocking the boat. He continues to consider himself a 'disruptive innovator', based on a career advanced with 'house money' and never expecting advancement. In *The Accidental Admiral*, he appeals to modern militaries to consign their traditional introspective and repetitive practices and instead develop akin to the modern technological world, which embraces risk and innovates rapidly.

Bush War Rhodesia 1966-1980

Peter Baxter
Helion & Company: Solihull UK, 2014, 130 pages
ISBN: 978-1-9099-8237-6
UK£16.95



Reviewed by Lex McAulay

This is No. 17 in the series *Africa@War*, which presents accounts of wars on that continent since 1945. Other titles deal with the Mau Mau, Selous Scouts, Biafra, the South African Air Force's Border War, and 'Congo Unravelling'.