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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

“Redefining U.S. Hemispheric Interests” Another Point of View

Sir:

The Summer 1998 *Naval War College Review* contained an article entitled “Redefining U.S. Hemispheric Interests: A Bold Naval Agenda for the Twenty-First Century.” Though I enjoyed reading this article, I am cognizant of the prominent circulation of the *Review* and feel that it may, if left unchallenged, skew its readers’ appreciation of the South American perspective.

I offer my personal view to redress the balance:

(1) *Proposed navies classification*: Cdr. González’s article seems to demand U.S. attention to Latin America and assumes that the United States will wish to invest in Latin American navies because of confidence in a particular country’s alignment rather than U.S. vital interests with respect to defense issues.

Noting the classification on page 50, it is difficult to understand the basis for the assessment of Argentina, whether it be based on “confidence” for U.S. support or on its own military capability. If it is based on confidence, then surely the United States must have every confidence in Argentina if she was recognized in 1997 as an “extra-NATO ally” and was applauded for her performance in peacekeeping operations by a U.S. general (Lt. Gen. Martin R. Steele, USMC, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Policy and Operations, in a lecture during the Current Strategy Forum at the Naval War College, Newport, R.I., on June 17, 1998). If it is based on capability, then Argentina’s participation in multinational coalitions in the Persian Gulf, Haiti, and Central America (ONUCA)

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contradict the author's definition of "green water." These operations spanned several years and were very far from Argentina's neighboring seas.

Furthermore, the Center of Naval Analyses also differs with such a classification (see Thomas Hirschfeld, *Multinational Cooperation Options: Final Report*, CNA, Washington, D.C., Table 1, p. 6).

(2) *Geopolitical vision*: The author's vision of the geopolitical situation on page 39 is rather simplistic. He says, "South America is a geopolitical triangle, with the smallest side represented by Argentina (1,620 nautical miles of coastline in the Atlantic), a second side by Chile (2,610 nautical miles of coast in the Pacific), and the longest by Brazil (4,000 nautical miles of coast in the Atlantic)." Position and international voice do not relate to length of coastline. For example, Germany has a much smaller coastline than Norway but a much larger navy. Alternatively, Germany has a smaller navy and coastline than the United Kingdom but has a much larger economy.

(3) *The Falkland/Malvinas conflict*: The U.K./Argentinean dispute over the Malvinas/Falklands is taken out of context. It was caused not through lack of maritime position but a historical claim dating from 1833. Despite U.S./Argentinean friendship, there was little that could undermine the enduring U.S./U.K. pact.

Finally, while I agree with the author that the United States must pay greater attention to Latin America, we as Latin American people must recognize that there are bigger fish on the U.S. agenda. Latin America is important but not essential for the United States.

Jorge H. Recio
Captain, Argentine Navy

Coastal Navies

Sir:

The main premise of Commander Tim Sloth Joergensen, Royal Danish Navy, in his Spring 1998 article "U.S. Navy Operations in Littoral Waters: 2000 and Beyond" is that if one is going to take on a brown-water navy, then one is best served also to operate a brown-water navy. Commander Joergensen stated that "to be able to understand and counter a threat one should be able to pose the threat oneself."

The commander wrote professionally about the coastal threats which a blue-water navy with aspirations to impose its will in the littoral battle space would face once it approached the area of operations. After reading of the threats posed by small, quiet submarines, mines, fast patrol boats (FPBs), coastal batteries, and attack aircraft, I am compelled to ask Commander Joergensen, does the U.S. Navy really need to operate the same kinds of platforms, whether

owned or “leased,” to validate the threats it long ago recognized as intrinsic to these systems? Is doing so the only way to effect a counter? As an example to one specific threat, does the U.S. Navy really have to reintroduce the FPB as part of its plan to fight in littoral waters? Granted, FPBs are very serious threats, as is anything that is capable of launching high explosives. Years ago, U.S. hydrofoil boats could hide behind rocks in the Virgin Passage and simulate Harpoon launches against high-value units. But one knows that, if given the opportunity, they will do that. I don’t believe the U.S. Navy needs to field patrol craft that would have to be forward deployed, as they would hinder the movement of task forces across blue water, and if I were the commander in chief, I would not rely on the certainty that allied navies that specialize in coastal warfare will provide support. Global markets plus national politics is a formula that sometimes precludes allied participation.

Would not precursor operations (not unlike the precursor operations to eliminate the submarine threat prior to putting aircraft carriers into the Vestfjorden) conducted from the amphibious ready group (ARG), carrier battle group (CVBG), and submarines be viable without FPBs? Would not sending forth patrol boats and helicopters equipped for surface warfare be a *mano-a-mano* game of attrition warfare? Would we expect a task force commander to wait out this precursor operation, hoping his brave FPB skippers are victorious before sending in the main strike force? Commander Joergensen stated the FPB has “poor ability to counter several threats at the same time.” Why then does this threat need to be met by a like threat? Why not cruise missiles, air-launched Harpoons, or attack air from the ARG or the CVBG in harmony with attack submarines—the appropriate mix depending on theater constraints? Why can’t a blue-water navy find within its past operations and adaptable hardware the means to counter the coastal threats from the current inventory of big decks and nuclear submarines?

As for mines, they are problematic, but they are not show-stoppers. Commander Joergensen stated they are “a very effective weapon, as was shown in the Persian Gulf between 1987 and 1991, when Iranian and Iraqi mines inflicted \$125 million damage on three U.S. warships.” Note the number is only three. Arguably, the weapon is an irritant vice “very effective.” I state this because the incidents referred to did not prevent the U.S. from continuing its mission and seeking national goals, nor do I suspect they will in the future. The weapon did not induce the U.S. Navy to depart the Persian Gulf. Until the “magic lance” comes along, avoid them as best one can and in the meantime, use the LCAC and field the V-22 Osprey and AAV to avoid them and to lessen the risk of influence detonation.

Forgive me for saying so, but the article reads to me like a marketing brochure selling the wares of a company which is trying to convince the potential

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buyer of a need that doesn't necessarily exist. I would advise the United States naval service to be prepared to go it alone, and go intelligently with what it has.

Nelson Hines
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The Coast Guard in Vietnam

Sir:

When I read Jonathan S. Wiarda's "The Coast Guard in Vietnam: Achieving Success in a Difficult War" (*Naval War College Review*, Spring 1998, pp. 30–45), I was surprised to see on page 39 a sentence beginning: "Not being a permanent branch of the armed forces, the Coast Guard. . . ." Because the authority cited in the note at the end of this sentence is my history of the Coast Guard, *Guardians of the Sea*, I wish to state unequivocally that the Coast Guard is a permanent branch of the nation's armed forces. Had Mr. Wiarda read my work carefully, he would know that the act of Congress that created the Coast Guard in 1915 specified that the service "shall constitute a part of the military forces of the United States." To be sure, the Coast Guard was not transferred to the Department of Defense during the Vietnam conflict and many of its vessels and aircraft are not armed; nonetheless, it is the nation's fifth armed force.

Some other errors appear in the article as well. None of the high endurance cutters that served off Vietnam had helicopter pads except the new 378-footers, six of which constituted a part of Squadron 3 beginning in 1969. The twenty-four smaller ships all had to rely on underway replenishment during their lengthy patrols. Nor did any have 40 mm mounts; these had been removed from the 255-footers earlier, while the older 327-footers and the 311-foot cutters (built as Navy AVPs) seem never have been so armed after World War II. The WHECs that formed Squadron 3 had only some .50-caliber machine guns and a pair of 81 mm mortars to supplement their single 5-inch/38-caliber guns. None had a complement even approaching 215—they were generally manned by 140–155 officers and men.

While I have never sailed in the South China Sea or the Gulf of Thailand, I cannot believe that "the rough waters off Vietnam were much worse than those around the United States," as Mr. Wiarda asserts on page 39. He should be aware that "Winter-North Atlantic" signifies the lightest lading on a freighter's Plimsoll mark, while the North Pacific in winter can be literally ferocious. No doubt rough water interfered with boarding Vietnamese junks, but to imply that this was something to which the crews of eighty-two-foot WPBs were unaccustomed simply is not true.

Finally, Mr. Wiarda does injustice to the Coast Guardsmen who served in Vietnam in capacities other than manning WPBs or WHECs by never mentioning their contributions. Tending aids to navigation, establishing and manning Loran stations, port security, dealing with merchant marine personnel, and especially the explosive loading detachments were fully as important as participation in MARKET TIME patrols—indeed, the last may have been the most valuable contribution their service made to the war in Vietnam.

I am sorry to have to find fault with a young scholar's efforts, especially when he has an M.A. in military history from the University of Alabama, from which I retired in 1993 after having helped to establish the program. But perhaps he can benefit from these remarks, which at least are not accompanied by a low grade.

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Pelham G. Boyer, Managing Editor