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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

U.S. Hemispheric Interests

Sir:

I read with interest the comments made in the Winter 1999 *Naval War College Review* by Captain Jorge H. Recio, of the Argentinean Navy, about my article in the Summer 1998 issue (“Redefining U.S. Hemispheric Interests: A Bold Naval Agenda for the Twenty-first Century”). I would like to express just three ideas, which I consider support my thesis and by no means justify the criticism made by my friend and classmate of the 1997 Naval Command College Class at the U.S. Naval War College.

First, my theory is based upon an intellectual exercise and as such it is subject to all sort of critiques, but in no way does it lose its character of academic exercise. In that respect, it represents my personal point of view, and it cannot be considered as an official opinion from my country or the Chilean Navy at all. I wrote the article as an analyst of the U.S. interests in the region, on the basis of my experience as student, and afterwards as teacher and researcher in the U.S. Naval War College. As I stated in my article, I attempted to interpret the U.S. interests in respect to the hemisphere, and not to represent the Chilean interests, or those of any other country in the region. To try to give another interpretation to this academic exercise would be capricious.

Second, in developing my work, I tried never to ignore the geopolitical, political, economic and military importance of Argentina. On the contrary, I situated that nation in the context of what I called the “geopolitical triangle” of South America, i.e., as one of the three more important countries in the region with respect to U.S. hemispheric interests. To mention only one of the many

arguments that support this condition, such as the length of the coast of these three countries, is a deceptive simplification and a complete distortion of what I attempted to demonstrate.

Third, regarding the “confidence” matter, which seems to be the main concern for Captain Recio and the one that provoked his criticism, I would like to insist that I have tried to interpret the regional interests of the United States and not the Chilean interests in Latin America. The Falkland War was, undoubtedly, a hard blow to U.S. interests, because Argentina engaged in a conflict with the traditional and main North American ally: the United Kingdom. To ignore the fact that after this episode the United States decreased her degree of confidence in Argentina means to be blind to a contemporary reality. Today nobody can deny that Argentina has a navy with a “blue-water” capability, but this is not the point analyzed in my article: the eventual support of the United States to the future development of that capability, in a regional context. Thus, I have framed this article in the twenty-first century. As I said, the naming of Argentina as a “major non-NATO ally” is a favorable sign of the recovery of the confidence lost by the United States during the past decade.

I hope that this explanation meets doubts and concerns of Captain Recio, and I send my most respectful regards to him and to all the journal’s distinguished readers, with a thought in mind: “The only way to make oneself free from flattery is to make men understand that nobody offends them saying the truth” (Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*).

Commander Edmundo R. Gonzalez,
Chilean Navy

“Shock and Awe”

Sir:

Re your review of *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* in the Summer 1998 edition, your reviewer rendered a gross disservice both to our paper and to those who are genuinely seeking innovative, creative, and constructive ways to deal with the future security of this nation. One hopes this disservice was inadvertent.

In the first instance, reviews are meant to be complete if not timely. The National Defense University edition of *Shock and Awe* was published over two years ago. A student in the field would know that since then, a second, follow-on, and far more specific work, *Rapid Dominance: A Force for All Seasons*, was released in 1997. For your readers’ interest, a major conference was held at NDU this past September that featured much of Rapid Dominance as an alternative warfighting concept, and work is being completed on a strategic roadmap for implementing an experimental Rapid Dominance Force.

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Any review of *Rapid Dominance and Shock and Awe* would be incomplete if not negligent without recognizing the follow-on, *A Force for All Seasons*, especially since it has been out for over a year. That error is akin to reviewing only the first volume of a multi-volume history of World War II and wondering in the review how the war turned out.

Your reviewer dismissed our strictures that “The purpose of this paper is to outline the beginnings of the concept of Rapid Dominance” and the concluding thought that “Rapid Dominance is still a concept and a work in progress. . . .” He then proceeded as if his only tasks were to refute all that we wrote and to seek out typographic errors that the computer printing and incomplete editing process had allowed to sneak through. (We must note that for inexplicable reasons, the word “blitzkrieg” is spelled correctly in certain places and not in others.)

To acquaint those of your readers who may not be familiar with the concept of Rapid Dominance, the theory combines two very old and fundamental components of war and politics: “shock and awe,” and “will and perception.” It is this premeditated combination of “shock and awe” and “will and perception” that distinguishes Rapid Dominance. The objective of Rapid Dominance is “to affect, influence and control the will and perception of the adversary through imposing or threatening to impose a regime of shock and awe sufficient to that end.” If shock and awe cannot sufficiently affect will and perception and therefore the outcomes we seek, Rapid Dominance retains the capacity to project “overwhelming force” in line with the current strategy and defense guidance.

Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, president of your great institution, recognizes this interaction of shock and awe, and will and perception as well as anyone. In his own view of “netcentric warfare,” he argues that the accumulation of rapidly applied, correct decisions will produce shock and awe and contribute to achieving decisive action.

As part of our initial theory, we developed an eight-level hierarchy of shock and awe to demonstrate and illustrate both historically and practically how will and perception might be affected, influenced, and controlled at a variety of levels. That hierarchy ranged from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (which forced the Japanese to surrender despite suicidal resistance up to that point) to seven other cases. Your reviewer was uninformed about the example of the Roman legions and their relevance to shock and awe. Rome ruled most of the then-known world with small numbers of forces, which did not have to be deployed everywhere. The threat that dissent or disobedience in the hinterlands would ultimately be crushed by Roman power indeed produced enough “shock and awe” to affect will and perception.

The paper identified and developed four key characteristics for Rapid Dominance: total knowledge; rapidity; control of the environment; and brilliance in execution. While the reviewer accused us of rambling and incoherence, the

simple matter is that we sensibly organized these characteristics in a chapter on "Strategic, Policy and Operational Application," and one on "An Outline for System Innovation and Technological Integration." This was meant to provide the reader with some concrete examples of where we thought the concept could be headed in both policy and capability terms.

Finally, we examined a number of key questions and recommended next steps to be taken in the process of defining, fielding, and testing a Rapid Dominance force. These formed the basis for much of the subsequent volume. We are now working on a roadmap for putting these recommendations into a form for testing and experimentation.

We, as a nation, could choose to rest on our oars and take our future security for granted. Clearly, the Department of Defense and the civilian and uniformed leaders of our military forces are of an entirely different school, and there is no question that there is strong and genuine commitment to re-examining our strategy, force posture, and future directions. In the best of times, this is a very difficult process. What is needed perhaps most of all is a means for collecting and vetting good ideas in a process that encourages debate, dissent, and criticism. Our team has what we all believe is a good idea in Rapid Dominance, one that merits serious consideration. And we believe in a process that requires debate, dissent, and criticism to test good ideas.

But criticism, if it is to be useful, must be objective, balanced, accurate, and informed. Your reviewer showed none of these qualities. To be crass, I am shocked but not awed.

Harlan K. Ullman
Washington, D.C.

Major Conversino replies:

With all due respect, it appears that Dr. Ullman is unfamiliar with the purpose of a book review as well as the responsibility of authors, even of "works in progress," to ensure the accuracy of their manuscripts. Likewise, while stating that the study group of which he was a part wished to engender criticism and debate, Mr. Ullman's reaction to my review seems to suggest that he desires his group be given a pass on the research, writing, and editing of their work, and an endorsement of the concept behind the literary product. I stand by my review of *Shock and Awe* and wish to respond to Dr. Ullman's letter. In short, if I rendered a disservice to anyone, it is to those who seek to peddle "new" ideas with a minimum of research and analysis.

At the outset, let me point out that Dr. Ullman overlooked several key statements in my review. I stipulated, for example, that the authors did not intend for this book to be a "scholarly tome but expected their work to spark thought and debate." Still, this does not excuse them from ensuring the accuracy of the

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text. Notably, Mr. Ullman does not mention my points concerning the book's reference to an Israeli raid on Syrian nuclear reactors in 1982—an event that never occurred—or several other particularly glaring factual mistakes that go well beyond mere typographical errors. As I noted in the review, such serious misstatements of historical events should cause the reader to doubt both the quality of analysis as well as the accuracy of other supporting material presented in the course of building that analysis. Indeed, I stated that the authors made good use of the historical evidence in casting blitzkrieg as an example of “shock and awe.” In pointing out that “blitzkrieg” was consistently misspelled, however, I was merely noting one typographical error that was typical of the uneven quality of the book and, given the amount of emphasis the authors placed on that well known German strategy, a most distracting error at that.

Why is accuracy and sound proofreading important? The authors are clearly trying to “sell” a concept and should ensure that their message is not lost in hasty, sloppy work or through overstatement. The authors, however, might have provided more depth in their evidence and thus a more convincing analysis. Dr. Ullman fails to explain the contradiction inherent in a theory that relies on “*perfect knowledge*” (emphasis mine) but cannot be “over-visualized”—whatever that means—because of the enduring fog of war. Mr. Ullman resorts to the “work in progress” line of defense, which is an unsatisfactory attempt to avoid dealing with the book's shortfalls and the theory's contradictions.

Likewise, merely stating that certain historical events or scenarios provide examples of shock and awe is not the same as building a cogent and convincing analysis. For example, Dr. Ullman states that I was “uninformed” about the role the Roman legions played in inducing shock and awe throughout the empire. I made the comment in light of the authors' model, which touted “rapidity” as a key ingredient of their theory. I will concede that rapidity of movement might be relative, but how far does one stretch the concept of speed—“rapidity”—before it loses all meaning? The authors' conclusion, restated by Dr. Ullman in his letter, that the mere threat of Roman retaliation induced shock and awe, ignores the historical record. A cursory look at Roman history, particularly following the turn of the third century A.D., would reveal an empire often convulsed by major upheavals and rebellions, not all of which were easily or even successfully put down. Was it merely the “shock and awe” supposedly generated by the Roman legions that established order and stability? If so, why did it fail in certain periods? Furthermore, why did the legions fail to impose “shock and awe” on the Goths or Persians? Does shock and awe exist, except where it doesn't?

This brings us to a broader point about the use of history in “proving” an otherwise untested theory: while *Shock and Awe* was meant to be a thought-provoking work in progress, the authors then should expect, as Dr. Ullman claims they do, “dissent” and “criticism” based on their application of the

historical evidence. This is particularly true when they simply throw an idea on the table with little or no evidence to support it and expect “objective” and “informed” readers to accept their view at face value.

I should remind Dr. Ullman that I was asked to review a completed volume, not a series of roundtables and debates. Neither did the editors of this journal ask me to debate the concept of shock and awe. Thus, Dr. Ullman attempts to compare the 1996 book, which was apparently superseded by a subsequent work, to the first volume in a multivolume series on World War II. I agree that one would be grossly remiss in criticizing an author for not ending the war in his first installment. On the other hand, should the author portray the *anschluss* as transpiring in Belgium or describe a September 1939 German invasion of Latvia, a reviewer should rightly call these errors to the reader’s attention. Whether that book is a single volume or is the first in a series, the authors have an obligation to provide an accurate representation of the historical record. This is even more important when the ideas at the heart of the work are still in development and therefore more vulnerable to criticism than a fully developed theory.

In closing, I might point out that Dr. Ullman asserts that I lacked objectivity, balance, accuracy, and was not “informed” in crafting my review. I can only conclude that “objectivity” and “balance” to Dr. Ullman are reflected in a book review that overlooks serious flaws in evidence and argumentation, as well as in editing. I clearly stated in the review that I considered the book’s central thesis to be valid and that *Shock and Awe* contains “new concepts for the nation’s defense,” provided one can get past the distracting errors, poor organization, and occasional contradictions. As for accuracy, I challenge him to point out which of the specific errors I noted were not contained in the book. I will admit that I am not “informed” on the current state of “shock and awe’s” development. Nevertheless, I submit that neither my professors in graduate school nor my faculty colleagues at the Air Force Academy and the U.S. Air Force School of Advanced Airpower Studies would have found the volume that I was asked to review to meet acceptable standards of evidence, organization, argumentation, and editing. In a published book, spelling does count! Dr. Ullman may not have intended *Shock and Awe* to be a work of intense scholarship. Hopefully, the second volume to which he refers, *Rapid Dominance: A Force for All Seasons*, rises above the questionable standard he has apparently accepted for *Shock and Awe*.

Mark J. Conversino
Major, U.S. Air Force

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