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In My View

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Taking Sides, Again

Sir,

I am writing in regard to the review of *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel*, published in the July-August 1984 issue. Your reviewer, like the author of the book, apparently lacks a firm background in the murky details of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result, he did not recognize that what might appear to be a "sober but convincing case" is, in reality a poorly disguised anti-Israeli polemic. All the material presented in the volume was based on a carefully and purposefully chosen set of U.S. government documents. Many are "raw" intelligence reports of dubious reliability, merely entered into files without comment. Had the author, (or reviewer) bothered to check, he would have found contradictory documents in every instance. The very fanciful theories are not based on the cold evaluation of the available evidence, but on the author's propagandistic objectives.

The case of the U.S.S. *Liberty* presents a particularly important example of the techniques employed in the book. As Goodman and Schiff demonstrate conclusively in their exhaustive analysis of the incident, (see *The Atlantic*, September 1984), this tragic incident was the result of a combination of US and Israeli intelligence errors during the "fog of battle." The very partial evidence presented in this book is designed not to enlighten, but to create an historically inaccurate version of events which turn Israel into the villain.

In a general sense, Stephen Green, the author of *Taking Sides*, is a member of the "anything is plausible" school of evidence. In the place of facts, this school believes in a coarse mixture of a few facts, a clear villain, and a bit of imagination. (The now-popular theory that the US arranged to have KAL flight 007 shot-down by the USSR, presents a similar combination of polemic and plausibility.) This case demonstrates again that a little knowledge, particularly in the form of "raw" declassified documents, is a dangerous thing.

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Nato Credibility

Sir,

This letter is written in concerned response to Karl Kaiser's article "Nato Strategy Toward the End of the Century," published in the January-February 1984 issue. I was somewhat troubled by this article after my initial reading, and was even more disturbed after a recent second reading.

While I agree with many of Kaiser's thoughts, his thesis regarding the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence in Europe requires careful, critical analysis. Kaiser argues that NATO's option of early nuclear response, currently embodied in the "flexible response strategy" with the open option of first use of tactical nuclear weapons, has preserved the peace in Western Europe since World War II. He acknowledges that no "final evidence" of this thesis can be provided, but describes it as "in the realm of a relatively convincing probability." He then proceeds to use the premise that nuclear deterrence has prevented European war to argue against endorsing a no-first-use agreement regarding nuclear weapons. He also sees a no-first-use pact as a severe dilution of United States commitment to Western European security.

These arguments appear to rest on the rather fundamental proposition that, were it not for NATO nuclear deterrence, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies would have long ago invaded Western Europe. Furthermore, the flexible response strategy is seen as the key to this deterrence, and Kaiser argues for the strengthening of this strategy. Interestingly, Western Europe was markedly *uncomfortable* with flexible response during its implementation by President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense McNamara in the early 1960's. Henry Kissinger, in his 1965 book *The Troubled Partnership*, described in detail the Western European objections to instituting the flexible response strategy in place of the prior Eisenhower-Dulles strategy of massive retaliation. It was predicted at that time that the U.S.S.R. would see flexible response as an opportunity to invade or blackmail Western Europe with much less risk, and flexible response was seen in many European capitals as a severe decrease in American commitment to the security of its NATO allies! Thus, the arguments which Kaiser uses in support of flexible response were once used against it by his predecessors!

Secondly, it should not be uncritically assumed that nuclear deterrence, in whatever form, is the only thing which has effectively blocked Warsaw Pact expansion into Western Europe. It is clear that worldwide expansion of communism remains a goal of the Kremlin. It is much less clear that such an expansion *by force* would have been attempted in Western Europe were it not for NATO nuclear power. Indeed, cogent arguments to the contrary have been presented. George Kennan, in *The Nuclear Delusion*, argues that the U.S.S.R. has not invaded Western Europe, and is unlikely to do so in the future, at least partly because of a recognition by the Soviet leaders that they could not then effectively control the Western European people. Kennan's argument deserves careful consideration. The Soviet Union has had frequent problems keeping its Eastern Europe satellites "in line," even though these countries came under Soviet domination immediately after a world war which had devastating effects on their economies, populations, and nationalistic fervor. In 1984, the Western European countries are in far better condition. Economically, Western European countries are relatively healthy, with a standard of

living far exceeding that typical in Eastern Europe. While political dissension does exist, the national pride and unity in Western European nations is strong, certainly strong enough to have resulted in important intramural disputes within the NATO alliance! Clearly, even if it succeeded in overrunning Western Europe, the Soviet Union would have very severe problems in controlling these countries, infinitely greater than those they have faced in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Afghanistan. The Soviet military commitment which would be required to maintain any semblance of control in Western Europe would be a severe economic drain, and could be so great as to leave the Soviets vulnerable in other areas, such as their border with China. Such an economic drain and/or military vulnerability would not serve the Soviets' vital interests.

In summary, those who are concerned about the security of Western Europe should remain aware of all arguments and theories regarding that security. Kaiser is correct: there is a one hundred percent correlation between NATO nuclear power and Western European peace since World War II. However, a correlation only means that two things have occurred together. It does *not* prove that one has caused the other! Other factors, such as those noted by Kennan, may also have contributed greatly to Soviet caution. The Soviets do have vital interests in addition to avoiding nuclear annihilation over Europe, perhaps including avoiding overextending themselves economically, militarily, and politically in Europe. It would behoove NATO to do all it can to remind the Soviets that this is true. Further increasing the nationalism and political unity of the Western European people would do much to remind the Soviets of the severe burden they would incur by invasion or nuclear blackmail. A decrease in NATO reliance on nuclear strategy could, as noted by Kaiser, do much to increase the political cohesiveness of Western Europe's citizens, and this increased cohesiveness could well offset any decreased military risk to the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, it would also decrease the risk of expansion of communism to Western Europe through internal political upheaval as opposed to outside invasion. NATO would do well to recognize and maximize *all* factors which contribute to its own security.

David B. Mather

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British View of Falklands Air War

Sir,

As the CO of 801 Royal Navy Sea Harrier squadron which operated from HMS *Invincible* during the Falklands War, I feel I must respond to some of the issues raised by Commander Colombo in his account of his squadron's part in the campaign. I do so not simply to correct some of the misapprehensions which I believe are reflected in the article, but more especially to give balance to his conclusions and lessons learnt, which could be misleading.

The first point I should make is that notwithstanding the spirited performance of his squadron which I acknowledge, the fact is that they failed in a first principle—the

maintenance and achievement of the Aim. Their aim was doubtless to deprive the task force of its already limited air power by sinking or totally disabling at least one or preferably both of the British aircraft carriers in the Force, HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes*. As one who was there throughout the campaign, I can assure readers that neither ship was hit by any form of ordnance, Exocet or iron bomb, at any time. The implied claim of an Exocet hit on HMS *Invincible* on 30 May 1982, to quote, “. . . the other two (aircraft) indicated that they followed the missile’s trajectory and arrived at the objective (HMS *Invincible*) which was wrapped in a dense smoke which was a consequence of missile impact only an instant beforehand” reflects either—a not uncommon feature under stress—that people believe what they want to believe rather than the hard evidence before them, or that their observation was poor and totally inadequate; or perhaps it was pure propaganda. In any event they were quite wrong, and neither carrier was hit!

Had either carrier been disabled or sunk, this would undoubtedly have affected the course of the air war. Sea Harrier might not have been able to dominate the airspace over the islands to the degree that it did. (The aircraft could of course have operated from a disabled platform, such is the joy of VSTOL!) At the end of the day, therefore, the Etendard effort failed to have the impact on events which they desired and trained for. In the event all their training and planning resulted in the sinking of one escort and one merchantman: a far cry from *Invincible*, and a great deal less than they hoped and planned for.

Several other points arise from the author’s narrative.

Training. The delivery of a stand-off air-to-surface guided weapon is not as demanding as the author would have the reader believe. That it should require “hundreds” of practice launches before the event may be interpreted in one of two ways: either the statement is an exaggeration, or the pilots concerned were at a lower level of training than my own team. Whatever the reason, the task is hardly high-work load or “very complicated,” particularly by day. Tactically, the training left something to be desired: why else did the pilots attack the wrong ships?

Pre-war preparations. The huge effort that reportedly went into preparing for attacks on British warships before the declaration of hostilities puts the sinking of the *Belgrano* into perspective. The Argentines apparently had every intention of sinking our capital ships but were unable to do so.

Operational launch of the first air-to-air surface missile. Although the author’s enthusiasm on this matter is understandable, he is nevertheless mistaken in his claims. The first operational success with an air-to-surface missile in fact took place off South Georgia when a Royal Navy helicopter successfully attacked the surfaced Argentine submarine *Santa Cruz* with an AS12 missile.

There are, I suggest, flaws in the conclusions and lessons which Commander Colombo chooses to draw from his squadron’s part in the war stemming from the fact: in the final analysis the Argentine air forces failed to achieve either their strategic aim of preventing the deployment of maritime power—including its organic air power—to retake the Falkland Islands, and his squadron failed to achieve the tactical aim of sinking or wholly disabling one or both aircraft carriers. He ignores the major deficiency of the task force in the lack of AEW, a deficiency that might have been remedied. He disregards the importance of target identification and

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post strike reconnaissance and intelligence, factors which (unless the reports are propaganda fabrications) led Argentine commanders to conclude that a carrier had been disabled or sunk—a conclusion that could have been disastrous for them had the Argentine Navy been more adventurous, notwithstanding their deep rooted fears following the *Belgrano* sinking. In short, I suggest that the real lessons of the air war in the wider context are:

- Fighter Ground Attack aircraft carrying stand-off air-to-surface missiles constitute a threat to Naval Forces which can affect tactical deployment.
- Accurate target identification is essential if strikes by such aircraft are to be effective and achieve their aim.
- Accurate and timely post strike intelligence is important in the appreciation of force capabilities following an attack.
- AEW is vital.
- Organic maritime air power equipped with rugged, capable, versatile aircraft, and with highly trained, bigly motivated crews, operating from well exercised platforms, can take on and defeat air forces—even at a numerical disadvantage of some 8 to 1, to the extent of effectively destroying the main part of those air forces.

In no way do I wish to depreciate the spirit and courage displayed by many Argentine aircrew—Naval and Air Force—but I believe the real results as well as the experiences of my own squadron, cast doubts on the lessons they claim from their activities, and on their training and preparedness. The outcome of the air war in the South Atlantic, in the end, speaks for itself.

Commander N.D. Ward, DSC, AFC
Royal Navy

