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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

"SSN: Queen of the Seas"

Sir,

Professor Graham Rhys-Jones's diagnosis that "someone does seem to have slipped a canvas bag over Rear Admiral Holland's periscope" was gleefully endorsed by family and friends who have been attempting to determine the problem for many years. He is correct in asserting that my point was not limited simply to reminding people of the formidable capability of a nuclear power submarine. But evidently I was not clear enough to allow him or Captain Some's to grasp my argument fully. Both seem to hold me suspect because I have violated the valuable and honored dictum of the "balanced forces" adage, which is among the more sacrosanct of those taught at war colleges.

I make no claim that SSNs can do "everything." While those with budget responsibilities are reeling under the impact of the Persian Gulf War, grasping for evidence based upon the lessons of that war that their weapons systems have utility and meaning for the future, I find such efforts on behalf of submarines disingenuous. Submarines are terrible platforms from which to launch anti-aircraft weapons; they can land marines only in very small quantities, and sweep mines only by attrition. As cargo carriers, they should be restricted to nurses, gold bullion, and similar very high value commodities which must be removed from under an enemy's nose by stealth. Of course a navy should have forces, not submarines, to do all these things.

But without control of the sea, a navy can do *none* of these things. And in the face of the threat posed by nuclear attack submarines, no navy, including that of the United States, can do any of these things. Nuclear powered attack submarines are indispensable if one wishes to be a maritime power. Captain Richard Sharpe, Royal Navy, has it right when he says in his foreword to

Jane's Fighting Ships, 1991-1992 that the "swing of priorities away from submarine warfare, if that is what has happened, could return to haunt the navy if the next aggressor understands better the significance of control of the sea and is properly equipped to contest it, particularly by submarine warfare."

The navy, and the War College in particular, needs to face up to the ability of this platform to dominate the sea. While in the near term, with the Soviets dormant and all other maritime powers increasing their dependence on the United States, it is not the issue of prime concern, someday it will be. If Rhys-Jones's and Captain Somes's opinions are true samples, we have lived so long with predominance that we've forgotten why dominance is important.

W.J. Holland, Jr.
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(Retired)
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Desert Storm Reservists: "The War Had Come Home"

Sir,

Colonel Charles F. Brower cuts to the heart of the matter in his article "Strategic Reassessment in Vietnam" (Spring 1991), when he writes that "additional American forces well above . . . 470,000 . . . would require mobilization of the reserves in the United States, a particularly explosive political issue on the eve of an election year [1968]."

Was the political failure to mobilize reserves proof that the United States was simply never serious about winning that war? That may sound like a cruel judgement to the thousands of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who, left hanging out to dry by their government, struggled on for years 10,000 miles from home against a tough, resourceful enemy. But particularly in the aftermath of the recent Gulf War, the role of reserve mobilization in building and sustaining broad popular support for foreign interventions is plain. When citizen-soldiers are uprooted from day-to-day pursuits, required to drop the plow and pick up the gun, Hometown U.S.A. gets aroused enough to demand a swift (and if necessary violent) conclusion. Mom and the kids want Dad back home, and they (and Dad's boss) won't wait forever.

Local TV news crews begin to tape background stories for 6:00 and 11:00 about how families here (in Peoria, not at Fort Faraway) are part of the national effort. An authentic villain like Saddam Hussein is made the butt of popular jokes in a way Ho Chi Minh and other Asian Marxists never were. In a word, we go to war hot-blooded, insisting that *our* young men, not the enemy's, return alive from the fatal encounters.

I knew for certain that Saddam Hussein's army was in deep trouble when on Sunday afternoon, January 20 (early in the Desert Storm air campaign) I watched thousands of rabid Buffalo Bills fans in frigid Rich Stadium waving the Stars and Stripes during (yes, a hot-blooded) rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Whitney Houston. Right from the start, the war had come home.

Robert P. Fairchild
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"Desert Shield and Strategic Sealift": RRF Shipping

Sir,

In "Desert Shield and Strategic Sealift" (Spring 1991), note number 5 in its assumption of poor management misstates the series of events in the case of the RRF (Ready Reserve Force) vessel *Gulf Banker*. As the contractor involved, I submit that the following is the correct series of events.

A. The *Gulf Banker*, designated a ten-day activation vessel, was in fact activated in eight days by the contractor.

B. Upon activation and an abbreviated sea trial, as ordered by the Maritime Administration (MarAd), the *Gulf Banker* was loaded with military equipment for the Persian Gulf. She sailed from Beaumont, Texas, and experienced a loss of the plant by the ship's engineers in the Gulf of Mexico. The vessel was towed back to Port Arthur, Texas, where the contractor's port engineers had the plant back on the line within ten hours. Some problems with the sewage systems existed and were worked on, on an ongoing basis. The vessel sailed within twenty-four hours for the Persian Gulf.

C. As the vessel rounded Key West, Florida, she again experienced problems keeping up steam and so was steamed into Port Everglades, Florida, for additional work. At Port Everglades, the chief engineer of the vessel complained of chest pains and was relieved by a new chief engineer. The vessel again sailed for the Persian Gulf within seventy-two hours.

D. After one day at sea, the contractor received a call from the vessel's master stating that the ship had lost the plant and the ship's engineers were trying to re-fire the boilers. Upon further discussions with the vessel's master, it was determined that the ship was unable to steam under its own power. The vessel was at this time approximately 350 miles from Jacksonville, Florida. A commercial tug was employed and the *Gulf Banker* was towed to Jacksonville.

E. Upon arrival of the *Gulf Banker* at Atlantic Drydock, Jacksonville, it was determined that the boilers had been "dry fired" under the orders of the chief

engineer. The contractor immediately notified the Coast Guard and dismissed the chief engineer. An investigation by the Coast Guard determined that the chief engineer was in fact responsible for "dry firing" the boilers and causing the rupture of 154 boiler tubes.

F. Under the direction of the contractor, the *Gulf Banker* was repaired in twenty-two days and taken on sea trials, which it passed with flying colors. (During this repair period, the *Gulf Banker* was offloaded and its military cargo was reloaded aboard another vessel en route to the Persian Gulf.)

G. After the successful completion of sea trials, Military Sealift Command instructed MarAd to keep the vessel in a "notional status." MarAd then instructed the contractor to steam the vessel to the Beaumont, Texas, area and to solicit bids for deactivation of the vessel. The *Gulf Banker* was sailed 1,200 miles with a full crew (and a new chief engineer)—and no problems—to Coastal Marine, Port Neches, Texas, for deactivation. After four days into the 30-day deactivation period, MarAd instructed the contractor to dismiss the remaining crew members and stop all deactivation work. Six days later the contractor was notified via fax that the *Gulf Banker* was removed from his contract and given to Lykes Brothers to operate. *No reason* was given to the contractor for the removal of the *Gulf Banker* from his contract! (And, as of this date, a reason has still not been given to the contractor for the removal of four of the five vessels from his contract.)

The irony of it all is that the one RRF vessel the contractor still operates has made five successful voyages to the Persian Gulf area with military hardware and returned to the United States and Germany with retrograde military hardware.

How was the assumption arrived at that the contractor might not have kept the *Gulf Banker* in a high state of repair and readiness when in fact the Maritime Administrator himself has stated on numerous occasions that there was insufficient money to keep the RRF vessels in the readiness required? In fact, this contractor requested funding on numerous occasions (after each dry-docking and repairs to the five vessels) to complete dock and sea trials.

Harry A. Rausch
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Replying for the authors:

Sir,

Mr. Rausch has essentially documented the point made by the authors.

Andrew E. Gibson
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“A War Fleet Built for Peace”: Defense and Deterrence

Sir,

Eric Grove's essays on naval strategy are always thought-provoking. However, his article “A War Fleet Built for Peace” (Spring 1991) sidesteps the main question posed by his analysis of British naval rearmament in the 1930s: is there such a thing as credible deterrence without a credible defense?

The concept of an actual dichotomy between defense and deterrence is a construct of strategic nuclear theorists developed in the 1960s to explain why anti-ballistic missile defenses and strategic superiority “didn't matter.” The premise of the concept was (and remains) that the very existence of strategic nuclear weapons—whether or not they are capable of performing a coherent military function—would be sufficient to deter aggression because the results of their usage would be “unacceptable.” These forces could not provide a “defense” of national populations in the traditional sense (indeed, their mutual use would prove suicidal), and it was but an easy step to argue that their function was “deterrence-only.” While this debate concerning strategic nuclear forces has never been truly resolved, flaring up in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, we very fortunately have no evidence to disprove the theory. But, that does not mean that the conceptual dichotomy applies to conventional forces. I would argue that there is ample historical evidence that it does *not* apply to conventional forces, and that Professor Grove's attempt to explain a very unclear British defense policy in terms of deterrence versus defence (as he would spell it) is an anachronistic rationalization.

Clearly, as Professor Grove demonstrates, the Royal Navy leadership recognized its inability to fight both Germany and Japan simultaneously, and, in fact, saw little to achieve by fighting them. But nowhere is it clear that this leadership viewed their policy as “deterrence” in the same way we understand the term today. It appears that their objective was to *avoid* war, not *deter* it; that is why it was so easy for His Majesty's Government to slip into a policy of appeasement, which if anything is the antithesis of deterrence. Being ill-prepared, it is (as the article states) “no wonder the Admiralty entered upon the year of Munich even more committed to a ‘general settlement’ with Germany. . . .” But such does not constitute a policy of effective “deterrence,” particularly since the Admiralty readily and apparently openly assessed its forces as inadequate. Chamberlain did not attempt to “deter” Hitler, he attempted to buy him off. Wishful thinking and the fact of financial constraints simply do not make a virtue out of failed policies, and make no mistake about it, if Britain's policy was actually “deterrence,” it certainly failed.

The one pre-nuclear era example I can think of in which the United States attempted a deliberate “deterrence without adequate means of defense” strategy is the stationing of the U.S. Asiatic Squadron in the wake of the growing Japanese

“East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,” and it too was a failure. Not only was the Japanese thrust into Southeast Asia *not* deterred, but the Squadron and its Allied counterparts were cut to ribbons in short order. No wonder naval professionals such as myself—the ones who might be cut to ribbons in such a situation if war were to occur—remain unconvinced that a force that clearly cannot defend itself presents an adequate deterrent to a determined aggressor.

To summarize: despite Professor Grove’s efforts, I am very skeptical that there is a true dichotomy between defense and (successful) deterrence for conventional forces, and thus remain unconvinced that the modern concept of deterrence (without functional defenses) is applicable in explaining the formulation of military policies prior to the nuclear era. Perhaps your other readers will be so kind as to attempt to convince me otherwise.

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