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In My View

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Ian Oliver

IN MY VIEW . . .

Castex Revived

Sir,

In his review of two new books on the strategic thought of Admiral Raoul Castex, Commander Michel P. Gevrey, French Navy, stated that "Castex's work has never been translated into English." Though, indeed, no translation has ever been published, the Naval War College had a translation of a good portion of it prepared just before World War II, and a bound copy remains, probably unread, in its library. One of the books the Commander reviewed is entitled *Castex, Le Stratège Inconnu*. If Castex is, indeed, "the unknown strategist" to French readers, how much less is he known in the United States?

This ignorance should be remedied. Castex may serve us even today. He put strategy into a larger construct and looked for connections between the international system, national policy, land strategy, and maritime strategy. He showed how seeming opposites in strategy could be integrated and explored the appropriate strategies for powers of differing means and situations. He pricked lazy assumptions. He made no promises; his is a sober assessment of what navies can do. In short, Castex remains a challenging thinker whose contributions transcend his time. Americans absorb a great deal of Mahan, a little Corbett, and perhaps some Gorshkov, but this exposure is not enough. We need to take greater steps to ensure that we are not trapped within our peculiar strategic traditions. Castex can thus help us hone our strategic instincts.

Castex's *Théories stratégiques* comes in five large volumes, surely one reason why we avoid it. I suggest that it is time that an edited selection of the Naval War College's translation of Castex's ideas be published, such as Westcott did years ago for Mahan. Castex deserves better than oblivion.

Willard C. Frank, Jr.
Old Dominion University

Our Flagging Merchant Marine

Sir,

Two hundred years ago, there was no U.S. Navy. American shipyards in every state turned out a huge merchant marine which sailed the seven seas in search of trade. In the Mediterranean, corsairs swarmed out of North Africa to hijack cargo ships and hold the crews for ransom, and Congress responded by passing an act directing the construction of six frigates of the finest quality. In 1798, the first of these, the U.S.S. *Constellation*, put to sea, and the toast of the day became "Millions for Defense, but not One Cent for Tribute!" given by Robert Harper at a banquet for Justice John Marshall.

The first and foremost mission of that fledgling force was to protect the merchant marine. By being willing to project appropriate power in distant lands, that small fleet of frigates was able to command respect for the Stars and Stripes on the shores of Tripoli and insure the safety of American seamen. Today, we seem to have lost our national perspective as to the economic importance of commercial shipping to our strategic well-being. The next decade may find the U.S. Navy shy of its most historic mission.

The protection of foreign-flag ships is extremely detrimental to the American merchant marine. The political shortcut of reflagging Kuwaiti tankers, owned and operated by Arab sheiks and protected by expensive U.S. Navy warships and sailors, is historically unique. After the Second World War, the common talk on the waterfront was a cocky assurance that the primary benefit of sailing in the American merchant marine was the exclusive protection of the world's greatest navy. "Let those rusty tubs call the Liberian Navy when they need help!"; so ran the old saw. There were over 5,000 active oceangoing ships in the U.S. commercial fleet in 1950, protected by a 1,200-ship navy. The ratio has changed since then.

According to Captain Bertil James Haney out of San Juan, Puerto Rico:

Our little union hall . . . was crammed to capacity with starving senior officers following the collapse of America's largest and oldest shipping company, U.S. Lines. . . . In fact, the last six years has seen the U.S. private oceangoing fleet decline to only 365 ships, and fully 35% of seamen have permanently lost their jobs. Meanwhile, the [Administration] put the U.S. Flag on Kuwaiti tankers and waived the requirement that the officers and crew be Americans. The upshot of this is that after being reduced to tending bar following a two-week relief job . . . I shipped out as Chief Mate in the Honduran-flagged M/V LEFKIMMI, a sinking wreck. . . .

(Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 157, requires that the officers and crew of American ships be Americans, whenever possible. This is one of the laws waived by the Administration while U.S.-flag ships rust in port and American merchant seamen go on welfare.)

The question needs to be asked: Is the U.S. Navy for hire? Can the fleet be loaned or rented to countries unwilling to provide for their own defense on the simple pretext of a paper corporation and a nominal American sailing master? This certainly makes good business sense for Kuwait, but it puts nothing into the American economy. According to Professor E.B. Potter, a noted naval historian, "Maritime Power includes all those elements that put a nation in the position to deploy its military power on the sea, to move its forces from the sea to land, and maintain them there.

The element of maritime power is not limited to warships, weapons, or trained personnel, but includes land facilities and well placed bases, merchant shipping, and satisfactory international relations.”

President Eisenhower called the merchant marine “our fourth arm of defense.” In 1950, the United States ranked first in the world in numbers of ships, carrying capacity, and deadweight tonnage; today it is tenth. Of twenty U.S.-flag shipping lines in 1950, seven remain, and one of those is in bankruptcy. U.S.-flag ships carry less than 6 percent of the total U.S. foreign trade, down from 21 percent in 1950. Over thirty private U.S. shipyards have gone out of business in the past 10 years, and there are no commercial vessels under construction or on order in American yards today.

The decay of our maritime industry can be laid on many doorsteps. The high salaries of seamen, mates, masters, and shipyard workers are loudly proclaimed by owners and operators. Rate slashing by the state-controlled fleet of the Soviet Union is the favorite scapegoat of the right wing. While most countries have extensive cargo preference programs to aid their shipping lines, the United States refuses to violate the “principles” of free trade. As well as Title 46 CFR 157, the few cargo preference laws on the books are not being enforced by the Administration. Every party is willing to find fault with another, while the ships are sinking under their feet.

To be a maritime power requires both a navy and a merchant marine. Any military plan, anywhere, anytime is based on logistics. Without the ability to resupply, the Army is helpless, the Air Force is grounded for lack of fuel, and any subsequent maritime strategy of the Navy is fit only for the circular file. For military planners and strategic policymakers to assume an apolitical stance in this matter of national security is culpable. An effective U.S. industrial base must have a steady supply of raw materials from worldwide sources. The balance of trade to and from the United States needs to be shipped in U.S. ships crewed by American seamen. It is time for Congress to demand that U.S. laws concerning shipping be enforced.

The U.S. Navy should be in the business of protecting American tankers, built, owned, and operated by U.S. businessmen. If someone wants his goods to be protected, let him hire American ships and seamen to do the job. If the Stars and Stripes becomes yet another “rag-of-convenience,” it is not worth the sacrifice of a single, red-blooded, white-hatted bluejacket! When reflagged Cuban ships begin the passage to Nicaragua, escorted by Soviet minesweepers, we shall regret this politically expedient precedent.

Sankey Blanton

Lt. Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve

Speedy Red Victory

Sir,

Lieutenant William K. Baker did an excellent job from our Western perspective in his review of S.P. Ivanov, *The Initial Period of War*. However, a key element of the Soviet perspective has escaped his mention.

I refer to Ivanov's analysis of what many Soviet spokesmen call "the Soviet-Japanese War of 1945." Secure in our knowledge that *we* defeated Japan and fascinated by the ethical and political issues surrounding our use of the A-bomb, we have tended to ignore Soviet lessons from the last days of World War II. Peter H. Vigor devotes an entire chapter to Soviet operations against Japan in his superb study, *Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory*, relying heavily on Ivanov for his primary source material. As Vigor remarks, it is the Soviet view that "there has been one single war in modern times which has indeed been won in its initial period; that this war was the Soviet-Japanese War in Manchuria of 1945, and that it was the USSR which won it." Not only do the Soviets claim to have conducted the largest regrouping of forces in history (around 30 divisions were transferred a distance of 9,000 to 12,000 kilometers), they so cloaked their mobilization with disinformation and camouflage as to achieve strategic, operational, and even tactical surprise. No Soviet reader could peruse Ivanov's analysis of this conflict without realizing its importance for the expansion of Soviet borders, power, and influence in the Pacific, through the seizure of Japanese-held territory.

Notwithstanding mandatory Soviet rhetoric and censorship, *The Initial Period of War* constitutes one of the most important monographs available in any language on what Ivanov calls "preparations for and delivery of the unexpected first strike with the creation of a new strategic front." This is about as close as unclassified Soviet-speak ever gets to an analysis of the ambitions, obstacles, and thought processes surrounding a putative Soviet attack upon NATO (or the People's Republic of China). Although printed in Moscow 13 years ago, Ivanov's book provides an important context for evaluating current Soviet capabilities for a quick march to the Rhine, as well as for crafting Western countermeasures to best deter such an attack.

G. Paul Holman
Naval War College

Ill-served

Sir,

I read with great interest and some wonderment Lieutenant Christopher Abel's article, "Controlling the Big Stick: Theodore Roosevelt and the Cuban Crisis of 1906." Interest because he writes well and has chosen a fascinating topic. Wonderment because his interpretation and exposition of the misguided actions of naval officers in 1906 bears a striking similarity to the misguided activities of other naval officers over the past several years. Presidents Roosevelt in 1906 and Reagan today have been ill-served by well-intentioned but uninformed zealots. At the same time, these naval officers, of both eras, have been ill-served by a leadership which allowed "operational initiative to fall to the Navy's commanders in the field."

When Lieutenant Abel writes of "These relatively junior officers" in 1906 "left to act in consonance with what they believed to be the best interests of . . . the Nation" he may just as well be writing of current events. His description of the reluctance of the naval officers landed in Cuba in 1906 to recognize that they were not carrying out

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the wishes of their President, and indeed doing him great harm by their own idea of "protecting American interests," could easily be applied to the officers so much in today's news.

So long as many believe that "the diplomat is the servant, not the master of the soldier" (President T. Roosevelt at the Naval War College, quoted by Lieutenant Abel), we may expect to see similar fiascoes in the future.

William W. Struck
McLean, Virginia

Gulf Security

Sir,

Some observations on Lieutenant Cox's interesting essay, "The Gulf of Mexico: A Forgotten Frontier. . . ." The threat that Lieutenant Cox describes, most notably the mine and terrorist threat in the Gulf, far from being ignored, has been on our minds a great deal in the two years that the Maritime Defense Zone (MDZ) commands have been in place. With CINCLANTFLT's full support, a number of exercises, mobilizing Coast Guard and Navy Forces, have been conducted out of such ports as Galveston, Mobile, Beaumont, and Houston. We've learned a great deal from these exercises. The environmental problems cited by Lieutenant Cox are certainly real, and security operations against unconventional threats are always difficult. Still, the situation is far from hopeless, and I think we have the organization that can do the job.

Our Sector Eight MDZ commander, a flag officer based in New Orleans, has responsibility for security in the Gulf from the high-water mark to 200 miles offshore where COMUSFORCARIB takes over. Similarly, our Sector Seven commander, based in Miami, owns the northern half of the Straits of Florida and the offshore waters of the eastern Gulf.

We report to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet who has approved plans which call for the assignment of significant active and reserve Naval and Coast Guard Forces to the Gulf when needed. I certainly endorse Lieutenant Cox's call for additional Navy resources but recognize as well that we must take our place in line. It is, as it ought to be, the CINC's prerogative to evaluate the threat and the priorities.

Finally, Lieutenant Cox's threat analysis makes the assumption that Cuba would play a significant role in support of hostilities in the Gulf. If we allow that, if we foolishly permit the other side to use Cuba as a base, then I agree with most everything that Lieutenant Cox has to say. But take Cuba out of the equation and I think the level of threat is something we should be able to handle. Shame on us if we can't.

J.E. Liebmann
Captain, U.S. Navy