

From: (2003). *Journal of Communication Studies*, 20, 1
http://www.uamont.edu/organizations/asca/journal/20_1_dewberry.html

Words are Weapons: The Real Shock in "Shock and Awe"

David R. Dewberry

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

"Shock and Awe" is possibly one of the most shocking phrases to enter the contemporary lexicon. The phrase is so popular that major corporations are racing to gain trademarks for the phrase. Manufacturers of swimmer, baseball caps, and mugs sought the trademark. Sony, has since repealed its request for the trademark and calling the action an act of regrettable bad judgment.

'Shock and Awe' is most aptly noted from the schoolyard. In the schoolyard, a bully might approach a victim and say, 'I'll see you after school.' The fear of the anticipated beating is far more brutal than any actual thumping that may or may not occur. This schoolyard strategy also has a presence in the modern battlefield.

The United States had made it known that the first 48 hours of combat operations in Iraq will see a massive campaign comprised of some 3,0000 precision-guided missile attacks, which is more than was used in the entire Gulf War. Then coalition ground forces will race south from Turkey and north from Kuwait straight for Baghdad. All this was to commence at a time, as President Bush mentioned, of "our choosing."

This paper intends to abrogate the proverbial phrase 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me' by explaining that dissemination of information regarding the impending conflict was in and of itself 'Shock and Awe.' That is, the real value of the Coalition's use of 'Shock and Awe' is not the rapid pace, although significantly important, rather informing the enemy that you will defeat them in record time with never before seen massive destruction is the essential military and political objective.

The Influence of Panic and Fear

Fear is what makes a soldier believe that the sound of a woman beating a rug draped over a clothesline or a backfiring car is in actuality the awesome report of a sniper's rifle. In hostility a soldier's senses are open to receive familiar stimuli; it, however, does not come. Normal things become strange and hostile. Fear of the great unknown puts a man in a strange, homeless world (Meerlo 1950).

From the trenches of WWI to today, the psychological consequences of war (e.g., Shell shock, was neurosis, effort syndrome, battle fatigue, acute combat stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the Gulf War syndrome) have all been well documented. All these examples describe the same phenomenon- the human mind buckling from unbearable stress and the crippling effects of witnessing and committing dehumanizing acts of war.

The influence of discipline plays a grave role in fear among soldiers. Ostensibly, the focus of military discipline is to fortify morale. However, a severe level of regulation weakens morale.

A prime example is in 1943. German troops in Tunisia were fighting under an egregious level of disciplinary conditions against an equal numbered and more technologically advanced Allied force. If the German soldier did not fight to the death, the German hierarchy would extort their own lethal punishment. In such a trilemma, capitulation offers safety from the enemy (Meerlo 1950).

To induce such fear, a wartime commander has two types of weapons. One being weapons of destruction the other being weapons of fright and panic (Meerlo 1950). These weapons of fright and panic can be used quite easily, for most of these weapons are nothing more than words.

Fear Arousing Communication

When a message arouses fear the receiver will become highly motivated to attempt various responses to alleviate the unpleasant state (Sutton 1982). Mass communication can be manipulated in a variety of ways as to arouse socially acquired motives; prime examples are achievement, power-seeking, group conformity, and anxiety (Janis and Feshbach 1954). Among the various methods of manipulating messages to gain compliance is the use of threat appeals.

Threat appeals are the motivating appeals in persuasive communication that emphasize potential dangers that allegedly will result from failure to comply with the communicator (Janis and Milholland 1954). However, the tendency to accept ideas about warding off anticipated danger may not always be the dominant reaction to the threat; in certain conditions, highly undesirable defensive reactions may occur (Janis and Milholland 1954).

Although, the exploratory research conducted by Janis and Feshbach (1953), which stated that there is a proportionally inverse relationship to using fear to gain compliance, has been replicated successfully, there are some instances that the findings show a different perspective.

The acceptance of a communicator's recommendations has a greater presence when there is an increase of high-fear stimuli rather than that of low-fear (Leventhal and Singer 1963). In such circumstances, the more interesting the message is, by the virtue of its vividness and dramatic quality, the more potential of the high-fear message is at producing a desired attitude change towards compliance (Berkowitz and Cottingham 1960). Quite simply, the more you scare someone the more they will listen to you and do what you want them to do.

Despite the studies that conclude high-fear messages produce compliance, which contradict the original findings of Janis and Feshbach (1953), the explanations for the discrepancy are accounted for in theory. First, 'emotional flooding' can be held responsible for the inconsistencies. Here an individual receives a message that produces such great internal fear that the receivers are too upset to comprehend the recommendations of the communicator (Krishner, Darley, and Darley 307).

Secondly, the receiver's personality may play a prominent role in producing fear (Leventhal and Watts 1966). There is one explanation that is highly notable, especially for the purposes of this study, for explaining the discrepancies in the aforementioned research. That is, those who have been exposed to treatment, which is referred to in the fear message, report less fear regardless of the level of fear in the message (Leventhal, Singer, and Jones 1965). Many psychologists identify this concept as the 'megadeth syndrome.'

This concept exemplifies psychologists' observations that individuals possess an enormous capacity to become used to something unpleasant over a period of time. Furthermore, those who know what and how to do, either by instruction or observation, the greater the efficacy of the message will have (Sutton 1982).

The Messages

By mid March, a total of 15 million leaflets had dropped on Iraq. Some leaflets were directed at the Iraqi military and others at the Iraqi citizens. Those directed at the military depicted Iraqi soldiers with long, wearisome faces with the Arabic phrase "Don't Risk Your Life and The lives of Your Comrades" and on the side was a picture of an Iraqi family with the phrase "Leave Now and Go Home: Watch Your Children Learn, Grow, and Prosper."

On March 19, a total of 4 million leaflets were dropped in two days on Iraq out of the same planes that were destined to drop bombs in a few days time. These leaflets warned Iraqi citizens to stay away from military targets and informed them how to tune to Allied radio broadcasts that included up to five different radio frequencies with the times in which information was to be expected.

The leaflets also referenced the use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi regime. They mentioned that Allied forces were well equipped to confront a chemical or biological attack, but the Iraqi citizens were not; thus they would suffer the consequences. One such leaflet depicted a nuclear fallout with Coalition soldiers continuing on in full protective gear and a deceased mother and baby with the phrase "No One Benefits from the Weapons of Mass Destruction." On the reverse the warning, "Any Unit that Chooses to Use Weapons of Mass Destruction will face swift retribution from coalition forces. Unit Commanders will be held accountable if Weapons of Mass Destruction are used."

Those directed at military personnel showed fighter aircraft destroying communication networks on the front and a warning on the back that those networks were used by Saddam Hussein to "suppress the Iraqi people." Other leaflets depicted an Iraqi cannon shooting at an Allied aircraft with the word, "If." Next to it shows the Allied aircraft shooting a missile back at the cannon with the word, "Then." On the other side it shows the Iraqi troops and cannon in a splendid fireball explosion with the phrase, "You Decide."

U.S. Military Strategy in Operation Iraqi Freedom

Operation Iraqi Freedom was planned to move at a rapid pace. Ground troops were expected to be on the ground within three to four days after the first bomb's fall. Special Operation Forces were expected to enter sooner. Airborne troops were to capture oil fields in northern and southern Iraq. Other soldiers were delivering E-bombs that are capable of destroying the communications between Iraqi command and control and Iraqi troops.

All the while, orbiting planes with high-powered transmitters would broadcast propaganda in Arabic indicating that U.S. forces have come as liberators and not as occupiers. Iraqi soldiers were told that they were needed for the new Iraq and do not risk death for the old Iraq. High-ranking Iraqi military officials were told not to follow orders to fire chemical and biological

weapons, for 'I was just following orders' is not an excuse.

The original scenario, as drawn by Gen. Tommy Franks, allegedly resembled Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf's Desert storm war plan: a slow, steadfast armor advance relying on massive power to crush any resistance. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, drawing on lessons from the intensive operations in Afghanistan, persuaded Gen. Franks into a war plan relying on rapid domination, better known as "Shock and Awe."

Overview of the Rapid Domination Strategy a.k.a. "Shock and Awe"

The objective of "Shock and awe" "is to affect the will, perception, and understanding of the adversary to fit or respond to our strategic policy ends through imposing a regime of Shock and Awe" (Ullman 1996). This means that physical and psychological tactics must be utilized. The quintessential psychological tactics include unnerving, paralyzing, and shocking the enemy.

To reach beyond a level of abeyance, further action must be used to successfully achieve the political objective. Unlike in decisive force, rapid domination can rely on the use of a smaller force size that has the advantage in terms of technology, training, and techniques. Decisive force solely relies on the use of an overpowering force that is, essentially, materially overwhelming compared to the enemy. The advantage of rapid domination is that, theoretically, there will be fewer casualties on either side.

As described by the authors, the use of rapid domination twenty years in the future could resolve a similar 1991 Iraqi conflict "in a matter of days (or perhaps hours) and not after the 6 months or the 500,000 troops that were required in 1990 to 1991... [and] rapid dominance may even offer the prospect of stopping an invasion in its tracks" (Ullman 1996).

Ideally, the use of shock and awe is to destroy the command infrastructure and the flow of vital information so rapidly to create "a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese" (Ullman 1996). Accomplishing massive and rapid objectives requires competence and versatility in employing land, air, sea, and special operation capable forces. Advances in technology allow commanders access to information in real time from everyone from division commanders to a single private. Ullman et al. describe several fundamental approaches to accomplishing "Shock and Awe."

A Synopsis of Saddam Hussein's rule

Before the outbreak of war, it was highly debatable if the Iraqi populace truly supported Saddam Hussein. Defectors were constantly claiming that the Iraqi people never have and never will support Saddam Hussein. Obviously, the Iraqi people could not support the acquisition of chemical and biological weapons that have been used on tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds and the Iraqi Arabs. And when former President George Bush called the Iraqi people to fight the Hussein repression, 250,000 Iraqis were killed in 3 weeks.

County Reports on Human Rights Practices- Iraq has charged Hussein with refusing human rights monitors and independent human rights organizations from visiting Iraq from 1992 to 2002 and expelling six United Nation humanitarian relief workers without explanation in September 2001. In addition, Hussein's regime is widely reported as videotaping sexual assaults of

female relatives of oppositionists to ensure cooperation of the dissenters. Mothers were tortured until death for their children's opposition activities.

In 2000, the introduction of tongue amputation came in 2000 for those who criticized Hussein or his family. In June 2001, Hussein Bahar al-Uloom was killed for refusing to congratulate Saddam's son on television for winning an election into the Ba'ath Party.

Amnesty International reports that Iraq has the world's worst record for the number of persons who have disappeared or remain unaccounted. In 1999, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that Iraq remains the country with the highest number of disappearances known to the UN at over 16,000.

There are also countless reports of executions of individuals attempting to challenge Hussein. It has been persistently reported that the families are made to pay for the cost of such executions.

The Result

On March 19, 2003, U.S. military struck with cruise missiles and precision-guided bombs against a site near Baghdad, where Iraqi leaders were thought to be located; later that day 17 Iraqi soldiers surrendered to U.S. troops. The next day, 25 refugees fled Iraq. The day after that, March 21, the 51st Division of the Iraqi Army surrendered en masse. Earlier that day, an Iraqi spokesman declared that any soldiers have surrendered. Five hours previous to the statement, BBC correspondent Clive Myrie reported, "scores of Iraqi soldiers surrendering" to UK Royal Marines.

On Saturday, March 22, Gen. Franks, in his first briefing since the war, stated:

Let me begin by saying this will be a campaign unlike any other in history, a campaign characterized by shock, by surprise, by flexibility, by the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force.

On the same day BBC's David Willis reported hundreds of young Iraqi men applauding and hundreds of soldiers surrendering as Coalition forces gain control of Basra. Also, UK Chief of Defense Staff Michael Boyce states that an entire Iraqi Division has surrendered in the south.

Gen. Franks again held a press conference on March 24, the fifth day of combat operations and claimed the "enemy prisoner-of-war count today is in the vicinity of 3,000." Also, Gen. Franks mentioned that the progress was "rapid" and "in some cases dramatic."

Discussion

As the first cruise missiles were launched at a 'target of opportunity,' the belief that Shock and Awe would start was one the lips of every reporter. Yet, cameras beamed back only pictures of Baghdad that were only showing the burning of street lights with distant explosions heard far in the distance. This was not the 'Shock and Awe' everyone was suspecting. News agencies were informed, "this is not 'it' yet." Shock and awe was put on hold perhaps because the Iraqi

leadership had been rendered ineffective. Some 48 hours after the initial effort to remove Hussein from power, the actual "Shock and Awe" as understood by the world was under way.

It appeared that the attack that was to be like nothing anyone has seen was ostensibly nothing new; the attacks on Iraq had lasted longer the Vietnam conflict. Yet, in actuality, the sudden removal of the head of state is "Shock and Awe." Ullman et al. (1996) described this tactic as Royal Canadian Mountain Police approach, which is sending the bullet where a man can go. However, there was no bullet- just a handful of smart bombs.

Some 48 hours later, the onset of massive bombardment left Baghdad's night sky burning with huge columns of smoke rising above the city. The bombardment, which included 2,000 sorties with 1,500 aim points and 1,000 cruise missiles, rocked the city during the night. That Friday night was, as some pilots reported was "an impressive light show."

This is what was promised; clearly this was "Shock and Awe." Baghdad was burning, and Iraqi troops started to rethink their position.

The United States made no qualms about their intentions. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the best-case scenario was to achieve the political objective by rapid military means; the ideal rapid military means was to accomplish the political objective in a political manner. Leaflets were dropped; the message, 'this will be unlike anything anyone has ever seen,' was sent out in the hopes that Iraqi soldiers would prefer capitulation before annihilation.

This message, or rather belief, that the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Coalition force was unquestionably going to destroy all opponents feared many soldiers including those Hussein trusted the most. One such individual, reportedly persuaded by the super-secret Delta Force and CIA operatives, proved most beneficial. The first strikes at Hussein were possible due to intelligence obtained from one of Saddam's bodyguards, who was more "afraid of the United States than he was of Saddam Hussein." This informant purportedly weighed the options of betrayal against the Iraqi regime versus mortal certainty of the American military.

Other Iraqi soldiers and citizens heeded these warnings and instructions to not oppose or interfere with Coalition forces. However, not all were compliant. 'Pockets of resistance' were often very troublesome to the Coalition. This resistance was reported to be gangs loyal to Hussein's son.

Evidently, these threats of utter destruction produced a most unwelcome response. Yet, it was to be expected. After all, they were between a rock and a hard place. If they fought the Coalition certain death would most likely result. On the other hand, if they were to give up, the backlash of the Iraqi citizens upon these gangs could be so unbelievable that capitulation could offer protection. Inversely, those who dared to oppose the gangs often found themselves in a grave situation. It is widely reported that vengeance from the Iraqi regime for defection has been known to cross borders and oceans.

Scores of Iraqi soldiers capitulated for, apparently, a multitude of reasons. Learning their lessons from the Persian Gulf War, which took less than 100 hours, made many soldiers to gain better treatment from the Coalition captors rather than face annihilation from a superior force in terms of numbers and technology.

There were depictions on the news of citizens going about their day in Iraq as if nothing out of the ordinary was occurring. This clearly displays the 'megadeth syndrome,' which shows that Iraqi citizens were accustomed to over ten years of bombardment, which outlasted the

U.S.-Vietnam conflict, from the Coalition. The U.S. Vietnam parallel continues in that in 1969 bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail was purported to be so fierce that no living thing could survive. Yet, General Nguyen An, Deputy Commander of the unit charged with defending the trail claims, "we remained alive [and] fought back... [t]he same thing could happen in Iraq" (Lan 2003).

Conclusion

The U.S. made no attempt to hide the fact that forces were going to enter Iraq and, among other objectives, remove Saddam Hussein from power. Telling an entity that you are coming to get them often produces more fear than the actual act itself. The fear comes when you *know* something bad is going to happen, not when it will happen. Just as some criminals some criminals who have escaped justice for several years have given themselves up for being constantly in fear of one day being caught.

In World War II, then Gen. Eisenhower revealed that D-Day landings were going to be in Calais, not Normandy. Critics of the 'Shock and Awe' claim that according to this strategy in 2003, if Eisenhower had told the Germans that the Allies were going to come through Normandy, the German morale would have been exhausted and laid down their weapons and fled. Obviously, the balance of power between the axis and allies in Operation Iraqi Freedom is not balanced as equally as it was in WWII.

Unquestionably, the U.S. military is second to none. However, surgical precision bombings and superbly equipped and simultaneously charging, well-choreographed land forces are not as threatening as a few words: We are coming to get you.

The phrase 'sticks and stones may break their bones, but words will never hurt' is partially true. There are, however, some instances in which words are emotionally and physically crushing. For example, "30 years imprisonment," "You're fired," "You have six months to live," ";we're coming to get you," and even "I do." In theory, all these examples are just words and possess no actual, real meaning. Empirically speaking, these, along with many other words and phrases, are very powerful.

Clearly, the strategies for gaining rapid domination do not include telling your enemy what you intend to do, but that may have indeed prevented soldiers from even beginning to fight and citizens from interfering. And what quicker way is there to defeat an opposing force than to prevent them from fighting? Truthfully, rapid domination is all that more rapid when there is no resistance.

Works Cited

- Allen, B. (1993) Frightening information and extraneous arousal: Changing cognitions and behavior regarding nuclear war. *The Journal of Social Psychology* 133, 459-467.
- Barry, J. and Thomas, E. (2003, February 17). Boots, bytes and bombs. *Newsweek*, 38-43.
- Berkowitz, L. and Cottingham, D. R. (1960) The Interest Value and Relevance of Fear Arousing Communications. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 60, 1, 37-43.

- Cowley, G. (2003, February 24) Our bodies, our fears. *Newsweek*, 42-49.
- Burton, N. (2003, March 22) Shock and awe designed to crush enemy morale. *Northern Echo*, 2a.
- Dicket, C. and Lorch, D. (2003, February 17). Saddam's crimes. *Newsweek*, 42-43.
- Gray, J. A. (1987) *The psychology of fear and stress*, 2nd. ed., New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Halloway, D. (2003, March 21) 'Shock and awe' fails to appear, but war news still rules airwaves. *Austin-American Statesman*. Retrieved March 21, 2003. http://austin360.com/statesman/editions/today/news_31.html
- Hoover, J. H. and Olson, G. (2000) Sticks and stones may break their bones: Teasing as bullying. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 9, 87-91.
- Infield, T. (2003, March 20) Shock and awe war plan has roots in new doctrine. *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News*, 1.
- Janis, I. L. and Feshbach, S. (1953) Effects of Fear Arousing Communications. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 48, 1, 78-92.
- Janis, I. L. and Feshbach, S. (1954) Personality differences associated with responsiveness to fear-arousing communications. *The Journal of Personality*, 23, 154-166.
- Janis, I. L. and Milholland H. C. (1954) The Influence of threat appeals on selective learning of the content of a persuasive message. *The Journal of Psychology*, 37, 75-80.
- Karon, T. (2003, March 20) Psyche and awe in Baghdad. *Time: Online Edition*. Retrieved March 21, 2003. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,435390,00.html?cnn=yes>
- Krisher, H., Darley, S., and Darley, J. (1973) Fear-Provoking Recommendations, Intentions to Take Preventive Actions, and Actual Preventive Actions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 2, 301-308.
- Lam, T. (2003, March, 25) Iraq: Shock and awe familiar to Vietnamese. *Global Information Network*, 1.
- Leventhal, H. and Singer, R. P. (1966). Affect Arousal and Positioning of Recommendations in Persuasive Communications. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 2, 137-146.
- Leventhal, H., Singer, R. P., and Jones, S. (1965) Effects of fear and specificity of recommendations upon attitudes and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2, 1, 20-29.
- Leventhal, H. and Watts, J. C. (1966) Sources of resistance to fear-arousing communications on smoking and lung cancer. *Journal of Personality*, 34, 155-175.
- Lord, L. (2003, April 28) Days of shock and awe, horror and fear. *U.S. News & World Report*, 6.
- Macan-Marker, M. (2003, March 31) Iraq: 'Shock and awe' invasion rekindles interest in sun tzu. *Global Information Network*, 1.
- Meerloo, J. (1950) *Patterns of panic*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Press, J. (2003, April 9-15) Shell-shock and awe. *The Village Voice*, 46-50.
- Sulaiman, T. (2003, April 11) From video games to sunglasses: U.S. manufacturers seek trademarks on war terms. *Knight Ridder Tribune Business Week*, 1.
- Sutton, S. R. (1982) Fear arousing communications: A critical examination of theory and

research. In J. Eiser (ed.), *Social Psychology and Behavioral Medicine* (303-338). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Tackett, M. (2003, March 24) 'Shock, awe' more than bombs. *Knight Ridder Tribune Business Week*, 1.

Thomas, E. and Klaidman, D. (2003, March 23) The War Room. *Newsweek*. Retrieved March 23, 2003. <http://www.msnbc.com/news/889577.asp>

Ullman, H. K. and Wade, J. P. (1996) *Shock and awe: Achieving rapid domination*. Washington, DC : Center for Advanced Concepts and Technology.

U.S. Senate, One Hundred Fifth Congress, second session (1998, March 2) *Iraq: can Saddam be overthrown?* Hearing before the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

A decade of deception and defiance: Saddam Hussein's defiance of the united nations. September 12, 2002.