
Shock and awe

Shock and Awe (technically known as **rapid dominance**) is a military doctrine based on the use of overwhelming power, dominant battlefield awareness, dominant maneuvers, and spectacular displays of force to paralyze an adversary's perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight. The doctrine was written by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade in 1996 and is a product of the National Defense University of the United States.

Doctrine of rapid dominance

Rapid dominance is defined by its authors, Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, as attempting

"to affect the will, perception, and understanding of the adversary to fight or respond to our strategic policy ends through imposing a regime of Shock and Awe."^[1]

Further, rapid dominance will

"impose this overwhelming level of Shock and Awe against an adversary on an immediate or sufficiently timely basis to paralyze its will to carry on . . . [to] seize control of the environment and paralyze or so overload an adversary's perceptions and understanding of events that the enemy would be incapable of resistance at the tactical and strategic levels."^[2]

Introducing the doctrine in a report to the United States' National Defense University in 1996, Ullman and Wade describe it as an attempt to develop a post-Cold War military doctrine for the United States. Rapid dominance and shock and awe, they write, may become a "revolutionary change" as the United States military is reduced in size and information technology is increasingly integrated into warfare.^[3] Subsequent U.S. military authors have written that rapid dominance exploits the "superior technology, precision engagement, and information dominance" of the United States.^[4]

Ullman and Wade identify four vital characteristics of rapid dominance: "near total or absolute knowledge and understanding of self, adversary, and environment; rapidity and timeliness in application; operational brilliance in execution; and (near) total control and signature management of the entire operational environment."^[5] Shock and awe is most consistently used by Ullman and Wade as the effect that rapid dominance seeks to impose upon an adversary. It is the desired state of helplessness and lack of will. It can be induced, they write, by direct force applied to command and control centers, selective denial of information and dissemination of disinformation, overwhelming combat force, and rapidity of action.

The doctrine of rapid dominance has evolved from the concept of "decisive force". Ullman and Wade enumerate the elements between the two concepts in terms of objective, use of force, force size, scope, speed, casualties, and technique.

Civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure

Although Ullman and Wade claim that the need to "Minimize civilian casualties, loss of life, and collateral damage" is a "political sensitivity [which needs] to be understood up front", their doctrine of rapid dominance requires the capability to disrupt "means of communication, transportation, food production, water supply, and other aspects of infrastructure",^[6] and, in practice, "the appropriate balance of Shock and Awe must cause ... the threat and fear of action that may shut down all or part of the adversary's society or render his ability to fight useless short of complete physical destruction."^[7]

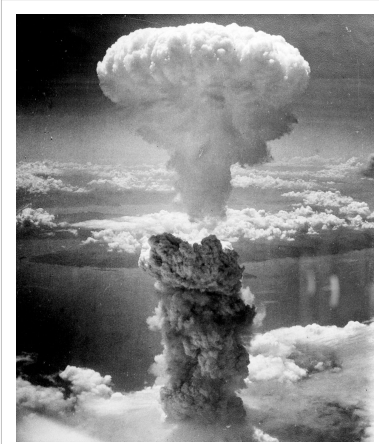
Using as an example a theoretical invasion of Iraq 20 years after Operation Desert Storm, the authors claimed, "Shutting the country down would entail both the physical destruction of appropriate infrastructure and the shutdown and control of the flow of all vital information and associated commerce so rapidly as to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese."^[8]

Reiterating the example in an interview with CBS News several months before Operation Iraqi Freedom, Ullman stated, "You're sitting in Baghdad and all of a sudden you're the general and 30 of your division headquarters have been wiped out. You also take the city down. By that I mean you get rid of their power, water. In 2, 3, 4, 5 days they are physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted."^[9]

Historical applications

Ullman and Wade argue that there have been military applications that fall within some of the concepts of shock and awe. They enumerate nine examples:

- **Overwhelming force:** The "application of massive or overwhelming force" to "disarm, incapacitate, or render the enemy militarily impotent with as few casualties to ourselves and to noncombatants as possible."
- **Hiroshima and Nagasaki:** The establishment of shock and awe through "instant, nearly incomprehensible levels of massive destruction directed at influencing society writ large, meaning its leadership and public, rather than targeting directly against military or strategic objectives even with relatively few numbers or systems."
- **Massive bombardment:** Described as "precise destructive power largely against military targets and related sectors over time."
- **Blitzkrieg:** The "intent was to apply precise, surgical amounts of tightly focused force to achieve maximum leverage but with total economies of scale."
- **Sun Tzu:** The "selective, instant decapitation of military or societal targets to achieve shock and awe."
- **Haitian example:** "Imposing shock and awe through a show of force and indeed through deception, misinformation, and disinformation."
- **The Roman legions:** "Achieving shock and awe rests in the ability to deter and overpower an adversary through the adversary's perception and fear of his vulnerability and our own invincibility."
- **Decay and default:** "The imposition of societal breakdown over a lengthy period, but without the application of massive destruction."



According to its original theorists, shock and awe renders an adversary unwilling to resist through overwhelming displays of power. Ullman cites the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Nagasaki is pictured) as an example of shock and awe.

Iraq War

Buildup

Before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, officials in the United States armed forces described their plan as employing shock and awe.^[10]

Conflicting pre-war assessments

Prior to its implementation, there was dissent within the Bush Administration as to whether the shock-and-awe plan would work. According to a CBS News report, "One senior official called it a bunch of bull, but confirmed it is the concept on which the war plan is based." CBS Correspondent David Martin noted that during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan in the prior year, the U.S. forces were "badly surprised by the willingness of al Qaeda to fight to the death. If the Iraqis fight, the U.S. would have to throw in reinforcements and win the old fashioned way by crushing the republican guards, and that would mean more casualties on both sides."^[11]

Campaign

Limited bombing began on March 19, 2003 as United States forces unsuccessfully attempted to kill Saddam Hussein. Attacks continued against a small number of targets until March 21, 2003, when, at 1700 UTC, the main bombing campaign of the US and their allies began. Its forces launched approximately 1700 air sorties (504 using cruise missiles).^[12] Coalition ground forces had begun a "running start" offensive towards Baghdad on the previous day. Coalition ground forces seized Baghdad on April 5, and the United States declared victory on April 14. The term "shock and awe" is typically used to describe only the very beginning of the invasion of Iraq, not the larger war, nor the ensuing insurgency.

Conflicting post-war assessments

To what extent the United States fought a campaign of shock and awe is unclear as post-war assessments are contradictory. Within two weeks of the United States' victory declaration, on April 27, *The Washington Post* published an interview with Iraqi military personnel detailing demoralization and lack of command.^[13] According to the soldiers, Coalition bombing was surprisingly widespread and had a severely demoralizing effect. When United States tanks passed through the Iraqi military's Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units outside Baghdad to Saddam's presidential palaces, it caused a shock to troops inside Baghdad. Iraqi soldiers said there was no organization intact by the time the United States entered Baghdad and that resistance crumbled under the presumption that "it wasn't a war, it was suicide."

In contrast, in an October 2003 presentation to the United States House Committee on Armed Services, staff of the United States Army War College did not attribute their performance to rapid dominance. Rather, they cited technological superiority and "Iraqi ineptitude". The speed of the coalition's actions ("rapidity"), they said, did not affect Iraqi morale. Further, they said that Iraqi armed forces ceased resistance only after direct force-on-force combat within cities.^[14]

According to *National Geographic* researcher Bijal Trivedi, "Even after several days of bombing the Iraqis showed remarkable resilience. Many continued with their daily lives, working and shopping, as bombs continued to fall around them. According to some analysts, the military's attack was perhaps too precise. It did not trigger shock and awe in the Iraqis and, in the end, the city was only captured after close combat on the outskirts of Baghdad."^[15]

Criticism of execution

According to *The Guardian* correspondent Brian Whitaker in 2003, "To some in the Arab and Muslim countries, Shock and Awe is terrorism by another name; to others, a crime that compares unfavourably with September 11."^[16] Anti-war protesters in 2003 also claimed that "the shock and awe pummeling of Baghdad [was] a kind of terrorism."^[17]

Casualties

A dossier released by Iraq Body Count, a project of the UK non-governmental non-violent and disarmament organization Oxford Research Group, attributed approximately 6,616 civilian deaths to the actions of US-led forces during the "invasion phase", including the shock-and-awe bombing campaign on Baghdad.^[18]

These findings were disputed by both the U.S. military and the Iraqi government. Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan, the spokesman for the US military in Baghdad, stated, "I don't know how they are doing their methodology and can't talk to how they calculate their numbers," as well as "we do everything we can to avoid civilian casualties in all of our operations."^[19] National Geographic researcher Bijal Trivedi stated, "Civilian casualties did occur, but the strikes, for the most part, were surgical."^[15]

Popular culture

Following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, the term *shock and awe* has been used for commercial purposes. The United States Patent and Trademark Office received at least 29 trademark applications in 2003 for exclusive use of the term.^[20] The first came from a fireworks company on the day the United States started bombing Baghdad. Sony registered the trademark the day after the beginning of the operation for use in a video game title, but later withdrew the application and described it as "an exercise of regrettable bad judgment."^[21] It is also the name of a level in the video game *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, in which United States Marine Corps forces execute the strategy in an unnamed Middle-Eastern country, before themselves falling victim to a nuclear blast. The term is also used as an achievement in the popularly acclaimed game *Starcraft 2*, it is obtained when an a certain amount of units die to the tactical strike craft whilst invisible. It is also the name of an achievement in *Gears of War 2*. Miscellaneous other uses of the term include golf equipment, an insecticide, a set of bowling balls, a racehorse, a shampoo, condoms, and heroin. The phrase was also suggested by the title of the Toby Keith album *Shock'n Y'all*, the hit from which was the pro-military "American Soldier".

In an interview, Harlan Ullman stated that he believed that using the term to try to sell products was "probably a mistake," and "the marketing value will be somewhere between slim and none."^[22]

Max Brooks' 2006 post-apocalyptic horror novel "World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War" contains a pointed criticism of "Shock and Awe" tactics, in the chapter relating the defeat of the US military by a zombie horde numbering in the millions at the cataclysmic Battle of Yonkers. Brooks' criticism is that Shock and Awe tactics are essentially a relic of Cold War strategies for fighting the Soviet Union in the Fulda Gap of West Germany, and are not effective for combating guerrilla fighters in protracted insurgencies. Particularly, Brooks' point is that the entire concept of "Shock and Awe" is rendered moot when facing enemy combatants who *by definition* have no fear of death: be they zombies, kamikaze pilots, or suicide bombers.

In the 2011 scifi film *Battle: Los Angeles*, the hostile aliens that are invading Earth are stated during a USMC press conference to be carrying out a "textbook campaign of rapid dominance".

Notes

- [1] Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Shock And Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman_Shock.pdf) (National Defense University, 1996), XXIV.
- [2] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, XXV.
- [3] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, Prologue.
- [4] David J. Gibson, *Shock and Awe: A Sufficient Condition for Victory?* (http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/fulcrum_main.pl?database=ft_u2&searchid=111016521012191&keyfieldvalue=ADA389508&filename=/fulcrum/data/TR_fulltext/doc/ADA389508.pdf) (Newport: United States Naval War College, 2001), 17.
- [5] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, XII.
- [6] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, Introduction (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1996/shock-n-awe_intro.html).
- [7] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, Chapter 5 (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1996/shock-n-awe_ch5.html).
- [8] Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, Chapter 1 (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1996/shock-n-awe_ch1.html).
- [9] CBS Evening News (Jan. 24, 2003) Interview with Harlan Ullman (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml>) accessed August 4, 2006.
- [10] " Iraq Faces Massive U.S. Missile Barrage (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml>)" (CBS News, January 24, 2003.
- [11] David Martin (January 24, 2003). "Iraq Faces Massive U.S. Missile Barrage" (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml>). CBS News. .
- [12] " Operation Iraqi Freedom - By the Numbers (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf_oif_report_30apr2003.pdf)", USCENTAF, April 30, 2003, 15.
- [13] William Branigin, " A Brief, Bitter War for Iraq's Military Officers (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A42721-2003Apr26¬Found=true>)", Washington Post, October 27, 2003.
- [14] " Iraq and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2003_hr/03-10-21warcollege.pdf)", presentation by the United States Army War College to United States House Committee on Armed Services, October 21, 2003.

- [15] Bijal Trivedi (February 14, 2005). "Inside Shock and Awe" (http://blogs.nationalgeographic.com/channel/blog/2005/03/explorer_shockawe.html). National Geographic Channel. .
- [16] Whitaker, B. (March 24, 2003) "Flags in the dust" *Guardian Unlimited Iraq special report at guardian.co.uk* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,920806,00.html>) accessed July 30, 2006.
- [17] "Antiwar Protesters Spar With Police" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A11085-2003Mar22?language=printer>). The Washington Post. March 22, 2003. .
- [18] "A Dossier of Civilian Casualties in Iraq 2003–2005" (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/press/pr12.php>). Iraq Body Count. July 18, 2005. .
- [19] "Iraq war takes heavy toll on civilians" (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8628614>). Reuters/MSNBC.com. July 19, 2005. .
- [20] Robert Longley, " Patent Office Suffers 'Shock and Awe' Attack (<http://usgovinfo.about.com/cs/censusstatistic/a/shockandawe.htm>)", About.com, October 27, 2003.
- [21] "Tech Briefs: Sony says it's sorry for 'shock and awe' idea" (http://www.seattlepi.com/business/118102_tbrf18.html). Seattle Post-Intelligencer. April 18, 2003. .
- [22] Agnes Cusack (May 16, 2003). "US companies battle over 'shock and awe' copyright" (<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s856964.htm>). The World Today. .

Further reading

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- Ullman, Harlan K. and Wade, James P. *Rapid Dominance: A Force for All Seasons*. Royal United Services Institute in Defense Studies, 1998.

External links

- Shock and awe, from SourceWatch
 - Command and Control Research Program (<http://www.dodccrp.org>)
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