



E. R. ZUMWALT, JR.
ADMIRAL, U. S. NAVY (RET.)

21 March 1988

Mr. Jack Hitt
Senior Editor
Harper's Magazine
666 Broadway
New York, NY 10012

Dear Mr. Hitt:

I attach a proposed commentary on Admiral La Rocque's badly flawed proposed article.

My comments are about as restrained as I can make them.

All best wishes.

Sincerely,

E. R. Zumwalt, Jr.

1500 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22209
703/841-8960

Attachment

DEFENDING AMERICA: THE REALITIES

To use a term, Mr. La Rocque and his article "Defending America" are really extraordinary pieces of work principally because they paint great expectations and seductive outcomes for U.S. security while ignoring both the implications of the assumptions underlying those notions and the realities and consequences of implementing these schemes. The result could easily produce a catastrophic failure for national security.

About La Rocque, I recall his appearance a year or so ago on the MacNeil-Lehrer TV news hour. The topic was discussion of the increased and then controversial U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf to protect a handful of Kuwaiti tankers reflagged under the stars and stripes.

La Rocque protested that, in his view, the Reagan administration had made absolutely no policy case for the Navy's expanded role and we were unnecessarily standing into danger. One could agree or not with that view. When pressed however on whether it made sense for the U.S. to have a large, powerful Navy and no use for it, La Rocque responded to the effect that navies were for killing people and...sinking other navies' ships. This flight between the reality of Naval powers influence and farce is the reason why La Rocque's views are unsettling no matter how superficially appealing they may appear or how pure the intent may be. "Defending America" is demonstrative of this phenomenon in the extreme.

La Rocque argues that the "world is changing in fundamental ways" and this provides a great opportunity for America "to lead this change, not fight it." He also believes that economic pressures in the form of our growing national

debts and deficits and new Soviet attitudes towards reform can allow the United States to make unilateral military cuts of about 50% across all its armed forces, both nuclear and conventional. His assertion is that because "our rivalry with the Soviet Union is no longer the obsession it once was," we can be assured that we will all live happily ever after. Maybe we will, but leaving security in the hands of fate is a risky business at best and one which no responsible official is going to take seriously.

Let me make several points before getting back to the reasons why La Rocque's view is based on pure nonsense. First, few rational Americans including hard-liners towards the Soviet Union are opposed to even profound mutual reductions in superpower military capability provided no worse than equal security for the U.S. and its allies can be assured. Second, few rational people would deny that the world has changed. However, few would agree that a precipitous, unilateral cut in U.S. military capability is a good thing either for our own security or that of our allies. Finally, and to be factually correct, it is not military spending that is causing the record deficit and debt. This country has been able and can easily afford to spend five or six percent of GNP a year on defense indefinitely. (Ironically, virtually all members of Congress now favor a strong defense.) The fundamental cause of our growing debt structure is the imbalance between revenues and outlays produced by the huge tax cuts of 1981-82 and our inability to control federal spending.

Now La Rocque must believe, if his objective is really defending America, that such a large unilateral cut in U.S. military forces and even the declared intent to so do will have no negative consequences for nor do lasting injury to U.S. interests and to U.S. allies. Goodness knows the Europeans are already nervous enough over the INF Treaty and those reductions in nuclear weapons on balance are minuscule. Under La Rocque's plan, given his rationale and strategy

and admittedly phased over the next decade, NATO could very likely disintegrate once withdrawals were announced let alone started and the political-economic effects of sealing off our major trading and investment partners could be the catalyst for precipitating an economic disaster.

In the Pacific, U.S. military withdrawal could very easily force Japan to rearm. Although I have the greatest respect and admiration for the Japanese and believe they perhaps should spend more money on defense, I also fought in World War II in the Pacific. With LaRocque's assumptions and strategy, a rearmed Japan is indeed very likely. How far that rearmament could go is problematic. But it is hard to believe the emergence of a third military superpower, and one no longer our close ally, is automatically going to improve U.S. security.

Finally, while Mr. Gorbachev is certainly attempting to bring dramatic change to the Soviet Union, it would be unwise to think that Soviet motives are likely to be more benign towards us. Without bilateral steps in mutual military disarmament agreed to and publicly supported, the possibilities of Soviet aggrandizement and, indeed, allied panic are too risky a basis on which to rest serious policy.

To be sure, if one wanted to derive a military strategy based on substantial, mutual force reductions, that certainly can be done. However, the overarching political and geostrategic actions we would have to take to ensure the common defense is safely maintained would require the most careful examination and implementation. All that is entirely absent from La Rocque and turns his arguments into globaloney.

So, in spite of the seductiveness of La Rocque's disarming approach of how to re-draft U.S. military strategy and cut roughly half our current strength, his conclusions and recommendations are extraordinary, bordering on fantasy and almost certain to guarantee quite the opposite effect of his presumed intent in defending America.

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March 16, 1988

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LaRocque protested that, in his view, the Reagan administration had made absolutely no policy case for the navy's expanded role and we were unnecessarily standing into danger. One could agree or not with that view, ~~but~~ fair enough. When pressed however on whether it made sense for the U.S. to have a large, powerful navy and no use for it, LaRocque responded to the effect that navies were for killing people

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