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Shocked and Awed: How the War on Terror and Jihad Have Changed the English Language. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. ISBN 9781848850316. Paperback, £12.99.

Review by Jack Holland, University of Surrey

On 26 April 2010, Fred Halliday died in Barcelona after a year-long battle with cancer. *Shocked and Awed* is one of three books published posthumously in the year since. After an exceptional career spanning four decades, his work continues to inspire students, encourage critical reflection in the academy and challenge the practitioners of world politics. Like much of Halliday's work, *Shocked and Awed* will also demonstrate a considerable impact beyond the ivory tower and the think tank, as it informs and educates an interested general public, through clear and concise prose. It is vital that both the information and the message this book contains are heard.

Having been one of the first to pen a response to the events of 11 September 2001 in *Two Hours That Shook The World*, it is appropriate that Halliday's *Shocked and Awed* should reassess the political and linguistic landscape of war after its first seven years. Unfortunately, the title is only a partial encapsulation of the book's task. In its two variants, the book goes by the full title of *Shocked and Awed: A Dictionary of the War on Terror* or *Shocked and Awed: How The War on Terror and Jihad Have Changed The English Language*. Neither does justice to the full remit of the work they describe. While the respective titles allude only to the first two, the aims of *Shocked and Awed* are three-fold, and Halliday achieves them all.

First, *Shocked and Awed* clearly is a 'dictionary' of the language of the 'War on Terror'. It will certainly 'serve as a work of reference ... to words and phrases used about 9/11, and the events that have followed them, as well as about the ongoing issues of cultural conflict, terrorism and Middle Eastern politics linked to those events' (p.x). And like much of Halliday's work, this book will 'make a broader contribution to understanding the politics *and* thinking of the contemporary Middle East'. True to form, this is done with a keen eye for the past, linking etymology and political histories together to shed light on the terminology and turns of phrase on which today's struggles pivot.

Second, *Shocked and Awed* sets out to 'illustrate *the linguistic consequences of major international crises*'. Halliday shows that the events of 11 September 2001 and later interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq 'had a significant impact on language' (p.xi). Creating new words and phrases, as well as reviving and redefining existing ones, Halliday argues that the crisis that has been seen to follow 9/11 has operated in much the same way as other great modern cataclysms, such as the World Wars and Vietnam. 'The linguistic harvest of war', as Halliday so eloquently puts it, has perhaps been even greater in times of terror, fuelled by the growth of communications technologies and the rising importance of information war. *Shocked and Awed* is then a 'dictionary', in the

traditional sense of a work of reference, but it is also a guide to the *linguistic impacts* of this most recent and intense 'global vocabulary war'.

Third, *Shocked and Awed* is driven by a strong normative concern extending beyond the academic pursuit of precision in analysis and explanation. Just as the 'crisis' of 9/11 and the War on Terror have had profound impacts on language, so words have had significant and far-reaching political impact. As Halliday notes, 'words can exalt and can explain', but they can also 'kill, and promote fear, hatred and misunderstanding'; it is for this reason too that 'they need to be studied, challenged and controlled' (p.xv). Recognising a long theoretical tradition, Halliday attempts to explore 'the intersection of words with power' (p.ix). To this end, *Shocked and Awed* reveals how key phrases are used by states as they seek to 'use language to control events'. However, Halliday's focus is not only on revealing the (ab)use of language by the Coalition of the Willing in pursuit of political legitimacy; rather, *Shocked and Awed* recognises the linguistic battlefield as a site of contestation and of resistance. This recognition of the malleability and (dis)order of words enables Halliday to make his own critical interventions in the language of the War on Terror to great effect.

On the first aim, *Shocked and Awed* chronicles some 316 pages of key terms in the War on Terror from '9/11' to '24', from 'ayatollah' to 'Absurdistan', and from 'al-Zarqawi' to 'Zionism'. Many of the terms discussed will be familiar to readers, while many will be new and perhaps unexpected inclusions. Halliday's take on one of the most familiar – the title phrase 'shock and awe' – is typical of an approach that attempts to explain these key terms in clear language, whilst situating them historically and identifying their political impact. Politically then, 'shock and awe' is seen to be a deliberate attempt to limit American casualties by convincing an enemy that resistance is futile, but it is also necessary to understand previous American interventions to grasp the full utility of and preference for the term (p.133). Halliday situates the policy of 'shock and awe', now most readily associated with the 2003 American-led intervention in Iraq, within its military history, contrasting the term to the Vietnam-era policy of 'turning the screw'. Learning the lessons of failure led the United States to shift from Vietnam's 'Rolling Thunder' to Kuwait's 'Instant Thunder'. Seen in this light, the 'shock and awe' campaign of 2003 was the logical continuation of a policy that sought to maximise the impact of airpower through a temporal intensity, which would reap significant material and psychological destruction.

On the second aim, Halliday's choice of chapter topics is revealing. In turn, the twelve chapters group terms and phrases associated broadly with: 9/11; Osama Bin Laden; detention; Afghanistan and Iraq; the Middle East; Muslim stereotypes; the Arab-Israeli conflict; euphemisms of war; American colloquial; place names; euphemisms in general; and other terms that have entered public debate. In each of these overlapping areas, the 'War on Terror' has had a significant linguistic impact by generating, re-animating and redefining numerous key terms and phrases. For example, Halliday reminds readers that there have arguably been *four* conflicts afforded the name 'Gulf War' to date. Other useful examples of terms that have been re-animated and redefined include: 'Vietnamalia Syndrome', as an updated Vietnam Syndrome, incorporating the

more recent lessons of Mogadishu; 'positive domino theory', a reversal of Cold War fears that pins its hopes on the contagion of democracy; and, most notoriously, 'axis of evil', as an invocation of Franklin Roosevelt's 'axis of hatred', reworked by President Bush's speechwriters, David Frum and Michael Gerson. Likewise, Halliday's *Shocked and Awed* offers an extensive chronicling of entirely new terms spawned by the authors of the 'War on Terror'. Chronologically stitching some of these together, the reader can chart the progress of the 'War on Terror' from a pre-9/11 'failure of imagination', via a 'sexed-up' dossier and exculpatory claims that 'freedom is untidy', to ultimate 'shoe thrower' acts of resistance.

It is however the third aim, lost from the title, which is most important. Make no mistake, this is a 'critical' dictionary, explicitly and effectively attempting an intervention of its own. In revealing the intimacy of words and power, Halliday's interventions are well researched, erudite and occasionally very funny. *Shocked and Awed* is in parts a humorous book, deploying comedy to challenge and contest dominant discourses that marginalise and subjugate the most vulnerable in the 'War on Terror'. Halliday's task is to reveal and resist the role of language in naturalising and/or concealing violence. The term 'detention facility' he informs us is a bit like using "cabin attendant" to describe 'stewardess', 'body lotion' to describe 'soap' and 'arrangement fee' to describe 'bank rake-off', a euphemism to conceal and/or embellish more mundane words, in this case 'jail' and 'prison" (p.66). While at times Halliday's subject matter is too serious and too grotesque to raise smiles (see, for instance, his obvious disgust at the term 'terror-lite'), *Shocked and Awed* is at its most likeable when it pokes fun at power in order to disarm it. For instance, 'Grand Strategy', Halliday tells his readers, is no more than a 'pompous term much used in Washington to describe and give bogus coherence to random bits of aggressive and bellicose fantasy' (p.296).

The impact of Halliday's work was acclaimed in his lifetime and has been rightly recognised in the obituaries that have followed his death, as well as in the outpouring of comments from esteemed colleagues (see, for instance, the 134 contributions at opendemocracy.net). This latest book will be read alongside Richard Jackson's *Writing the War on Terrorism*, Stuart Croft's *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror*, Sandra Silberstein's *War of Words* and John Collin and Ross Glover's *Collateral Language*. It should be read for its utility as a work of reference, as a guide to the linguistic impact of crises, and as a critique of power. And it should be read if you do not yet know what is meant by terms such as 'Scottish Guantanamo', 'Colinectomy' and 'pretzel of preposterousness'.