

U.S. Naval Options for Influencing Iran

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April 2009

**(This report is under consideration for publication
in the Naval War College Review)**



Executive Summary

Engaging Iran is both a difficult and complex endeavor. The United States will need to use all the tools at its disposal. One of the advantages the United States possesses in dealing with Iran is its Navy. The Navy provides the U.S. Government with a range of unique potential options that can be employed across the entire diplomatic and conflict spectra. Some of these options derive from the ability of the Navy to deploy a wide range of capabilities from a sovereign base at sea. Others result from the Navy's continuous presence in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. Still others are a reflection of the way the Navy operates every day.

Shaping is the set of continuous, long-term integrated, comprehensive actions with a broad spectrum of government, nongovernmental and international partners that maintains or enhances stability, prevents or mitigates crises, and enables other operations when crises occur. With the end of the Cold War, shaping operations became a more important part of the Navy's array of activities. Today, U.S. military planners envision shaping as something to be pursued across most of the five phases of future campaigns. These phases are defined as shape, deter, seize the initiative, dominate, stabilize and enable civil authority.

There is no question that in the event of conflict with Iran, the Navy could exert tremendous pressure on Iran. Equally important, the U.S. Navy has many potential opportunities to influence Iran during peacetime and in the event of a crisis. What is particularly important is the number and variety of options available to support early shaping activities.

The Navy can take a leading role in providing means for opening communications with elements of the Iranian military. The development of Confidence Building Measures would both reduce risks inherent in conducting day-to-day operations in the Gulf and provide an opening for improved communications. Enhanced cooperation with allies through cooperative exercises and exchanges would appear to be the most important option in both shaping the region and deterring Iranian aggression.

In the event of conflict with Iran, the Navy will have perhaps the most important strategic role of all U.S. forces. Together with joint and combined forces, the Navy will be required to ensure that the Gulf remains open to traffic and that the movement of oil is not interdicted. The Navy needs to focus on ensuring that it can deal with the most stressing threats to movement in and through the Gulf, specifically sea mines, Iranian submarines and missile-armed patrol craft and nuisance attacks by small, high speed boats including suicide attacks. An additional important role for the Navy is the provision of effective missile defense. The ability to neutralize these threats will contribute significantly to deterrence of Iranian aggression.

This report was written by Dr. Daniel Goure and Dr. Rebecca Grant of the Lexington Institute. Participants in the working group meeting had the opportunity to review and comment on the text.

Introduction

Shaping and influence operations have long been an integral part of seapower. Nations claim sovereignty over their land territory, coastal waters and airspace. In contrast, the high seas still provide a neutral domain where military forces may posture and present themselves in more subtle ways.

Shaping is the set of continuous, long-term integrated, comprehensive actions with a broad spectrum of government, nongovernmental and international partners that maintains or enhances stability, prevents or mitigates crises, and enables other operations when crises occur. Actions short of war designed to influence the behavior of another nation fall under the rubric of shaping operations. With the end of the Cold War, shaping operations became a more important part of the Navy's array of activities.

Navy leaders have never been shy about extolling these unique attributes. "The Navy's role in global influence and deterrence will grow significantly in the future," said Admiral John Nathman, former Commander, Fleet Forces Command. "You can go up to 12 nautical miles [to a country's shoreline] without asking permission. You come with no footprint. And you deliver a message that can be broad, subtle, persistent, credible or powerful. The Navy can do that."¹

Demand for Navy shaping operations has risen steadily over the past several years. All joint forces are engaged in shaping actions, ranging from theater security cooperation and shaping to more elaborate options to deter and seize the initiative.

When thinking about deterring Iran, Navy options quickly come to mind. In fact, there is both a valuable historical legacy and an important niche role for the Navy in operations to counter Iran at various levels of engagement. The same warships on scheduled rotation can shift from presence to deterrence to countering aggression. Day in and day out, Navy forces help set the limits of Iranian military action in the Gulf.

Few question that unique Navy capabilities to shape and deter have special strategic significance. Yet there is little awareness in the broader policy community regarding the impact that naval presence can have over the longer term and during crises on the situation in the Persian Gulf. Nor has it been made clear to decision makers that Iran's leadership is aware of our naval actions, and factors the presence of the U.S. Navy and its operations into its strategic calculations.

This paper is intended to explore the range of options the U.S. Navy can provide to policymakers in developing a strategic approach to Iran. The new administration and Congress are confronted by the imminent possibility that Iran will develop nuclear weapons. The subsequent analysis focuses on the range of policy-relevant options the Navy can provide short of war that could help shape Iran's behavior.

¹ Christopher P. Cava, "Interview: Admiral John B. Nathman," *Defense News*, August 4, 2006.

This paper is also intended to provide a reflection on the current roles and impact of U.S. naval might in the Persian Gulf. The Obama Administration has taken power just as a delicate change is beginning. The U.S. land, air and naval presence in the Gulf will diminish as forces return from Iraq. Simultaneously, the Obama Administration will be trying to elicit from Iran an agreement not to develop a nuclear weapons program. The administration must think its plan through carefully: if naval posture weakens, it may be harder to make diplomatic progress.

U.S. Policy Toward Iran

While keen to distance itself from the Bush years, the Obama Administration may first keep to much the same course followed in recent years.

The Bush Administration was very clear about its security issues with Iran:

... the behavior of the Iranian regime poses as serious a set of challenges to the international community as any problem we face today. Iran's nuclear ambitions; its support for terrorism; and its efforts to undermine hopes for stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, including lethal backing for groups attacking American troops, are all deeply troubling. So are its destructive actions in Lebanon, its longstanding rejection of a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the profoundly repugnant rhetoric of its leaders about Israel, the Holocaust, and so much else. Compounding these concerns is Iran's deteriorating record on human rights.²

The United States has struggled to manage the dangers posed by the revolutionary regime in Teheran for nearly 30 years. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the central policy objective of the United States has been to change the behavior of the Iranian regime. It has sought to do so by a combination of means including a larger military presence in the region, enhanced support for regional allies (including, for a time, Iran's principal adversary, Saddam Hussein's Iraq), economic leverage, targeted sanctions and limited engagement.

Our policy toward Iran is clear and focused. First and foremost, we have demonstrated to the Iranian regime that its provocative and destabilizing policies will entail painful costs for Iran, including financial hardship, diplomatic isolation, and long-term detriment to Iran's prestige and fundamental national interests. Secondly, and equally importantly, we are working to convince the regime that another, more constructive course is available to it.³

² William J. Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Opening Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, July 9, 2008.

³ R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, Washington, DC, March 21, 2007.

Even though only recently in office, the Obama Administration has made it clear that Iran will be a principal focus of its foreign policy. The Obama Administration appears to hold objectives with respect to Iran very similar to those of the Bush Administration.

Foremost on its list of objectives is to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. In a recent television interview, the new President said, "Iran is going to be one of our biggest challenges." He specifically mentioned that country's support for Lebanese Shia party Hezbollah and Teheran's nuclear enrichment program.⁴

According to recent press reports, the new administration sent a secret letter to the Russian Government offering to halt development of a ballistic missile interceptor system in Eastern Europe, provided that Russia assist in halting Iran's effort to build nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles.⁵

Recent intelligence estimates make it all the more important to redouble U.S. effort to influence Iran's thinking on security and, more specifically, their quest for a nuclear weapon. According to Admiral Denis Blair (Ret.), "We assess Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons. In our judgment, only an Iranian political decision to abandon a nuclear weapons objective would plausibly keep Iran from eventually producing nuclear weapons – and such a decision is inherently reversible."⁶

U.S. policy is based on the belief that Iran is basically a weak nation. As the preeminent Shia nation in the Muslim world, Iran has few natural allies. Ironically, one of these may be Iraq, whose government is now dominated by representatives of that country's majority Shia population. Iran's economy is dominated by oil exports, a position which at times can provide enormous infusions of resources, but which makes it fundamentally vulnerable to rapid shifts in the state of the global economy. Moreover, a monoculture economy is not one that can readily absorb the large numbers of young adults entering the workforce.

Current policy has three basic threads: more diplomacy, tougher sanctions and developing a bilateral relationship. The goal is to shape Iranian behavior so as to make a resort to direct military force unnecessary. In particular, this means encouraging Iran to enter into direct talks with the United States and its allies. As part of these negotiations, it is hoped that Iran will acquiesce to Western demands that Teheran halt its nuclear enrichment efforts. Ultimately, it is hoped that the diplomatic process will see Iran moderate its revolutionary stance and integrate itself into the community of nations.

Supporting the policy threads is the important factor of U.S. military forces and their power to shape U.S., allied and Iranian security choices. U.S. military forces can play a large role in shaping Iranian behavior. Given their inherent flexibility, sovereign basing

⁴ BBC World News, "Obama promises new tack on Iran," January 11, 2009. Available at: BBC.co.uk

⁵ Peter Baker, "Obama Offered Deal to Russia in Secret Letter," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2009, p. A1.

⁶ Eli Lake, "Obama still crafting Iran policy: Clinton aide named week before IAEA board meeting," *The Washington Times*, February 26, 2009.

and tremendous mobility, U.S. naval forces are particularly well-suited to contributing to shaping activities. Equally important, the same forces engaged in shaping operations can rapidly shift into combat mode, providing high value military resources to the theater commander.

There are some who argue that the Iranian leadership is not amenable to influence, whether by carrots or sticks. This would mean that there is no hope of shaping Iranian behavior in general or, more specifically, influencing their decisions on matters of security and defense.

There is no evidence to support this contention. It is often difficult to determine who is making decisions in Iran. However, this was an intentional part of the political structure created by Ayatollah Khomeini.

However decentralized the Iranian political system may be, there is order amid the apparent chaos. In fact, the mutual mistrust, loosely defined responsibilities and overlapping architecture characteristic of Iranian political institutions were in part intentional features of their design; Khomeini, ever fearful of international subversion, hoped to ensure the system's impenetrability.⁷

The experience of those who must deal with Iranian officials, particularly U.S. military personnel in the region, argues exactly the opposite. Senior U.S. military personnel with recent experience in the region characterize Iranian behavior as very calculating and cautious. This suggests that a carefully crafted policy directed toward shaping Iranian perceptions, expectations and behaviors may have a chance of success.

Navy Shaping Over Time

Attention to shaping Iran via careful use of military force has been done before, but as a policy tool, it has moved into the spotlight in new ways. Shaping policy today marks a distinct break from the Cold War period. In the last two decades, shaping has become one of the most important and flexible of military tools, even though it is not always well understood. For the Navy, today's shaping operations trace back to the traditional oscillation between presence and sea control. Under Cold War containment, the Navy's shaping and influence operations fell into relatively clear categories. In this bipolar world most shaping and influence actions were targeted at the Soviet Union and its allies, or designed to reinforce collective security through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for example.

However, in this period, shaping and influence operations were subordinate to other missions. The accent was on deterrence and crisis response. Presence up through the 1980s was part of regional and global war plans. The shaping "metric" was treated as a subset of the combat readiness metric.

⁷ Hesham Sallam, Andrew Mandelbaum, and Robert Grace, *Who Rules Ahmadinejad's Iran?* U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, April 2007.

Most of the Navy's shaping of that period related directly to influencing the joint warfare environment in situations where the use of force was a very real and immediate prospect. One example was the development of the Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) and how it stimulated the Soviet submarine fleet's bastion strategy. Another example came from Navy operations off Libya. An extensive system of forward bases maintained a well-defined presence of U.S. forces, naval and otherwise.

By the 1980s, there was a gradual separation of the Middle East, in particular, from the overarching containment focus. New policy interests centered on protecting the international supply of oil and stemming fundamentalism led to the stand-up of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The new trends also provided a setting for talking about an expanded role for shaping and influence. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan said that, "given the importance of the region, we must also be ready to act when the presence of American power and that of our friends can help stop the spread of violence."⁸

Conflict in the Persian Gulf began to carve out a new role for Navy operations quite distinct from their Cold War missions. From this came the roots of today's naval shaping actions. From July 24, 1987 through September 26, 1988, U.S. Navy forces took part in operations to protect oil tanker traffic during the late phases of the Iran-Iraq War. Kuwait requested reflagging of its tankers and even Soviet Union vessels ultimately took part in the operations. Iran attacked a Soviet freighter on May 6, and the USS *Stark* was hit by Exocet missiles fired by an Iraqi pilot on May 17. Iran also increased its minelaying operations.

Operation Praying Mantis occurred in April 1988. On April 14, the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* hit a mine laid by Iran. The mine tore a 25-foot hole in the hull but the ship reached safety in Dubai. President Reagan approved an attack on two Iranian oil platforms, with rules of engagement that permitted Navy forces to seek out and engage the Iranian patrol frigate *Sabalan* as well. The oil platforms were armed with forces including a formidable ZSU-23 anti-aircraft gun. Surface Action Group Bravo supported the attack on the Sassan platform while Surface Action Group Charlie handled the Sirri platform. Aircraft from the USS *Enterprise* were in support. First, they sank an Iranian patrol boat using Rockeye munitions. Surface Action Group Charlie then sank an Iranian fast frigate, the *Joshan*. Next, Iranian frigate *Sahand* challenged elements of Surface Action Group Delta and launched missiles at A-6s. *Sahand* was sunk by attacks from the A-6s and the USS *Joseph Strauss*. The *Sabalan* fired on several A-6Es and one placed a laser-guided bomb on her deck, setting fires and causing the ship to be towed with bow submerged. Operation Praying Mantis was later documented by a U.S. Naval Academy

⁸ President Ronald Reagan, Speech to National Leadership Forum of the Center for International and Strategic Studies, Georgetown University, April 6, 1984.

professor as one of five naval battles that established U.S. Navy dominance.⁹ Order of Battle for the operation appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Order of Battle – Operation Praying Mantis

Surface Action Group Bravo

- USS *Merrill* (DD-976)
- USS *Lynde McCormick* (DDG-8)
- USS *Trenton* (LPD-14)
- Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) 2-88

Surface Action Group Charlie

- USS *Wainwright* (DLG/CG-28)
- USS *Bagley* (FF-1069)
- USS *Simpson* (FFG-56)
- SEAL platoon

Surface Action Group Delta

- USS *Jack Williams* (FFG-24)
- USS *O'Brien* (DD-975)
- USS *Joseph Strauss* (DDG-16)

The Rise of Shaping

With that background, the Navy was well-positioned to provide shaping tools as post-Cold War policy interests broadened. Overseas presence was redefined as a major element of Navy strategy in the 1990s. Shaping and influence operations were no longer aimed at containing Russia. Now, as Admiral William Owens described it in 1995, overseas presence was needed for the transition to “a world in which the United States and other nations can pursue their interests in mutually beneficial ways, less conditioned by fear of conflict, less constrained by disagreements on the rules of international interaction.”¹⁰ Owens assessed that as forward bases closed, naval forces would become a bigger share of those seen overseas and thus “increasingly be seen as representatives of the entire range of U.S. military power.”

By the mid-1990s, presence was a prime element of U.S. Navy strategy.

Forward...From the Sea (1995) contained these tenets:

Most fundamentally, our naval forces are designed to fight and win wars. Our most recent experiences, however, underscore the premise that the most important role of naval forces in situations short of war is to be *engaged* in forward areas, with the objectives of *preventing* conflicts and *controlling* crises. Naval forces

⁹ Craig L. Symonds, *Decision at Sea: Five Naval Battles that Shaped American History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005. The other four battles were Lake Erie (1813), Hampton Roads (1862) Manila Bay (1898) and Midway (1942).

¹⁰ Admiral William Owens, *High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World*, U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1995, p. 37.

thus are the foundation of peacetime forward presence operations and overseas response to crisis.¹¹

At the same time, but for different reasons, a new emphasis on peacetime engagement emerged in national security policy. In 1993, the Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Charles Larson, spotlighted the need for a new policy of engagement. “With the end of the Cold War, and the absence of an overt strategic military threat, America does not have a mandate for retrenchment,” Larson reasoned. The chance for better global stability depended on a decision that “the United States must be present and must be engaged.”¹²

1995 marked the beginning of official policy on engagement. Army General Wesley Clark claimed authorship of the first engagement strategy in 1994. Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili directed Clark, who at the time was the Joint Staff J-5, to look more deeply at peacetime engagement, but to steer clear of getting the U.S. involved everywhere like a “globocop.” Clark, with staff help, deduced that “we might be doing the same thing – positioning ships in the Mediterranean Sea – but now the purpose would be to help reinforce friendly governments rather than implicitly threaten a potential adversary.” Clark decided engagement alone was too weak as a policy basis, so under his leadership, the Joint Staff split peacetime engagement from deterrence and conflict prevention. The term of the day became “Flexible and Selective Engagement.”

By 1997, the National Military Strategy bore the title: “Shape, Respond and Prepare Now.” The idea was that:

U.S. military forces help shape the international environment primarily through their inherent deterrent qualities and through peacetime military engagement. The shaping element of our strategy helps foster the institutions and international relationships that constitute a peaceful strategic environment by promoting stability; preventing and reducing conflict and threats; and deterring aggression and coercion.¹³

General Shalikashvili gave an example during a visit to China in May 1997:

With the end of the Cold War and a significant decline in the threat from the former-Soviet Union, we have developed a new National Security Strategy. Our new strategy hinges on Engagement, engagement with old friends and old adversaries alike.¹⁴

Thus, by 1997, most of the elements of today’s “shaping” were already in place. The National Military Strategy that year went on to discuss how international exercises and

¹¹ United States Navy, *Forward...From the Sea*, Washington, DC, 1994, p. 1.

¹² Admiral Charles Larson, “A Few Reasons for U.S. Engagement in the Pacific,” *International Herald Tribune*, December 21, 1993.

¹³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, 1997.

¹⁴ Remarks by General John Shalikashvili to China’s National Defense University, Beijing, May 14, 1997.

“other engagement activities” to include military contacts, Foreign Military Sales, and International Military Education and Training, could promote stability. Peacetime deterrence was defined as “the most important contribution to the shaping element of the President’s strategy.” This was tailor-made for Navy forces. “Deterrence rests in large part on our demonstrated ability and willingness to defeat potential adversaries and deny them their strategic objectives,” said the 1997 strategy.¹⁵

Most of these elements remained in place in national strategies as the global war on terrorism began. Subsequent strategies spoke to forward forces, security cooperation and the value of deterring aggression. In 2004, security cooperation as a means to promote security and prevent conflict was defined in more detail. There was also a clear sense of adjusting “overseas presence” up and down. The National Military Strategy for that year suggested:

... combatant commanders must develop and recommend posture adjustments that enable expeditionary, joint and multinational forces to act promptly and globally while establishing favorable security conditions. The value and utility of having forces forward goes beyond winning on the battlefield. Employing forces in instances short of war demonstrates the United States’ willingness to lead and encourages others to help defend, preserve and extend the peace.¹⁶

Shaping in Joint Doctrine

The next major shift came in 2006 when Phase 0 Shaping became an official part of joint doctrine. That’s important, because joint doctrine was made “authoritative” and binding on commanders in the mid-1990s.

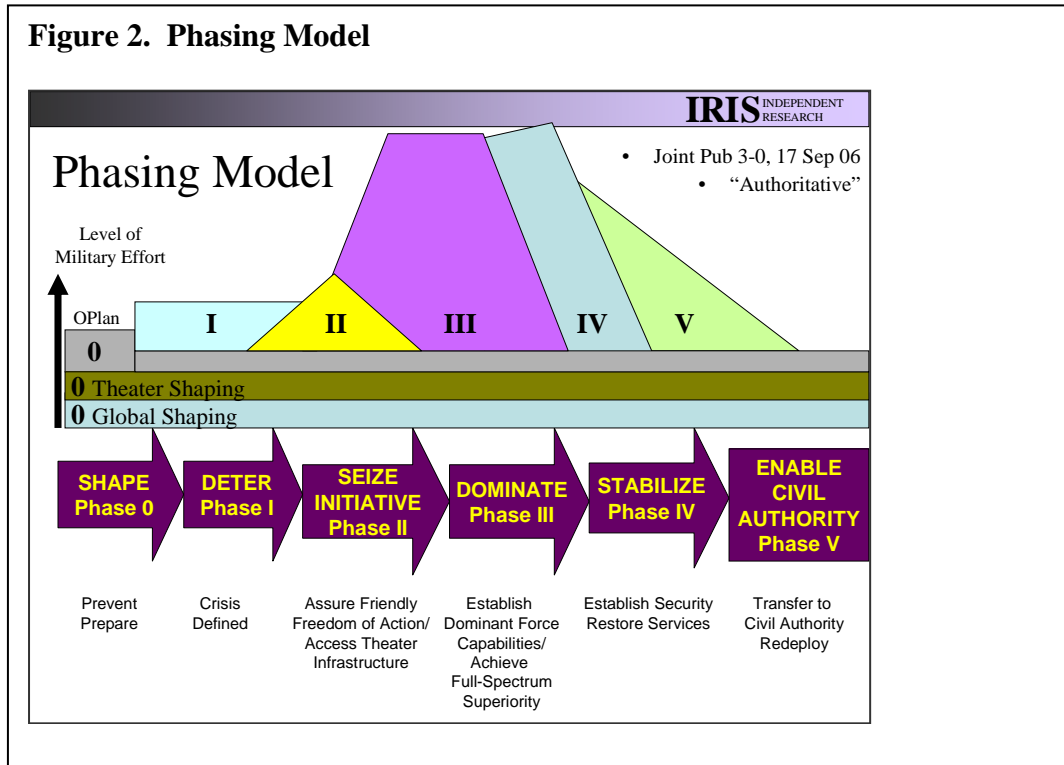
The centerpiece of joint doctrine is Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Operations. This publication covers all elements of planning and conducting joint operations. It is important to keep in mind that the structure of joint doctrine was adapted mainly from Army doctrine – in large part because the Army had always produced a large body of doctrine.

Phasing is an element of operational design and planning. The 2006 JP 3-0 significantly expanded the accepted phases of an operation from four to six and revised their definitions. Phase 0 Shaping became the “book-ends” taking place at the beginning and end of the sequence. The other new phase was Phase V Enable Civil Authority. Phase IV Stability Operations had already been in place, but its definition was revised to include more metrics on reducing threat levels and monitoring security levels.

¹⁵ *National Military Strategy of the United States*, 1997.

¹⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, 2004.

Figure 2. Phasing Model



As it turned out, what the Navy thought of as “shaping operations” actually fit across the first three elements of the new joint doctrine on phasing. They were:

- **Phase 0 Shape:** Continuous operations including normal and routine military activity “performed to dissuade or deter potential adversaries and to assure or solidify relationships with friends and allies.” Goals include shaping perceptions, developing capacity for coalition operations, improving information and intelligence exchange, and providing peacetime and contingency access. JP 3-0 also stated specifically that shaping activities could be “executed in one theater in order to create effects and/or achieve objectives in another.”
- **Phase I Deter:** Deterring undesirable adversary action and demonstrating joint force capabilities and resolve. This phase specifically includes preparatory actions for subsequent phases of the campaign, such as mobilization, staging intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, developing logistics and force protection plans and assisting other government agencies and non-governmental organizations. In this phase, military action is focused on “crisis defined.”
- **Phase II Seize Initiative:** Permits the “rapid application of joint combat power” to “delay, impede or halt the enemy’s initial aggression and to deny their initial objectives.” Phase II could be preparation for the next “dominate” phase. It could include gaining access to theater infrastructure and operations to “expand friendly freedom of action.” In some ways, Phase II retained elements of “preparing the battlefield.” It also allowed for limited strike operations.

Joint doctrine acknowledged that there was a lot of overlap between Phase 0 and Phase I. For example, operations and activities in the shape and deter phases might both be found in security cooperation plans. (Later phases would be only in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan.) That would leave it to the Combatant Commanders to link the pertinent Security Cooperation Plan activities to the operations plans activities.¹⁷

Shaping as laid out in joint doctrine has gone far beyond crisis response. It is now central to U.S. military policy. Nor is it an exclusive Navy mission. When shaping entered formal joint doctrine, this was clear acknowledgement of the role of all joint forces in shaping.

The Navy and Phase II

But the fact remains that the Navy has a niche in Phase II operations – such as 1988’s Operation Praying Mantis. A review of conflicts from 1981 to 2001 shows clearly that “shaping” takes place in many ways and the Navy has unique strengths in a region like the Persian Gulf. The data depicted in Table 1 comes from a list of U.S. military operations from 1981 to 2001. This database was drawn from a larger database spanning 1798 to 2004.¹⁸ It was originally assembled by the Congressional Research Service in 2005, and its purpose was to catalogue all discrete uses of armed force in that period, including the eleven full-fledged wars. As its author cautioned, “the instances differ greatly in number of forces, purpose, extent of hostilities, and legal authorization.”

This list contained many different types of operations, from small deployments to augment embassy security, to major operations such as Grenada, Panama, Operation Desert Storm, the operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, and finally, the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Most sources for the 1981-2001 period were official reports by the President to Congress, consistent with the War Powers Act. Special Operations Force (SOF) operations were essentially omitted from the database due to secrecy restrictions, except for a few major, well-publicized incidents like the failed hostage rescue of 1980.

Table 1: Early Crisis Use of U.S. Armed Forces 1980 to 2001

	Navy	Marine Corps	Army	Air Force	Joint	Total
Phase 0	2	2	5	2	4	15
Phase I	4	6	8	6	2	27
Phase II	13	1	1	6	3	23
Phase III	2	0	0	2	4	6
	21	9	14	16	13	

Source: *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2004*, Congressional Research Service, 2005.

¹⁷Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, 2006, p. IV-27.

¹⁸Richard F. Grimmett, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2004*, Congressional Research Service, March 14, 2005.

A total of 73 cases were grouped into Phase 0, Phase I, Phase II or Phase III based on the joint definitions as shown in Table 1. An operation was grouped as “Navy” if Navy forces were the sole or predominant forces used. “Joint” operations had relatively balanced forces from two or more services. Of course, Phase III operations were primarily joint except for two cases: the air campaigns over Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 and the air war over Kosovo in 1999. (While a small number of Marine Corps aircraft participated in both, they were employed as part of the coalition air force, not as part of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force.) Thus the zero for the Army and Marines in Phase III does not mean they were not used; it means they were not used independently.

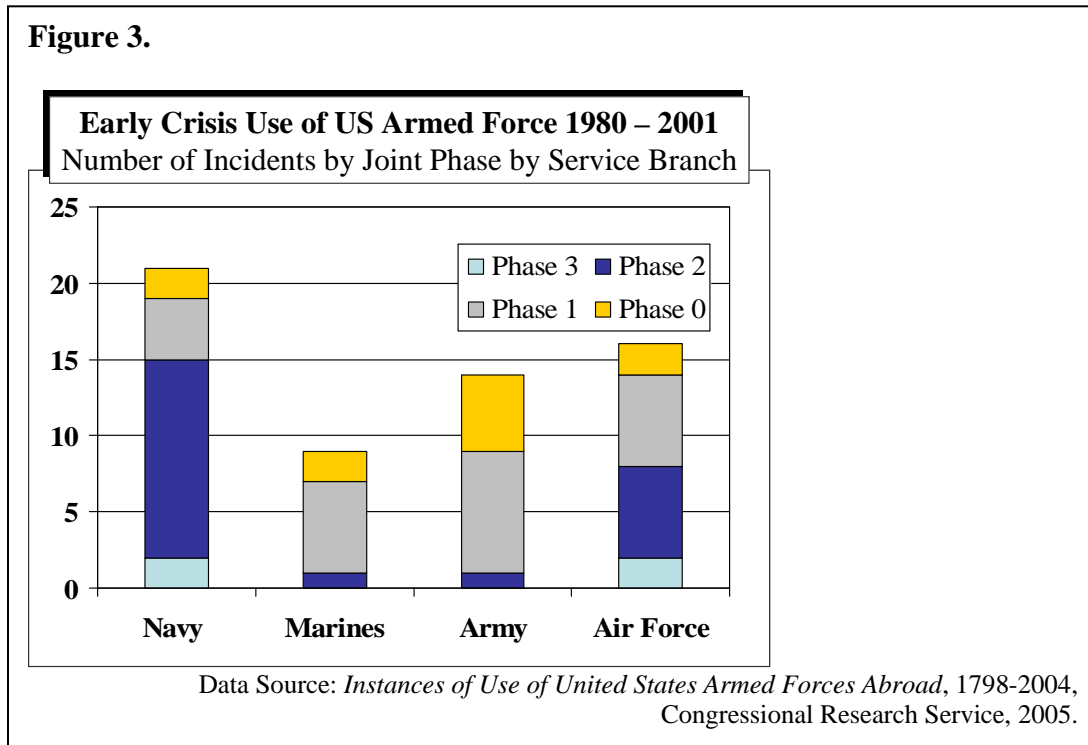
The data set is crude in some ways because a) it fails to account for unnamed operations; b) it does not account for the relative numbers and duration of forces employed; and c) it does not adequately account for SOF operations. However, the data does give a good feel for the varieties of diplomatic and crisis management response, where often even small numbers of forces or rapid, limited force employment can take on significant roles. The results showed an interesting spread of force types across Phase 0 and Phase I. For example, there were many Army deployments of peacekeepers or additional forces (such as the battalion deployed to Kuwait in 1993).

- Notable Phase 0 operations on this list included the USS *Nimitz* transit of the Taiwan Strait in December 1995, and the U.S. Air Force airlift of Belgian troops to Kinshasa in September 1991.
- Typical examples of the many Phase I operations were deployment of an Army brigade-sized force to Panama in May 1989; the Air Force airdrop of relief supplies to Bosnian Muslims surrounded by Serbs in February 1993; and the Navy’s role in the Egyptian airliner intercept in October 1985.
- Phase II incidents from this period include the failed April 1980 Iran hostage rescue; Operation El Dorado Canyon in 1986; the Army Quick Reaction Force in Somalia in 1993; Operation Desert Fox in December 1998; and the East Timor United Nations (UN) support in October 1999.

It is interesting that the named Phase 0 operations were fewer in number than the Phase I and Phase II operations. Across Phase I, armed forces were used in tailored packages depending on the type of action desired. Most instances focused on one type of force element and a large number involved Army forces.

Probably the stand-out data is the dominance of Navy forces in Phase II. Figure 3 shows the use of forces by phase and by service branch (here omitting the “joint” column which appeared in Table 1). The bulk of the 13 incidents of Phase II operations came from operations in and around the Persian Gulf: the tanker re-flagging incidents in the late 1980s, and enforcement of UN sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s. Within this Operation Praying Mantis in 1988 was a stand-out. Navy operations to implement the UN embargo against Haiti from October 1993 to April 1994 also counted as one instance in Phase II. So did the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile strikes on Iraqi targets in June 1993 and on the suspected bin Laden camp in August 1998.

The data for Phase II documents a distinct role for Navy forces in seizing initiative and in providing unique means to act in a crisis through dominance of the maritime domain. Use of Navy forces stood out far more in Phase II than in Phase 0 and Phase I, where at least according to this data, each type of armed force has its own role to play.



In October 2007, the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard unveiled a new, tri-service maritime strategy. The document, titled *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, marked a sharp departure from traditional U.S. naval strategies that had focused largely on command of the sea and the employment of conventional naval and amphibious power against asymmetrical adversaries at sea and on land. The new strategy recognized that new, asymmetric challenges were now the most stressing threat to U.S. global interests. In addition, the new strategy elevated so called soft power and the humanitarian as well as economic efforts have been elevated to the same level as high-end warfare.¹⁹

A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower envisioned new and very different roles for U.S. maritime forces. The strategy envisioned U.S. maritime forces that remained postured for global operations and forward deployed. Forward deployed forces would have sufficient combat power to protect vital sea lanes, shape their immediate environments, limit the possibility of regional conflicts, deter major-power war, and should deterrence fail, win wars as part of a joint or combined campaign. Significantly

¹⁹ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, October 2007. Available at: <http://www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf>

for the purposes of this paper, the new strategy pays particular attention to the maintenance of local sea control and unimpeded access to important sea lines of communications.

U.S. maritime forces had a significant role to play in denying unconventional threats the use of the seas either as a means for movement and communications, or as a platform from which attacking the U.S., our friends and allies, and vital interests. Equally important, U.S. maritime forces would take greater responsibility for policing the global commons and addressing common threats such as piracy, drug smuggling and weapons proliferation.

Another new mission for U.S. maritime forces is to create operational bonds with partners facing similar challenges. Many states lack the ability to police their own maritime sphere or to operate in concert with others in their region. Helping such nations improve their capacity to operate in the maritime domain will both reduce the threats to their sovereignty and stability. As the maritime skills of partner nations improve, they become more capable of operating alongside U.S. maritime forces. For the U.S. there is the additional benefit inherent in the ability of partners to conduct integrated maritime operations. Properly trained, equipped and exercised, local forces not only can provide valuable additional maritime assets, but act as a force multiplier through the provision of intelligence and unique situational awareness. The ability to conduct integrated operations will require enhancing interoperability with multinational partners possessing varying levels of technology.

In addition, the U.S. is committed to building its relationship with other nations. The strategy recognizes that trust and cooperation must be built over time, so that the strategic interests of the participants are continuously considered while mutual understanding and respect are promoted. Building and reinvigorating these relationships requires an increased focus on capacity-building, humanitarian assistance, regional frameworks for improving maritime governance, and cooperation in enforcing the rule of law in the maritime domain.

The Future of Shaping Activities

Overall, current shaping missions are marked by significant differences in policy and procedure. The Combatant Commanders now direct and set the agenda for most shaping initiatives. These may range from ongoing humanitarian assistance to enhanced, clandestine ISR to multi-national exercises to counter-proliferation initiatives to major force deployments and movements in an escalating crisis. U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) policy has also become a guiding force for military shaping. Theater Security Cooperation Plans (TSCPs) for engagement with regional actors are a major element. Another is the emphasis on strategic communication of U.S. government themes.

While some of the politics have changed, the tools of Navy shaping against Iran in the Persian Gulf are even more important today. Navy Component Commanders develop the fleet schedules and other activities that form core inputs for any shaping strategy. The

utility of Navy forces comes from their ability to exert control through Phase 0 presence and to dominate but contain conflict in Phase II actions. As joint doctrine makes clear, Phase III and beyond requires a joint approach. However, as the cases demonstrate, the Navy has a powerful role in options just short of major conflict.

Iran and the Persian Gulf States are well aware of this legacy. “Do you think those U.S. warships are out there on vacation?” Saudi King Abdullah was said to have asked that of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a March 2007 summit meeting.²⁰

Navy forces again proved uniquely valuable in the enhanced confrontation with Iran. At the root of the confrontation was Iran’s continued support for terrorist groups, and its renewed work on nuclear technology. Reports also indicated that Iran might be aiding and supplying insurgents in Iraq – hardly a surprise if true, given the history between the two countries. It is extremely important under such circumstances to clearly signal to Iran that it does not have a free hand in the region and that its options for using force to achieve its regional objectives are quite limited. The political value of U.S. naval forces in communicating these points is clearly on the minds of U.S. diplomats:

The Middle East isn’t a region to be dominated by Iran. The [Persian] Gulf isn’t a body of water to be controlled by Iran. That’s why we’ve seen the United States station two carrier battle groups in the region.²¹

The impact of naval deployments on political risk calculations is not limited to potential U.S. adversaries. With European and regional leaders intent on political approaches to dealing with the dangers posed by Iran, the U.S. option for showing resolve with Navy forces became even more important. In 2006, the U.S. began using Navy forces in a signaling and deterrence role. While ostensibly assisting U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the *Eisenhower* battle group was also sending a clear signal to Iran.

In the years ahead, Navy shaping operations remain a flexible tool and one with powerful continuity well understood by the region’s key actors. Warfighting remains the central task, but shaping and influence operations at certain periods in time take on a critical mass so vital that they dominate Navy tasking. Where Iran is concerned, this is one of those times.

Naval Options for Influencing Iran

The U.S. Navy can be an enormously powerful instrument of policy. There is no question that in the event of conflict with Iran, the Navy could exert tremendous pressure through its ability to contest and counter Iranian military moves in the waters around the Strait of Hormuz. Equally important, the U.S. Navy has many potential opportunities to influence Iran during peacetime and in the event of a crisis. The ensuing discussion will examine naval options for influencing Iran short of those involving a deliberate conflict.

²⁰ Christopher Dickey, “A Desert’s Lion in Winter,” *Newsweek*, April 9, 2007.

²¹ “US Ships Headed to Middle East Called a Warning to Iran,” Associated Press, January 24, 2007.

Prospective options are grouped according to the phasing model discussed above. Under each phase, a number of prospective options are identified.

Unlike the other services, the Navy has extensive direct experience with the Iranian military and the Republican Guard. U.S. and Iranian ships pass in close proximity on a regular basis. When operating in the enclosed environment of the Persian Gulf, it is necessary to interact with other parties using the same space, including those that are potential adversaries. This is an important base on which to develop influence or shaping options.

Shaping the Regional Environment (Phase 0)

The U.S. Navy has maintained a presence in the Middle East region, in general, and the Persian Gulf, in particular, for many decades. In itself, this presence helps to shape the regional environment. The presence of U.S. warships in the Gulf has become somewhat routine. At the same time, all parties in the region are quite sensitive to changes in that presence. Changes in the number and types of naval vessels deployed inevitably send a message to friends and foes alike.

U.S. diplomats view the deployment of naval forces as adding to the effectiveness of political actions. They provide for reassurance of allies, act as a warning to would-be aggressors and serve as clear evidence of U.S. interest in and commitment to the region. One senior diplomat made the point very succinctly:

We have stationed two carrier battle groups in the Gulf to reassure our friends in the Arab world that it remains an area of vital importance to us.²²

The presence of U.S. naval force can shape the regional environment in many ways. One that is often overlooked is the ability of naval assets to collect intelligence on a wide range of activities. Maritime domain awareness, the development of a common operating picture of the movement of ships and aircraft through the Persian Gulf, is a critical tool supporting both national and homeland security. Intelligence can provide warning of emerging dangers allowing the United States to act to head them off. The presence of Navy platforms may, in some instances, engender restraint on the part of adversaries out of a fear of detection. The U.S. Navy uses a wide range of assets including surface vessels, manned and unmanned aerial platforms and submarines, to collect intelligence.

Managing the balance of forces

The most straightforward way the U.S. Navy can shape the regional environment in the Persian Gulf is by altering its force dispositions in that area. Both the quantity and quality of deployments can be adjusted in response to circumstances. In effect, force deployments can be treated as a political-military “rheostat” to be used to help establish a more stable environment. A change in naval force levels or the character of deployed forces can communicate a number of messages simultaneously. The most obvious

²² R. Nicholas Burns, *op.cit.* p.3.

change in force posture is associated with the movement of carrier battle groups. With respect to deployment of two carriers to the Persian Gulf in April, 2008, Director for Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant General Carter Ham said:

It allows us to do a couple of things, by doing that. First, it provides some additional capability to our commanders in the region for additional air power, which is always a good thing. It allows us also to demonstrate to our friends and allies in the region a commitment to security in the region. And importantly, from a military – from a tactical standpoint, operating two carriers in the same maritime and same airspace simultaneously allows us to practice some tactics, techniques and procedures which are very, very useful to us in a relatively constrained area.²³

The U.S. Navy has a range of other assets that it can deploy in the Persian Gulf to ensure an adequate balance of forces. These include both SSNs and SSGNs. Expeditionary Strike Groups could provide a responsive land attack capability, something particularly valuable during the latter stages of an exit from Iraq.

As U.S. forces are withdrawn from Iraq and the region, Washington may see it as advisable to increase its naval presence in the region in order to ensure a stable level of military power. Such force deployments can be calibrated to provide additional sea control, land attack and amphibious capabilities as needed. The U.S. has plans to maintain land-based rapid response forces in Kuwait for the duration of the mission in Iraq and probably thereafter. Sea-based forces could complement those deployed on land.

It is important that the U.S. government articulate the general strategy and purpose behind its long-term force deployment plans. Also, the United States should make explicit the kinds of conditions that would alter these plans. In the past, the routine deployment transition of one carrier strike group for another has been exaggerated in some of the media as preparations for an attack on Iran. There is some value in uncertainty. But there is also a value in clarity.

CENTCOM and the Office of the Secretary of Defense need to consider what would constitute a stable and robust presence in the Gulf area. It should consider making the general character of that capability known publicly. Changes in naval force deployments could be identified as contributing to the maintenance of a stable balance of forces in the region. Moreover, in the event Iran seeks to increase its military capabilities, then additional naval forces could be deployed to counterbalance them and maintain overall stability. At the same time, not all deployments should be “telegraphed” to Teheran. Altering deployments to the Gulf region on a somewhat unpredictable schedule provides the CENTCOM Commander another tool with which to “communicate” with Iran and potentially deter them by maintaining an element of tactical and operational uncertainty, while at same time demonstrating strategic (Navy) depth.

²³Director for Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant General Carter Ham and Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant General John Sattler, “Press Conference,” Pentagon, April 30, 2008.

The new administration is currently developing its own national security strategy and related force posture requirements, and associated defense budgets. It is likely that tightening budgets will force reductions in current force levels. In making choices of where to reduce forces it is important that the administration recognize two facts. First, a robust naval presence in the Persian Gulf is critical to U.S. national security and the ability to influence Iran. Second, because of the distances involved, for every ship deployed in the Persian Gulf, the Navy needs at least three more in the fleet to address rotations, streaming time and maintenance requirements. Even seemingly small reductions in the size of the fleet can have enormous consequences for the U.S. Navy's presence in the Persian Gulf.

Confidence-building measures

Since the late 1970s, the Persian Gulf has been a region of extraordinary tensions. Since that time the U.S. Navy has been engaged in two declared conflicts, Desert Shield/Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), several military engagements and a host of other military operations. In addition, the region has had internal conflicts such as the 1979-1989 Iran-Iraq War. U.S. naval forces and those of some two dozen navies continually navigate the congested waters of the Persian Gulf. It is no surprise that incidents involving military forces such as the Exocet missile strike on the USS *Stark* in May 1987 and the January 2008 confrontation between Iranian patrol boats and U.S. Navy warships continue to occur.

It is all too easy to think that the only U.S. naval options for influencing Iran are those intended to counter the latter's negative behaviors. Far more intriguing is the possibility to employ the U.S. naval presence in the region in ways that might encourage positive behavior by Teheran. Given the parlous state of the current relationship between Washington and Teheran, efforts to develop a more positive relationship should start with small, concrete steps that benefit both sides and demonstrate the potential for cooperative endeavors.

Iran and the United States have been in a state of near total confrontation for almost 30 years. Since the Iranian revolution, the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran have had virtually no direct communications. Even their indirect engagements have been limited. There are other areas where this lack of communications is dangerous for all parties. According to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, "I do not have a direct link with my counterpart in the Iranian Navy. I don't have a way to communicate directly with the Iranian Navy or Guard."²⁴ Even more challenging is the gulf that exists between the U.S. Navy and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command (IRGC) which also maintains a significant naval force. Recent incidents involving U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf have involved IRGC units, not forces of the Iranian Navy.

The reality is, however, that Iran and the United States do talk to one another constantly. They do so in the context of day-to-day operations in the Persian Gulf that they refuse to

²⁴ Jon Alterman and Daniel Murphy, "The U.S.-Iranian Naval Incident," *Critical Questions*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 17, 2008.

talk about. These are not formal communications, but rather the tactical exchanges necessitated by ships operating in close proximity. But in the cramped sea routes of the Persian Gulf, U.S. and Iranian military forces communicate daily as they traverse the narrow boundaries of the Gulf. As one senior U.S. naval officer observed:

We are operating very close to their territorial waters in a very confined space with a tremendous amount of traffic, be it the small dhows, be it the supertankers going up to the oil platforms... The margin of error is smaller in that the space is more confined. That would be the case even if anyone was your ally, just because of the sheer small size of the Arabian Gulf.²⁵

One approach that can be employed to shape the region's political environment and, at the same time, address specific issues is the development of so-called Confidence Building Measures. CBMs are intended to reduce fear and suspicion and to make the behavior of states more predictable. Typically, CBMs involve exchanging information, particularly regarding the status and activities of armed forces and the creation of agreed mechanisms to verify this information.

A recent study by a reputable non-profit institution identified naval CBMs as one avenue for establishing some degree of official communications between Iran and the United States and at the same time addressing immediate, practical security issues. The study proposed an effort to articulate CBMs related to major security issues. Related to this was the proposal that CBMs start with practical and operational challenges in areas of common interest, such as incidents at sea, drug trafficking and border control.²⁶ Success in these areas would result in a number of benefits for U.S. security and that of the region. Agreed on "rules of the road" and communications channels for dealing with incidents at sea or interdiction of drug trafficking would benefit U.S. naval operations in the Persian Gulf.

The United States could also seek to cooperate with Iran on a limited basis in carefully selected areas. One of these might be counter narcotics and smuggling. Such cooperation could begin most simply with the U.S. Navy/Coast Guard offering to keep the Iranian Navy apprised of U.S. patrol activities. This could then be expanded with exchanges of information on illicit activities and possibly a U.S. offer to provide Iran with data from tactical ISR platforms. This type of cooperation was successfully undertaken by Great Britain in the 1990s.²⁷

The U.S. Navy should pursue discussions with Iran on CBMs not directly, but through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The focus should be on engaging the Iranian Navy and not the IRGC. Discussions should be very low key and designed to address issues of mutual interest.

²⁵ U.S. Navy Captain Sterling Gilliam Jr., quoted in Borzou Daragahi, "U.S., Iran do Persian Gulf squeeze." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 2007, p. A4.

²⁶ *The Future of Gulf Security*, Project Summary Report, The Stanley Foundation, p. 12.

²⁷ Riccardo Redaelli, *Why Selective Engagement? Iranian and Western Interests Are Closer Than You Think*, Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, June 2008, p. 9.

Operate with allies

As discussed above, the new U.S. naval strategy places great emphasis on cooperation with allies and the development of indigenous naval capabilities. This is an area that has seen tremendous progress since 2001, driven by the demands of the Global War on Terror. The U.S. Navy has conducted numerous exercises involving global allies as well as nations in the Middle East. Many of these exercises are focused on operations other than war, such as humanitarian assistance and civil support.

Effective Theater Security Cooperation activities are a form of extended deterrence, creating security and removing conditions for conflict. Maritime ballistic missile defense will enhance deterrence by providing an umbrella of protection to forward-deployed forces and friends and allies, while contributing to the larger architecture planned for defense of the United States. Our advantage in space – upon which much of our ability to operate in a networked, dispersed fashion depends – must be protected and extended. We will use forward based and forward deployed forces, space-based assets, sea-based strategic deterrence and other initiatives to deter those who wish us harm.²⁸

There are a number of examples of what the Navy has been doing to improve cooperation with U.S. allies. In November 2007 the U.S. Navy began a series of exercises in the Gulf and wider Gulf waters involving a U.S. aircraft carrier and two expeditionary assault ships. The five-day crisis response exercise also involved amphibious, air and medical forces. The start of the exercises coincided with world powers agreeing at talks in London to move ahead with a third round of sanctions against Iran, unless reports indicate Teheran has tried to address their concerns about its nuclear program. The purposes of the deployments and associated exercise were described thusly by a Navy spokesman:

Our primary goal is to enforce maritime security including the free flow of commerce through the Gulf for all regional partners ... We are committed to keeping the Strait of Hormuz open to ensure that there is a free flow of commerce throughout the region.²⁹

Cooperative activities and exercises can also be conducted to address scenarios other than potential conflicts. In 2007 the U.S. Navy participated in a crisis response exercise in the region. Phase I was a table-top discussion which focused on the planning phase of the exercise. Phase II moved operational assets into action and transported relief supplies and equipment ashore from USS *Wasp* (LHD 1) to a staging base in Bahrain. The exercise scenario involved a tropical cyclone that devastates a notional regional nation, destroying its critical infrastructure, shutting down its international airport, desalination and electrical plants, and displacing thousands of citizens. Additionally, the scenario

²⁸ Admiral Gary Roughhead, Chief of Naval Operations, Statement before the House Armed Services Committee on *The Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, December 13, 2007, p. 6.

²⁹ “US Navy Starts Exercises in Gulf Waters,” Reuters News Service, November 2, 2007.

included an oil spill from a damaged tanker at sea. According to Rear Admiral Terence E. McKnight, Combined Task Force (CTF) 59 commander:

One cannot predict when or where a natural disaster is going to take place. But we can train to improve our response when a host nation requests our assistance. Coalition forces are committed to helping a host nation that requests our assistance by providing support, security and stability to the region.³⁰

The Navy is aggressively conducting Maritime Security Operations (MSOs) in the region. MSOs are operations intended to combat sea-based terrorism and other illegal activities, such as hijacking, piracy and human trafficking. The CENTCOM Coalition Maritime Forces Component and its subordinate CTFs 150, 152 and 158 are designed to conduct multinational coalition security activities in the region. Creating Combined Maritime Forces is important in signaling to adversaries we are not acting alone. CTF-150, established near the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom with logistics facilities at Djibouti, is tasked to monitor, inspect, board, and stop suspect shipping to pursue the Global War on Terror in the Horn of Africa. Countries recently contributing to CTF-150 include Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Other nations who have participated include Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. The command of the task force rotates among the different participating navies, with commands usually lasting between four to six months. The task force usually comprises 14 or 15 vessels.

Established in March 2004, CTF-152 is responsible for conducting MSOs in the central and southern Persian Gulf. CTF-158 is an international naval task group, set up as a result of OIF to operate in Iraqi waters. It consists of naval assets from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, the Royal Australian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy working alongside elements of the Iraqi Navy and the Iraqi Marines.

Cooperation involves far more than simply hosting U.S. forces. A wide range of advisory, training, and exercise activity takes place with Southern Gulf states, as well as British and sometimes French forces, at the multilateral level.³¹ Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) conducts various maritime security conferences and symposiums in its area of responsibility, such as the Maritime Infrastructure Protection Symposium, in Bahrain February 26-28, 2008. Fifth Fleet subordinate units conduct mine hunting and sweeping exercises and operations as well as explosive ordnance disposal. The Task Force's Mine Countermeasure (MCM) ships perform surveys throughout the Arabian Gulf. These activities help ensure the sea lines of communication remain open, guaranteeing the free flow of commerce in and out of the region.

The lack of interoperability, specialization and orientation around key missions leaves most Southern Gulf navies with only limited ability to cooperate. So does a lack of

³⁰ "CTF 59, Coalition Forces Conduct Crisis Response Exercise," Combined Task Force 59 Public Affairs, November 2, 2007.

³¹ Anthony Cordesman, *Conventional Armed Forces in the Gulf*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 23, 2008, p. 3.

effective airborne surveillance, modern mine warfare ships, and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities.³² To achieve interoperability, an increase in the number of training exercises with regional navies, either at the bilateral or multilateral level, is expected. Also required will be the establishment of standard operating procedures and doctrine, and the creation of a common data link for shared and improved situational awareness.³³

Maritime Domain Awareness

While the U.S. Navy has many options for Phase 0, there are some areas where gaps have been identified. An important policy recommendation is to consider improvement that will enhance shaping operations. One of these is boosting surveillance capabilities and improving allied participation in maritime domain awareness. Closely linked to other Phase 0 shaping operations is the need to establish and maintain maritime domain awareness. Challenges such as maintaining tracks on non-emitting vessels that don't respond to hails can make a major difference in the maritime environment. Surveillance to feed the maritime picture can be accomplished by many types of sensors and platforms. What's needed is a careful fusion of information into a common picture followed by dissemination to players who need it.

Deterring Hostile Actions (Phase I)

A central focus of U.S. military deployments in the Persian Gulf is to deter Iran from taking actions deemed inimical to U.S. interests. The presence of U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, and since 1991 in Kuwait, is a visible demonstration of the U.S. interest in the region and commitment to secure its national interests and defend allies.

Iran's principal behaviors of concern to the United States include its nuclear program, support for extremist groups in the region, assistance to anti-U.S. forces in Iraq and efforts to undermine U.S. allies in the region. In addition, Iran's efforts to develop asymmetric capabilities designed to hold at risk U.S. forces and allies in the region or to contest movement in the Gulf must also be considered as potentially destabilizing moves. U.S. planners must consider the possibility that Iran may threaten to resort to military force in the event the pressures on Teheran to change its behaviors become intolerable.

Deterrence must include a clear message to Iran that it cannot alter the strategic situation in the region through the use of force, regardless of how much it may try. In recent years, Iran has engaged in a series of information operations (IO) intended to create the impression that it is capable of exerting its military power in the Persian Gulf. Iranian sources claim the Islamic Republic's navy can close the Gulf. To accomplish this, Iran is relying on a so-called strategy of asymmetric warfare, in essence guerrilla warfare at sea.³⁴

³² *Ibid*, p. 3.

³³ Zia Mir, "Fifth Fleet Chief commits to Regional Cooperation," *Jane's Defense Week*, July 16, 2008, p. 32.

³⁴ "A New Line of Defense," *Jane's Defense Week*, January 28, 2009, pp. 28-31.

The United States, together with its allies, needs to conduct its own IO campaign. This campaign should be accompanied by clear demonstrations – through exercises, fleet deployments and cooperative activities with allies – that the United States can rapidly defeat Iran’s asymmetric warfare strategy.

The heart of deterrence and dissuasion is the promise of unacceptable consequences for the target nation. The recipient of the deterrent/dissuasion message must either fear his fate too much or his gain too small to continue his behavior. In other words, he must be confronted by the likelihood that the United States will impose unacceptable costs or that it will negate the effects of the target’s actions. Deterrence theory suggests a number of potential options: preemption/first strike, retaliation, and defenses either alone or in combination. It may be possible to threaten preemption or retaliation with conventional forces even against a nuclear armed adversary, although the persuasiveness of a non-nuclear response to a nuclear threat is uncertain.

It is important that a deterrence/dissuasion strategy to the greatest extent possible be collective in nature, involving U.S. allies in the region. Obviously, the support of allies would be important to the implementation of most deterrent threats. Equally important, there should be no doubt in the minds of Iran’s leaders that the U.S. and its allies are in agreement regarding responses to Iranian actions. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for greater cooperation among the Gulf nations in the areas of air and missile defense and monitoring of local waters as a means of deterring Iran.³⁵ The fact that the United States and its allies, particularly the GCC states, are undertaking serious contingency planning should be part of the deterrent message to Iran.

Offensive deterrent options

What kinds of offensive military options might the United States need either to supplement its economic, diplomatic and other tools of dissuasion or to dissuade Iran from resorting to military force? Options for the use of force must be credible and appropriate to the nature of the activities which the U.S. is seeking to deter. At the same time, the U.S. must indicate that it can escalate beyond the ability of the Iranian military to respond. Speaking to the idea of using the threat of disproportionate military action to dissuade hostile Iranian actions, defense analyst Anthony Cordesman points out that:

This could mean at least demonstrating U.S. capability to carry out far more punitive strikes. Iran is vulnerable in other areas. The U.S. has no interest in the survival of its gas facilities, power grid, or refineries. It may have underground nuclear facilities, but its reactor facility is vulnerable and so are its military production facilities. Asymmetric warfare is not simply the province of the weak; it is also the province of the strong.³⁶

³⁵ Ann Scott Tyson, “Iran Aims ‘To Foment Instability,’ Gates Says,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2007, p. A27.

³⁶ Anthony Cordesman, *Covering US Military Options for Dealing with Iran*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, April 30, 2008.

Deterrent options often require a degree of visibility or public disclosure that are not always consonant with the desired degree of secrecy and surprise that operational consideration would warrant. It is reported that most U.S. Navy ships transit the Strait of Hormuz at night, so as not to attract attention, and rarely in large numbers. On at least one occasion, however, a daylight transit was conducted. Depending on specific circumstances, one relatively straightforward option available to the Navy would be to make certain transits occur during the day and/or in relatively large numbers.

Without question, naval forces would play a prominent part of any strike options against Iran. As noted above, the U.S. has periodically deployed carrier battle groups to the Gulf as a reminder of U.S. offensive and defensive capabilities. The Navy has the option under the Fleet Response Plan to surge carrier forces to the Gulf. This would be a highly visible and potentially provocative action that should only be taken when there is a requirement to send the strongest signal to Teheran.

A possible alternative deterrent option could be to deploy one or more of the Navy's four SSGNs to the Gulf region. Unlike the carrier option this would not be a visible deterrent, but could be done with the appropriate information campaign that made clear that the United States was deploying assets of this type to the region.

Defensive deterrent options

Iran has repeatedly sought to pursue its own deterrence strategy. This has centered on the threat to contest transit of the Persian Gulf or otherwise interfere with the flow of oil. The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini warned that, "If the Americans make a wrong move toward Iran, the shipment of energy will definitely face danger, and the Americans would not be able to protect energy supply in the region."³⁷

Iran has deployed a broad range of capabilities to threaten both civilian and military shipping in the Gulf. This includes a large number of small surface vessels, submarines, sea mines, shore-based anti-shipping cruise missiles and manned aircraft.³⁸ This capability is intended to enforce an anti-access strategy. The former commander of CENTCOM, Admiral William Fallon, said Iran's increasing military capabilities were focused on blocking U.S. military operations. "Based on my read of their military hardware acquisitions and development of tactics ... they are posturing themselves with the capability to attempt to deny us the ability to operate in this vicinity."³⁹

The Navy can provide options to counter Iranian threats to itself and commercial shipping in the Gulf, thereby potentially deterring not only such attacks but undercutting a main pillar of Iran's effort to create its own asymmetric deterrent threat. The principal

³⁷ Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., James Phillips, and William L. T. Schirano, "Countering Iran's Oil Weapon," *Backgrounder No. 1982*, The Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, November 13, 2006.

³⁸ Fariborz Haghshenas, *Iran's Asymmetric Naval Warfare*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus Number 87, September 2008, pp. 12-22.

³⁹ Ann Scott Tyson and Glenn Kessler, "Centcom pick Hears of Iran Influence in Gulf Region," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2007, p. A11.

deterrent the Navy can provide is the capability to surge large and capable forces into the Gulf region. Such a force must be able to conduct a wide range of missions, strike a broad range of both sea and land-based targets, conduct demining and ASW operations, and engage in comprehensive ISR.

As the Navy surges into the Gulf it will have to deal with a number of Iranian anti-access threats. But in order to deal with some threats such as sea mines and small boats, it will be necessary for U.S. forces to establish air dominance. The combination of F/A-18-E/Fs, F-18 Growler electronic warfare aircraft and, when they are deployed, F-35 Joint Strike Fighters will give the Navy a powerful tool to contribute to what will be a joint fight for air dominance.

Successful air dominance will include area air and missile defense. The defense against cruise missiles is a challenge the Navy is preparing to address. Its Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air (NIFC-CA) system is a system-of-systems that will link sensors, aircraft, ships and even land-based air defense missiles into a capability that can neutralize large numbers of targets at long-ranges and all altitudes. This improvement is essential because missile defense has become a multi-layered problem. Threats come from short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, or a combination of both. Cruise missiles can be launched from land or sea, further complicating the problem. The Navy needs to continuously improve its capabilities so as to maintain unfettered access near Iran.

For example, central to NIFC-CA is the new E-2D Advanced Hawkeye. The E-2D will not only expand the Navy's surveillance capability, but also for the first time will enable naval and joint forces to conduct effective defenses against cruise missile threats. The E-2D can draw threat data from its own sensors and other ISR systems, establish engagement priorities and match available weapons to targets. Demonstrating this capability in the Gulf could be a significant deterrent to Iranian aggression.

In a January 6, 2008 incident, five small Iranian high-speed boats charged U.S. warships and perhaps even threatened to blow up the ships. In mid December 2007, a U.S. ship fired a warning shot at a small Iranian boat that came too close, causing the Iranians to pull back. Iran has an inventory of 195 patrol boats and small surface combatants. Most of these are armed, at best, with machine guns and small-caliber cannons. Iran has three frigates, ten fast attack craft and another dozen patrol boats armed with anti-ship cruise missiles.

One experienced naval officer referred to incidents like these as an Iranian desire to "scrape paint" with a U.S. warship. Incidents remembered by those serving in the Gulf showed a determined, committed face of Iran's navy. Professional as they may be on most occasions, the clear impression is one that crews can be very determined and opportunistic as they "shape back" with posturing activities directed at the U.S. and other nations.

The U.S. has a range of options for dealing with the small boat threat. Navy surface combatants, rotary and fixed wing aircraft all can be deployed against the Iranian surface threat. In the near future, the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) equipped with the anti-ship module will be an extremely effective means of countering limited Iranian small boat operations.

One deterrent option that falls in the U.S. Navy's domain of expertise is ASW. Iran has three Russian-built Kilo diesel-electric submarines. These are armed with advanced torpedoes and sea-mines. More than half of Iran's inventory of modern mines is only deployable by the Kilos. The U.S. Navy is seeking to rehone skills in ASW lost after the end of the Cold War. The Navy will need rapidly to find and neutralize Iran's submarine capability. Here the LCS, now employing ASW modules, will be extremely effective. So too the Virginia Class SSN with its improved sonar, mast-mounted sensors and weapons launchers.

Iran also is seeking to develop a credible missile threat to its neighbors and to U.S. military bases in the region.⁴⁰ The deployment of effective missile defenses could dissuade Iran from pursuing what is a very extensive military option or, at the very least, reduce the effectiveness of any Iranian missile operations. The United States maintains at least one Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) battery in Kuwait and is assisting Israel in the development and operation of its long-range missile defenses.

The U.S. Navy is planning to deploy the Aegis ballistic missile defense system (BMDS) on dozens of surface combatants. This capability could add immeasurably to U.S. capabilities to defeat the threat, and hence to dissuade Iran from pursuing a very expensive military capability. This effort could begin with a series of exercises and demonstrations in the Gulf. In June 2008 the U.S. Navy conducted a coordinated naval missile defense exercise in the eastern Mediterranean and northern Persian Gulf. This exercise demonstrated data sharing and the ability to track ballistic missiles along multiple flight trajectories.⁴¹

Missile defenses can also serve to reassure allies such as Israel, making it potentially less likely that they would react to a perceived threat from Iran with offensive action against that nation. But for this option to be credible, the U.S. would have to permanently station several Aegis-capable ships in the Persian Gulf and possibly also in the Black Sea. In addition, the Navy will need to increase the number of Aegis-capable warships equipped with the new anti-missile capable Standard Missile 2. The challenge for the Navy is that it has too few Aegis BMDS-capable ships armed with an insufficient quantity of missiles.

The U.S. Navy can provide deterrence options in addition to the deployment of sea-based assets. Navy aerial assets can be deployed from land-bases in the region in a visible sign of U.S. engagement, cooperation with allies and capability to support deterrent threats.

⁴⁰ Anthony Cordesman and Adam C. Seitz, *Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: Part V: The Broader Strategic Context*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, December 8, 2008.

⁴¹ Andrew Scutro, "USN Tests Comms for Missile Defense in Mideast Waters," *Defense News*, Vol. 23, No. 27, July 7, 2008, p. 36.

The Navy's E-2 Hawkeye air surveillance/command and control and EP-3 intelligence aircraft provide critical support not only to naval operations but to CENTCOM's overall plans and activities. Deploying these aircraft as early as possible to the Gulf region could demonstrate to Iran the futility of its strategy of deploying anti-shipping cruise missiles.

The United States can also contribute to its deterrence objectives by improving the capabilities of its allies. The United States needs to press the GCC countries to increase their ability to operate as a combined force both among themselves and with U.S. forces. These nations should be convinced to invest in air and missile defense capabilities, ISR, mine warfare and even ASW. In addition, passive defenses including hardening of critical facilities, communications, command and control, and airfields should be encouraged.⁴²

Seize the Initiative/Containing Aggression (Phase II)

The overriding focus of Phase II operations is ensuring the free flow of traffic in the Persian Gulf. This responsibility was made clear by Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, former Commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet when in response to reporters' questions regarding the possibility that Iran might seek to close the Strait of Hormuz, declared that this would be equivalent to "saying to the world that 40 percent of oil is now held hostage by a single country." Cosgriff went on to state that, "We will not allow Iran to close it."⁴³

The primary focus of naval options in Phase II must be preventing Iran from controlling access to the Persian Gulf and interfering with the flow of oil. A secondary focus is to deny Iran the ability to escalate the conflict. In order to achieve both of these objectives, the U.S. Navy must be able to rapidly seize the initiative.

Although the shift from Phase I to Phase II operations means that deterrence has failed, it is unlikely to have failed completely. As has been seen in the past, Iranian aggression may be limited. The IRGC may conduct hostile activities but not the Iranian military. Aggression may take the form of deployment of sea mines but not direct attacks on commercial or military vessels. Iran may take action at sea but not threaten U.S. bases or allies in the region. By ensuring that it is able to respond at the level of aggression demonstrated by Iran, the U.S. Navy can help to contain the aggression without offering a provocation that could lead to escalation.

Crisis communications

One of the important considerations as a crisis evolves into a confrontation or even outright hostilities is to avoid conflict by mistake or miscommunications. This is a particularly important consideration in the crowded and often confusing environment of the Persian Gulf. Good crisis communication is important in complex humanitarian

⁴²Anthony Cordesman, *USCENTCOM and the Future: Establishing the Right Strategic Priorities*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, November 19, 2008, p. 9.

⁴³ Fox News, "U.S. Navy Commander Warns Iran: Don't Try Closing Gulf Oil Passageway," Foxnews.com, July 2, 2008.

situations where there is the potential for the movement of U.S. naval forces to be misinterpreted. For that reason, the U.S. Navy has practiced crisis communications as part of their exercise program in the region (as well as globally).⁴⁴

An outbreak of hostilities in the Persian Gulf would take place in the context of the transformed international news media which will have an effect on how the entire world responds to the situation. Iran will undertake its own IO campaign to influence the behavior of regional parties and world public opinion. As suggested above, it is important for the U.S. Navy to pursue in peacetime options to develop better communications with elements of the Iranian military. Such options might bear unique fruit when it comes to the opening of hostilities.

Crisis communications must be part of the Navy's IO plan. The most likely scenarios involving an outbreak of hostilities should be identified and wargamed. The Navy can provide CENTCOM and the National Command Authority with communications options to support theater operations and global outreach. It is likely that the U.S. Navy and Fifth Fleet have developed a series of options for use in the event of an escalating crisis.

Mine clearance

One characteristic of past confrontations with Iran has been that nation's indirect use of military means. During the so-called Tanker War of the 1980s, the Iranians engaged in limited operations in the Gulf, using sea mines deployed from civilian vessels. Iran could again seek to deploy mines surreptitiously.

The ability to neutralize rapidly the Iranian air and naval threats in the Persian Gulf will also be critical to efforts by U.S. naval forces to counter the Iranian sea mining capability. The Navy has been conducting mine warfare exercises in the Gulf primarily using the aging Avenger-class MCM ships. The Navy is moving to modular counter-mine systems embedded on destroyers, submarines, helicopters and the new LCS. Additional exercises using more modern systems would be a valuable additional demonstration of U.S. capability.

The Navy needs to make plans that will make it easier to surge minesweeping capabilities, both remaining dedicated MCM vessels and newer, more capable remote demining systems, to the Gulf. The U.S. Navy also should encourage the GCC to acquire advanced minesweeping capabilities. Rapid deployment of minesweeping systems would provide an option for countering a major Iranian threat.

Anti-submarine warfare

Over the longer term, one of the more potent threats available to Iran is their fleet of Russian-made Kilo-class attack submarines armed with anti-ship cruise missiles and sea mines. The U.S. Navy will have to move extremely rapidly to neutralize this threat,

⁴⁴ "Communication Key During Crisis Response Exercise," *Navy News Stand*, Story Number: NNS071109-14, November 9, 2007.

particularly before the Kilos can lay mines to hazard the Persian Gulf shipping channels.⁴⁵

One possible option is to destroy the Kilos before they can be deployed. Such a preemptive action could be made conditional on intelligence that they were preparing to deploy. Precision strikes against Iran's submarine platforms could be carried out by Navy strike aircraft and cruise missile-armed ships and submarines.

It is also possible, albeit more difficult, to find, track and engage the Kilos once they are underway. To be successful in such an endeavor, the U.S. Navy will have to deploy a significant number of airborne, surface-based and subsurface ASW platforms and defend these against Iranian air defense and anti-ship capabilities.

Missile defense

The Iranian use of ballistic or cruise missiles could be central to the move from Phase I to Phase II. The ability to rapidly deploy theater missile defenses to protect U.S. facilities and forces and allied territory could help to control the level of violence and deny Iran the initiative.

Sea-based missile defenses are currently the most widely available, deployable and flexible capability available to a theater commander. Aegis BMDS-capable ships could be deployed to provide effective missile defenses of the Gulf region. One or more ships could be routinely deployed in anticipation of an escalating crisis, providing defenses against any Iranian preemptive action. If ships needed to be deployed to the Gulf after hostilities have started, they would be part of a task force in order to provide protection against other Iranian threats. Of course, any ships deployed will have to be on constant guard for threats such as anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM). A robust, credible ability to deal with the most sophisticated ASCMs on the market is vital for maintaining shaping options.

For the longer term, the Navy could have additional missile defense capabilities such as a marinized Kinetic Energy Interceptor (KEI). Such a system could be deployed in the Black Sea or Eastern Mediterranean to defend Europe and the United States against long-range Iranian ballistic missiles.

Blockade

What might be done short of war if Iran moves aggressively to acquire a nuclear weapons capability? One of the most powerful (yet potentially dangerous) options the United States could employ against Iran is a blockade. In 2008, resolutions were introduced in both houses of the U.S. Congress calling on the government to increase pressure on the government of Iran by, among other means, prohibiting the import of refined petroleum

⁴⁵ For a discussion of such a scenario see Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Straits of Hormuz," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Summer 2008, pp. 82-117.

products.⁴⁶ Such a blockade would be an obvious option to consider should Iran engage in its own efforts to interfere with the flow of oil or seek to close the Persian Gulf entirely. But it would also be a potential “weapon of last resort” in the event that non-military efforts to halt Iran’s nuclear program had failed.

Operationally, such an effort would be well within the capacity of the U.S. Navy. It would involve continuing global surveillance to identify cargoes and ships bound for Iran. Halting and inspecting ships is something at which the Navy is very good.

Concluding Points

It is clear that the U.S. Navy has already made and continues to make a significant contribution to shaping the strategic behavior of Iran. The Navy can provide options for the theater commander and the National Command Authority across the spectrum of conflict. What is particularly important is the number and variety of options available to support early shaping activities.

In Phase 0 the Navy can take a leading role in providing means for opening communications with elements of the Iranian military. The development of CBMs would both reduce risks inherent in conducting day-to-day operations in the Gulf and provide an opening for improved communications. The Navy can also have a major positive impact on the security of allies in the region through cooperative exercises, educational activities and the extension of maritime domain awareness. Enhanced cooperation with allies would appear to be the most important option in both Phase 0 and Phase I.

In the event of conflict with Iran, the Navy will have perhaps the most important strategic role of all U.S. forces. The Navy, together with joint and combined forces will be required to ensure that the Gulf remains open to friendly military and commercial traffic and that the movement of oil is not interdicted. The Navy needs to focus on ensuring that it can deal with the most stressing threats to movement in and through the Gulf, specifically sea mines, Iranian submarines and missile-armed patrol craft and nuisance attacks by small, high speed boats including suicide attacks. An additional important role for the Navy is the provision of effective missile defense. The ability to neutralize these threats will contribute significantly to deterrence of Iranian aggression.

If the adversarial situation between the United States and Iran were to persist, then the United States must be able to address the potential improvements that Iran is likely to make in its military capabilities. Among these would be so-called triple digit surface to air missiles (SAMs), advanced sea-skimming cruise missiles with passive radar seekers and more capable ballistic missiles. The counter to these threats would be more and better air and missile defenses.

Cynics often point out that military power is a blunt instrument. In the case of Navy shaping operations short of war, recent experience shows the set of tools to be much finer

⁴⁶ Nicholas Krlev, “Dems Bury Resolution due to War Fears,” *The Washington Times*, September 26, 2008, p. 6.

and well adapted for their tasks. Keeping the Strait of Hormuz open, providing an operational architecture for allies, and hemming in Iranian military options constitute one of the major roles for today's U.S. Navy. Given the high-stakes diplomacy underway now, holding fast on maritime options is indispensable.

Glossary:

ASCM	Anti-Ship Cruise Missile
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
BMDS	Ballistic Missile Defense System
CBM	Confidence Building Measures
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CTF	Combined Task Force
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IO	Information Operations
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JP	Joint Publication
KEI	Kinetic Energy Interceptor
LCS	Littoral Combat Ship
MCM	Mine Countermeasure
MSO	Maritime Security Operations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAVCENT	U.S. Naval Forces Central Command
NIFC-CA	Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PAC-3	Patriot Advanced Capability 3
SAM	Surface to Air Missile
SOF	Special Operations Force
SOSUS	Sound Surveillance System
TSCP	Theater Security Cooperation Plan
UN	United Nations



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