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14. ABSTRACT
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Naval Presence with a Purpose:
Considerations for the Operational Commander

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

Signature: _____

10 May 2007

Abstract

For centuries Navies around the world have operated under the idea that the mere presence of a warship bearing their flag within sight of a potential adversary's coastline would have an impact on that adversary's political decision making process. This mission of naval presence is still valid in today's world even though many things have changed. Among these many changes are the codification of laws of the sea, increased weapon technology and proliferation, the advancement of the information age and the change in strategic balance of forces around the world. These changes have made the planning and execution of the naval presence mission more difficult, requiring layering of missions, evaluation of threats to the naval forces and incorporation of detailed public affairs and information operations plans. This paper draws several conclusions about what considerations are necessary for the operational commander to evaluate before a naval presence mission is executed. And finally, the paper recommends the establishment of maritime influence operational planning teams within each combatant commander's staff to ensure we are getting the most value out of our limited assets while conducting presence missions throughout the area of responsibility in support of a theater security cooperation plan.

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<u>Introduction</u>

For centuries Navies around the world have operated under the idea that the mere presence of a warship bearing their flag within sight of a potential adversary's coastline would have an impact on that adversary's political decision making process. Today with globalization of the world economy making the world ever smaller and very few nations having a true naval power projection capability, the mere presence of a U.S. Navy ship or strike group may not influence potential adversaries in the same way. Presence remains an inherent subset or precursor for almost any other mission that the Navy conducts. Therefore it is critical for the operational commander to fully understand the need for deploying naval forces to an area of operations, what are the desired short and long term strategic and operational effects and what other missions or tasks must be accomplished to fully realize those effects. Merely deploying a ship to show the flag is no longer an effective use of naval forces that are in increasingly short supply.

<u>Background</u>

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the United States was slowly increasing its influence around the world through commercial interests. As our trade relationships spread throughout South America and the western Pacific regions, the need for protection of those interests increased. At that point in history, there were few methods for projecting influence abroad that were more effective than the presence of a U.S. warship. With the relative lack of long-range communications in that time period, commanding officers of individual warships and the commanders of squadrons and fleets were given broad guidance as to the desires of the U.S. government in their area of operations and were expected to establish

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necessary relationships and solve any problems that arose utilizing their judgment and experience while remaining within those guidelines.

Until the recent rise of strategic airlift capabilities, naval forces were the most readily available and mobile assets available to respond to a crisis situation or to project influence abroad. Even the relatively short history of the United States is replete with examples of the use of naval forces to further U.S. interests through a veiled threat of force. As early as 1855, the US had established a naval presence as far away as China in order to provide "… protection of our valuable trade with China and the Isles of India."[1] This presence in the far east continued for many years at varying levels of effort and expanded even further in August of 1921 when "The US Navy establish[ed] a Yangtse rive patrol 'to protect US interests, lives and property and to maintain and improve friendly relations with the Chinese people'."[2] This move was later summarized in a speech given in 1924 by Secretary of the Navy, Curtis D. Wilbur:

> An American child crying on the banks of the Yangtse a thousand miles from the coast can summon the ships of the American Navy up that river to protect it from unjust assault.[3]

This quotation accurately reflects the employment strategy of the U.S. Navy in the early 20th century. Between the two major world wars (1919-1939), the US deployed naval forces in support of diplomatic and economic objectives 23 times. These deployments reached from the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea to the shores of South America and to Japan and China in the western Pacific.[4] Some of these operations were successful, some were not. The primary recurring theme was the use of forward naval presence as the first and fastest response to a brewing crisis.

This limited use of naval force came to be known as "gunboat diplomacy". Over the years, the rather simple mission of showing the flag as a warning of potential punitive action has grown to include "… demonstrations of good will".[5] This broad mission is commonly referred to as naval presence and has been a persistent stated or implied U.S. Navy mission since the end of World War II. In a 1974 article for the Naval War College Review, VADM Stansfield Turner defined the naval presence mission as follows:

> **Naval Presence Mission**. Simply stated, the naval presence mission is the use of naval forces, short of war to achieve political objectives. The use of presence forces is for two broad objectives:
> - o To deter actions inimical to the interests of the United States or its allies
> - o To encourage actions that are in the interest of the United States or its allies[6]

In 2007, naval presence is no longer enumerated as a stand-alone mission of U.S. naval forces. However, the concept of presence is inherent in all that we do. In the Universal Joint Task List (UJTL) there is only one specified task with presence in the title and it is the strategic-national task 3.1, "Coordinate Forward Presence of Forces in Theaters."[7] In the definition of this task, the UJTL strikes at the heart of the matter by stating that presence "…is a crucial element of deterrence and can be a demonstration of resolve to allies and potential adversaries."[8] In addition to this one task, however, the term presence or forward presence is used in the definition of several other tasks such as operational task 1.2.4.1, "Conduct a Show of Force".[9] This gives credence to the belief that presence is an underlying theme in every mission we undertake as a Navy.

In addition to the UJTL, the U.S. Navy's roadmap to its future 21st Century fleet, known as "Sea Power 21", outlines the three major tenets of "Sea Strike", "Sea Shield" and

"Sea Basing". Inherent in each of these principles is the need for forward, persistent

presence, for without forward presence none of these is achievable.

Through new initiatives such as the Fleet Response Plan, which outlines the core

deployment and readiness plan for the future, "… the Navy has increased its ability to

aggregate and disaggregate the force as required to provide persistent forward presence and

massive combat power."[10] In addition, "We will maintain a critical 'presence with a

purpose' in vital world regions and the ability to respond immediately to emergencies as the

needs arise."[11] In the current parlance, naval presence falls squarely in the realm of regional

engagement under a Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP) generated by each of the

geographic combatant commanders to shape events in their area of responsibility during

"Phase 0" operations. In summarizing the U.S. Navy's operations in the U.S. Central

Command area of responsibility in October 2000, VADM Moore stated,

> The real NAVCENT story is the success and necessity of this forward-deployed presence halfway around the world from the United States. It is within the context of forward presence that the unique attributes of naval forces best support our national interests. We are on station today, and we will be on stations tomorrow. As I said, there is no substitute for being here.[12]

Analysis

A lot of things have changed in the last 100 years which have altered the way that we

look at naval presence as a mission. Despite these changes, the underlying need for naval

presence and the strategic effect it produces has remained constant. The desire to protect

commercial and political interests abroad and to prevent small scale crises from evolving into

full spectrum regional or global wars has not changed. However, in order to understand how

today's operational commander can utilize the presence mission to achieve regional

objectives we must understand some of the fundamental changes in the world.

<u>Law of the Sea</u>

One decisive change has been the creation of universally accepted international laws regarding the conduct of ships at sea. In the late 19th century, when American gunboat diplomacy was in its infancy, there were no codified laws of the sea. Therefore, the idea of territorial waters was really only defined by the size of ocean and amount of your coastline that you could effectively secure and defend. Although some coordination was required for conducting port visits, there was no international law that prohibited the warships of another nation from steaming well within sight of land or anchoring therein. For example, in 1878 the Secretary of the Navy ordered the USS Enterprise to explore the Amazon and Madeira rivers in an attempt to open the interior of Brazil to American commerce.[13] It is extremely doubtful that a sovereign nation in current times would allow such exploration and certainly not by a warship flying the colors of a foreign nation.

In 1982, the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) outlined a universally accepted regime of international law addressing, among other things, the idea of sovereign territorial waters extending from a nation's shoreline.[14] Although entry into this territory is allowed under certain circumstances and with certain restrictions, it certainly prevents a warship from arriving unannounced at a foreign port and visibly showing the flag within sight of the native population. While the restrictions placed on maritime travel by the UNCLOS certainly don't neuter the idea of a warship conducting presence, it does change the nature of presence missions and what is required to induce the desired effect. Indeed the UNCLOS has actually helped the US and other countries more clearly define a subset of the naval presence mission, that of ensuring freedom of navigation. By defining territorial waters and common areas, the UNCLOS allows for the contest of excessive territorial claims.

<u>Weapons Technology & Proliferation</u>

Another significant change has been the increase in the number of nations with a
Navy or Coast Guard and the proliferation of sophisticated weaponry. In the late 19th
century, the number of nations with a sea going Navy was relatively small. Much like today,
there were only a handful of nations that had a blue water Navy capable of projecting power
and influence around the globe. The major European powers, for example, were able to
maintain a presence in South America to project influence and, perhaps more importantly,
protect their trade and commerce in the region. At the same time, RADM Rodgers, the
commander of the U.S. Pacific Squadron, lamented the fact that he had fewer ships in his
own backyard than did several European powers. He summarized the comparative lack of
influence in South American affairs as follows:

> The English have no merchant steam-vessels touching at any of these ports,
> yet their armed vessels frequently drop their anchors in each of those harbors.
> It is revolting to American pride to know that these petty representatives of
> any government, can indulge their oppressive inclinations where the interests
> of Americans only are jeopardized, while they would not dare to do the same
> in any transaction in which the dignity or property of an Englishman was
> involved.[15]

In 2007, there are 154 nations with a viable Navy or Coast Guard.[16] While it is true
that the overwhelming majority of these nations lack the number and type of assets required
to project presence beyond their shores into the vast ocean commons and beyond, they
certainly have the ability to monitor access to their key ports and some of their territorial
waters. In addition, proliferation of advanced technologies has greatly increased the relative
sophistication of these navies and their ability to deter and dissuade the U.S. Navy and others
from conducting presence operations. For example, the Congressional Research Service
(CRS) stated in 2005 that there were approximately 70,000 anti-ship cruise missiles in the

possession of 70 different countries.[17] The effectiveness of these weapons against an

unsuspecting target was conclusively demonstrated in 1987 when an Iraqi Mirage F-1 fired

two Exocet missiles which struck the unsuspecting USS Stark (FFG 31).

In 1984, the war between Iran and Iraq escalated to the point where both sides were

attacking oil tankers in the Arabian Gulf headed to ports of the other belligerent. This new

tactic increased tensions throughout the region as neutral countries in the region began to

worry about attacks on vessels headed to or from their ports and the resultant economic

effects. The United States increased its presence in the Arabian Gulf in an attempt to

demonstrate our interest and resolve in the region. In 1987, STARK and several other U.S.

warships were patrolling throughout the Arabian Gulf. On 17 March, the day STARK was

struck, there were no open hostilities between the US and either Iran or Iraq. The results of

the attack were substantial. Thirty seven American sailors lost their lives that day and the

STARK was almost lost. If not for superb damage control efforts by her crew, the US may

have lost a warship and many more lives that day.

This is a lesson that should not be lost on any operational commander today.

Deploying U.S. warships into littoral regions for any mission, even during conditions of

peacetime, has become increasingly dangerous. The missiles that almost sank STARK were

relatively low technology weapons that have been surpassed in lethality by new supersonic

Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCM) which are on the export market today. For example,

Russia has been exporting supersonic ASCMs such as the SS-NX-27 and the SS-N-26 to

countries such as China and India.[18]

In addition to sophisticated weaponry, presence in the littoral region has become

more dangerous due to asymmetric tactics utilized by our emerging enemies. The most

prominent example of this is the October 2000 attack on the USS COLE (DDG 67) while she was in port Aden, Yemen for refueling. The use of regional ports for refueling meets an operational need while also providing a limited opportunity to show a U.S. presence in neutral or coalition ports. On that day in October, the use of a small boat laden with explosives in a maritime version of the ubiquitous suicide car bomb came as somewhat of a surprise and certainly changed the face of littoral warfare threats. In a matter of seconds, terrorists killed 17 sailors, tore a 40 ft x 60 ft hole in the hull and placed a billion dollar, state of the art Aegis Destroyer out of commission for years.[19] These are just two examples of how a ship or task group sent to "show the flag" are in more significant danger today than in the past.

The Information Age

The third major change in the world is the rampant advances of the "information age". For many reasons, individual nations and individual people are connected through information technology in ways that could not be dreamt of even 50 years ago. The combination of these new technologies with the insatiable public desire for up to the minute news has created an environment where very little that happens on the international stage goes unnoticed or unreported. This presents a critical new challenge at many levels, from the national leadership at the strategic level, down to the young Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine in the field.

It is critical that the conduct of any military operation be supported by an appropriate public affairs plan which outlines the key message(s) that the commander is trying to communicate to the world at large. Joint doctrine defines public affairs (PA) as: "Those public information, command information, and community relations activities directed

toward both the external and internal publics with interest in the Department of Defense."[20] If the PA plan is not sufficiently aligned with the strategic and operational objectives of a mission, unintended consequences may result.

In 2004, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) wanted to demonstrate a new readiness and deployment strategy for U.S. Naval forces, called the Fleet Response Plan (FRP). One of the key tenets of the FRP is the ability to sustain a high level of readiness of forces regardless of where they were in the inter-deployment training cycle. This would allow for forces to be ready to surge forward to respond to a potential crisis significantly faster than in the past. In demonstrating the FRP, the Navy surged several additional Carrier Strike Groups (CSG) from their homeports to forward areas, bringing the total number of CSG's deployed world-wide to seven. However, in preparing for this exercise of the FRP, there appears to have been little proactive PA effort targeted towards potential adversaries to assuage any fears of U.S. intention to create a conflict. The headlines of the Singapore Straits Times from June 30, 2004 (during the beginning of the FRP exercise) reported rather ominously that the "US plans huge show of force in Pacific. Seven Aircraft Carriers to move within striking distance of China…"[21] Of course we can't expect to control the spin placed on a story or the misinterpretation of information by media, but it is interesting to note how different this one interpretation of the facts is from the intended effect of the operation. It may have been prudent to more clearly outline the plan and objectives to the both the domestic and international media audience. In addition to alignment of the PA plan with the strategic message to be conveyed the Information Operations (IO) plan must also be aligned and coordinated to achieve desired effects.

A review of military literature over the last decade would demonstrate the ever increasing importance placed upon the creation and execution of a coordinated Information Operations (IO) plan. Joint doctrine defines IO as, "… the integrated employment of electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), psychological operations (PSYOP), military deception (MILDEC), and operations security (OPSEC), in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own."[22] While a PA plan is targeted primarily at the civilian population and civilian leadership, IO plans are targeted at the military leadership and their decision making processes.

The point of the presence mission has always inherently been to affect the decision making process of another country's military and political leadership. A goal which aligns very well with the definition of IO provided above. However, the alignment of a PA and IO plan will inherently be difficult due to the different objectives of each. To examine this further, let's assume that the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) has been assigned a mission to conduct presence operations with surface forces near the coastline of a potential adversary that possesses ASCMs, among other naval weaponry. On one hand, it would be crucial for the PA plan to explain the strategic and operational goals of the operation. For example, the PA plan may release information stating that U.S. naval forces were deploying to the area in response to recent events in order to demonstrate US resolve and commitment to regional allies. However, the IO plan will attempt to mitigate the risks posed by operation of forces close to the shores of a well armed, potential adversary. The IO plan will utilize the key tenets of EW, MILDEC and OPSEC to disrupt the ability of the potential adversary's military to locate and target the U.S. forces. This illuminates the

inherent dichotomy between public affairs and information operations. On one side, you need to be noticed by the target nation in order to accomplish your mission however, you don't want to be seen (i.e. located and targeted).

Balance of Forces

The final critical change in the world has been the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower. Without question, the U.S. Navy has been the dominant maritime force without equal since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. Taken at face value, this was a good development for general stability in the international environment. If there is no Navy in the world that can defeat ours in direct combat, then by default we have control of the seas which contributes greatly to economic and diplomatic stability.

However, this dominance combined with the presence of U.S. Navy assets throughout the world may have had two significant and unintentional consequences. First, the new and emerging weapons and tactics discussed earlier in this paper may point to a determined effort by nations and other enemies to find an asymmetric advantage in naval power. Second, our persistent and overwhelming presence in potential conflict areas such as the Arabian Gulf, may have lessened the effect that mere presence has on a potential adversary. By way of analogy, if someone points a gun at your head every day for a year, you could easily reach a point where the gun just becomes part of the background, unnoticed and not feared.

This phenomenon was demonstrated recently in the Arabian Gulf in the relations between the US and Iran. In the past year, Iran has made headlines because of its continued refusal to bow to international pressure to cease its nuclear weapons program. Throughout the last several years the U.S. Navy has maintained the presence of at least one aircraft carrier strike group in the Arabian Gulf.[23] It is interesting to note that the presence of one or

two carrier strike groups has had little impact on the political decision making of Iranian leadership. Indeed, the US has maintained a continuous naval presence in the Arabian Gulf region for over 50 years, with the number of forces assigned rising and falling based on the political situation.[24] And yet, we were unable to deter the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and we remain unable to dissuade Iran from proceeding with a nuclear weapons development program. These results certainly call into question the concept of how much presence is enough and how much is too much.

Conclusions

The mission of naval presence has been referred to by many names such as "show the flag" or the more colloquial version "show them we care". These phrases adequately imply what the mission of presence is intended to achieve. Simply put, we wish to affect the decision making process of a potential adversary by demonstrating that their possible courses of action will have either benefits or consequences from the international community. Using military forces to demonstrate resolve and commitment to the political and economic stability of a region is just as important today as it was in the late 19th century as the fledgling American Navy began to deploy around the world in support of our national objectives.

Today's Navy is growing ever smaller and is made up of relatively large, extremely complex, multi-mission surface combatants. In light of this fact, the important question for the operational commander is how to make the most effective use of limited assets, while gaining the desired presence throughout their area of responsibility. This is a challenging question with many variables. For example, conducting presence in the Strait of Taiwan requires a large force with significant warfighting capabilities for force protection. However, conducting presence in an area like Indonesia may best be accomplished by sending a lone

hospital ship to provide medical care and humanitarian assistance. Both are valid presence missions, but with very different objectives and requirements.

There are three major considerations that the operational commander must address when deciding to conduct a presence mission. First, the commander must determine what other missions need to be or can be accomplished in parallel. As discussed earlier, there are only limited cases, such as Iran, where presence is the primary mission due to the size of forces required to accomplish the objective. In many other cases, sending a ship solely to conduct presence is not an efficient use of assets. Therefore presence becomes a collateral mission that is accomplished along with other missions such as training and exercises with other nations. In order to get the most efficient use of the naval assets assigned to her theater, the operational commander must layer other simultaneous missions with presence.

Second, the commander needs to ensure that the forces assigned to the mission are both credible and noticeable. The naval forces assigned must be scaled to meet not only the desired objective, but also the possible threat posed by potential adversaries in the operating area in order to provide a credible presence. Therefore, the size of force required to demonstrate presence in the Arabian Gulf is significantly different than that required to meet our objectives in the Gulf of Guinea. Even more importantly, the force must be noticed in order to have the desired effect. This also ties back to the concept of layering missions. In order to be noticed, a naval force may execute a wide range of maritime missions. Everything from a large scale, live fire military exercise such as that recently conducted in the Arabian Gulf as a deterrent to Iran, to a single Frigate hosting a reception for foreign dignitaries from an African nation can provide the necessary visibility.

And finally, every presence mission must incorporate a targeted PA and IO plan to support the objectives of the mission and the desired end state. A proactive and well designed PA plan can reduce the risk of misinterpretation of U.S. intentions to a minimum. It can also support the other considerations of credibility and noticeability. In a relatively low threat environment, it would be advantageous to announce the deployment of U.S. naval forces and their stated objectives well before commencement. A well executed PA plan will also provide post-operation information to the international media to highlight the positive effects of our presence in a given region. As discussed above, a detailed IO plan is integral to achieving the goals of any presence mission and must be well thought out ahead of time.

One positive example was the US response to the tsunami in southeast Asia in 2004. Even though this was a crisis response operation vice a pre-planned presence mission, it highlighted several of the points regarding planning for presence missions and achieving the desired effects. Specifically, this operation shows the value of a credible and noticeable force. Credibility of the force was established by the overt non-aggressive attitude of U.S. forces and the inherent value of the medical aid and humanitarian relief they were providing. U.S. forces were clearly noticeable and in many cases provided the only available resource for meeting humanitarian needs. The overwhelming majority of press reports indicate a favorable response to the U.S. presence during that operation.

Recommendation

In light of the significant coordination required to properly plan and execute a mission involving naval presence, it is critical that all of the relevant stakeholders have a say in development of the objectives and measures of effectiveness for such missions. This can be implemented through the establishment of a maritime influence Operational Planning

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Team (OPT). This OPT would reside at the Combatant Commander level and would consist of members from each of the J-codes within the staff, as well as key representatives from other agencies such as the Department of State and others depending on the geographic area of responsibility. This maritime influence OPT should be a permanent organization which meets regularly to review all ongoing and future operations to ensure synergy is achieved between the desired presence-related objectives and the other objectives of the operation. The focus of this OPT would be on the long term strategic and operational implications of naval presence throughout their assigned region. Without this structured, focused effort to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of naval assets conducting presence missions the commander's maritime TSCP will never achieve its ultimate goal.

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