

TACTICAL PROBLEM: DENYING THE GULF

Given that the US (and presumably a coalition) may begin Persian Gulf operations very soon, this question has been spawned for this month's tactical discussion at Waypoint. It is a two-fold question.

1) How would you prevent the United States from operating from within Persian Gulf waters? This is under the condition that you too must use those waters for economic purposes and that your neighbors must also use it. So your intention is to strictly keep the United States out - not bring traffic to a complete halt.

As a follow up...

2) How would the United States overcome your stated method of keeping them out? This again operates under the assumption that the wheels of commerce must remain turning.

It should be noted that the reader's suggestions reflect their own views and do not in any way represent the Waypoint staff.

Harold Hutchinson suggests...

Denial of the Persian Gulf to the United States Navy

Operational Prospective: Iran

Objective: Denial of the Persian Gulf to the United States Navy.

Obstacles and Current Forces:

The major obstacle to obtaining dominance in the Persian Gulf is the American carrier task force. Assume it contains a *Nimitz*-class CVN, a *Virginia*-class CGN (*Ed. IIRC these have been retired...?*), a *Ticonderoga*-class CG, an *A. Burke*-class DDG, two *Spruance*-class DDs, and two *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class FFGs.

The carrier is the major strike arm, with 24 F-14 Tomcats and 40 F/A-18C/D/E/F Hornets. However, for defense against missiles, it is reliant on its escorts, particularly the *Ticonderoga* and *Burke*-class vessels with the Aegis system.

The air wing, while geared for offense, is still capable defensively. All sixty-four aircraft can carry air-to-air missiles for defense of themselves and their carrier, and their training is far ahead of ours.

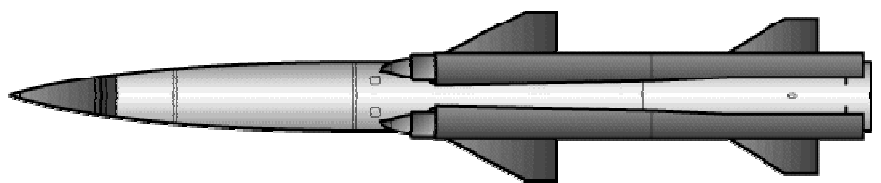
American technology is also years ahead of ours – our best warships are the *Babr*-class destroyers, with eight SM-1 missiles, and even with the improvements that added eight MM.38 Exocets, it is no match for American surface vessels. We also have three Kilo-class submarines, capable of carrying WET-80 torpedoes. They cannot be expected to go head-to-head with American vessels, however.

Solution:

To sweep the American Navy from the Persian Gulf, we must first destroy the American Aegis vessels. The Aegis vessels are very capable systems, but if they can be destroyed, the rest of the American fleet can be defeated.

The best means to deal with the Aegis vessels is to give the crews little time to react. To do this, missiles that will move fast and deliver a devastating punch are needed. The best option is the SS-N-22 Sunburn – already going by the nickname "Aegis killer." It is a Mach-2.5 seaskimmer with a 2,200-pound high-explosive warhead, and sufficient range to cover the Strait of Hormuz. A more reliable means of success would be to combine the Sunburns with an attack by one or more Kilo-class SSKs.

We currently have a large number of Silkworm and even some Exocet missiles. These forces should be increased, but the key to controlling the Strait of Hormuz is to add a significant force of SS-N-22 Sunburn missiles, half of which should be set to home on SPY-1 radars. At least 80 missiles should be ready for initial launch, with as many additional reserve missiles as possible.



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The SSM batteries should be defended heavily with SAMs and AAA. Our current HAWKs are not a bad start, but additional missiles will be required. The best systems would be SA-10, SA-6, and SA-11 systems, backed up with

SA-8s and ZSU-23s. Additional support could come from 57mm, 37mm, and 23mm anti-aircraft guns, which could provide literally walls of lead for a cruise missile or stealth bomber to fly through.

If we could acquire a passive radar system or two from the Ukraine, it might give us enough early warning that we could shoot one down.¹

Tactics/Attack Plan:

The ideal time to strike is when the American carrier group is transiting the Strait of Hormuz. While they will be on high alert, they will still have very little reaction time, particularly when the attack is a coordinated attack between Sunburn batteries at Qeshm Island and the Silkworms at Bandar Abbas. Firing the Silkworms at the carrier and the Sunburns at the Aegis vessels will maximize the chances for success.

Should the American carrier manage to launch aircraft, F-4s and MiG-29s from Bandar Abbas are to launch and draw them over the SAM belts. Any survivors will be engaged and destroyed by the fighters.

After the initial attack, the American force will be attacked from multiple aspects. The former Iraqi Mirage F-1s and Su-24s will combine with the Su-24s and Tu-22Ms purchased from Russia to complete the destruction of the American task force.

Conclusion:

Defeating a carrier force is not easy, but this plan provides us the best chance. If we can wipe out a task force, the political repercussions would force an American withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. The result could even enable us to force America to change their policy to reflect our will. This effort should be pursued as soon as possible.

The American Response

Subject: Means of countering Iranian buildup

Initial Response:

Announce that our ships have orders to “launch on warning” in the Strait of Hormuz, targeting the Tu-22M Backfire base at Masshad, command and control in Tehran, and Iran’s nuclear weapons program. They need to know that if they try to hit us, we will hit back – hard, and we will not limit the theater of activity to the Strait of Hormuz.

Down the road options:

Commence reactivation of the *Iowa*-class battleships. These vessels are tough, and with modernization, they will be able to survive a pitched battle in the Strait of Hormuz, including Sunburn hits². The other advantage: Iran’s systems are not capable of shooting down 16” projectiles. We also should look into measures designed to counter passive radar systems. Laser-based close-in weapons systems would also be a good idea in light of the increasing capabilities of some missiles.



Preemption:

The last option would be a pre-emptive strike, with all the risks it entails. We would need to time it precisely, but it would remove the Iranian Sunburn threat on our terms. The risks are great, and we would have to be ready for Iranian counterattacks.

¹ Passive locator systems like the Ukrainian Kolchuga are unable to detect non-emitting targets. They may, however, be able to locate faint emissions from terrain-following radars or TERCOM bursts by cruise missiles.

² Ed. This point has been a source of endless Usenet discussions.....there appears, however, to be a general consensus amongst most naval warfare experts that battleships are much less resistant to modern weapons than the general public’s impression. This is reinforced by the catastrophic results of primitive guided weapons on battleships in WW2.

Michael Mykytyn suggests...

From the OPFOR side:

Given US Naval and Air superiority in the region, I only see three possible options to keep the US Navy out. These include anti-shipping missile attacks, selective mine warfare and unconventional warfare. All of these have been successful against US forces in the past and certainly would have some effect this go-around, hopefully, to the point of keeping them out.

First, all nations in the area have access to modern anti-shipping missiles, whether they are ship mounted or even land based. The most popular seems to be the Chinese Silkworm, which I will assume my forces have. I would prefer to have them shore-based, as the United States would conceivably have less warning time than launched from a ship. It would also force US forces to attempt to hunt these assets down which could conceivably cost them more than sinking PTM's with relative ease (as they did in the second Gulf War). The geography, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz also gives me the ability to launch from several points along the axis (complicating US defensive strategies) as well as giving me the ability to hide them. Given the US history with these weapons in the region (USS Stark, Tankers and a near miss of a BB during the Gulf War) I believe these weapons can be employed to great effect.



Next, selective mine warfare may be a viable option. This is probably the least feasible, as I must keep trade flowing through the region and Lloyd's would surely keep anything moving if a noncombatant was struck. If I had access to modern bottom mines which have the capability to engage certain displacements I would certainly use these. The United States has mine warfare craft in the region but just making the US employ them would hamper US efforts a great deal. Again the United States has not had a great history with this (Bridgeton, Samuel Roberts, Princeton, Iwo Jima, and numerous flagged Tankers). These mines are more expensive and fall under a bunch of arms bans so I may not have access to them. If I do however, they will be used.

Finally, although completely immoral, unconventional warfare seems very effective against US forces. Small lightly armed combatants and even suicide craft could cause significant damage to US forces. US forces have enacted certain measures to protect their assets from these threats but the risk-rewards of such action are too good to ignore. Again this completely violates what most civilized nations consider moral but it would be effective none the less.

From the US side:

The danger from anti-shipping missiles, mines and unconventional warfare would be integral to my planning a Persian Gulf expedition. There are a number of improvements I would like to make but I would have to work with what I have in inventory now.



An integral factor in how well you deal with anti shipping missiles is location and detection. Prior and during entry into the Persian Gulf, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, I would allocate as many intelligence assets as I could to locating these threats. These would include satellite, UAV and HUMINT assets who would scan the coastlines and waters for all platforms capable of carrying these weapons. With that information, I would be sure my transiting forces bypass these threats and are arrayed to detect any missile that leaves any rail. Given that distance and flight times may be relatively short I would be sure to keep my high value units screened by the best SAM-armed combatants. As soon as any launch is detected I would attack all assets capable of launching such weapons.

Mines would be high on my list of concerns while moving through the Persian Gulf. I would be sure to have all assets possible to sweep for these formidable weapons. Beyond the obvious I would also be watching for any craft laying these weapons as the more complicated types take much longer to deploy than the older types (can't just kick them off the back of the boat). I would also be sure that my submarines had snoopied around a good bit making sure nothing is deployed.

Finally, unconventional warfare is a clear and present danger in the region given the recent attack on USS Cole. I would be sure that all my ships are equipped to engage smaller combatants (25mm Bushmasters, AGLs, machine guns) as well as employing smaller special warfare craft such as the Cyclones or Mark V's to act as escorts for the larger combatants. If time and money allow I would like to employ a small force of special operations forces, light attack helicopters and combatants as what was deployed during the end of the Tanker War. The forces were successful and would certainly prevent a regional player from using these craft with low risk.

Dale Hiller suggests...

This can be summed up into one word...commitment.

With that one word, you can overcome any obstacle. However, as with all military operations, there is much more to it than just this one word.

One of the reasons that the US and its allies won the 1991 Gulf War was that they were committed to a set of objectives. Once those objectives were met, they called for a halt to their operations.

To this extent, commitment can be broken down into three basic parts:

1. Equipment
2. Training
3. Support from High Command

These are obvious, are they not? One cannot fight a war without equipment, cannot use the equipment without training, and without support from high command, the ordinary soldier will lack the morale and willpower to fight his enemy. Let's look at each one in depth.

Equipment

For the situation at hand, an investment in modern military equipment is a must. There are two basic routes that can be taken to block the Persian Gulf to US traffic.

Conventionally, we talk of using an integrated network of mobile surface-to-surface missile batteries, ground-based radars, airborne radars, and modern military aircraft. Assuming that US sources are not available, Russian or European (or even Chinese) contractors can be the suppliers of this equipment. A nation can also use an untraceable third party to avoid any unwanted publicity.

The US, being the predominant military force on the globe, will have the best training and most up-to-date (for the most part) equipment available. Therefore, it would behoove a nation to procure the most modern equipment available on the market today. The Russian P-800 Yakhont (NATO designation SS-N-26) has been designed in a coastal defence version with a range of 120 km in sea skimming mode at a speed of Mach 2.5. At its narrowest point, the Persian Gulf is less than 35 nm wide while at it's widest it is less than 185 nm. While this leaves the southern portion of the Gulf beyond the range, it is important to note that US vessels will probably be destined to the mile-long pier of Al Jubayl on the Saudi coast. This will require US shipping to pass the Quatari coast where the Gulf narrows to just over 100 nm. The P-800 missile has a range of 300km in mixed (hi & low) trajectory mode, more than enough range to reach Qatar.



The basic problem facing long-range missiles today is over-the-horizon targeting. This has been somewhat alleviated over the last ten years with the increasing speed of SSMs, especially Russian SSMs (the faster the missile, the shorter the distance the target can travel). The P-800 being no exception, some form of OTH system will be required. This can be accomplished using a variety of aircraft; however, the most ideal will be helicopters flying from the numerous oil platforms. The Kamov Aircraft Company, a long time supplier of helicopters for the Soviet/Russian Navy, has developed its Alba-F radar designed by Phazotron-NIIR. The Ka-28 helicopter is currently equipped with this radar. It has a 250km range against large surface vessels and the Ka-28 is a proven design of naval helicopters, making it much ideally suited for OTH targeting.

Backing all this up is the air support. Modern fighters like the Su-27 or Su-30 series are more maneuverable than even the most modern systems currently in use by Gulf States today. Recent developments indicate a possible Saudi interest in EF-2000 aircraft but no concrete information is available at this time.

The use of land based multi-role aircraft; especially modern multi-role aircraft would add a further dimension to US forces. Aside from the obvious requirement for air cover, there is also the threat of offensive counter air strikes against US and US allied forces in the Gulf region. The threat of serious air attack is something that the US and her allies haven't faced.

Unconventionally, there are several different methods open, mainly against merchant shipping and its infrastructure. Special Forces can conduct attacks against vessel traffic services, loading terminals, and can attack shipping tied to the dock. Air-mobile and light naval forces can mount assaults on merchant shipping in the area and insert teams to attack targets of opportunity. Finally there's the option of using third party terrorist organizations to close down the Gulf to commercial traffic. However, this kind of operation can lead to indiscriminate destruction, taking away from the main goal of removing US forces from the Gulf.

Training

Equipment is useless without training. It is a well documented fact that a smaller, better trained force can indeed defeat a larger, conscripted force. For years, this was NATO policy in dealing with the Warsaw Pact and it was an aspect of the coalition victory in 1991.

Due to the political and military nature of the Gulf, it is very unlikely that any sort of extended advanced training would go un-noticed by US forces. The result will be constant observation by US intelligence sources, none of which can be interfered with. Consequently, even before the commitment of hostilities, US forces will have an idea of what they can expect with regards to tactics & forces employed.

Before developing a training regimen, one must look at past situations where US forces have been defeated. The natural first choice here would be Vietnam. However, this is a poor example due to the political considerations in the US and South Vietnamese politics and corruption. Ultimately, the US lost the war not because of poor training or equipment but due to lack of commitment on a national level. Training in our regard is more of a tactical nature than of a strategic aspect. A better example would be the 1993 US operation in Somalia. Although the US had the best equipment and training, and also the best of intentions, they still failed in their ultimate objectives because they lacked the support from high command (in this case the segments of the executive branch of the US government). This was only exacerbated after the loss of two Blackhawk helicopters and the deaths of over 20 US Army personnel in the battle that followed. Soon after, US forces were withdrawn. Nations must look for and exploit the weakness that US forces displayed. In this regard it was the high (and in US public opinion unnecessary) casualties sustained in an operation that resulted in the removal of US troops.



The second aspect to training can be summed up by an old saying: To defeat an enemy, one must train like that enemy. It should be noted that the US is considered the foremost power of the globe even though their pilots train in an environment where many days of the year are lost due to weather. This isn't so much of a problem in the Gulf where there is warm climates and very little in the way of hazardous weather to contend with. Training using US methods and US tactics must increase the level of skill. Training is the most expensive aspect of this and must proceed with every advantage that money will be able to buy. Limited dissimilar air combat training can be accomplished by provoking other Gulf States. However, the primary main goal is to train combat personnel to work together and to react well when under fire.

Training with naval and ground based units will require good communications and emissions control. Nevertheless, it will be impossible to train without radiating. This will open radiation frequencies to US ELINT sources and possible jamming once hostilities begin. However, given the nature of the naval craft to be used (mainly small GRP and rubber boats) their low RCS will take radar out of play to a certain extent.

The training itself can be masked by using targets that are not as capable as US vessels. Large tankers and other types of merchant ships fall into this category because of their limited radar and almost non-existent passive sensors.

Support from High Command

To most countries, the US armed forces represent a gigantic, unstoppable juggernaut. For the most part this is a myth. US forces are successful because they are very well trained, their operations are extensively planned and gamed-out, given sufficient logistical support and, most importantly, they support the troops that they commit to battle. Again it will be noted that in 1991, Iraqi troops were not supported by their own high command and as a result were rendered combat-ineffective after the first weeks of the air war.

In 1990 author Barrett Tillman wrote a book called 'Warriors'. It is a fictionalized account of how Saudi Arabia, with the help of retired US pilots, assists other Arab states in an attack on Israel. Near the end of the book, the main

character, in a meeting with Saudi General Staff cites an adage gained from the Battle of Jutland during World War One. He said that Imperial Germany, even though possessing warships of murderous power, had never adjusted psychologically to the Royal Navy. They sailed never thinking they could defeat the British while at the same time the British sailed thinking they could never be beaten.

The end result of 'Warriors' is that Israel, near defeat and faced with nothing left to lose, uses nuclear weapons against advancing Arab forces.

Even though this is a fictionalized account, it can be applied to the same extent. In the book, Israel loses a war because Arab forces were committed to winning. In our discussion, preventing US forces from operating in the Persian Gulf requires the same level of commitment even though the mission involved (sea denial) is much easier to accomplish tactically. It is the **myth** that is created by the consistent victories of US forces that must be dispelled.

Support from High Command is the most important aspect of closing the Persian Gulf to US forces. Once you start something, you should finish it. Equipment might be complex, training might be expensive, but both are worthless unless military commanders lack the will to use them.

Conclusion

Diplomacy doesn't mean war. However, it could be argued that war is simply an extension of diplomacy. The second half of the 20th century has shown that war only succeeds when one side has committed to victory. Starting a war isn't the same thing as winning a war. Recent history shows us that nations that are committed to winning will take any and all steps to win that war. It is here that the Vietnam War can be cited as the example. The North was committed whereas the US and her South Vietnam ally were not. Commitment can be broken down into three segments: equipment, training, and support from high command - the third aspect being by far the most important. One needs only to look at the 1991 war to understand this.

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