

OPLAN 1019 Arabian Gauntlet



On 06 January 2008 three US Navy vessels took evasive actions after five Iranian boats buzzed the ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz into the Persian Gulf. Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman called the Iranian provocation "a serious incident." The fast Iranian boats approached at "distances and speed that showed reckless, dangerous and potentially hostile intent," he said. The incident lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. The Navy ships were going into

the Persian Gulf when the Iranian boats confronted them. "Small, Iranian fast boats made some aggressive maneuvers against our vessels and indicated some hostile intent," Whitman said. "This required our vessels to issue warnings and conduct some evasive maneuvers. The U.S. Navy vessels were prepared to take appropriate actions, but there was no engagement of the vessels." The ships were the USS Port Royal (CG 73), USS Hopper (DDG 70) and USS Ingraham (FFG 61). U.S. warships will take all the precautions needed to safely transit the open waters of the straits, the Pentagon spokesman said.

Iranian officials called the buzzing by five Revolutionary Guard speedboats of three U.S. Navy ships "normal," but American officials insisted the behavior was reckless and needlessly provocative. Iranian senior Revolutionary Guards commander Ali Reza Tangsiri told the Mehr news agency that Iran has the right to ask any ships to identify themselves upon entering or leaving the Persian Gulf. "It is a basic responsibility of patrolling units of the Revolutionary Guards to take necessary interception measures toward any vessels entering into the waters of the Persian Gulf," Tangsiri said.

The San Diego element of the Tarawa Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) departed 05 November 2007 for a six-month deployment to the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operations. Units from San Diego include Amphibious Squadron 1, USS Tarawa (LHA 1), USS Cleveland (LPD 7), USS Germantown (LSD 42), 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit and elements of Naval Beach Group 1. USS Port Royal (CG 73), USS Hopper (DDG 70) and USS Ingraham (FFG 61) joined the Tarawa ESG in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.



The Strait Of Hormuz [SOH, much less commonly termed Straits of Hormuz] is the world's second busiest international strait. The key to the Central Command area is to maintain uninterrupted access to energy resources. The Persian Gulf region contains roughly 68% of the world's known oil and natural gas reserves. Nearly 25% of the world's oil supply flows through the Strait of Hormuz on a daily basis. Over 75% of Japan's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz -- daily oil flow of 16.5-17 million barrels (2006E) -- is

roughly two-fifths of all seaborne traded oil. The Energy Information Administration projects that oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz will double to 30-34 million barrels per day by 2020, suggesting that ensuring the free flow of oil through the Strait will continue to be an important mission.

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway separating the Arabian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman and the North Arabian Sea, is only about 40 miles wide, and is 34 miles wide at its narrowest point. By far the world's most important oil chokepoint, the Strait consists of 2-mile wide channels for inbound and outbound tanker traffic, as well as a 2-mile wide buffer zone.

The Persian Gulf is a shallow, semi enclosed basin with a mean depth of only 25 to 40 m. The circulation of this basin is driven primarily by the local wind stress and secondarily by thermohaline forcing. The prevailing wind in the Persian Gulf is from the northwest and is called the shamal. A wind-driven generally cyclonic circulation results. The lands surrounding the Persian Gulf are dry so there is strong excess evaporation over the Persian Gulf. This results in a surface inflow of relatively fresh water and an outflow of deeper, more-saline water at the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait of Hormuz has a very small sill and thus a classic inverse-estuarine circulation dominates the Gulf. Relatively freshwater flows in through the Straits and the more saline water flow uninhibited out of the straits at depth. Some of the highest current speeds are in the inflow through the southern side of the Strait of Hormuz. This inflow feeds the eastward coastal current along the south edge of the Gulf, which is strongest near Qatar. Along the Iranian coast, there is another eastward current where it terminates and its remnant turns south into the interior.



The majority of oil exported from the Strait of Hormuz travels to Asia, the United States, and Western Europe. Currently, three-quarters of all Japan's oil needs pass through this Strait. Most of the crude exported through the Strait travels long distances by Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCC) which can carry over two million barrels of oil per voyage.

If access to the Gulf were denied, assuming pipelines would flow at maximum capacity, the world would lose about one-fifth of its oil supply. Closure of the Strait of Hormuz would require use of longer alternate routes (if available) at increased transportation costs. Such routes include the 5 million-bbl/d capacity Petrolina (East-West Pipeline) and the 290,000-bbl/d Abqaiq-Yanbu natural gas liquids line across Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea. Theoretically, the 1.65-million bbl/d Iraqi Pipeline across Saudi Arabia (IPSA) also could be utilized, more oil could be pumped north to Ceyhan (Turkey), and the 0.5 million-bbl/d Tapline to Lebanon could be reactivated.

A US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report of October 5, 2006 concluded that the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) was "insufficient" to replace the oil lost from a severe supply disruption, including a global Iranian oil embargo, Strait of Hormuz closure, or a shutdown of the Saudi oil fields due to terrorism. The report noted that an Iranian embargo could cause oil prices to increase by \$16 per barrel and up to \$200 billion in GDP damage to the US economy, of which \$132 billion could be offset by the SPR. A Saudi shutdown could cause \$832 billion in damage to the US GDP, of which only \$77 billion could be offset by the SPR. GAO estimated that Strait of Hormuz closure could cause oil prices to increase by \$175 per barrel.

Some say it would be foolish for Iran to seek to disrupt oil traffic in the Gulf because all of its oil flows through the Gulf. The US Government doesn't anticipate that Iran would try to do something like that because it would be the first victim of any such program.

Strait of Hormuz Legal Status



In a December 1982 declaration accompanying signature on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Iran appeared to require prior authorization for warships to enter territorial sea and limited transit passage right in Strait of Hormuz to signatories of 1982 Convention. Iran's declaration stated: "In the light of customary international law, the provisions of article 21, read in association with article 19 (on the Meaning of Innocent Passage) and article 25 (on the Rights of Protection of the Coastal States),

recognizes (though implicitly) the rights of the Coastal States to take measures to safeguard their security interests including the adoption of laws and regulations regarding, inter alia, the requirements of prior authorization for warships willing to exercise the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea."

Under the 1982 LOS Convention, a coastal state may claim a territorial sea up to 12 nautical miles from the coastline. Each nautical mile is equal to 1852 meters. While the territorial sea is part of the sovereign territory of the state, ships of all states have a right of innocent passage through the territorial. Warships which do not comply with the laws and regulations of the coastal state concerning passage through the territorial sea can be ordered to leave the territorial sea immediately.

On May 2, 1993, the Government of Iran completed legislative action on an "Act on the Marine Areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea." The legislation provides a reasonably comprehensive set of maritime claims to a territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and continental shelf, and Iran's jurisdictional claims within those areas. Many of these claims do not comport with the requirements of international law as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS Convention). Warships and certain other ships

are, contrary to international law, required to receive prior approval to engage in innocent passage.

Iran's requirement for prior approval is not recognized by the US. The LOS Convention does not permit a coastal State to require a foreign vessel to seek the prior authorization of, or notification to, the coastal State as a condition of conducting innocent passage through its territorial sea. Warships representing a wide variety of nations pass through Iran's territorial sea in innocent passage without objection from Iran, despite Iran's requirement that prior authorization be obtained for each transit. These examples of State practice, shared in by many nations and fully consistent with international law, appear to outweigh Iran's claims to restrict freedom of navigation. The US protested this stated requirement in 1983 and 1987, conducted operational assertions in 1989 and 1992 of prior permission requirement, and conducted regular transits of the Strait of Hormuz starting in 1983.

As of 2007 the United States remained a non-signatory of the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (USCLOS), yet strongly supports the navigational causes contained therein. The U.S. Freedom of Navigation program has ensured that excessive coastal state claims over the world's oceans and airspace are repeatedly challenged. By diplomatic protests and operational assertions, the United States has insisted upon adherence by the nations of the world to the international law of the sea, as reflected in the UN Law of the Sea Convention.

Iranian Capabilities

Iran's rearmament program in the 1990s invited an array of interpretations of its military capability to close or interdict the Strait of Hormuz (SOH). The fighting in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), drove Iran's military forces down to minimal levels of equipment while increasing institutional disorganization. Air and ground assets ended the war in the poorest condition. Iran chose to rearm these forces first. However, in 1992, the focus widened to include the rebuilding of the Navy and those military assets physically near the Strait of Hormuz. This enlarged emphasis expanded Iranian military capacity to again challenge shipping transiting the SOH. With its new naval acquisitions, Iran is an increased threat to the interests of its neighbors and the West, particularly the United States.

In 1992 Iran began a military buildup on several small gulf islands close to the Strait of Hormuz. They added several thousand additional troops to those islands, artillery, and anti-ship missiles. Iran occupies two islands in the Persian Gulf claimed by the UAE: Lesser Tunb (called Tunb as Sughra in Arabic by UAE and Jazireh-ye Tonb-e Kuchek in Persian by Iran) and Greater Tunb (called Tunb al Kubra in Arabic by UAE and Jazireh-ye Tonb-e Bozorg in Persian by Iran); Iran jointly administers with the UAE an island in the Persian Gulf claimed by the UAE (called Abu Musa in Arabic by UAE and Jazireh-ye Abu Musa in Persian by Iran).

UAE and other Arab Gulf states are seeking to reverse Iran's occupation of three small islands near the Strait of Hormuz: Abu Musa, Greater Tunb Island, and Lesser Tunb Island, all strategically located in the Strait of Hormuz. The three islands were effectively occupied by Iranian troops in 1992. In 1995, the Iranian Foreign Ministry claimed that the islands were "an inseparable part of Iran." Iran rejected a 1996 proposal by the Gulf Cooperation Council for the dispute to be resolved by the International Court of Justice, an option supported by the UAE. On December 31, 2001, the GCC issued a statement reiterating its support for the UAE's sovereignty over Abu Musa and the Tunbs, declared Iran's claims on the islands as "null and void," and backed "all measures...by the UAE to regain sovereignty on its three islands peacefully."

The Iranians have repeatedly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz if the rest of the world does not do what Iran wishes it to do in a variety of ways. There was such a threat in May 1997, with the Iranians saying that if the Americans were to try to take any kind of retaliatory action against Iranian terrorism, they would close this Strait of Hormuz. During an 18 December 1997 press conference, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki stated that Iran supports "the free flow of oil" through the Strait of Hormuz, but reserved the option of closing off the shipping route if it is threatened. Iran has admitted to deploying anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles on Abu Musa, an island strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz's shipping lanes.

In one possible scenario for an area-denial strategy, Iran might be able to prevent the US Navy from operating in the Persian Gulf by mining the Strait of Hormuz and then guarding it with antiship cruise missiles and small submarines to thwart mine-clearing operations.

The US intelligence community judges that Iran can briefly close the Strait of Hormuz, relying on a layered strategy using predominately naval, air, and some ground forces. During 2004 Iran purchased North Korean torpedo and missile-armed fast attack craft and midget submarines, making marginal improvements to this capability. Tehran's ability to interdict the Strait of Hormuz with air, surface and sub-surface naval units, as well as mines and missiles remains a concern. Additionally, Iran's asymmetrical capabilities are becoming more robust. These capabilities include high-speed attack patrol ships, anti-ship missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and hardened facilities for surface-to-surface missiles and command and control.

The American Military & the Strait of Hormuz

The US Navy's presence in the Gulf has grown steadily since 1879, when Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt sailed USS Ticonderoga through the Strait of Hormuz, making it the first American man-of-war to visit the Gulf. Because the free flow of trade in the region was threatened as Iran and Iraq staged a "tanker war," a stronger US stance became necessary. In 1987, after the Iran-Iraq War resulted in several military incidents in the Persian Gulf, the United States increased U.S. Navy forces operating in the Persian Gulf and adopted a policy of reflagging and escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers through the Gulf. President Reagan reported that U.S. ships had been fired upon or struck mines or

taken other military action on September 23, October 10, and October 20, 1987 and April 19, July 4, and July 14, 1988. During the Iran-Iraq War, one of China's most controversial arms transfers involved the HY-2 antiship missile, commonly [and improperly] referred to in the media as the "Silkworm." The first of several HY-2 shipments was delivered in the summer of 1986, and in October 1987 an American-owned tanker under the Liberian flag and a Kuwaiti tanker under the US flag, the Sea Isle City, were hit by Iranian HY-2 missiles. The United States gradually reduced its forces after a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq on August 20, 1988. Operation Earnest Will proved successful.

The United States reacted to Iran's military buildup in the 1990s by an increased military presence, economic sanctions, and continued political rallying against the Islamic Republic. Simultaneously, the Gulf Cooperation Council reacted by implementing efforts to improve military strength through the acquisition of weapons from the United States and others.

A "spiraling effect" arms race is taking place between Iran and the GCC, in which each side attempts to gain military advantage over the other. The growth of the Iranian forces, specifically the navy and those components next to the SOH, have resulted in mixed threat interpretations. The challenge for decision-makers and strategic planners alike lies in accurately assessing the ability of Iranian forces to attempt to and, if possible, keep the Strait of Hormuz closed.

On many occasions since 1989 U.S. warships exercised the right of innocent passage through the Iranian territorial sea without notice to or reaction from Iran.

Exercise Arabian Gauntlet

Multinational forces gather to participate in the world's largest mine countermeasures exercise, "Arabian Gauntlet." Arabian Gauntlet is a joint multinational military exercise to maintain the vital sea lines in and out of the Persian Gulf. Arabian Gauntlet is a multilateral exercise that integrates mine warfare with surface warfare. The purpose of the exercise is to refine coalition warfare capabilities, specifically in the area of mine warfare, surface warfare and off-shore infrastructure protection. It also promotes military to military relationships and improves the tactical proficiency of the coalition as well as enhances regional security in the 5th Fleet area of responsibility.

Fleet Battle Experiment Foxtrot (FBE-F) FBE Foxtrot [30 Nov - 8 Dec 1999] was shifted from C6F to C5F due to operations in Kosovo and occurred 30 November-8 December 1999. Focus areas included Weapons of Mass Destruction and Coastal Dominance. Networked combined force required 62% less time to restore mine free shipping in Strait of Hormuz (FBE Foxtrot, December 1999). FBE-Foxtrot investigated coordinated joint naval and land fires (including those provided by SOF and U.S. Army Apache helicopters) through an experimental Joint Fires Element. It explored time-critical targeting of a coordinated, multi-layered enemy at a naval chokepoint. The experiment also explored using distributed, collaborative planning to enhance understanding of the

undersea environment and operational situation in countermine warfare. A battle management cell for defense against chemical and biological weapons was established to seek improvements in chemical/biological defense readiness and vulnerability assessment, warning and reporting of chem./bio events, and coordination of intra-theater support and initial responses to chemical/biological attacks.

USS PAUL F. FOSTER (DD 964) departed for its eleventh deployment on January 27, 1999. While serving as part of the Pacific Middle East Force, PAUL F. FOSTER participated in OPERATION IRON SIREN, EAGER SENTRY, and ARABIAN GAUNTLET. In addition, the ship conducted boarding's in support of United Nations Sanctions against Iraq.

The Shipboard Deployable Surface Target (SDST) -- also known as "Roboski" -- provides an enhanced gunfire training capability against highly maneuverable, high speed surface targets. As such, Roboski offers an inexpensive, expendable target for Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection small arms training and supports 76mm, 5-inch/54caliber, and Phalanx CIWS training. SDST's are presently maintained by the Fleet Composite Squadron Six (VC-6), COMFIFTHFLT, COMSEVENTHFLT, and the Southern California Offshore Range Extension (SCORE) in support of COMTHIRDFLT. SDST was used for gunfire training in the Arabian Gauntlet exercise.

During 2000 in Neon Falcon and Arabian Gauntlet, LAKE CHAMPLAIN improved interoperability and fostered good will with forces from Europe as well as Arabian Gulf coalition partners. USS Elliot (DD 967) was one of eight U.S. naval ships participating in Exercise Arabian Gauntlet 2000.

The Harry S Truman Battle Group participated in numerous international exercises during 2001, including Arabian Gauntlet, an 11-nation exercise that involved more than 20 ships. Fleet ocean-going tug USNS Catawba conducted a simulated distressed diver drill during the multi-nation operation Arabian Gauntlet 2001. Patrol Squadron 47's "Golden Swordsman" took part in the Arabian Gauntlet exercise in the Persian Gulf. VP-47 combat aircrews flew missions in support of the Arabian Gauntlet exercise, while operating out of Masirah, Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain. The P-3 Orions of VP-47 participated with ships and aircraft from the British, German, French, Saudi Arabian, Omani, Kuwaiti, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Pakistan and U.S. military forces. The exercise lasted 21 days, with VP-47's P-3s flying both day and night missions for a majority of the exercise's duration. The event ended on April 1 and VP-47 buckled back down to finish out the last two months of a six month deployment, with a Bravo Zulu from the commodore, DESRON 50, under their belt.

For the first time in its country's history, the Iraqi Navy has joined with coalition forces to participate as observers during exercise Arabian Gauntlet 2005 in the Persian Gulf 22-30 March 2005. More than 3,000 people and 19 ships from the United States, Iraq, Pakistan and other coalition and regional allies participated in Arabian Gauntlet 2005. Sixteen ships from 14 coalition and regional allies concluded Exercise Arabian Gauntlet 2007, the world's largest mine countermeasures exercise, 30 April 2007 in the Arabian

Gulf. The biennial Arabian Gauntlet is a two-phase evolution. Two days of training seminars precede an eight-day underway phase. USS Shreveport (LPD 12) served as the flagship for commander, Mine Countermeasures Squadron (MCMRON) 3 during Exercise Arabian Gauntlet 2007. Throughout the exercise, Shreveport and MCMRON 3 hosted a multinational command element aboard. The exercise consisted of dive operations, mine hunting and sweeping, and the establishment of safe lanes of navigation. It culminated in a simulated merchant vessel's transit through an area that had been swept by coalition ships and aircraft. Shreveport launched its Landing Craft Unit (LCU) early every morning to provide a forward dive platform to conduct underwater countermeasure operations. The mine countermeasure ships not directly involved in diving operations focused their efforts on mine detection, mine sweeping, the establishment of routes for safe passage and a number of simulated oil infrastructure defense and force protection exercises.