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## A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES

Wayne P. Hughes, Jr.

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It is appropriate for the *Naval War College Review* to reprint the superb essay by Admiral Ya'ari, because the things he foresaw nearly twenty years ago are all coming to pass—an analytical performance worthy of any Old Testament prophet.

The growing hazards and deadliness of the littoral seas are something all navies must take into account, but particularly the U.S. Navy, because it is only just beginning to grasp the uniqueness of the littoral environment, the need for new tactics, and the value of warships better suited to fight in its clutter. For example, with Professor Don Brutzman of the Naval Postgraduate School, I have reached the conclusion that the goal of “network-centric warfare” (NCW) is appropriate only for operating an aircraft carrier battle group, an expeditionary strike group, or a surface action group, none of which can perform its function without radiating almost continuously. But NCW is ill suited for more numerous, distributable, smaller, and less expensive ships intended to fight in the demanding environment described by Admiral Ya'ari.

A better image for inshore operations is one of “network-optional warfare” (NOW) that supports tactics of stealth and surprise, so we can *attack effectively first*. Such tactics take advantage of the many forms of clutter and concealment. They allow vessels to operate under doctrine that greatly reduces the need to radiate. In the 1973 war at sea, the Syrians found themselves outclassed tactically by the Israeli Sa'ar boats, so their missile ships attempted to hide behind shipping off their own ports. Appropriately, they called the merchant ships “sandbags.” NOW is also well suited to exploiting the advent of unmanned and robotic systems for search, deception, and attack.

Although I think Admiral Ya'ari's solution based on greater use of submarines is appropriate, he may have overstated a case that is more appropriate for Israel than the United States. The coast of the eastern Mediterranean has few bays, islands, or inlets. Its terrain and vegetation offer meager concealment, even for the smaller surface combatants. Moreover, the United States depends on its fleet

to protect merchant shipping for trade, as well as amphibious vessels engaged in landing and sustaining ground forces ashore. To date, it takes a *surface* warship to protect a merchant ship from missiles, and the notion of sending large volumes of goods in submersibles has thus far been untenable economically.

In contested waters, and in particular facing Chinese antiaccess/area-denial defenses, the growing land-to-sea threat from Iran, renewed Russian threats in the Baltic and Black Seas, and North Korean threats in the Yellow Sea, submarines are necessary *but not sufficient* for the U.S. Navy. A blend of four strong options to confront an enemy who contests the littoral seas would comprise, first, greater reliance on underwater systems; second, ships that can deny the enemy the use of his own littoral waters through maritime interdiction; third, small Marine outposts many of which can deliver land-to-sea missiles, some being invisible and all being relatively easy to establish and disestablish; and fourth, flotilla ships deployed from the outposts to confront illegal enemy claims on the ocean's surface.

But solutions will come in the U.S. Navy only when the word picture of littoral deadliness painted by Admiral Ya'ari has been grasped. His description of the unique complexity of operations there, the lack of battlefield depth, and the ever more numerous missile types and the many distributable ways of delivering them represents just the beginning of wisdom. Ya'ari emphasizes the remorseless, never-ending, mentally exhausting need for hair-trigger readiness to open fire, and the constant danger of attacking innocent ships or airliners. New tactics and warships, as well as such emerging technologies as robotic systems, will be needed—first, to create a contested no-man's-land in and over enemy waters, and second, to win control of the surface—so that the United States can continue to exploit its maritime advantages where and when needed.

And all at an affordable cost in ships, aircraft, and systems for command, control, surveillance, and intelligence.