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# How Navies Fight, and Why

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Frank Uhlig, Jr.

**I**N THE TWO AND A QUARTER CENTURIES since the birth of the United States, its navy has experienced, or watched closely, a fair range of the possibilities of war at and from the sea. It has been a small navy fighting a large one (the Continental navy versus Britain's in the American Revolution), has seen two large ones fight each other (the French against the British in that same war), has been a small navy fighting against first legalized and then state piracy (the Quasi-War and the Barbary War), for a second time has been a small navy fighting a big one (the War of 1812), has, as a small navy, fought against a foe without a navy (the Mexican War), then as a small navy suddenly grown large fought against an enemy with but fragments of a navy (the American Civil War), became one of two medium-sized navies fighting against one another (the Spanish-American War), has been one of several large navies allied against several others (the two world wars), twice again was a large navy opposing a foe without one (the Korean and Vietnam wars), watched one very small navy fight against two others, during which it acted as a large auxiliary to one of the principal combatants (the Levantine war of 1973), from a distance observed a medium-sized navy against a medium-sized air force (the South Atlantic war), watched with interest two countries with minuscule navies fighting against each other ashore and against each other's economic partners or nonbelligerent allies afloat (the Iran-Iraq War), and twice took part as a large navy against a minuscule one (the U.S. quasi-war against Iran and then the full United Nations war against Iraq).<sup>1</sup>

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This same period has seen fighting ships transformed through many stages, from wind-driven wooden sloops and frigates firing solid shot from muzzle-loading guns against enemies sometimes within touching distance, to nuclear-powered steel carriers, cruisers, and submarines launching aircraft, missiles, and torpedoes against enemies seldom within sight. Such far-reaching technological transformation is not likely to end soon.

Over these many years navies have fought their foes afloat, aloft, and ashore in a multitude of ways. But despite the variety of wars and the changes in their instruments, there is remarkable constancy in how navies go about their business. The ways of naval warfare that have shown themselves to be most robust, most resilient, are five in number:

- the strategic movement of troops (now, of armies and air forces alike);
- the acquisition of advanced bases as close as possible to the scene of action (by either military force or civil means);
- the landing of armies on a hostile shore;
- the blockade; and,
- the struggle for mastery of the local sea.

It might be useful to discuss, not how navies have fought, do fight, and, I postulate, will fight, but why they fight—that is, what the underlying purposes of naval warfare are.

Those purposes appear to be only three in number, two absolutes and a conditional. The absolutes are to ensure first that friendly shipping can flow and second that hostile shipping cannot. Once the flow of friendly shipping is assured, then, if it is necessary or desirable, navies can risk landing an army on a hostile shore, supporting that army with fire and logistics. The last of these raises a *method* of naval warfare to the status of a *purpose* of such warfare.

It is important to define shipping in all its breadth. Shipping includes commercial ships of all sorts. In current times these are oil tankers, dry-bulk carriers, barge carriers, automobile carriers, container ships, old-style mast-and-boom or “break-bulk” freighters, drilling rigs and their supporting craft, seagoing tugs and barges, short-sea ferries, long-distance liners, vacation cruise ships, fishing craft, and fish factory ships. Shipping also includes scientific ships and craft of all sorts, military logistical ships (such as the vast number of civilian-manned transports, freighters, and tankers built chiefly for military purposes in World War II), naval auxiliaries, amphibious ships, and ballistic-missile submarines. I include certain naval types in this list because, whatever their precise function, they do not fight for and gain mastery of the sea or any of its parts; instead they either support the forces engaged in that struggle or they take advantage of the success of those forces to affect affairs ashore in a direct and unambiguous fashion. As some recent wars have made clear, for purposes of

## 36 Naval War College Review

naval attack and defense, transport and cargo planes overflying the sea can now be included under the title of “shipping.”

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I hope that a few examples of why navies fight will suffice. Until the powerful French navy began to play a part in the American Revolution, British troops sent to quell the rebellion sailed into (and sometimes out of) Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah. Except perhaps off Boston, the inexperienced Continental navy had no influence on these matters. But acting as raiders, individual Continental warships and privateers ravaged British shipping in European waters, thus harming British merchants, shipowners, insurers, and seamen. During the Yorktown campaign in 1781, when Franco-American armies under Rochambeau and Washington moved to besiege Cornwallis's force on the shores of the southern Chesapeake, a French fleet under Admiral de Grasse helped decide the war. First, guarded by de Grasse's fighting ships, transports carried the allied troops on the final leg of their long march from New England and New York to tidewater Virginia. Then, at the Battle of the Chesapeake Capes, the French fighting ships both frustrated a British effort to bring help to General Cornwallis and opened the way for a small French squadron to bring General Rochambeau's siege artillery to Yorktown. Finally, by steadfastly denying Admiral Graves and General Clinton a second chance to rescue Cornwallis, they ensured the latter's surrender to the allied forces under Washington and, shortly thereafter, the independence of the thirteen colonies. Clearly, all this French and Continental naval effort was aimed at making sure that friendly shipping could flow and that hostile shipping could not.

The Quasi- and Barbary wars were wholly aimed at allowing the flow of friendly shipping, and nothing else.

One of the most influential actions of the U.S. Navy in the War of 1812 took place at the western end of Lake Erie when in 1813 Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's squadron of small fighting ships defeated a similar British squadron. Thus the shipping upon which the British army depended, already at risk, could not flow at all. Instead of continuing their westward thrust, the conquerors of Detroit began to retreat back to Canada. Supported by ships under the protection of Perry's guns, American troops surged eastward into Ontario.

Once again, the naval issue was mainly a matter of making sure that friendly shipping could flow and that hostile shipping could not.

During the Mexican War of 1846–1848 the U.S. Pacific squadron, unopposed by any hostile warships, moved small bodies of armed men (usually seamen and

marines) to wherever they could best be used, landed them, often with help from Americans already present, and took control of California. In March 1847, after a series of American military successes in southern Texas and northern Mexico had done nothing to bring Mexican acquiescence, the U.S. squadron in the Gulf of Mexico, unopposed at sea, landed General Winfield Scott's army at the nearest practical approach to Mexico City, a beach near Veracruz. From there Scott led his army inland, captured the enemy's capital, and brought the war to an end. Unhindered by enemy action at sea, the U.S. Navy had accomplished the ultimate task of any navy: landing an army on a hostile shore so it can begin a campaign inland to win the war.

As the age of sail faded away, the U.S. Navy had already demonstrated all the reasons why a nation owns a navy. Even if the enemy lacked a navy, there was no reason for the United States to deprive itself of one.

## II

By the time of the Civil War the North had the industry to make the weapons it needed while the South had only cotton, which bought it foreign-made weapons. The North also had merchant ships, many of which it transformed into makeshift warships with which to close Southern ports to merchantmen. As soon as Northern warships were stationed off those ports, the merchantmen bearing cotton out and weapons in became blockade runners. To an extent the Northern blockaders succeeded, for they forced those who would dare pass through the blockade to give up their commercially efficient, economical, and capacious, but slow and easily captured, sailing ships; these were replaced with commercially inefficient, low-capacity, fuel-hungry, but fast and handy, paddle steamers. Those steamers averaged only two round trips before being captured or perishing. But they brought in enough arms and supplies to keep the Southern armies fighting for years against the larger and better supplied armies of the North.

If the U.S. Navy was only partly successful in choking off the flow of enemy shipping, it was even less successful in making sure its own shipping could flow. A few Confederate raiders nearly drove the American flag off the seas. The interesting thing is that it did not matter much to the North. The North built its own weapons, and its overseas trade could go safely under foreign flags. Moreover, potential seamen in the North had already learned that ashore there was plenty of employment just as rewarding and much safer and more comfortable than any afloat, while Northern bankers and businessmen had made a similar discovery about their money—it was invested more safely ashore than afloat. The U.S. flag was already losing its high place in international trade; the Southern raiders simply hastened its decline. But on the war itself they had little influence.

## 38 Naval War College Review

Unopposed by an effective Confederate fleet, the North might have followed up Farragut's success in capturing New Orleans in the spring of 1862 and snuffed out the other Southern ports—and thus the Southern armies' supply of arms and ammunition—much earlier than it did. But as it was, the last Southern port was not closed until the war itself was about to end.

Once, and only once, the Confederates managed to establish an effective force afloat at the right time and place. This was the ironclad *Virginia* at Hampton Roads in March 1862. Single-handedly, that formidable inshore combatant prevented General George B. McClellan's army from advancing up the broad James River to Richmond. She might have achieved even more. But the timely arrival of the federal navy's *Monitor* curbed any ambitions the Southern navy might have developed. It was the *Monitor* that made possible the peninsula campaign that began shortly after the Union ironclad appeared in Hampton Roads. Shortly thereafter the Confederate army withdrew its protection from Norfolk. This led to the *Virginia's* self-destruction and the opening of the James to the Northern army. One wonders why Northern forces did not make an amphibious landing near Norfolk before the *Virginia* was completed. Had they done so they might have forestalled that threat to their mastery of the Chesapeake. Clearly, the issue at stake in the standoff between the ironclads at Hampton Roads was over shipping in the Chesapeake: Whose would flow? Whose would not?

The war in the East leaves one with a sense of opportunities lost, on both sides, stemming mainly from the failure of soldiers and sailors to work together. In the West things were different, at least among the North's commanders. There generals John Pope, U.S. Grant, and William T. Sherman, and naval commanders Andrew H. Foote, Charles H. Davis, and David D. Porter worked together to solve their problems. Their efforts completed, the last commanders in that theater, Grant, Sherman, and Porter, moved east to help with the problems there.

On the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, as on the coast, the great naval task was to permit the flow of friendly shipping and cut off the flow of hostile shipping. The South attempted to fulfill both of these aims by building forts at important points on the river. More successfully, the North sought the same results by combining its forces: gunboats afloat, mobile troops ashore. Union gunboats ran past the Southern strong points, cutting them off from support by water, while the troops outflanked those points by land, the two together forcing their abandonment or surrender. Then, except clandestinely, Southern river traffic could no longer flow on that part of the river formerly guarded by the now defeated fort, and Northern traffic could.

The most important part of that Northern traffic bore the armies which, after being landed anew on the hostile shore, repeated their share of the river-opening

campaign. Together the army and navy captured each successive Southern fort while their supplies followed in river steamers. For the rest of the war Rebel troops on the banks and Northern gunboats in the stream fought over whether Northern supplies would continue to move. They did.

### III

During the war with Spain, Commodore George Dewey's destruction of that nation's antiquated squadron at Manila Bay on a May morning in 1898 made the western Pacific safe for American shipping and unsafe for Spanish. Though there was little shipping there under either country's flag, what was important were the troop and supply ships Spain could no longer send to the aid of its now isolated garrison in Manila, and the similar ships filled with troops and arms the Americans could and did send to land on the hostile shore and then besiege that city. A belated Spanish effort at rescue made little progress before events in the Caribbean led to the recall of the Manila-bound ships.

There was considerable U.S. domestic shipping on the East Coast, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Caribbean. Theoretically it was at risk until Admiral William T. Sampson and Admiral Winfield S. Schley blockaded Admiral Pascual Cervera's cruisers at Santiago. With that military blockade in force, not only was American shipping no longer even theoretically at risk, but the gunboats and additional small American warships blockading other Spanish ports in the Caribbean and on the Gulf of Mexico could continue their work without fear of being overwhelmed by more powerful ships. Moreover, the United States could now safely move its army from Tampa, Florida, and land it on the hostile shore near Santiago. Once ashore, the army attacked Santiago. That attack led to Cervera's flight to another harbor and the swift destruction of his entire command.

Now unable to help its armies in Cuba and the Philippines, and with its own European ports in danger of American attack, Spain quickly opened peace negotiations, and the war came to an end. Brief as it was, this war showed as clearly as possible what happens to a distant army when its navy cannot keep the sea open between it and home. This was a lesson other armies, including that of the United States, would learn in the future. It is one of the things a country that cannot guarantee the flow of friendly shipping in war ought to think about in time of peace.

### IV

When war broke out in Europe in 1914, few people were surprised that the British so quickly ended the worldwide reach of German merchant shipping. Not many expected that the flow of British shipping, much greater even than that of Germany—indeed, more than half the earth's supply of shipping—would

## 40 Naval War College Review

also be endangered. What many did expect was that the two most powerful fighting fleets in the world, facing each other across the short distances of the North Sea, would soon engage each other there for mastery of the world's oceans and thus mastery of the world.

By virtue of its position and its fleet, soon after war began Britain had not only ended all hope that German shipping could flow anywhere but also ensured that nearly all British shipping worldwide could flow unmolested. True, Germany, by virtue of its position and fleet, had ended all hope that British shipping could flow into the Baltic and thus to Russia. But that was the full extent, or nearly so, of German naval influence.

With attacking or protecting shipping out of the question for either side, the British fleet was reduced to hoping that its smaller German counterpart would enter the North Sea anyway so it could be destroyed, and the Germans could likewise only hope that a portion of the British fleet would allow itself to be trapped and sunk, thus reducing or abolishing Germany's numerical disadvantage. Neither fleet obliged the other. The result was that only once, in mid-1916, and to a great degree as a result of chance, did the two great fleets meet, at what came to be called the battle of Jutland. The results chiefly confirmed the status quo.

It was submarines, small but long-ranged and indifferent to the enemy's battle fleet, that changed the situation. German submarines entered the Atlantic west of Britain at will. In so doing they changed the geographical focus of the naval war (the North Atlantic was teeming with ships, unlike the commercially and militarily barren North Sea), its decisive ideas (concentrating merchant ships in convoys became even more important than concentrating fighting ships in fleets), and its decisive instruments (submarines and escorts became more important than battleships and battle cruisers). In prewar theory, battle fleets had played the part of shipping's distant protector. When circumstances made those fleets ineffectual, submarines and their opponents showed that naval war could be fought decisively anyway. Unexpectedly, what placed empires and alliances in the balance was the issue of whether or not British shipping could flow. In the event, with the institution of convoys, the improvement of shoreside arrangements in England, and the help of American destroyers from May 1917 on, that shipping, which had been dribbling to a halt, again flowed vigorously.

Perhaps the most important result of the renewed vigor was that two million fresh American soldiers were sailed safely to France. There they provided the edge the weary French and British armies needed. Collectively, then, they defeated the German army, which, though also weary, had been advancing triumphantly in its final offensive. And so the war ended.

Obviously, the naval share of it had centered on the issue of whether British shipping could flow. Eventually it could, whereas the flow of German shipping,



quenched from the beginning, never recovered. Because of its malign influence on German living standards and thus on German hopes of victory, the German merchant marine's inability to do its job contributed less to the Allies' victory than it did to the Germans' defeat.

The opposing sides made a number of amphibious and assault landings during the war, but the only one that might have made a difference to the outcome was at Gallipoli. Though as a landing it was a success (barely), the British attack on that Turkish peninsula ultimately amounted to no more than that. The Allied forces failed thereafter to achieve even the most modest objective, and so their navies secretly withdrew them. Never again during that war did the Allies attempt such a venture.

## V

In 1939 war returned to Europe. Once again the focus of naval effort was on the flow of shipping, one side trying to stop it, the other to ensure it. Little need be said here of the central struggle in the Atlantic except that the U-boats went there again, in both coastal and distant waters. The convoys with their escorts formed again. Inshore, minefields appeared once more in heavily traveled channels. So did minesweepers. With much help from intelligence, friendly shipping flowed in the Atlantic, hostile shipping did not.

But soon the Axis controlled almost the entire coast of Europe as well as a large part of the North African coast. This permitted swarms of Germany's and Italy's fairly small, short-ranged land-based aircraft to overfly the continent's coastal waters and narrow seas. Usually more such aircraft seemed available to attack shipping than there were Allied aircraft to defend it. Swift and powerfully armed though many fighting ships were, they were usually no match for heavy, well executed attacks by torpedo planes, dive-bombers, or low-level strafers.

As defeated Allied armies retreated to the nearest coast, naval and merchant ships, despite their vulnerability to air attack, alike approached the same coast from seaward, their purpose to rescue the troops. This they did, though at high cost to themselves because they had no aircraft of their own, and to the soldiers, who upon embarking imagined they had reached safety.

The Luftwaffe came to dominate the Mediterranean. Very quickly British convoys stopped trying to make the passage between Gibraltar and Alexandria or Suez. Rather, to support their armies in Egypt and further east, the British took to sailing ships south to the Cape of Good Hope and then north to their destination. It was a long detour.

Not only had the passage from one end of the Mediterranean to the other become impossible for British shipping, but the passage from Gibraltar to Malta in the middle of that sea had become so difficult that enormous efforts became

## 42 Naval War College Review

necessary—and were made—to supply that small island's modest needs. Still, they nearly failed. The most pressing reason for the huge effort to supply and defend Malta was that from its harbors and airfields British submarines, surface combatants, and aircraft could attack the heavy flow of Italian shipping that first brought General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps to Libya and then supported it with fuel, supplies, and reinforcements. Despite the Malta-based forces' best efforts, the Italian navy succeeded in making sure that Axis traffic flowed to Rommel until at last the British Eighth Army drove the Afrika Korps out of Libya and eventually, under the guns of both British and U.S. troops, to surrender or death.

At the other end of Europe, north of Norway, U-boats and shore-based German aircraft, occasionally assisted by surface combatants, made the running of Murmansk-bound convoys filled with arms and supplies for the Soviet Union so chancy that for long periods the Allies ran no such convoys at all. Just as they had abandoned the direct supply route through the Mediterranean to Egypt and the east in favor of the long route around Africa, so did they largely abandon the direct supply route to the Soviet Union via the Arctic in favor of the same long southern route, ending up at Abadan on the shore of the Persian Gulf.

Wherever they were, deep sea or shallow, the merchant ships were the principal objects of attack and of defense. True, warships, especially big ones, were often the first targets an enemy focused on. But that was because they were scarce, and once they were out of the way it was easier to attack merchantmen. Even in the "tonnage war" waged by the German U-boat commander, Admiral Karl Dönitz, however, the real object of attack was not the merchant ships but what they were carrying or could carry—troops, tanks, oil, food, ammunition, anything at all, and with few exceptions, anyone at all.

When they had regained their strength, there was no way for the Western Allies to come to grips with the Axis armies except by an amphibious or assault landing. Hence, as soon as they had suitable armies of their own and could sail safely across the sea to thrust them upon enemy-held coasts, they did so. The amphibious objectives became increasingly difficult: North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, and Normandy. In each case navies landed invading armies and provided them with direct support as long as they needed it. At Anzio, where the troops did not move inland for six months, direct support lasted for six months. In France, after the invasion launched at Normandy seemed likely to run out of steam for lack of supplies, the Allies made another landing across the beaches of southern France to provide those supplies. With the same objective in mind, the British eventually thrust troops ashore at the Dutch island of Walcheren to clear the approaches to the undamaged port of Antwerp. But they did this too late to allow the armies to win the war, as they had hoped, before the end of 1944.

As in earlier wars, the naval struggle in the sixty-eight-month European conflict centered on making sure that friendly shipping could flow and that hostile shipping could not. That aim met, the successful navies could turn to landing their countries' armies on the hostile shore and keeping them there. Victory came only eleven months after the Allied navies thrust one of the greatest armies of all ashore at Normandy.

When Japan set out to conquer Southeast Asia it was to gain unimpeded access to the oil and other resources found there. Such resources were useless unless ships carried them to Japan. Those ships had to be defended against attack. So did those carrying reinforcements, arms, and supplies from Japan to the armies guarding the newly conquered territories. In both directions the Japanese navy had to keep friendly shipping moving. But, perhaps trying to do too much with too little, the navy failed to prepare itself adequately for the task. At first the Allies posed no challenge, but after they, especially the American submarine force, overcame a remarkable number of shortcomings, they sank Japanese ships in increasing numbers.

As soon as the war in the Pacific began, the Americans saw to it that friendly shipping could sail, first to Hawaii and then to New Zealand and Australia. The flow continued unchallenged throughout the war. When a threat developed from a Japanese seaplane base at Tulagi in the Solomon Islands and an airstrip on nearby Guadalcanal, the Americans, having rebuffed Japanese seaborne efforts to take Port Moresby on New Guinea and Midway Island, made Tulagi and Guadalcanal their first point of attack, by means of an assault landing (under enemy fire) on one and an amphibious landing (not opposed by enemy fire) on the other. It was possible for the Americans to make this attack because the battles of the Coral Sea (which saved Port Moresby) and of Midway had cost Japan heavily in naval power, especially in scarce aircraft carriers.

The struggle for Guadalcanal (the more important of the two recently attacked islands) focused on the airstrip, named by its new American owners Henderson Field. What made that strip worthy of such effort was that from it bombers and fighters rose, the former to attack Japanese ships bringing in troops and supplies for the airstrip's reconquest and the latter to protect American ships bringing in troops and supplies to defend that strip. In the struggle for Guadalcanal, all the battles at sea came about because one side was intent on destroying the aircraft on Henderson Field by bombardment, or on ensuring the safe arrival of troops and supplies on the island, while the other side was determined to frustrate those attempts. Indeed, except for the submarine campaign the entire naval share of the Pacific war could be described in those terms.

After the Japanese fleet perished at Leyte in October 1944, it was replaced by the kamikazes. The struggle between the Pacific Fleet and the kamikazes in the

## 44 Naval War College Review

spring of 1945 was as much a struggle for mastery of the sea around Okinawa as it would have been had the fleet's opponent been Japan's battle line or carrier task force. The issue was whether U.S. transport and supply shipping could continue to flow towards the contested island. After three hard months, it was clear that the fleet had won.

In the meantime U.S. bombers flying from the Marianas, which were among the islands conquered by troops attacking from the sea, busily laid waste the cities of Japan. In August 1945 one such aircraft dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and a few days later another dropped one on Nagasaki. The war ended soon thereafter.

Japan had lost all hope of winning the war long before August 1945—lost because its shipping could not flow, while Allied shipping could. As a consequence, the U.S. Navy was able to land armies on all the hostile shores the United States thought necessary, supporting its assault forces with fire and logistics. To fly from the Marianas the bombers depended totally on the flow of shipping. Their repair and maintenance crews, the supplies they consumed on the ground, the fuel they used getting to Japan and back, and the weapons they dropped over Japan, all reached the air bases in ships. The journey those people and things took from the United States to Japan was made safe as a result of earlier battles for mastery of the sea.

## VI

Five years after its victory over Japan, the United States found itself engaged in a new war, in Korea, against an enemy without a fleet. A thousand miles southward a potential enemy, though also without a fleet, threatened the seaborne invasion of a suddenly acquired American client state, Formosa (Taiwan). Its long sea-road across the Pacific safe from attack, the United States poured both an army and an air force into Korea. At the most advantageous moment the U.S. fleet launched an assault landing at Inchon, immediately transforming the war ashore from a desperate defense of a single friendly port to an exultant attack on an entire enemy state. But perhaps the U.S. Navy's greatest achievement in this war was rescuing the suddenly endangered X Corps from destruction by a powerful Chinese communist army in far northern Korea, and—by its looming presence—helping forestall an amphibious assault on Taiwan by another part of that army.

For the rest of the war the navy's tasks were those dreary matters of assuring that friendly armies and air forces were adequately supplied and, where armies and air forces could not conveniently place fire on the foe, doing it for them.

The fleet's achievements in the Korean War can be described as moving the army and air force strategically, landing part of the army on a hostile shore,

rescuing that same army from another part of the same shore, making sure that hostile shipping could not flow (towards Taiwan), and finally supporting the U.S. and United Nations armies in Korea with fire and logistics. Clearly, even in the absence of an opposing fleet, the demands on the U.S. fleet in this war were heavy.

The war in Vietnam was a devastating failure, and the navy had a share in that failure. Against a foe impotent at sea it had no problem ensuring the flow of friendly traffic to (though not within) South Vietnam. At the same time the navy was prevented from trying to halt the flow of enemy shipping to North Vietnam until it was too late. An effort to halt enemy supply shipping on the South Vietnamese coast succeeded briefly, until the enemy changed the destination of his small ships from South Vietnam's beaches to Cambodia's quays. For reasons still not clear, those diverted ships were allowed to come and go freely. A U.S. naval effort in the rivers of the Mekong Delta to stem the flow of enemy arms from Cambodia into South Vietnam foundered on the reef of South Vietnamese military indifference to the matter. In the face of all these conditions, nothing else the navy did, whether in the jungle-bordered rivers of IV Corps, along the sandy shores of I Corps, or in the murky skies over Haiphong and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, could have any but passing significance. And so the war ended in defeat. Even if the navy had been permitted to frustrate the flow of enemy shipping, the war might have been lost anyway. Surely, there were many causes of defeat. Probably some day we will be better able than now to rank their relative importance.

By closing the Suez Canal to shipping in 1956 and again in 1967, the wars in the Levant certainly affected the maritime world (including, in 1967, the Soviet supplying of North Vietnam), but the war of 1973 was the first ever fought in that corner of the world in which the U.S. Navy played a big part.

Going vigorously on the offensive in two swiftly conducted battles, the Israeli navy's fast missile boats defeated formations of similar Syrian and Egyptian craft. Thus they made safe the entry of friendly shipping into Haifa and unsafe the entry of hostile shipping into Latakia, Syria's main port. Alexandria, the major Egyptian port, was beyond their reach. In very small craft the Israelis also gained mastery of the Gulf of Suez, thus both easing the passage of their army across the Suez Canal into Africa and helping deny Egypt's army safe passage home from the Sinai desert. However, more than a thousand miles southeastward—at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, far beyond the range of Israeli counter-measures—Egyptian destroyers put an end to Israel's essential flow of oil from Iran.

In the meantime the Soviet Union, displeased with the sinking by Israeli missile boats of one of its civilian supply ships in a Syrian port, began to ship arms to the Syrians in amphibious ships. To add weight to the gesture and to protect those ships, the Soviets concentrated their recently reinforced Mediterranean squadron within easy steaming distance of Syria.

At about the same time, the United States deployed its Mediterranean force, the Sixth Fleet, in an unorthodox but effective manner both to support and to protect the flow of aircraft of various kinds from the United States to Israel. When it appeared as if the Soviets were about to move a division of troops by air to Egypt, the Americans swiftly concentrated their fleet, now centered on three carriers, where it could halt the flow of Soviet transport aircraft. In turn, the Soviet fleet stationed itself where it could both protect the aerial movement of Soviet troops and attack the U.S. fleet. Happily, the minor powers were able to agree on an armistice, the Soviet division did not fly, and after some lingering high tension, the superpowers sailed their fighting fleets away from the scene of confrontation.

This war was brief, complex, and dangerous. The naval aspects centered on assuring the flow of friendly shipping and halting that of hostile shipping. A new factor here was the effective though as yet unrecognized redefinition of shipping, which had come to include troop-carrying and supply-carrying aircraft as well as combat planes being ferried over the sea towards the scene of action.

After their seizure of the Falkland Islands early in April 1982, the Argentines flew in about a division of troops to guard the archipelago from British attempts at recovery. They sent arms, ammunition, and supplies by both ship and aircraft. When a small British task force arrived a month later, the flow of Argentine shipping to the Falklands dried up. British attacks on the airstrip at Port Stanley with bombs and gunfire, and efforts to down the transports with fighters and missiles, failed to destroy a single aircraft on a transport mission. But collectively those efforts appear to have reduced Argentine supply flights to a small fraction of the number the army needed.

Shortly after their amphibious ships joined the carrier task force the British landed their army on East Falkland Island. There, as the defending Argentine attack planes fell on them, the British ships supported their army with logistics and protected it with fire. British troops meanwhile advanced on their more numerous but isolated and ill supplied opponents and in three weeks defeated them. The war was over.

The Royal Navy's instruments of war included nuclear-powered attack submarines, missile-firing destroyers and frigates, and short-takeoff-and-vertical-landing (STOVL) fighter aircraft, all new to combat or almost so. Be that as it may, as always the navy's purposes were to make sure that friendly shipping

could flow, that hostile shipping (including transport aircraft) could not, and to land an army on a hostile shore, supporting it with fire and logistics.

By the time the South Atlantic war began, the Persian Gulf (Iran-Iraq) war had already been in progress for over a year and a half. Though in essence a continental war, after several bloody but inconclusive years it began to gain a maritime flavor when each opponent tried to foil the other's access to foreign arms by cutting the flow of enemy oil to the outside world.

Beginning in 1984, Iraq's air force attacked Iranian oil ports and the foreign tankers that were filled at those ports. Despite the spectacular photographs of burning ships, the effort failed. The number of tankers entering Iranian ports did not diminish, and Iran always found ways to fill them. The Iraqis were ill positioned to fight either a defensive or an offensive naval war, and shipping to their only port soon ended. Their neighbors the Kuwaitis came to the rescue, allowing tankers to fill up with Kuwaiti oil and using the profit to purchase arms for Iraq. The arms, carried in foreign freighters, were unloaded in Kuwait for further shipment overland to Iraq.

At first the United States, friendly to neither combatant, was content to let them destroy each other. But when Iran, anxious to punish Kuwait for helping the enemy, threatened to attack Kuwait's tankers in 1987, the Kuwaitis enticed the United States to protect those ships. Eleven hoisted American colors and thus became eligible for protection by U.S. naval forces in the gulf. From then until the war's end in mid-1988, all the action that took place in the gulf arose from U.S. efforts to ensure the flow of friendly shipping despite Iranian efforts to halt it. The United States won the contest.

Two years later, in August 1990, the Iraqis turned on their small benefactor and swallowed it whole. This led swiftly to a U.S.-led UN effort to protect Saudi Arabia from a fate like Kuwait's and to rescue Kuwait from its conquerors. After half a year of unopposed buildup by sea and air, the UN army and air force smashed the Iraqi armed forces in a forty-three-day campaign and rescued the battered remains of Kuwait. This, too, was a continental campaign.

Beginning in August and for long after the fighting ended, UN warships enforced an embargo on shipping carrying goods into or out of Iraq or nearby Jordanian ports, though, as heavily laden trucks continued to roll across the border from Jordan to Iraq, the effectiveness of that embargo was in doubt. When the aerial part of the campaign began in mid-January 1991, U.S. carrier-based aircraft and long-range shipborne missiles took their share of the load. During the four days of the UN ground advance the fleet conducted a demonstration off the Kuwaiti coast suggesting the imminence of an amphibious assault. This appears to have distracted at least some of the opposing army from

## 48 Naval War College Review

the UN army's attacks inland. Had such an assault been called for, it may well have proved an expensive venture, for, among other things, the UN mine-fighting force was inadequate to the task of making safe lanes that the amphibious ships and craft and the majority of their fire-support ships required. No such assault was called for. It is clear, however, that till the war's end the enemy was able to deny that patch of sea, the northern Persian Gulf, to his foes.

Perhaps the ships enforcing the embargo halted or forestalled the Iraqi acquisition of some important arms or materials, and perhaps the presence in the gulf of so many UN warships forestalled any Iraqi (or Iranian) attack by aircraft or missile boats against unguarded supply shipping. Otherwise, however, it was a continental war; had none of the U.S. or other UN warships been present, the war would probably have taken a course not much different from the one it actually took and ended not much later than in fact it did.

## VII

Ever since the defeat of the German U-boats in the spring of 1943 and of the Japanese Combined Fleet in the summer and fall of 1944, the U.S. and allied navies have been able to land troops on a hostile shore, supporting them then and thereafter with fire and logistics without first having to fight an enemy fleet.

For countries owning navies, this has been beneficial, because their enemies have been unable to require of them a preliminary struggle for mastery of the sea. Often it has appeared that even the requirement of landing troops "on a hostile shore" is superfluous. In its three wars since 1945 the United States has done that only once, at Inchon in 1950. But that once came not long after the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, had dismissed the need for such landings as a thing of the past. Inchon changed the course of the Korean War. Though during the Vietnam war the enemy was allowed to invade the South, neither the South nor its American ally was allowed to invade the North by either land or sea. Hence, the powerful amphibious weapon was allowed to rust in its scabbard. As we have seen, during Desert Storm in 1991 the U.S. command, properly, made no landing on the hostile shore. In contrast, the British, who in 1982 were dismantling the remnants of their modest capacity to conduct amphibious landings, found that conducting such a landing was exactly what they had to do if they were ever to get their soggy Falkland Islands back again.<sup>2</sup>

During those years it was also argued from time to time that the capacity to ensure that friendly shipping could flow and that hostile shipping could not was also a thing of the past. Frightened at such thoughts, some navy people sought to take over missions better carried out by the air force, if indeed worth carrying out at all. But without American dominion of the sea in 1950, the Soviet Pacific



Fleet based at Vladivostok might easily have forestalled the seaborne rescue of the beleaguered U.S. X Corps from North Korea, and Mao Zedong might have chosen after all to try his amphibious assault on Formosa.

The failure of the United States during the Vietnam war to make use of its huge potential to halt the flow of enemy seaborne cargo into Haiphong surely ranks among the major reasons the already risky venture in South Vietnam failed.

The longevity of Israel's spectacular success in the desert during the Levantine war of 1973 rested almost entirely on the free flow of resupply shipping into Israeli seaports (and to a lesser extent airports) from Europe and the United States.

The amphibious landing that led to the British recovery of the Falkland Islands depended fully on Britain's ability to ensure that its shipping could flow to those islands and that Argentine shipping could not.

Because Iraq had no means of halting the flow of UN shipping to the Persian Gulf in 1990–1991, ultimately it had no hope of victory. Even if Saddam's army had seized the Saudi sea and air terminals through which the UN armies and air forces surged after 2 August 1990, the UN navies had the power to punch through any hastily erected defenses afloat, aloft, or ashore and then to land the assault and follow-on echelons of the rescuing armies at places of their own choosing on the Arabian shore, supporting them then and thereafter with fire and logistics.<sup>3</sup>

Any country that can do such things, if it is to look after its interests, needs to cherish and nurture that ability. Let us hope that the United States, which can perform such tasks, will continue to be able to do so.

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## Notes

1. The Quasi-War with France, fought in the Caribbean from 1798 to 1801, was a purely naval conflict wherein the U.S. Navy sought essentially to fend off the depredations of privateers of revolutionary France upon American shipping.

In the Barbary War (declared in 1801 but fading away in 1805), U.S. naval forces temporarily ended this country's payments of tribute that Tripoli (among other North African states) had required in return for the safe passage of American merchant shipping in the western Mediterranean. For a decade larger events elsewhere prevented the U.S. Navy from continuing its operations in that sea. But in 1815 a powerful new force under Commodore Stephen Decatur quickly put an end to the problem and, instead of paying tribute to the pirates, collected from them fines and indemnities. Later, British and French forces extinguished the pirates' power completely.

2. The owners of amphibious forces found plenty of use for them during the multitude of crises that marked the years following World War II. The British and French, for example, seized Port Said, Egypt, by means of an amphibious assault during the Suez crisis of 1956; the United States, facing what it took to be a major crisis in Lebanon in 1958, put a substantial force ashore by means of an amphibious landing, which, days later, was reinforced by an airborne element from the army in Europe; and at Grenada in 1983 after a fortunately available amphibious ready group used its helicopters to put part of a marine battalion landing team ashore at Pearls airport in the island's northeast, it ensured the swift seizure of the capital city of St. Georges in the southwest by landing the rest of the battalion by boat over a nearby beach while the army's airborne elements were still gaining control of the main airport.

3. The minefields off Kuwait, and the gun positions ashore from which they could be defended, were erected, not hastily, but at Iraq's leisure during the half year that elapsed between Saddam's capture of Kuwait and the UN's successful drive to evict him.