

# NAVY NEWS

Special Issue

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## Forward Presence



### Being there is what counts

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This morning, keys are turning in the front doors of thousands of American business offices "forward deployed" literally all over the world. American companies invest in overseas presence because actually "being there" is clearly the best way to do business.

Also this morning, U.S. Navy amphibious assault ships carrying 4,400 combat-ready American Marines are forward deployed in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. And at sea in the Mediterranean and in the Persian Gulf are aircraft carrier battle groups with 16,000 Sailors and two air wings of combat ready aircraft. And finally, in the Far East, the U.S. has permanently deployed a third aircraft carrier battle group and a third amphibious ready group. The vigilant "forward presence" of these forces is

vital, but not always as visible to Americans as it is to the rest of the world. Their routine daily efforts don't always make the headlines, but they are vitally important to world peace and stability.

Some argue that the forward presence these forces represent is no longer necessary. They argue that forces reacting from the U.S. are enough to maintain international stability. They further maintain that "brushfires," or outbreaks of regional instability, are insignificant, or incidental at best. And they argue that America can no longer afford the forward presence of these forces on what amounts to a near continuous basis.

We would argue just the opposite. Forward deployed U.S. forces, primarily naval expeditionary forces - the Navy-Marine Corps team - are vital to regional stability and to keeping these crises from escalating into full-scale

wars. To those who argue that the U.S. can't afford to have this degree of vigilance anymore, we say: The U.S. can't afford not to.

These brushfires, whether the result of long-standing ethnic tensions or resurgent nationalism in the wake of the Cold War will only continue. The Cold War was an anomaly.

Never again will we live in a bipolar world whose nuclear shadow suppressed nationalism and ethnic tensions. We have, in some respects, reverted back to the world our ancestors knew: A world in disorder. Somalia, Bosnia, Liberia, Haiti, Rwanda, Iraq and the Taiwan Straits are merely examples of the types of continuing crises we now face. Some might call this period an age of chaos.

The U.S. and the world cannot afford to allow any crisis to escalate into threats to the United States', and the world's, vital interests. And while the skies are not dark with smoke from these brushfires, today's world demands a new approach. The concepts of choice must be selective and committed engagement, unencumbered global operations and prompt crisis resolution. There is no better way to maintain and enforce these concepts than with the forward presence of the U.S. Navy-Marine Corps team.

There are four basic tenets to international security in today's world; Prevention, deterrence, crisis resolution, and war termination. The underlying assumption of these tenets is that the U.S. and its allies should not be forced into winning a war in an



U.S. Navy photo

USS Shiloh (CG 67) was on station during routine operations when the call came to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles against targets in southern Iraq Sept. 2, 1996 during Operation Desert Strike.

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overwhelming (and expensive) fashion. Instead, it is much better - and cheaper - to resolve a crisis before it burns out of control.

### Prevent

The key to prevention is continuous presence in a region. This lets our friends know we have an interest and lets potential foes know that we're there to check any move. Both effects occur without any direct action taken. Although hard to measure, the psychological impact of naval expeditionary forces is undeniable. This regional presence underwrites political and economic stability.

*This is forward presence.*

### Deter

Presence does not prevent every crisis. Some rogues are going to be tempted to strike no matter what the odds, and will require active measures to be deterred. When crises reach this threshold, there is no substitute for sustained actual presence. Naval expeditionary forces can quickly take on the role of the very visible fist. Friends and potential enemies recognize naval expeditionary forces as capable of defending or destroying. This visible fist, free from diplomatic and territorial constraints, forms the bedrock of regional deterrence. For example, the mere presence of naval expeditionary forces deterred Chinese attempts to derail the democratic process in Taiwan and countered Iraqi saber-rattling toward Jordan. It's hard to quantify the cost savings of deterring a crisis before it requires our intervention. But the savings are real - in dollars, and often in blood and human misery.

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### Resolve

If a crisis can be neither prevented nor deterred, then prompt and decisive crisis resolution is imperative before the crisis threatens vital interests. U.S. Naval expeditionary forces are a transoceanic key that finds and opens - forcibly if necessary - any gateway into a fiery world. This ability is equally expandable and retractable according to the situation. Perhaps most importantly, naval expeditionary forces don't need permission from foreign governments to be on scene and take unilateral action in a crisis. This both unencumbers the force and takes the pressure off allies to host any outside forces.

Over the past two years, for example, U.S. naval expeditionary forces simultaneously and unilaterally deployed to Liberia and to the Central African Republic (1,500 miles inland) to protect U.S. and international citizens. They also launched measured retaliatory Toma-

hawk strikes to constrain unacceptable Iraqi behavior, and conducted naval air and Tomahawk strikes which brought the warring parties in Bosnia to the negotiating table.

*This is forward presence.*

### Terminate

Each of the above tenets is worthy of the U.S. paying an annual peace insurance premium. Otherwise we, and our allies, risk paying the emotional, physical and financial costs of a full-blown conflagration that began as just another brushfire. If there is a war, naval expeditionary forces will be first to fight. They are inherently capable of enabling the follow-on forces from the U.S. for as long as it takes. And they will remain on-scene to enforce the settlement that ends the conflict.

*This is forward presence.*

The Iraqs, Central Africas, Somalias and Bosnias inevitably destabilize and erode world order and respect for the rule of law. Indeed, a failure to respond to them encourages future - more serious - crises.

The U.S. must foster stability around the world, today and tomorrow. The peace insurance premium is a small price and is the cost of leadership. Who else is capable of this type of forward presence on a global basis? For the U.S., maintaining a steady commitment to stability will be a challenge. But maintain it we must, or the price, literally and figuratively, will be much greater down the road.

The example of fighting forest fires is precisely applicable. The philosophy is simple: Prevention through living in the environment; deterrence through vigilance; and resolution through quick and selective engagement. Ninety-five percent of all forest fires are contained - the direct result of the watchful presence of the local initial attack crews who attack flashpoints. As for the other five percent, once the window of opportunity for decisive early action is missed, firefighters must be brought in from outside the region, and it is exponentially more expensive. Sometimes there are casualties - casualties that would not have been incurred had the fire been contained before it had the opportunity to flare.

America's Navy-Marine Corps team is underway, ready and on-scene at trouble spots around the world. Forward presence makes it - and will keep it - the right force, tailor-made for these uncertain and sometimes fiery times.

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