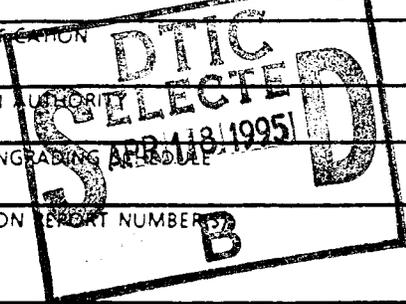


REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE



1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING AUTHORITY		4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) C	5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) MARITIME INTERDICTION: A VIABLE TOOL FOR TODAY'S CINC (U)			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) LCDR RICHARD J. PRESTON, JR., USCG			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 2/13/95	15. PAGE COUNT 23
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	THREATS; NATIONAL SECURITY; MARITIME INTERDICTION; APPLICATION; CHARACTERISTICS; PLANNING	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
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20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 841-3414	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL C

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

MARITIME INTERDICTION: A VIABLE TOOL FOR TODAY'S CINC

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

16 June 1995

Paper directed by Captain D. Watson
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

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Abstract of

MARITIME INTERDICTION: A VIABLE TOOL FOR TODAY'S CINC

Increasingly, the United States is becoming involved in conflicts that pose indirect threats to our national security through regional destabilization. While maritime interdiction is not a panacea, it does provide many worthwhile benefits to the CINC as a viable tool to deal with crises in the "gray area" between peace and war. Three historical case studies are analyzed to determine the factors which the CINC should consider before recommending maritime interdiction as a course of action. The interdependence of this strategy's application and the target nation's characteristics are also examined. Nation size, government and cultural type, dependence upon international trade, geography, and military status combine to affect the target nation's vulnerability. A critical parameter is the degree of international support. The maritime interdiction force should be closely tailored to the particular interdiction situation. Air support and defensive planning are essential elements of force structuring. Advance planning should include the acquisition of nearby ports for suspect vessel diversion and internment, as well as friendly force logistics and maintenance. Combining maritime interdiction with diplomatic, political, and other economic measures will ensure the most success against a target nation.

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Introduction

Today the United States must be prepared to respond to conflicts where the previously clear line between peace and war has become blurred and ill defined. Increasingly, we are becoming involved in conflicts that pose indirect threats to our national security by regional destabilization. The 1994 National Security Strategy emphasizes, "Our leadership must stress preventative diplomacy....to help resolve problems, reduce tensions and defuse conflicts before they become crises."¹

The U.S. Navy's doctrine includes enforcement of U.N. economic sanctions as a relevant naval mission.² If properly applied, maritime interdiction can assist in achieving national objectives. When, and for what type of objectives, should maritime interdiction be used? What criteria determine whether this strategy will be effective? What are the pertinent operational considerations? This paper will explore the factors that the CINC should consider in recommending interdiction as a feasible course of action.

What is Maritime Interdiction?

The concept of maritime interdiction is derived from the concept of pacific blockade. Pacific blockade focuses on contraband import and export, minimizes disruption of neutral shipping, and is not considered to be an act of war. The "quarantine" of Cuba during the 1961 Missile Crisis was a watershed event in the evolution of maritime interdiction. It is considered to be the model for current naval interdiction practices because of its limited goal of preventing missile importation, its precedent setting invocation of collective self defense as a legal basis for unilateral action, and the use of blockade as an inhibitor rather than as a catalyst of war.³

The term maritime interdiction as used in this paper means the use of naval forces to interrupt another nation's commercial trade as a form of coercive diplomacy in operations short of war. The techniques employed include challenging, boarding, and search of suspected contraband carrying vessels. Those vessels confirmed to be carrying contraband will either be diverted, turned back, or seized and interned.

Case Studies

Three cases of maritime interdiction will be reviewed to analyze some of the factors impacting upon the use of maritime interdiction. As each case is reviewed, the following factors will be addressed:

- How did maritime interdiction assist in accomplishment of the strategic objectives?
- ♦ What cargoes were targeted?
- ♦ What conditions enhanced or detracted from the interdiction's effectiveness?
- Were the strategic objectives achieved?

The Beira Patrol: In 1965 Britain reactively imposed political and economic sanctions to cause repeal of Rhodesia's unilaterally declared independence (UDI) and incorporation of black majority governmental representation. When these sanctions did not produce the desired reaction, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed voluntary trade sanctions and an oil embargo that would become effective in two months. The United Nations felt that this embargo would force Rhodesia to settle with Britain because Rhodesia received all of its oil by pipeline from the port of Beira, Mozambique.⁴ Instead Rhodesia responded by building storage tanks and stockpiling oil reserves.⁵

Britain next stationed the aircraft carrier H.M.S. EAGLE off Beira to observe and report oil trafficking.⁶ In April 1966 the UNSC authorized Britain to use force to prevent further violations after a Greek tanker reached Beira despite British interception. The British boarded and diverted 28 other tankers over the next two years; patrolling continued until 1976 when Rhodesia agreed to allow black majority representation.⁷

Analysis: There were a number of factors that simplified and increased the effectiveness of this interdiction effort. Only one port was involved, simplifying force concentration. The prohibited cargo was easily verified, simplifying boardings. The volume of shipping through Beira was relatively low, about 100 ships per month. The environment posed little or no threat as Rhodesia lacked a navy. The operations were conducted solely by the British, avoiding multinational complications. Lastly, the operations enjoyed the wide international approval of the U.N.

Three factors worked against the overall success of this episode. For much of the sanction period, South Africa provided critical support to Rhodesia through their mutual land border, enabling Rhodesia to resist. Imports from South Africa increased 500%, while exports rose 250% over the nine year period of the sanctions.⁸ Portugal also assisted in sanction circumvention to a lesser degree.⁹

Rhodesia was more economically self-sufficient and politically resolved than was anticipated. The Rhodesian economy was transformed from "virtual total dependence on importation of manufactured goods.....to self-sufficiency in most areas..."¹⁰ Similarly, politically diverse factions banded together under the external threat to support their government's policies.

This effort had significant opportunity cost to Britain. The Royal Navy maintained a patrol of one or two frigates, supported by fleet auxiliaries and naval airpower for nine years. This effort was taxing. It was estimated that nine ships were needed to maintain one on station; a total of 18 ships being devoted to this mission for its duration.¹¹

Politically this interdiction contributed to goal achievement. However, Rhodesia yielded to diplomatic mediation only after South Africa (under international pressure) eliminated the border trade. Economically these sanctions succeeded despite their long duration. The annual cost to Rhodesia was \$130 million, while imposing the embargo cost Britain \$24 million annually.¹²

The Middle East Maritime Interception Force: In August 1990, four days after Iraq invaded Kuwait, the UNSC imposed economic and trade sanctions upon Iraq. All imports and exports (except humanitarian food and medicine) were embargoed. The primary objective was to cause Iraq to "immediately and unconditionally" withdraw from Kuwait.¹³

Immediately the United States began unilateral maritime interdiction operations (MIO), citing Kuwait's inherent right to individual and collective defense under the UN charter. Just two weeks later the UNSC authorized the use of force to enforce the sanctions. From the outset, this was a multinational effort with 22 nations participating, including NATO and the WEU. Each naval force received its tasking from its own national command authority.

Iraqi merchant vessels and some neutral vessels challenged the MIF. All were successfully countered by persuading the ships to change destination. "takedowns" by allied

boarding teams, or warning shots. During the course of this operation roughly 7,500 ships were challenged, 964 boarded, and 51 diverted with one million tons of contraband cargo.¹⁴

The sanctions continued through the ground war, and remain in place to date because Iraq remains non-compliant with various UNSC resolutions.

Analysis: Despite the lack of a formal international command and control structure, superb international cooperation was achieved. Two keys to this were the previous experiences of the major navies in the region during the Iran-Iraq war, and the monthly MIF conferences held to facilitate cooperation and unity of effort.¹⁵ Besides the exceptional multinational cooperation, several other factors contributed to the interdiction's efficacy. The use of land and shipboard based aircraft greatly extended the surveillance capabilities of the MIF. The relatively constrained waters of the area "funneled" traffic enabling MIO forces to concentrate at strategic chokepoints, simplifying traffic control. The threat of counter-interdiction was low. Although Iraq had a navy, realistically it was incapable of contesting the MIO.

Iraq was particularly vulnerable to sanctions, depending upon oil export for 95% of its foreign exchange revenues. Thirty percent of Iraq's GNP was derived from importation. Also, Iraq imported 70% of its grain and 90% of its sugar and vegetable oil needs. By contrast, Japan's GNP was 10% import dependent while less than 50% of its food was imported.¹⁶

Maritime interdiction was greatly assisted by events on land. Along with exporting oil by tanker, Iraq also used two pipelines through Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Both pipelines were closed by those nations. In Turkey's case, this was a tremendous sacrifice since most Turkish oil needs were imported through that pipeline. Saudi Arabia closed the second line, increasing

well production to offset the loss of Iraq's output, provide oil to Turkey, and keep world oil prices stable.

A disconnect occurred between the economic and political effects of the sanctions. Iraq's leadership suppressed public dissent and did not incorporate public sentiment into strategic decisions. The Iraqi people were accustomed to economic distress from the recent Iran-Iraq war, raising their stoicism.¹⁷ Consequently, the sanction's economic effects did not translate into the desired political impact.

Although the MIO alone did not accomplish the strategic goal, the loss of oil export revenues drastically affected Iraq's economy and war preparedness. It also affected the maintenance and replacement of military equipment and material. The CIA estimated that the sanctions began to affect the Iraqi air force and the ground forces three and nine months respectively after implementation.¹⁸

The MIO provided a basis for coalition building and international consensus. Initially many nations were extremely skeptical of using military force against Iraq. However, they were able to commit to the MIO effort, and as events progressed, many later provided other forms of support to the coalition.

Maritime interdiction provided an opportunity for the building of a domestic consensus within the United States. The American people were initially skeptical of troop involvement in this distant conflict. The sanctions displayed President Bush's effort to "try everything" before initiating combat, and favorable public sentiment grew over time.

The Haitian Embargo: In June 1993 the UNSC imposed a mandatory oil and arms embargo on Haiti. The objective was to restore the democratically elected President to office after displacement by a 1991 military coup.

One month later, apparently under the embargo's pressure, the junta's leader agreed to President Aristide's peaceful return. The UNSC then lifted the embargo. Shortly thereafter, pro-military demonstrations broke out, and a U.S. warship carrying U.S. and Canadian peacekeeping troops was turned away by an angry mob.¹⁹ The UNSC subsequently re-imposed the embargo enforced by a multinational naval force.

In May 1994 the sanctions were elevated to a near total embargo, exempting only food, medicine and cooking oil. The U.S. unilaterally banned all air traffic and froze all personal Haitian financial assets to pressure Haitian business leaders to persuade the junta to step down. Although weakened by increased high level dissent, the junta remained in power.

In July 1994, the UNSC authorized the use of force. In September, under imminent threat of a U.S. invasion, the junta negotiated a peaceful settlement with a U.S. delegation. One month later the junta left and President Aristide returned to power.

Analysis: Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, with a shrinking economy (-15% growth of 1993 GNP²⁰), yet the sanctions were not effective in causing achievement of the UNSC goals. There are several reasons why this occurred.

The policy makers were not effected by the embargo. Given time by cautious, incrementally imposed sanctions, the military was able to stockpile fuel and supplies. Anticipating sanctions, the military built a paved road (the only one in Haiti) in 1991 to haul fuel from the Dominican Republic. The military profited from their control over the fuel

supply.²¹ Gasoline sold for \$1.60/gallon in the Dominican Republic, while in Haiti its price was \$8/gallon; the majority of the profit went to the Haitian and Dominican Republic militaries.²² Given these incentives, the embargo *benefited* the junta.

The repressive junta was unconcerned with domestic opinion and was unsympathetic to popular suffering under the sanctions. Not until the business leaders' personal assets were frozen did the junta begin to consider giving up power.

The junta perceived weak international resolve regarding the Haitian situation. This perception was due to the incrementally imposed U.N. sanctions, the willingness of the UNSC to retract the sanctions for promised changes, and the visible discord between the U.S. government and President Aristide's government-in-exile.

Several factors generally favored the success of the maritime interdiction and sanctions. The Haitian military was weak, posing no naval threat. Haiti is an island nation, so except for the Dominican Republic border, geographic isolation was easy to achieve. Likewise, access to only one seaport needed to be controlled. The imposing nations had the resources to maintain the sanctions for a long period if necessary. Lastly, the United States was able to freeze the personal Haitian financial assets, as well as threaten direct military action.

Two factors hampered the maritime interdiction. The porous border with the Dominican Republic diluted the strategic effect of the oil embargo, perversely benefiting the junta. Despite international pressure, the Dominican Republic did not close the border due to domestic politics and opposition to Rev. Aristide's return.²³

Second, domestic and world opinion were against continued sanctions, because of the devastating impact upon the populace. The necessity to provide humanitarian aid slightly complicated the interdiction effort. The economic pressure of the sanctions also exacerbated refugee emigration which distracted MIO focus and fostered domestic U.S. debates, raising questions of U.S. motivation and commitment toward the problem.

Considerations for the CINC

This chapter will examine the factors that the theater commander should weigh before recommending maritime interdiction as a potential course of action. It is presumed that the NCA has already indicated that economic measures will be used as part of the total U.S. effort. Thus the questions become: When is maritime interdiction appropriate? What factors indicate the probability of success? How should the interdiction be imposed? How should effectiveness be measured? When, and how, should maritime interdiction be terminated?

Maritime interdiction should be imposed when it is desired to take stronger action on an issue than pure diplomatic or economic sanctions, yet not go to war. Maritime interdiction can be used for various objectives. It can punish another nation for a misdeed, it can seek to change a current action or policy, or deter the target nation (or other nations) from engaging in undesired activity. It can also be used to "signal" acceptance or rejection of any behavioral changes by the target through tightening or loosening of the interdiction's restrictiveness. It also signals the national position both internationally and domestically.²⁴

Economic sanctions, and therefore MIO, are more successful in causing modest policy changes than major ones. Overall, sanctions are successful 36% of the time. Modest policy changes were accomplished 41% of the time; while disruptions of military adventures and

affecting military impairment were only 20-30% successful.²⁵ To be effective it is important to impose sanctioning early to seize the "window of opportunity."

The efficacy of maritime interdiction varies with the vulnerability of the target nation. The following questions apply: What is the relative size, societal and governmental structure of the target nation? How dependent is the economy on maritime trade? What are the geographic constraints? How strong is the target's navy?

Interdiction is attritive by nature, so it is important to have the resources to outlast the opponent. If the other nation is not dramatically smaller in resources and economic strength, then interdiction may prove too indecisive and costly to pursue. Another consideration is the complexity of the target's society. An urbanized culture is generally more dependent upon international trade and will suffer sooner from deprivation than a more self-reliant agrarian society. Similarly, an open, democratic culture is more susceptible to trade curtailment than an authoritarian government where public opinion is disregarded in policy decisions and the government has strict control over resource prioritization.

The amount of the target economy based on maritime trade is another indicator of vulnerability. On the average, a successful sanction degrades the target's GNP by 2% or more.²⁶ Therefore, maritime interdiction must directly, or indirectly effect much of this 2%. Interdiction of basic commodities such as oil or iron ore often have far-reaching indirect effects. Alternatively, directly interdicting a nation's exports can cause the requisite GNP differential by trade denial. Most likely, maritime interdiction will require supplementation by other economic sanctions to cause sufficient impact.

The target nation's geography and available trade routes are also factors of its vulnerability. An island or peninsular country will be more vulnerable than one with extensive land borders, depending on the permeability of those borders. Land borders impassable to heavy motorized traffic will be of little use, unless foot traffic can carry the necessary volume of material. For instance, in Haiti a significant amount of gasoline was smuggled by human bearers.²⁷ A country with only one or two ports will be more easily interdicted than one that has many ports or a long, sinuous coastline. The distance between the target and the interdicting nations is also important. The cost and effort to supply and maintain a fleet increases with greater distance from domestic basing.

The naval and air warfighting capabilities of the target nation must also be weighted against one's own capabilities. Interdiction raises the potential for escalation. If the targeted nation chooses to contest the interdiction by convoy or direct attack, the NCA will have to decide whether to continue, withdraw, or engage in direct conflict. Interdiction force structuring should anticipate the probability of attack by all means. The target nation's ability to interpose a force off your coast, or to engage in *guerre de course* should also be examined, and planned for. These defensive concerns and costs may outweigh the benefit of interdiction.

The degree of international support is an important parameter, even in unilateral sanctioning. International support provides three useful functions: it adds moral weight to the sanction as "the right thing to do"; it helps to isolate the target country physically, economically, and psychologically; and it preempts international anti-sanction backlash.²⁸ This last function can be vital to coalition cohesiveness, as well as to adding a social stigma to any evasion by bystander nations.

Domestic support is also important. An interdiction campaign will be protracted, so national will assumes great significance. If the people do not agree with the governmental policies, public discussion of the issues will ensue, and may affect governmental resolve. The target nation may perceive this debate as a lack of national resolve, prompting continued resistance. This occurred with both the Iraqi and the Haitian situations.

Conversely, the use of interdiction can display governmental resolve to deal with a contentious issue while simultaneously rallying public support. At first many people contested President Bush's decision to intervene in the Kuwait crisis, but as time went on a consensus was built that "everything had been tried" and eventually endorsed the use of military force to resolve the issue.

Imposing Interdiction: It is important to quickly convince the target nation of international and domestic resolve on the issue at hand. The sooner that this resolve can be conveyed, the better the chance that the sanctions will succeed. Hufbauer's study suggests that the "inverse relationship between success and sanction period argues against a strategy of turning the screw."²⁹ Thus quick, decisive and resolute application of sanctions is best; and it is to this purpose that maritime interdiction is ideally suited. Naval forces can be in place to enforce sanctions nearly worldwide in a matter of days. The quick embargoing of Iraq prevented the stockpiling of supplies and development of evasive schemes, as well as immediately putting Iraq on the psychological defensive. Conversely, an incremental imposition of sanctions, such as against Haiti, invites misinterpretation of international will and fosters increased resistance.

The interdiction effort must be total; most likely MIO will need supplementation by other measures. All sea, land and air trade routes must be closed to maximize effectiveness. Failure to accomplish this will result in situations like Rhodesia and Haiti where the sanctions were ineffective, except in the very long term. International support and cooperation may pressure a sympathetic neighbor (such as South Africa) into closing a land border that can not be closed by direct intervention.

Careful selection of target cargoes is necessary to gain maximum economic effect while simplifying MIO. Bulk cargoes and raw materials are easier to locate and identify at sea than small technological items such as computers, electronic parts, or containerized items. If it is necessary to inspect containerized cargo, it is often best to do this inport to maximize cargo accessibility. This in turn requires friendly host nation support and adequate port facilities nearby. The question of how to handle contraband carrying ships should be addressed and resolved at the start of operations. Will they simply be turned back, diverted out of the interdiction zone to another port, or should they be "seized" and interned until the cessation of hostilities?

The interdiction force should be prepared for a lengthy operation. Hufbauer states that the average time for successful sanctions was 2.9 years, while for failures it was 6.9 years.³⁰ The minimum time in the cases reviewed earlier was 11 months. This can entail a sizable investment of naval resources as evidenced by the Rhodesian case.³¹

The interdiction force should project overwhelming power to minimize risk to itself. If the targeted nation perceives that the interdicting force is more than sufficient to deal with any evasion or attack, it will be less likely to attempt either. However, if the target nation discerns

a weakness or inadequacy, it will test that perception. For example, the Iraqi vessel Tadmur was used several times to test MIO force resolve and possibly gather operational intelligence by various ruses. The presence of decisive allied force (two ships present for each intercept) and sound ROE effectively countered these attempted evasions.³²

The interdiction force should be carefully tailored to meet the situation. Air surveillance is essential. Whereas a small number of large platforms assisted by air surveillance will be effective in open ocean situations and at strategic chokepoints, other situations will require different assets. An archipelagic nation, or one with fringing island geography (such as Norway), will require larger numbers of smaller draft vessels to carry out interceptions in restricted waters and off numerous small bays.

Measuring Effectiveness and Termination: Measuring the effectiveness of maritime interdiction is difficult. The ultimate measure of success must be the achievement of the national strategic goals. It is doubtful if there will ever be a case where these goals are attained through unassisted maritime interdiction. Therefore, the effectiveness of MIO should be examined as a part of the overall effort. The best MOE would be the amount of GNP degradation attributable to MIO. As stated earlier, an average 2% degradation must be achieved for a moderate probability of success. Other available indicators such as number of ships intercepted or diverted, number of tons of cargo seized are not as relevant to the strategic goals.

Ideally, termination of maritime interdiction will not occur before achievement of the strategic goals. It should not be continued beyond the point where the imposition costs outweigh the benefits derived. This cost-benefit analysis must include intangibles such as

national will, international opinion and adverse humanitarian issues as well as economic indicators. If it is necessary to terminate interdiction prematurely, every attempt should be made to compensate for this loss by other methods available to avoid giving the target a false sense of success.

Conclusions

Maritime interdiction can be an effective means of enforcing economic sanctions if properly applied. It can cause modest policy changes by the target nation while sending international and domestic signals of resolve. It will not work for issues where the target is firmly entrenched on the issue, nor will it work well to counter military adventures. It must be applied while the target's position on the issue is still malleable, so it needs to be applied quickly once the target generates an adverse action or policy. International support is crucial for effective physical, economic and psychological isolation of the target nation. Maritime interdiction will not "do it alone." It must be combined with other diplomatic, political, and economic measures to ensure the maximum possibility of success. Before imposing MIO, it is important to consider the escalatory effect it may have and what your nation's response will be in that eventuality.

It is important to analyze the target nation's vulnerability carefully before proceeding. Nation size, government and cultural types, dependence upon international trade, geography, and military status should all be examined to determine the probability of success.

The application of maritime interdiction should contain overwhelming force closely tailored to the particular interdiction situation. Air support is essential, and should contain both land and ship based assets. The defensive posture of the MIF should be reviewed as it

pertains to the target nation's capabilities. Long duration patrols should be anticipated; maintenance and logistics should be incorporated into planning. Ports should also be identified for diversion of violating ships, as well as inport inspection of suspect vessels.

Maritime interdiction is a valuable means to carry out national policy in operations other than war. While it is not a panacea, it does provide many worthwhile benefits to the CINC as a viable tool in the "gray area" between peace and war so prevalent in today's tumultuous world.

Notes

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²⁴ Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott, Economic Sanctions In Support of Foreign Policy Goals, (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1983), p. 11.

²⁵ _____, Economic Sanctions Reconsidered, p. 80.

²⁶ _____, Support of Foreign Policy Goals, p. 80.

²⁷ Howard W. French, "U.S. Envoy," New York Times, 26 May 1994, A 8:3.

²⁸ Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, Support of Foreign Policy Goals, p.84.

²⁹ _____, Economic Sanctions Reconsidered, p. 87.

³⁰ Ibid., p.87.

³¹ Siegel, p. 103.

³² Dept. of Defense, p. 74.

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