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# **Toward the End of Force Projection?**

## **II. Operational Responses and Political Perspectives**

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**Corentin Brustlein**

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Laboratoire  
de **R**echerche  
sur la **D**éfense

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# Abstract

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For more than a decade, US defense circles have been concerned about the emergence of capabilities and strategies, which, as they spread, risk imperiling the United States' position in the world by their ability to disrupt or prevent force projection operations. Though most of the literature on such "anti-access" strategies focuses on the military aspects of the threat, this *Focus stratégique* – the second and last part of a two-part study – adopts a different perspective. Firstly, it considers the various means Western armed forces could rely on to confront anti-access strategies and conduct forcible entry operations, and assesses in particular the potential French and European contributions. Secondly, it argues that the problem of access cannot be studied in depth without taking into account its political dimension, which determines the operational freedom of action of both the interventionist powers and their adversaries. As was the case with the first part of the study, mostly centered on an analysis of current Iranian anti-access capabilities, this article is focused on examples taken from the Persian Gulf region.



# Introduction

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For more than ten years, American defense circles have been concerned about the emergence of capabilities and strategies, which, as they spread, risk imperiling the United States' position in the world. These anti-access postures aim to disrupt or hamper force projection operations using military and political means. Relying on the diffusion of advanced technologies – land-attack cruise missiles (LACM), anti-ship missiles, sea mines, surface-to-air defenses, etc. – to threaten weak points of force projection postures, anti-access strategies risk undermining the United States' capacity to intervene throughout the world.

Since Western, and especially French, armed forces focus mainly on force projection missions, it is essential to assess the threat posed by anti-access capabilities. Although assessing the means of action of potential adversaries such as Iran is a necessary preamble, a strategic analysis of this threat only makes sense if one also looks at possibilities to counter these postures and *force* access.<sup>1</sup> Hence, interventionist powers should perceive Tehran's current capabilities as more or less worrying depending on their own capabilities. As it happens, although European states have some "forcible entry" capabilities, it is far from sure that they could act in a collective and autonomous way against a regional adversary like Iran. In such a scenario, European armies would suffer from capability gaps, which, for now, seem to condemn them to dependence on US military superiority. Besides, the severity of the anti-access threat in fact hinges on the scenarios of intervention. In theory, a conflict in the Persian Gulf may not necessarily involve US participation. In practice, however, this seems unlikely due to the weakness of European offensive capabilities, and to the strategic and economic importance that the area will retain for the US in the next decades.

An analysis overlooking forcible entry capabilities would risk coming to two erroneous conclusions: either assuming that Western armed forces are totally powerless against the challenge posed by anti-access strategies, or, conversely, neglecting those domains of forcible entry to which certain regional capabilities compel us to pay closer attention.

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The author wishes to thank Admiral Jean Bétermier, Captain Denis Béraud and Colonel Bruno Foussard for their help in the preparation of the present article. Any mistakes in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

<sup>1</sup> The first part of this research is Corentin Brustlein, "Toward the End of Force Projection? I. The Anti-Access Threat", *Focus stratégique*, No. 20 bis, July 2011, available at: <http://www.ifri.org/downloads/fs20bisbrustlein.pdf>.

Beyond military aspects, the problem posed by the anti-access threat cannot be accurately grasped without taking into account its political dimension. Indeed, in the past, the political aspects of interventions determined the freedom of action of both interventionist powers and their adversaries, and will continue to do so in the future. Moreover, contrary to strictly military aspects of anti-access strategies, the political dimension has an impact on all kinds of force projection missions – from the mere evacuation of nationals to conventional war operations. For this reason, it deserves a careful and sustained attention.

The second part of this study on anti-access strategies thus attempts to correct these two flaws in existing literature on anti-access, first by examining possible responses to adversary strategies and capabilities, and second, by putting the issue of access into political perspective.

# Western Responses to Anti-Access Capabilities

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The analysis of Western “anti-anti-access” assets first requires a look at the various available basing options. The study will then examine existing military options for countering anti-access capabilities, whether by means of naval capabilities, Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD), or forcible entry and land-attack capabilities.<sup>2</sup>

## ***Basing Options***

The ability to overcome an anti-access strategy hinges above all on available naval air and naval assets, as well as those air units deployed in bases located near the theater of operations. To a lesser extent, this kind of mission may also rely on long-range strike capabilities used from the national territory. While the volume of forces the United States could employ in such long-range strike scenarios is substantial, France’s global reach capabilities are, however, extremely limited.<sup>3</sup>

In the event of a conflict with Tehran, three assets would play a key role in the US attempt to force access to the gulf: America’s presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, its access to other main theater air bases of the region (Al Dhafra, Al Udeid, Jeddah, Ali Al Salem...), and the presence of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, stationed in Manama, Bahrain. It is likely that one or several American carrier battle groups would come as reinforcements in the Gulf of Oman, which would be of precious help, especially as the US Navy is particularly competent in SEAD operations. As of today, an American carrier group is composed of nearly sixty combat and support (early warning, electronic warfare, anti-submarine warfare, etc.) aircraft. A significant part of these capabilities is required for the protection and escort of the fleet itself and would thus be unavailable for actions in enemy territory. Despite this constraint, the examples of *Desert Storm*, *Enduring Freedom* or *Iraqi Freedom* indicate that, in theory, several hundred US

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough assessment of all Western forces’ capabilities would need developments far beyond the framework of the present study. The latter limits itself to the evaluation of global – mostly American – “anti-anti-access” capabilities and to the French contribution to this kind of operations.

<sup>3</sup> The USAF B-2s and B-52s have this global reach. The French Air Force has conducted exercises (*Iroquois*) demonstrating such capabilities with the *Rafale* aircraft. Nonetheless, an Iroquois-type mission would only afford demonstration strikes: for instance, recent exercises involved four *Rafale*, each carrying only two *SCALP-EGs* cruise missiles. Even if France doubled the number of aircrafts involved, the resulting strike could carry a strong political message, but would fall short from having a decisive military impact.

aircrafts based on land and sea could be mobilized for an intervention within a few weeks or even days.

In regards to France, assuming that its basing rights do not evolve in the short to medium term, the French Air Force could rely on the facilities of its air bases 188 (in Djibouti) and 104 (in the United Arab Emirates, UAE). Ten *Mirage* 2000s are currently stationed in air base 188. In 2010, as part of the reinforcement of the French presence in the UAE, three *Rafale* fighters have replaced the three *Mirage* 2000-5s in Al Dhafra, and three more should follow by the end of 2011.<sup>4</sup> Should France contemplate intervening in the Persian Gulf after a NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, it would no longer have access to the facilities of the air bases in Kandahar and Bagram and would be unlikely to retain access to that of Douchanbé, Tajikistan. In addition to these installations, the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* would surely be called in. The latter can carry about thirty fighter-bombers, of which 20 to 25 at most could supplement land-based aircraft to undertake strike missions. For these reasons, in 2008 France was planning to possess the capability to project 70 *Rafale* combat aircraft from both air and naval aviation units over a distance of up to 7 to 8,000 kilometers, and which would have to share the different missions undertaken (air defense, escort, strikes, etc.).<sup>5</sup>

In the naval domain, problems arising from the heaviness and complexity of overseas deployments have no easy solution. When taken individually, none of the obstacles Western navies could face is insurmountable. However, their addition forces the US Navy to face difficult trade-offs regarding the number and types of ships it should procure, as well as the defensive and offensive capabilities to develop. These dilemmas are even stronger for European navies as they suffer from

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Marc Tanguy, "... et des Rafale aux Emirats Arabes Unis", *Le Mamouth*, 12 February 2010, available at: <http://lemamouth.blogspot.com/2010/02/et-des-rafale-aux-emirats-arabes-unis.html>; "Djibouti fond, Abou Dhabi croît", *TTU: Lettre hebdomadaire d'informations stratégiques*, No. 747, 17 February 2010, p. 1; Jean-Marc Tanguy, "Les Rafale iront bien à Kandahar (et aux EAU)", *Le Mamouth*, 28 May 2011, available at: <http://lemamouth.blogspot.com/2011/05/les-rafale-iront-bien-kandahar-et-aux.html>.

<sup>5</sup> *The French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, Paris, Odile Jacob – *La documentation française*, 2008, p. 216. The French air forces' operational contract aims to enable the undertaking of around 100 sorties of all types per day over two months in the context of a force projection operation. In comparison, France undertook around 50 daily sorties, during both operations *Desert Storm* (out of 2,700 sorties conducted by the coalition, that is 2% of the total) and *Allied Force* (out of 450 daily sorties, that is 11% of the total). Hence, we can note that France intends to participate more actively in future operations than it has done in Kosovo or against Iraq, despite having cut the *Armée de l'Air* personnel and equipment since the end of the Cold War. For statistics on *Desert Storm*, see Eliot A. Cohen and Thomas A. Keaney, *Revolution in Warfare? Air Power in the Persian Gulf*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1995, pp. 260-261. The number of sorties during *Allied Force* is estimated using statistics provided in Xavier de Villepin, *Les premiers enseignements de l'opération "force alliée" en Yougoslavie: quels enjeux diplomatiques et militaires?*, Rapport d'information No. 464 (1998-1999), Commission des affaires étrangères du Sénat, 30 June 1999, available at: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r98-464/r98-4642.html>.

constrained budgets and are supposed to tend toward complementary capabilities, even though decisions to deploy an EU member's fleet always depends, *in fine*, on national political choices that, by definition, cannot be forecast.

Two options appear essential in order to facilitate the undertaking of force projection operations and to improve prevention and reaction capacities in the face of emerging crises. First, prepositioning materiel and, to a lesser extent, troops in or near a potential theater of operations has historically played a central part in Western, and especially American, force projection postures. Such arrangements can spare a country the shipping of some of the heaviest equipment, although not all of it. The *Marine Corps Prepositioning Forces* (MPF) based in Guam, Diego Garcia and in the Mediterranean are particularly effective and reactive, thanks to their proximity to potential theaters, but also because these transport ships, loaded with enough equipment to support 15,000 Marines, are permanently available.<sup>6</sup>

No other naval forces can attain this level of prepositioning: for instance, in the event of a crisis, the French *Marine nationale* would have to rely on civilian ships for strategic sealift. In order to play its full part and give the country enough flexibility, force prepositioning still must come hand in hand with important transport assets available at all times, and always at the disposal of the Chief of Staff. Hence, prepositioning can reduce the transit time of the heaviest equipment, but it would be incorrect to think that a country could do without a strategic sealift fleet. Moreover, the logistical advantages of in-theater basing – closer to the threat – must be balanced with the operational risks and costs of such an option.

Sea-basing is a second option that would help reduce the difficulties linked to overseas deployments and appeared more recently, first in the US and, to a lesser extent, in Europe. According to this concept, bringing together complementary naval platforms off the adversary's coasts could partly replace the logistical footprint on the ground. Pooling command and control, strike, protection, supply and transport capabilities would offer the same possibilities for intervention while at the same time avoiding the political constraints that sometimes accompany ground deployments. The US Navy and Marine Corps (USMC) are contemplating the creation of real theater bases that could operate as autonomously as current carrier battle groups. The same kind of bases would currently enable the USMC to carry out amphibious forcible entry operations into enemy territory with a two-brigade-strong force (that is, the capacity to deploy more than 10,000 Marines by sea and air) – provided men and equipment were operationally readied.<sup>7</sup> In the medium term, the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan could bring about renewed interest in seabasing, especially

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the building of new prepositioning ships was postponed in the 2010 QDR. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010*, Washington, U.S. Department of Defense, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers, 1200–2000*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2007, pp. 168-171; Robert O. Work, "On Sea Basing", in Carnes Lord (ed.), *Reposturing the Force. U.S. Overseas Presence in the Twenty-First Century*, Newport, Naval War College – Newport Papers No. 26, p. 126.

should Iran confirm its regional ambitions. However, in the present state of US capabilities, as well as in the most ambitious forecasts, seabasing alone would not suffice to carry out large-scale operations such as *Desert Storm* or *Iraqi Freedom*.<sup>8</sup>

The downside of using theater bases – located on land or at sea – is that they are exposed to the different sorts of strikes previously mentioned and, more generally, exposed to direct or indirect attacks from the adversary. Therefore, protecting these bases would reduce the operational risks inherent to force projection. It is particularly important to establish security perimeters to prevent intrusions, collaborate with local counter-terrorism agencies, equip air bases with hardened shelters, or acquire anti-rocket systems such as the Israeli *Iron Dome*. This vulnerability of theater air bases is also, of course, one of the reasons why all the interventionist powers develop and deploy missile defense systems to intercept theater ballistic missiles or cruise missiles.

The utility of missile defense goes beyond the strict military level: projecting this type of defensive systems is also a political signal marking the expeditionary power's commitment toward the host-nation. The protection thus provided can also contribute to reducing internal difficulties caused by the presence of foreign troops. Nonetheless, if the host and foreign countries do not share the same threat perception, the task appears particularly difficult. Indeed, in the past, defenses have been at the heart of controversies about collateral damage they could inflict among civilians.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it has been argued that these defenses respond to a threat that only materializes as foreign troops deploy.

### **Controlling the Maritime Area**

In the naval domain as for anti-access as a whole, all the difficulty lies in the simultaneity of the threats facing foreign interventions. Their combination is what makes it so hard to secure command of naval and coastal areas.<sup>10</sup> In the Persian Gulf, for instance, intervening powers would have to carry out mine clearance missions, protect the fleet from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy's (IRGCN) and irregular groups torpedo- and missile- boats, and defend the fleet against anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) fired from land units. Ideally, all of this should only be done once air defenses have been suppressed.<sup>11</sup>

Mine countermeasures (MCM) operations perfectly illustrate the problem posed by these blended threats. MCM ships possess physical properties designed to match their missions (plastic or wooden hulls covered with fiberglass, relatively small size, quiet motors, etc.) but some of

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<sup>8</sup> Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> George N. Lewis, Steve Fetter and Lisbeth Gronlund, *Casualties and Damage from SCUD Attacks in The 1991 Gulf War*, MIT-DACS Working Paper, March 1993, p. 20, available at: [http://web.mit.edu/ssp/Publications/working\\_papers/wp93-2.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/ssp/Publications/working_papers/wp93-2.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup> Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz", *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, summer 2008, p. 85.

these very features make them more fragile and vulnerable to speedboat attacks or anti-ship missiles. Hence, MCM ships should ideally be engaged isolated from ships tasked with ensuring their defense, which makes the latter's task more difficult. These assets' vulnerability is coupled with potentially severe time constraints: once the minefield starts being laid, rapid action is essential.

In the particular case of the Persian Gulf, prepositioning dedicated assets in theater seems to be the American and British navies' option of choice for rapid action. The US possesses four *Avenger*-class MCM ships, based at all times in the Manama naval base, Bahrain.<sup>12</sup> It also owns four MH-53E *Sea Dragon* helicopters specialized in mine countermeasures and integrated to the Combined Task Force 52 (CTF-52), attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet.<sup>13</sup> Four British MCM ships deployed in the area since 2008 and able to work with the CTF-52 could add to these American capabilities, which apparently suffered from some maintenance problems.<sup>14</sup> France, however, does not currently possess prepositioned MCM capabilities in the Gulf, although such an option is conceivable for the future.<sup>15</sup> The ships of the *Marine nationale* specialized in mine action are based permanently in the two French military ports of Brest (nine ships) and Toulon (two ships). It would probably take them two to three weeks to reach the Persian Gulf.<sup>16</sup>

If Iran decided to lay a minefield in the Strait of Hormuz, the capabilities that Britain and the US could mobilize on short notice would be quite significant, and even more so as the area is under constant surveillance, giving prepositioned forces greater responsiveness.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, Western decision-makers wanting to undertake mine MCM operations would quickly face a dilemma. On the one hand, reacting within the shortest time period by interrupting the laying of the minefield and by starting to clear the straits would lessen the severity of the threat posed by the minefield, but would mean sending rare and specialized ships in an unsecured area, making them vulnerable to enemy attacks. On the other hand, a later intervention of MCM ships would allow them to work in a safer environment, but only after maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz had been interrupted, or at least disrupted, for a longer time.

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<sup>12</sup> "Mine Countermeasures Ships – MCM", United States Navy Fact File, 28 October 2009, available at: [http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact\\_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=1900&ct=4](http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=1900&ct=4).

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/5th Fleet Public Affairs, "Commander Task Force 52 Established", 20 January 2009, available at: <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/articles/2009/007.html>; Talmadge, "Closing Time", *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher P. Cavas, "US Minesweepers Fail Gulf Tests: Tactical Readiness, Long-Term Strategies in Question", *Defense News*, 31 July 2006; Tim Ripley, "Gulf of distrust – Naval stand-offs and the Persian Gulf", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1 March 2008, pp. 8-15.

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Gelfand, "France opens first ever Middle Eastern military base in UAE", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 May 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Non-official estimate by Captain Denis Béraud, French Navy Staff. Interview conducted on 28 January 2010.

<sup>17</sup> William D. O'Neil and Caitlin Talmadge, "Correspondence: Costs and Difficulties of Blocking the Strait of Hormuz", *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Winter 2008-2009, p. 192.

The current ability to react to Iran mining the Strait of Hormuz appears significant, but serious weaknesses seem to emerge because of how the West prepares for the future of mine countermeasures operations. Here, the US Navy's disinterest in MCM could become a handicap:<sup>18</sup> the US seems to have chosen to abandon its naval platforms specialized in MCM warfare within ten years. It will rely instead on destroyers and on the *Littoral Combat Ships' MCM Mission Package*.<sup>19</sup> These packages would undoubtedly include the most recent technologies such as *Remote Multi-Missions Vehicles* (RMMV) integrated to the *Remote Minehunting System* (RMS); however, the crew's level of competency in such a specific field as MCM might be lower than that of the members of the three US squadrons currently in charge of these missions.<sup>20</sup>

France's fleet is currently comprised of eleven mine hunters modernized in the early 2000s. This force can fulfill its missions near the French coasts – especially the protection of the strategic fleet (*Force océanique stratégique*, FOST), off Brest – but it recently lost a large part of its projection capabilities when the MCM support ship *Loire* was decommissioned in 2009. France has not yet made provision for her replacement, but alternative solutions are being tested (“containerization” of the support, use of non-dedicated vessels). In the mid and long terms, capabilities will be reshaped to favor specialized surface and Undersea Unmanned Vehicles operated from five dedicated vessels. To a lesser extent, France will also rely on multi-mission frigates (*frégates multimissions*, FREMM) or *Mistral*-class amphibious assault ships (*bâtiments de projection et de commandement*, BPC), whose minesweeping capabilities are limited.<sup>21</sup> This will not solve the problem of maintaining specialized MCM know-how, or the availability of in-theater logistical support, which will soon be essential as forces have to operate far from their naval bases.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> J. Peter Pham, “Iran’s Threat to the Strait of Hormuz”: A Realist Assessment”, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2010, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> At the end of 2007, 12 *Osprey*-class mine hunters were already removed from service. Cf. Benjamin H. Friedman, “The Navy after the Cold War: Progress without Revolution”, in Harvey M. Sapolsky, Benjamin H. Friedman and Brendan Rittenhouse Green (eds.), *US Military Innovation since the Cold War: Creation without destruction*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray, *Chinese Mine Warfare. A PLA Navy ‘Assassin’s Mace’ Capability*, Newport, Naval War College – China Maritime Studies, No. 3, June 2009, pp. 48-49; Martin Sieff, “Defense Focus: ASW dangers – Part 4”, *UPI.com*, 18 July 2008, available at: [http://www.upi.com/Business\\_News/Security-Industry/2008/07/18/Defense-Focus-ASW-dangers-Part-4/UPI-39851216412832/](http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2008/07/18/Defense-Focus-ASW-dangers-Part-4/UPI-39851216412832/).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Captain Béraud. See also Mourad Chabbi, “Enjeux d’une implantation militaire française dans le Golfe”, *Revue Défense Nationale*, May 2010, pp. 89-92. For an overview of the choices that Britain made in this domain, see Richard Scott, “Steady state: reality check for UK procurement plans”, *Jane’s Navy International*, September 2009, pp. 12-17.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Captain Béraud. This problem would arise, for instance, if France undertook a minesweeping operation from Djibouti into the Gulf of Oman or the Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian submarine capabilities model after their naval doctrine based on harassment, by relying on *Kilo*-class and various midget submarines. The most worrying threat facing Western forces is that of *Kilo* submarines. As of today, Western forces seem to be able to contain this threat as they have maintained their expertise and skills in the field of anti-submarine warfare (ASW), as they can destroy or block enemy submarines in their homeport, or also because the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf make it hard for submarines to operate unnoticed.<sup>23</sup> More generally, operational readiness is problematic for Iranian ships, especially in regards to IRIN's vessels (patrol boats and, to a lesser extent, *Kilos*).<sup>24</sup> While the Iranian naval units and coastal defenses have acquired more modern ASCMs, the weakness of their C4ISR capabilities in the short to mid-term risks being highly penalizing. This flaw would firstly make it difficult to coordinate the attacks of speed- and patrol boats supposed to harass the enemy fleet. Secondly, it would prevent Iranian forces from taking full advantage of the maximal range of most of their ASCMs, due to the absence of radars able to guide missiles beyond the battery's visual range.<sup>25</sup> Once military operations would start, destroying these radars would be a priority, and would quickly undermine the threat of Iranian long-range ASCMs, though it could not remove the threat altogether.<sup>26</sup>

Since it is uncertain whether the whole of the ASCM launchers located on Iranian coasts and ships could be destroyed, Western fleets would probably remain as long as possible outside the reach of this threat so as to take advantage of the superiority offered by their own weapons' longer range. Should it be necessary to enter the Strait of Hormuz, Western ships would take advantage of their mobility to reduce their vulnerability to enemy strikes and, in a last resort, would rely on their air and missile defenses.

Quite logically, in the field of air and missile defenses, the longer the interceptors' range, the more intercept attempts that can be undertaken. This can potentially be a decisive factor against salvos of missiles, or modern missiles. By this account, the US Navy undoubtedly possesses the best protection as it benefits from a multi-layered *Aegis* system able to intercept both cruise missiles and some ballistic missiles. Norway, Japan and Spain also acquired elements of this system, which currently equips almost 75 *Ticonderoga*- and *Arleigh Burke*-class vessels. In France and Italy, interceptors of the *Future Surface-to-Air Family* (FSAF) missile program protect the *Marine nationale* and *Marina militare*. These interceptors are divided into two categories: on the one hand, the *Principal Anti-air Missile System* (PAAMS) equips anti-air *Horizon* frigates for area defense missions and on the other hand, *Surface-to-Air Anti-Missile* (SAAM) short-range defense system equips the *Charles de Gaulle* carrier

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Captain Béraud; Anthony Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in The Northern Gulf*, Westport, Praeger Security International, 2007, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces: From Guerilla Warfare to a Modern Naval Strategy*, Autumn 2009, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Talmadge, "Closing Time", *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 102-103.

<sup>26</sup> O'Neil and Talmadge, "Correspondence: Costs and Difficulties of Blocking the Strait of Hormuz", *op. cit.*, p. 193.

and, eventually, the FREMMs. Finally, the Royal Navy has equipped its *Type 45*-class ships with both PAAMS and *Phalanx* systems, the latter – absent on the Franco-Italian *Horizon* class – is designed for self-defense.

The threats facing projection fleets not only arise from naval capabilities but also result from land-based assets (air force, coastal defense batteries, etc.). Therefore, their suppression requires command of the theater airspace, especially in the face of adversary surface-to-air defenses.

### **Suppression and Destruction of Air Defenses**

Securing command of the airspace is one of the primary tasks during a force projection operation. This requires the ability to suppress enemy fighter aircrafts and, more importantly, surface-to-air assets, which are cheaper and thus more widespread. Suppression or Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD/DEAD) capabilities depend on the composition of the available air and naval air forces. As of today, the US is the only country that possesses the capacity to carry out a large-scale SEAD operation, but its capabilities remain uncertain against Integrated Air Defense Systems (IADS) using modern equipment (e.g. variants of the Russian S-300 missiles). Knowing that all US air forces combat losses since *Desert Storm* have been caused by surface-to-air defenses helps understand why SEAD/DEAD missions have since become central in modern war operations.<sup>27</sup>

SEAD/DEAD missions rely on various capabilities including signals intelligence, defensive and offensive jamming, and surface-to-air strikes, sometimes using specialized munitions such as antiradiation missiles.<sup>28</sup> These missions became increasingly important and sophisticated as modern air forces faced growing surface-to-air threats during the operations conducted by the US at the end of the Vietnam War and by Israel against Egypt and Syria in 1973, or later in Lebanon. For instance, Israeli practices have evolved significantly in less than ten years – between the Yom Kippur War and Operation *Peace for Galilee* – illustrating the growing complexity of modern operations. In 1973, Israel possessed, in theory, sufficient capabilities to suppress the massive air defenses network Egypt had developed with Soviet help. However, the Israeli Air Forces (IAF) were ill-prepared for this threat – especially that posed by SA-6 and SA-7-type mobile SAM launchers – and, as a consequence, their air operations in the early stages of war suffered significantly and unexpectedly from coordination flaws.<sup>29</sup> This experience convinced Israel that electronic warfare was of central importance in modern warfare.<sup>30</sup> Nine years later,

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher Bolkcom, “*Military Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD)*”, Congressional Research Service, RS21141, 5 June 2006, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> For a diagram showing the principles of a SEAD operation, see annex 1, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> The number of Israeli air forces aircraft shot down by surface-to-air defenses is the following: 46 by SAMs, 31 by anti-air artillery, totaling 77 aircraft lost. Cf. Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War. Volume I: The Arab-Israeli Conflicts, 1973-1989*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1990, p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-85.

after learning from its mistakes and from American experiences in Vietnam, Israel gave priority to SEAD/DEAD missions and was extremely successful against Syrian SAMs and air defense fighters operating over Lebanon. To achieve this, the IAF combined reconnaissance and electronic warfare drones; strike aircraft; guided and unguided munitions; reconnaissance, warning, control and command aircraft; varied electronic warfare assets; and precision-guided artillery.<sup>31</sup>

Less than ten years later, the air forces involved in Operation *Desert Storm* managed to suppress the KARI IADS protecting Saddam Hussein's Iraq with a complex combination of modern platforms and weapons. The operation involved F-117 stealth bombers – which disabled several Iraqi air defense operation centers during the first night of operation –, USMC F/A-18s and USAF F-4Gs, protected by the jamming devices of EF-111s, EC-130s and EA-6Bs. *Unmanned Air Vehicles* (UAVs) were also employed to simulate an air attack and prompt Iraqi surface-to-air defense units to turn on their radars, thus exposing themselves to US antiradiation missile strikes. At the end of the first day of the war and after almost 500 HARM (for *High-speed, Anti-Radiation Missile*, AGM-88) missiles had been launched, the coalition had secured air superiority.<sup>32</sup> After seven days of strikes, radar emissions from KARI components had decreased by 95%; the Iraqi surface-to-air defense could then only offer residual and very localized resistance.<sup>33</sup>

This evolution in practices illustrates the complete transformation that US SEAD/DEAD capabilities have undergone since the Vietnam War: F-117s, F-16CJ Block 50/52s, EA-6B *Prowlers* specialized in offensive jamming (and, eventually, EA-18Gs), have replaced the former F-105F/Gs, F-4Gs, EF-111s and A-6s. Capabilities are still evolving and a new version of the HARM antiradar missile, called AARGM (or AGM-88E) was developed following the coalition's difficulties against the non-cooperative tactics used by Serbian SAM batteries during operation *Allied Force*.<sup>34</sup> In order to neutralize such tactics, designers added to the AGM-88E's antiradiation guidance system a multi-sensor package, giving the missile the ability to maintain its trajectory toward the initial target even after the radar has ceased to emit.<sup>35</sup> In the medium and long terms, F-22s and F-35s

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<sup>31</sup> In this operation, 17 out of the 19 SA-6 sites in the Bekaa valley, as well as some SA-2 and SA-3 sites were destroyed, while no Israeli aircraft was shot down. Cf. *Ibidem.*, pp. 186-193.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen and Keaney, *Revolution in Warfare?*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 111-113.

<sup>34</sup> Owen R. Cote, Jr., *Assuring Access and Projecting Power: The Navy in the New Security Environment*, MIT Security Studies Conference Series, April 2002, chapter 3, available at: [http://web.mit.edu/ssp/Publications/navy\\_report/demands.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/ssp/Publications/navy_report/demands.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> The US is currently manufacturing the AGM-88E/AARGM missile and has started its operational evaluation in February 2010. Orders for 1,750 units for the US and 250 for Italy are expected. "AGM-88E AARGM Missile: No Place To Hide Down There", *Defense Industry Daily*, 13 September 2009, available at: <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/italoamerican-agm88e-aargm-missile-no-place-to-hide-down-there-01852/>; Bolkcom, "Military Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD)", *op. cit.*, p. 6; *Defense Acquisitions: Assessments of Selected Weapon Programs*, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1 March 2010, pp. 29-30; Martin Streetly,

will add to these capabilities. Their low observability should reduce considerably the effectiveness of enemy air defenses. Other options are also being developed and tested, such as resorting to cyber warfare capabilities to suppress surface-to-air defense radars, or equipping stealth or non-stealth UAVs with antiradiation or general purpose guided missiles. This last option could act as a useful supplement to manned aircraft, in that employing such capabilities would be less politically risky.<sup>36</sup>

On the European scale, current SEAD capabilities lack consistency, to say the least. Partly as a legacy of the Cold War, certain countries (Germany, Spain, Italy and Greece) possess HARM antiradiation missiles. Britain acquired ALARM antiradiation missiles to equip some of the *Tornados* it currently deploys, and adapted the missile for the *Eurofighter*.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, most of these missiles' technology is outdated and their overall number would be insufficient to conduct a large-scale SEAD mission autonomously.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, only Italy, Britain and Germany seem to possess both the required weaponry, the dedicated platforms, and the necessary know how to employ them.<sup>39</sup> Finally, no European country currently possesses offensive jamming systems.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1990s, France chose not to develop nor procure new antiradiation missiles to replace the old AS-37 *Martel*, but rather to rely only on electronic warfare capabilities. After operation *Allied Force* revealed the capability gap in this area, the French procurement agency – DGA – launched several “Advanced Defense Research” programs (*Programmes d'Etudes Amont*, PEA) on offensive jamming. These programs aimed for capabilities superior to the EA-6B *Prowler*, with the resulting systems

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“Disrupt, Disable, Destroy”, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 50, 14 December 2005, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> “Air-to-ground missile launched from drone”, US Air Force, available at: <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123082272&page=2>; Général Gaviard, “Les forces aériennes françaises et l'opération *Allied Force*”, *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, No. 21, Autumn 2009, pp. 74-75. SEAD measures using cyber warfare capabilities carried by UAVs and targeting Syrian surface-to-air defenses were allegedly used in September 2007 during the Israeli raid that destroyed the Syrian nuclear reactor located near Al-Kibar. David A. Fulghum, “Why Syria's Air Defenses Failed to Detect Israelis”, *Ares: A Defense and Technology blog*, 3 October 2007, available at: <http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/blogs/defense/index.jsp?plckController=Blog&plckScript=blogScript&plckElementId=blogDest&plckBlogPage=BlogViewPost&plckPostId=Blog%3a27ec4a53-dcc8-42d0-bd3a-01329aef79a7Post%3a2710d024-5eda-416c-b117-ae6d649146cd>.

<sup>37</sup> Like the HARM, the ALARM missile was modified following the operations in Kosovo, so that its sensors can memorize the location of the enemy radar in case the emission is interrupted. Streetly, “*Disrupt, Disable, Destroy*”, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Rapidly deployable European air forces*, European Security and Defense Assembly, Document A/1836, 1 December 2003, available at: [http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions\\_ordinaires/rpt/2003/1836.php](http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2003/1836.php).

<sup>39</sup> Philippe Coquet, “La notion de partage capacitaire en question”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 8, June 2008, pp. 22-23, available at: [http://www.ifri.org/downloads/Focus\\_strategique\\_8\\_Coquet\\_partage\\_capacitaire.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/downloads/Focus_strategique_8_Coquet_partage_capacitaire.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Xavier Pintat and Daniel Reiner, *Projet de loi de finances pour 2010: Défense - Equipement des forces*, Sénat, Avis No. 102, 2009-2010, 19 November 2009, p. 79, available at: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/af09-102-5/a09-102-51.pdf>.

supposed to be integrated to the *Rafale* fighter.<sup>41</sup> While procurement of around 15 offensive jamming pods was still planned in the French 2003-2008 Military Programme Bill of Law (*Loi de Programmation Militaire*, LPM), this project was postponed by the Chief of the Joint Staff in 2008 due to the announced cost of the system and technical difficulties it faced.<sup>42</sup> As of today and in the short and medium terms, France tends to focus on DEAD rather than on SEAD capabilities. Indeed, it combines electronic intelligence gathered by C-160G *Transall* 'Gabriel' and *Astac* reconnaissance pods (currently fitted on *Mirage* F1CRs and, from 2014, on *Mirage* 2000-Ds) to identify and locate the source of surface-to-air defense radar emissions, with AASM-type precision-guided munitions (PGMs) to target it.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, *Rafale*'s detection and protection systems (SPECTRA, OSF and RBE2)<sup>44</sup> should, in principle, be able to identify the source of radar emissions, determine its coordinates, and target it with one or several AASM PGMs – all of these tasks being performed autonomously.<sup>45</sup>

Such methods seem feasible against short- and medium-range threats. It is, however, unsure whether they would be efficient against radars employed following non-cooperative tactics, long-range, mobile batteries or modern S-300-type long-range threats. Following *Allied Force*, General John P. Jumper admitted that the US would not have known how to suppress this kind of system.<sup>46</sup> The reach of the S-300s is superior to that of either AGM-88 antiradiation missiles or AASM PGMs, and their radars are reckoned to be able to follow and engage even stealth platforms.<sup>47</sup>

Absent such systems in the Iranian arsenal, Western air forces – mostly American – appear today able to carry out the SEAD/DEAD missions necessary to secure freedom of action in the third dimension. Iran currently lacks C4ISR and modern electronic warfare systems that would

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Colonel Bruno Foussard, French Air Force Staff, 26 January 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Colonel Foussard; Jean-Claude Viollet, *Projet de loi de finances pour 2010: Défense - Préparation et emploi des forces - Air*, Assemblée nationale, 14 October 2009, available at: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/pdf/budget/plf2010/a1972-tVI.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> France plans to develop an antiradiation version of the AASM, but as of today it has not been funded. Cf. "AASM – Fiche Technique", *Ixarm*, accessed on 23 April 2010, available at: <http://www.ixarm.com/Fiche-technique,18987>; Jean-Marc Tanguy, "Les carences françaises, selon le général Gaviard", *Le Mamouth*, 28 April 2009, available at: <http://lemamouth.blogspot.com/2009/04/les-carences-francaises-selon-le.html>.

<sup>44</sup> SPECTRA (*Système de Protection et d'Évitement des Conduites de Tir du Rafale*), OSF (*Optronique secteur frontal*) and RBE2 (*Radar à Balayage Electronique*) are the three components of the *Rafale*'s self-protection and defensive electronic warfare system.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Colonel Foussard, 26 January 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in "Operations in Kosovo: Problems Encountered, Lessons Learned and Reconstitution", Hearing before the Military Readiness Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 106th Congress, 26 October 1999, p. 42, available at: [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/h\\_as299030\\_0.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/h_as299030_0.htm).

<sup>47</sup> Cote, *Assuring Access and Projecting Power*, *op. cit.*

enable it to build a fully integrated surface-to-air defense system out of its mostly short- and medium-ranged set of batteries.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the US seems to be “probing” Iranian air defense frequently to obtain its electronic order of battle and, this way, identify key targets for a possible SEAD operation.<sup>49</sup> The only modern threat arising from Iranian surface-to-air defenses are *Tor* M-1 and *Pantsir* S-1 systems, whose very short ranges should limit their capacity to cause harm. Surface-to-air systems with a longer range, such as the SA-2s (40 km) or SA-5s (up to 300 km) are technically outdated and, more importantly, fixed. In the very unlikely event of Europeans having to intervene without US support, the absence of offensive electronic warfare capabilities would significantly increase the risks of losses during SEAD missions, so much so that this could jeopardize the mission’s military and political feasibility.

In regards to France, current capabilities are praiseworthy for their versatility, but are at odds with the ambitions declared at the highest level. In the White Paper on Defense and National Security, as well as during the debates in Parliament, *forcible entry* is presented as a set of capabilities France should possess nationally to legitimately aspire to a “lead nation” status during a force projection operation. Now, whether one considers only French capabilities or all of the available European SEAD/DEAD assets, an autonomous European action would only be possible against the simplest cases of anti-access strategies.

### ***Forcible Entry and Land-Attack Capabilities***

Beyond SEAD/DEAD missions that offer projected armies freedom of action in the third dimension, overcoming anti-access strategies requires intervening directly in adversary territory through coastal actions, deep strikes against targets such as air bases or ballistic missile fixed or mobile launchers or, possibly, forcible entry operations such as airborne, airmobile, or amphibious missions. These kinds of actions perfectly match Donald Rumsfeld’s military transformation plans, which aimed, among other things, to find technical alternatives to the excessive reliance on overseas bases. Seabasing, as was discussed above, was thus to be combined with “transformed” land forces – of smaller size and quickly deployed<sup>50</sup> – and long-range strike capabilities offered for example by intercontinental missiles with conventional payloads, air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM), and stealth strike platforms. The latter could be either based in theater (airbases, aircraft carriers) or on US territory and refueled in flight. Here again, the US concentrates most of the resources and capabilities and the French, or even European, contribution would be extremely limited.

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<sup>48</sup> Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran’s Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64, 97, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Bruno Gruselle and Guillaume Payre, *Iran. La défense aérienne face à une attaque préventive contre ses sites nucléaires*, Notes de la FRS, 30 January 2006, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> See in particular the “Shinseki Plan”, from the name of the US Army Chief of Staff who started in 1999 an ambitious transformation program for Army units, following problems encountered when deploying in Kosovo. Cf. Etienne de Durand, *Les transformations de l’US Army*, Paris, Etudes de l’Ifri, No. 1, July 2003, pp. 44-51.

Resulting from innovations forming the “military transformation” process, deep strike capabilities have largely outlived Donald Rumsfeld’s mandate. They are now found in all the interventionist powers’ armed forces. In the United States, any forcible entry scenario could currently rely on unequalled strike capabilities combining, among other things, around 20 B-2 stealth bombers loaded with PGMs or conventional cruise missiles; air assets from one or several of the ten US carrier groups; and four *Ohio*-class nuclear submarines turned into cruise missile submarines (SSGNs) that can each carry up to 154 *Tomahawk* missiles with a 2,500-kilometer range.<sup>51</sup>

In Europe, there are today only a limited number of cruise missiles: the UK has acquired about sixty *Tomahawk Block IV* missiles to equip its SSNs, and the Spanish navy has taken steps toward procuring around twenty missiles to equip its F-100-class frigates.<sup>52</sup> For its part, France chose to develop long-distance strike capabilities independently from the US, in the form of *SCALP naval* cruise missiles, whose maximum range should be around 1,000 km.<sup>53</sup> Two hundred missiles, instead of the 250 initially planned, are currently being procured by the French Ministry of Defense. They are designed to equip the FREMMs (150 missiles, in service in 2012 or 2013) and the *Barracuda*-class SSNs (50 missiles, supposed to come into service in 2017).<sup>54</sup> Finally, German, British, French and Italian air forces and naval aviation units possess a significant number of *Taurus* and *SCALP-EG* (or its UK variant, *Stormshadow*) cruise missiles – several hundred per country – with ranges estimated at 350 and 250 km respectively.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, it seems useful to mention that, within ten years, European naval forces – in this case French and British – should be able to deploy up to around a hundred cruise missiles deployed on a dozen submarines and capable to strike at approximately 1,000 km. Thanks to the missiles’ small radar cross section and the quietness of the submarines,

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<sup>51</sup> “B-2 Spirit”, *GlobalSecurity.org*, accessed on 16 May 2010, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/systems/b-2.htm>; “Ohio-class SSGN-726 Tactical Trident”, *GlobalSecurity.org*, accessed on 16 May 2010, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/ssgn-726.htm>; “BGM-109 Tomahawk”, *GlobalSecurity.org*, accessed on 16 May 2010, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/bgm-109.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Charles Hollosi, “SLCMs emerge as weapon of choice for deep strike”, *Jane’s Navy International*, March 2009, pp. 26-31. In case of necessity, Spain will also be able to equip its future S-80A submarines with *Tomahawk* missiles. Richard Scott, “Spain’s A-80A submarine comes up to surface”, *Jane’s Navy International*, December 2007, pp. 26-31.

<sup>53</sup> The maximum range (unofficial as of today) could only be reached if the missile adopts a specific flight path that includes a cruise phase at a relatively high altitude. Hollosi, “SLCMs emerge as weapon of choice for deep strike”, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Pintat and Reiner, *Projet de loi de finances pour 2010: Défense - Equipement des forces*, *op. cit.*, p. 30; interview with Captain Béraud.

<sup>55</sup> “Storm Shadow / Black Shaheen / SCALP-EG” *Deagel.com*, 7 March 2010, available at: [http://www.deagel.com/Land-Attack-Cruise-Missiles/Storm-Shadow\\_a001126001.aspx](http://www.deagel.com/Land-Attack-Cruise-Missiles/Storm-Shadow_a001126001.aspx); “Taurus KEPD 350”, *Deagel.com*, 7 March 2010, available at: [http://www.deagel.com/Land-Attack-Cruise-Missiles/Taurus-KEPD-350\\_a001100001.aspx](http://www.deagel.com/Land-Attack-Cruise-Missiles/Taurus-KEPD-350_a001100001.aspx).

these capabilities would provide Europe with a great potential for operational surprise and thus be very useful in the event of a forcible entry operation. However, the size of such an attack would necessarily be limited (in absolute terms as well as in practice), as it would be impossible to mobilize all the SSNs to participate in a given mission. However, if the objective is not to obtain a theater-wide surprise, particularly useful in forcible entry operations, more visible platforms such as frigates could be relied upon, and EU countries would then have a larger choice of means of delivery. In these circumstances, the total number of LACMs procured in Europe and able to strike land targets at a distance of more than 200 km should enable European forces to contribute significantly to a military operation – provided the massive use of cruise missiles is deemed politically acceptable.

As far as amphibious capabilities are concerned, only the US retains sufficient forces to conduct by itself this kind of mission involving at least a brigade-sized deployment. Even for America, however, conducting a joint landing to seize a stretch of coast held by the adversary is not a highly probable scenario, as these operations are both very complex and costly. In France, the idea of forcible landing was maintained in the National Concept for Amphibious Operations (*Concept National des Opérations Amphibies*), but it remains very improbable, if only for political reasons. French capabilities rely on the combination of Army assets – a combined arms battle group composed of elements from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Airmobile Brigade and the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Light Armored Brigades – with amphibious ships of the *Marine nationale*. The latter currently possesses two *Foudre*-class landing platforms and two *Mistral*-class amphibious assault ships.<sup>56</sup> Hence, France's objective is to rely simultaneously on three of these four ships to project up to 1,400 men with their vehicles, support and equipment.<sup>57</sup>

On a European scale, existing gaps in the number of ships available for amphibious operations (landing platforms, assault ships, aircraft carriers, etc.) seem to be about to be filled – but other problems will remain unsolved, such as operational and strategic lift.<sup>58</sup> It is nonetheless striking that the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI) launched in 2000 for the pooling of five participating states' naval assets aims at figures for personnel and equipment to be engaged in a European operation only slightly bigger than France's – *i.e.* 2,000 men landing from four to six platforms.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that the construction of the third assault ship – agreed in 2008 as part of an economic stimulus plan – will not add a fifth amphibious ship to the French fleet: one of the two landing platforms will most likely be decommissioned. Interview with Captain Béraud.

<sup>57</sup> Gérard Bezacier, "Les opérations amphibies de la France", *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, June 2008, p. 97.

<sup>58</sup> *European defence - the role of naval power*, European Security and Defence Assembly, Document A/1813, 3 June 2003, available at: [http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions\\_ordinaires/rpt/2003/1813.php](http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2003/1813.php).

<sup>59</sup> Lt.-Col. Ghiringhelli, "L'initiative amphibie européenne (IAE)", *Objectif Doctrine*, No. 36, 2005, p. 22.

Missions aimed at seizing air bases can be fundamental for various purposes, as for taking the adversary by surprise by opening a second front on its rear, or facilitating the transport of troops and equipment to a landlocked area. These types of missions are the US 75<sup>th</sup> Rangers Regiment and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division's areas of specialty.<sup>60</sup> At the French and British levels, the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade (*Brigade parachutiste*) and the 16<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade, respectively, would be in charge of such missions. In an environment in which most of the surface-to-air threat were neutralized, airmobile operations would also be one of the possible options. The US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, whose core competency is "vertical envelopment", could only be called in if significant land bases were available close to the target territory. For its part, the US Marine Corps has made efforts during the past decade towards developing capabilities for conducting envelopment maneuvers from its assault ships (Ship-To-Objective Maneuver, STOM), which could enable them to seize targets beyond the coastline. Nevertheless, one of the few occasions when the STOM concept was put into practice revealed these maneuvers' persistent reliance on land installations close to the target, and more generally underlined their relatively short reach.<sup>61</sup>

To conclude, it would be misleading to present the anti-access challenge as a monolithic threat imperiling Western capacity for foreign interventions. An in-depth analysis of each potential adversary's capabilities seems essential to assess this risk realistically. Without suggesting that the threat is overwhelming, the Iranian case nonetheless demonstrates the limited contribution of European – and notably French – armies in the context of an operation aimed at countering an Iranian anti-access strategy in the Strait of Hormuz.

Analyzing the anti-access threat by focusing on its sole military dimension would amount to forgetting the political context of force projection operations. Just as it requires an analysis of the operational and technical responses to anti-access capabilities, a thorough study of the anti-access problem supposes understanding its politico-strategic dimension. Only a careful understanding of these higher-level considerations can form the basis of a comprehensive threat assessment.

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<sup>60</sup> Randolph C. White Jr., *The Airborne Forces of the United States Army: Cornerstone of Force Projection*, Naval War College, 5 February 1999, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, the seizure of an airfield near Kandahar on 25 November 2001 by the 15<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit was only possible thanks to the Marine Corps' access to Pakistan. Only this allowed the USMC units to refuel their assault helicopters and deploy in two steps their light armored vehicles (LAVs). Austin Long, "The Marine Corps: sticking to its guns", in Sapolsky, Friedman and Rittenhouse Green (ed.), *US Military Innovation since the Cold War*, *op. cit.*, p. 129.



# The Primacy of the Political Framework

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The concern about “anti-access” capabilities and strategies appeared in the post-Cold War period in the midst of the US debate on the advent of a “revolution in military affairs”. As such, the concept suffers from a fundamentally apolitical legacy. Few analysts, however, have sought to understand the full extent of its political dimension, although it is a crucial one: the political framework shapes the force projection operation through several aspects such as the size of deployed forces, the distance covered, or the chosen path.

## ***The Forgotten Dimension of Access***

Western powers came out of the Cold War with a wide network of military bases established on the territory of explicit or implicit allies. France, and above all, the US thus enjoyed easy access to these territories and to installations inherited, for the former, from its colonies and, for the latter, from its worldwide deployment designed to contain the Soviet threat. The end of the Cold War, however, forced Western countries to rethink their overseas presence following two parallel impulses, one voluntary and the other imposed – the latter concerning mainly the US.

Western countries’ presence overseas has evolved, first, as they reassessed their regional priorities, resulting for instance in a redistribution of US military presence toward Asia, from the Middle East to Eastern Asia, and the simultaneous downsizing of its presence in Europe.<sup>62</sup> France seems to follow a similar path: the White Paper on Defense and National Security (*Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité Nationale*, LBDSN) indeed initiated a diminution of French forces in Africa and a new foothold in the Persian Gulf.<sup>63</sup>

However, this reassessment of their world military presence had to happen, especially in the US, mainly because of growing constraints beyond their control. First, the more diffuse threats of the post-Cold War era led to a reduced demand for territorial protection from US allies, making foreign military presence less necessary. Moreover, maintaining such a high number of facilities abroad became increasingly difficult to justify after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and while it caused socio-economic

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<sup>62</sup> Etienne de Durand, “Le redéploiement global des forces américaines”, *Politique étrangère*, 4/2005, pp. 833-854.

<sup>63</sup> *The French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, Paris, Odile Jacob – La documentation française, 2008, pp. 148-149.

troubles in the areas nearing bases (incidents, prostitution, trafficking, etc.). These difficulties progressively turned into durable political problems, which even complicated US bilateral relations within NATO (for instance with Italy) or with Japan (US bases in Okinawa).<sup>64</sup>

Parallel to these developments, some host-nations questioned the US presence for security reasons: accepting foreign troops on their national soil weakens local governments in the face of potential internal dissent and terrorist groups – as in the case of the 1996 Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia. Negative effects affect not only the host-country but also, on some occasions, the interventionist power itself. Indeed, America's long-lasting presence on Saudi territory after Operation *Desert Storm* held a central place in Osama bin Laden and Al Qaida's discourses.<sup>65</sup> In such circumstances, alternative options can be necessary, for instance establishing bases in other territories.

In the years following the Gulf War, the US became aware of political difficulties that may arise when willing to use its worldwide network of bases. After Iraqi Republican Guard and Kurdish opposition units invaded Erbil – the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan – in Summer 1996, the American military contemplated retaliation strikes against Iraqi units. On this occasion, Saudi Arabia and Turkey refused to let the US use the hundred combat aircrafts stationed on their bases. At the same time, Jordan opposed the deployment of around thirty US Air Force aircrafts. Similarly, two years later, before and during operation *Desert Fox* in 1998, Saudi Arabia and the UAE blocked the sixty US combat aircrafts prepositioned on air bases located on their territories, authorizing only support air operations to be conducted from these facilities.<sup>66</sup>

Although they were rare, cases of denial of access, or use of bases, did not disappear following the September 11 attacks: during *Enduring Freedom*, Saudi Arabia did not allow the US to command air operations from the Prince Sultan air base, forcing it to move its command structure to Qatar. The most striking example, however, is probably Turkey's refusal to let the US 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division transit via its territory. This refusal happened on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, that is, less than three weeks before Operation *Iraqi Freedom* started.<sup>67</sup> By preventing the US from opening a second front in northern Iraq, Turkey's decision perfectly illustrated the fact that access to

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<sup>64</sup> On Okinawa, see, for instance, Anni P. Baker, *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence*, Westport, Praeger, 2004, pp. 131-150.

<sup>65</sup> *Defense Science Board Task Force on Sea Basing*, Washington, U.S. Department of Defense, 2003, p. 5. Al Qaida explicitly denounced US presence in Saudi Arabia in the 1998 "Déclaration du Front islamique mondial pour le jihad contre les Juifs et les Croisés" Cf. Gilles Kepel (foreword by), *Al-Qaïda dans le texte*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2005, pp. 63-69.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts and Robert Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge*, Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2003, p. 2; Christopher J. Bowie, *The Anti-Access Threat and Theater Air Bases*, Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002, pp. 34-35.

<sup>67</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Turkey: Update on Selected Issues", Congressional Research Service, RL32071, 12 August 2004, p. 15.

facilities based in foreign territory is eminently conditional – even when dealing with a long-time ally – and that political conditionality entails significant military risks.<sup>68</sup>

This kind of setback and its consequences in terms of operational efficiency pushed the US to seek alternative solutions less affected by political hazards and giving them a greater freedom of action during overseas interventions. In the early 2000s, American posture thus underwent a reorientation aimed at reducing its global logistical footprint, improving its long-range capabilities, and reorganizing its bases located on foreign territory to remain as politically independent as possible from the host-states. The operational agility offered by advanced technologies (stealth, extended reach, networking, precision guidance, active defense, etc.) and *ad hoc* political arrangements were supposed to replace the heaviness of Cold War-inherited stationing forces.<sup>69</sup> Along with the reorientation of US services that formed part of Donald Rumsfeld's transformation project, the objective was to adapt US deployment options – more or less heavy and long lasting – to local conditions. One of the results of this reform is, for instance, “presence without permanence” in the Middle East. Historically, Gulf States have indeed favored such orientations toward *ad hoc* cooperation.<sup>70</sup> Three types of facilities thus succeeded to the massive infrastructures of the Cold War period: first, the Main Operational Bases, which retain most of the former characteristics; second, Foreign Operating Sites, where presence is limited and which US military use mainly for training and materiel prepositioning; and finally, Cooperative Security Locations. The latter are of a more diverse nature, used discontinuously and especially relying on contractors instead of permanently deployed US personnel, reducing the visibility of American military presence.<sup>71</sup>

Abandoning a posture centered on one particular country (such as Saudi Arabia in the 1990s) supposedly makes foreign presence less visible within each host-nation and offers more flexibility and resilience against risks of access denial. The more the network of bases is extended and redundant, the less damaging potential frictions between a host-state and the US would be. Such posture thus offers the latter a better adaptability to unexpected events.<sup>72</sup> These different types of basing go hand in hand with various arrangements for security and defense cooperation (financial support, training, intelligence sharing, etc.). Subsidies usually amount to several million dollars, but can rapidly increase to compensate – or “buy” –

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<sup>68</sup> Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-154.

<sup>69</sup> *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001*, Washington, U.S. Department of Defense, 2001, pp. 25-27. The above-mentioned forcible entry capabilities acquired during the past decade are among the military innovations drawing on this logic.

<sup>70</sup> Christopher T. Sandars, *America's Overseas Garrisons. The Leasehold Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 298-299.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. de Durand, “Le redéploiement global des forces américaines”, *op. cit.*, pp. 835-836.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Knights, “US military basing posture undergoes transformation”, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 August 2005, pp. 25-29.

unexpected, potentially intensive access to certain facilities located on the host-state's territory.<sup>73</sup>

In the same logic, *ad hoc* coalitions – which seem to offer substantial room for maneuver in access-constrained environments – could in the end prove to be of little interest in this context. Indeed, relying on intermittent political rapprochements to secure guaranteed, long-term access to a given theater of operations is no easy task.<sup>74</sup> Paradoxically, seeking to gain more flexibility would increase exposure to those political setbacks that affected US deployments over the past 15 years. The intervention's political motives would even more directly shape the operation and determine the overall size of ground and air forces deployed on bases located close to the theater. Moreover, when conflicts are characterized by long-term deployments on the ground, a lack of visibility regarding the mid- and long-term possibility of using military installations close to the theater of operations could be particularly problematic. Indeed, the necessity of continued, consistent and sustained efforts on the ground makes it hard to put up with complex, potentially fast-evolving local situations.

The evolution of US posture toward *ad hoc* access to theater bases has no equivalent in European countries: their areas of intervention are relatively closer to their respective national territories, and the size of their projectable forces is a lot smaller than that of the US.<sup>75</sup> The location of French bases, for instance, is intrinsically linked to its defense and military cooperation agreements: its two major footholds located near the “arc of crisis” stretching from Maghreb to Central Asia, in Djibouti and the UAE, are supported by defense agreements between France and the host-nations.<sup>76</sup>

Linking defense agreements and basing rights has certain advantages, as it ensures a permanent access to facilities and provides France with significant responsiveness, especially through its prepositioned forces. Moreover, the continued presence of French military units on a threatened territory can appear to guarantee the credibility of French commitment alongside its partners and contribute to deter initiatives from hostile neighbors. Nevertheless, this arrangement does also present some weaknesses. Like the Soviet Union in its time, the adversary can always conceive and conduct counter-deterrence maneuvers, and weaken the credibility of French guarantees by operating under the nuclear threshold. For instance, economic pressures, subversive or terrorist activities, or limited conventional strikes could target the host-nation rather than France's clear and direct interests as embodied by their deployed forces. France has traditionally been skeptical regarding the effectiveness of extended deterrence postures. Protecting other states' vital interests by

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<sup>73</sup> Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>74</sup> Cote, *Assuring Access and Projecting Power*, *op. cit.*

<sup>75</sup> Besides, as European states also seem less likely to use these facilities, the risks undertaken by nations hosting them seem easier to maintain at an acceptable level.

<sup>76</sup> See the list of bilateral agreements signed by France in *The French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

offering them a “nuclear umbrella” would be a very complex task and pose significant challenges to the French posture’s credibility.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond access to air and naval facilities, the political dimension of the anti-access threat also manifests itself through the issue of naval port visits and overflight rights. In this latter field, air forces depend entirely on international law – and thus on the willingness of the countries concerned – , which can have particularly strong operational consequences. There are two types of authorizations: firstly, permanent authorizations are usually linked to defense and security cooperation agreements between partnering countries, or even within alliances, such as NATO. For instance, in 2007, France had signed permanent agreements with 85 states, thus easing procedures associated with military air transport.<sup>78</sup> The other type of authorization is granted on a temporary and case-by-case basis. Because such configuration necessarily depends on the objectives of the operation, the outcome of the procedure is, by definition, uncertain and weighs on the planning of force projection operations.

### ***Political Motives and Their Consequences***

Studying the political dimension of the anti-access challenge highlights one central, obvious fact: the extent of access to third territories in order to carry out a force projection operation is intrinsically dependent on the objectives pursued and, more generally, on the strategic context in which the operation takes place. In this respect, two variables appear crucial: on the one hand, a threat perception shared by host- and intervening countries and, on the other, the freedom of action of the local government *vis-à-vis* its public opinion.<sup>79</sup> A state’s leeway and the rights it is willing to grant foreign countries vary greatly depending on the stakes of the conflict and how legitimate national participation is among the population and the government. Similarly, and as Clausewitz stated, the objective they pursue indicates to the interventionist power the extent of the effort that they must and can make to reach it, the concessions it is ready to make to the host-nation and the cost it feels ready to pay.

Hence, the objectives they pursued naturally exerted a direct influence on the difficulties encountered by the United States during recent interventions. Following the 11 September attacks, the US first obtained massive overflight and basing authorizations, which became more costly

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<sup>77</sup> The founding fathers of French deterrence posture had rightly underlined such difficulties during the Cold War, while France was acquiring nuclear weapons despite American security guarantees. See, for instance, Colonel Lucien Poirier, “Dissuasion et puissance moyenne”, *Revue de Défense nationale*, March 1972, pp. 365-368.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Guyot, “La problématique des autorisations diplomatiques de survol et de stationnement”, *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, No. 14, July 2007, pp. 90-98.

<sup>79</sup> On this topic, General Jumper declared more than a decade ago that “[a]ccess is an issue until you begin to involve the vital interests of the nation that you want and need as a host. Then access is rarely an issue.” General John P. Jumper, “Expeditionary Air Force: A New Culture for a New Century”, Air Force Association Orlando Symposium, 26 February 1998, available at: <http://www.afa.org/AEF/pub/o119.asp>. The perceived threat, however, must not appear so overwhelming as to make foreign assistance trivial or useless.

and harder to negotiate as US posture moved away from self-defense and toward regime change and durable presence. Indeed, the problems the US faced while preparing Operation *Iraqi Freedom* were attributable to the absence of a common threat perception and to the intervention's lack of legitimacy. The fact that the US could only use three of the 58 regional air bases located close to the targets for offensive purposes dramatically highlights the direct link between freedom of deployment and political motives behind action overseas.<sup>80</sup>

This problem is not new: many past experiences proved that the issue can affect both combat and support units. During the Yom Kippur War, for instance, only Portugal and the Netherlands let American aircrafts – dispatched to help the Israeli armed forces – use their bases.<sup>81</sup> However, political motives particularly affect combat operations, such as the *El Dorado Canyon* raid conducted in 1986 as a response to Muammar Gaddafi's support for terrorist activities. On the grounds of Washington's lack of transparency, especially regarding its military objectives, several Western European countries such as France and Spain refused to let US F-111s departing from the UK fly over their territory. USAF aircrafts thus had to fly around the Western end of the European continent and to conduct many in-flight refuelings, lengthening their flight time. These additional complexity and constraints imposed to the pilots and equipment brought about a significant loss in the mission's tactical and operational effectiveness.<sup>82</sup>

France faced similar problems: during Operation *Artemis* in 2003, acting within the framework of a UN resolution seems to have helped the country win the agreement of overflown states.<sup>83</sup> While Europe faces a widening capability gap in terms of strategic airlift, it is important to note that, in this particular field, resorting to leasing brings its shares of difficulties. In France, the civilian aircrafts chartered for military purposes are not considered to be “state aircrafts”, meaning they do not belong to the state and are not “exclusively allocated for missions of public service”.<sup>84</sup> The authorization delivered as part of permanent overflight agreements does not systematically apply to leased aircrafts. Such a situation can engender new logistical vulnerabilities, depending on the political objectives of the mission – as was notably observed in the context of Operation

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<sup>80</sup> Sophie Volmerange, *Conflit irakien. Enseignements tirés des opérations maritimes en Irak. Période pré-conflit irakien, Avril 2002-20 Mars 2003*, Les études du CESM, 16 January 2008, p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> David A. Shlapak, John Stillion, Olga Olikier and Tanya Charlick-Paley, *A Global Access Strategy for the U.S. Air Force*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2002, pp. 7-8. See also Lt.-Col. Eric le Bras, “Opération *Nickel Grass*, le transport aérien militaire vecteur de la diplomatie aérienne et de la résolution des conflits”, *Penser Les Ailes Françaises*, No. 19, 2009, pp. 39-44.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Admiral Jean Bétermier, President of the “Forum du Futur” and adviser to the presidents of EADS, Monday 15 March 2010; see also Shlapak et al., *A Global Access Strategy for the U.S. Air Force*, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>83</sup> General Gaviard, in Guyot, “La problématique des autorisations diplomatiques de survol et de stationnement”, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

*Licorne* (“Unicorn”).<sup>85</sup> Permanent authorizations granted to state aircrafts, usually within the framework of security and defense cooperation agreements, are much less affected by the very kind of uncertainty that can pose problems in emergency situations.

In regards to the issue of access, the situation in the Persian Gulf ceaselessly illustrates how central the political dimension is. Beyond regional perceptions of the Iranian threat and possible internal problems that could affect local regimes because of US presence, the question would arise about the motive and legitimacy of any Western operation. As such, one can reasonably assume that an Iranian initiative to block the Strait of Hormuz would bring about a large-scale international reaction – as the United States and Europe are far from being the only consumers of the oil and gas originating from and transiting via the Persian Gulf.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, Iran would find itself brutally isolated, facing a potentially massive political and military mobilization. Whether it would be opportune for Iran to take the initiative to block the Strait of Hormuz is not actually self-evident: Iran’s oil refining capacity could cover only two thirds of its daily needs for fuel.<sup>87</sup> A scenario in which Tehran would block the strait would thus *a priori* imply that this strong dependency vis-à-vis foreign refining be previously reduced significantly. Or else, the Islamic Republic should deem the stakes so important that they justify both the deprivations and the political, economic and social consequences of such an initiative.

Conversely, should the US initiate an escalation resulting in the use of force – which seems, for now, very unlikely –, access to the bases in the region would be compromised. For instance, Washington pays close attention to the evolution of Turko-Iranian relations, as Tehran seems willing to increase Ankara’s energetic dependency in order to limit the latter’s role in the event of a military intervention.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, even though Iran’s relative weakness could encourage it to try to take advantage of the initial surprise effect, this could bear heavy political consequences.<sup>89</sup> Tehran could find itself facing a serious dilemma. If it took the initiative to mine the Strait of Hormuz to buy time, Iran would lose the battle for legitimacy, and indirectly facilitate US access to in-theater bases by helping it gather massive support from the Gulf States. On the contrary, relinquishing the initiative to Washington could make it appear responsible

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<sup>85</sup> Algerian authorities denied overflight rights to the company that owned the *Antonov* aircrafts leased during this operation. *Ibidem.*, p. 94.

<sup>86</sup> O’Neil and Talmadge, “*Correspondence: Costs and Difficulties of Blocking the Strait of Hormuz*”, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Captain Béraud; Pham, “*Iran’s Threat to the Strait of Hormuz*”, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>88</sup> Haim Malka, “Turkey and the Middle East. Rebalancing Interests”, in Stephen J. Flanagan (ed.), *Turkey’s Evolving Dynamics. Strategic Choices for U.S.-Turkey Relations*, Washington, CSIS, March 2009, pp. 43-44, available at: [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090408\\_flanagan\\_turkeyreport\\_web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090408_flanagan_turkeyreport_web.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> On the complex relationship between strategic surprise and victory, see Corentin Brustlein, “La surprise stratégique. De la notion aux implications”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 10, October 2008, pp. 22-24, available at: [http://www.ifri.org/downloads/Focus\\_Brustlein\\_Surprise\\_Strategique.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/downloads/Focus_Brustlein_Surprise_Strategique.pdf).

for the outbreak of war but, at the same time, would mean accepting the loss of a significant part of its military assets during the first attacks.<sup>90</sup>

In the end, as interventionist powers can hardly count on surprise to counter an anti-access strategy,<sup>91</sup> they must be able to oppose to adversary forces a wide range of capabilities that would, ideally, enable them to “control escalation” along the spectrum of conflict.<sup>92</sup> Letting the adversary initiate violent escalation can be politically wise for a country, as long as its military apparatus can react quickly and effectively at each different level of conflict intensity. This means having to respond to very dissimilar challenges such as harassment tactics by irregular fighters or ballistic missiles carrying nuclear or biological warheads. In practical terms, a country has to possess capabilities for warding off each one of the adversary’s initiatives, by neutralizing enemy assets and limiting damages, while maintaining its ability to undertake nuclear retaliation. In this context – and provided it has developed tailored weapon systems and declaratory policies – nuclear deterrence should enable an interventionist power to maintain its adversary’s actions under a certain level of violence.

Dissociating the analysis of the sole military capabilities from the study of an intervention’s political circumstances seriously distorts the assessment of the anti-access threat. In the specific case of the Persian Gulf, however, one additional factor risks complicating even further the political environment: third party initiatives, especially coming from Israel.

The case of the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan recently illustrated the influence of third actors and the means to mitigate it. Intensively used by ISAF units, the air base has drawn a significant Russian pressure on Bishkek.<sup>93</sup> More than Russia’s, it is Israel’s implication in the outbreak of a

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<sup>90</sup> Ripley, “*Gulf of distrust*”, *op. cit.*

<sup>91</sup> A forcible entry operation entirely based on the principle of surprise could thus be both politically counter-productive and operationally difficult. From a political point of view, the country taking the initiative risks appearing as an aggressor. From an operational point of view, the deployments of ground, naval and air assets required to launch a large-scale operation are such that they could not go unnoticed, except for certain platforms combining long range and stealth, like the B-2s or SSGNs. However, it would be extremely difficult to sustain in the long run the shock effect of the first massive strike over time by resorting solely to this sort of rare and expensive capabilities.

<sup>92</sup> Patrick J. Garrity, *Why the Gulf War Still Matters: Foreign Perspectives on the War and the Future of International Security*, Los Alamos National Laboratory – Center for National Security Studies, July 1993, p. xix.

<sup>93</sup> Russia was successful in using financial incentives to convince Bishkek to shorten US lease in 2009 – a decision that the Kyrgyz President, now in exile, overturned – and it may have played a part in the recent political troubles. That said, the Kyrgyz governments’ hesitations may have been part of a bargaining strategy aimed at maximizing the benefits drawn from NATO exploiting this facility. Cf. Natalie Ouvaroff, “Kirghizistan: la main de Moscou”, *Slate.fr*, 16 April 2010, available at: <http://www.slate.fr/story/19943/kirghizistan-revolution-russie-crime>; “Lutte d’influence entre Moscou et Washington au Kirghizistan”, *RFI*, 15 April 2010, available at: <http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100415-lutte-influence-entre-moscou-washington-kirghizistan>. For a study on the Manas base in its physical and geopolitical environment, see Mickaël Aubout, “Géographie militaire d’une base

conflict with Iran that would determine regional political alignments and, consequently, access to local installations.<sup>94</sup> During the Gulf War, one of the difficulties facing Western powers, and which Iraq successfully identified at the time, was precisely the necessity to keep Israel out of the war. This had to be achieved despite Iraqi SCUD attacks in order to preserve the unity of the coalition. In the future, a situation in which Israel would take the initiative to strike Iranian nuclear facilities may both push Iran to block the Strait of Hormuz and prevent Western reaction from appearing legitimate, which would considerably limit the number of local allies and Western freedom of action.

Thus, the anti-access problem is eminently strategic, with both political and military dimensions exerting reciprocal influence. Such political aspects as the stakes of the conflict, the motives' perceived legitimacy, the regional context, or the existing alliances, strongly affect the requirements and contours of a force projection operation. In the same way, countries considering a military intervention are constrained in their choice of options by the forcible entry capabilities at their disposal.

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aérienne: l'exemple de la base de Manas (2002-2004)", *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, No. 19, April 2009, pp. 28-38.

<sup>94</sup> This point is mentioned in Bruce Riedel and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "The Case Against Threatening Iran", Brookings, Saban Center, 16 March 2010, [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0316\\_iran\\_israel\\_riedel\\_ohanlon.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0316_iran_israel_riedel_ohanlon.aspx).



# Conclusion

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Force projection has always been an essential element of great powers' foreign policies. Indeed, projecting forces is necessary in order to protect overseas strategic interests, deter attacks against those interests, support an endangered ally and give more credibility to alliance commitments. These reasons have participated in the current emergence of anti-access as a concern for Western countries, and there is every indication that this issue will remain a crucial preoccupation for Western defense policies for a long time. This problem arises in many different forms, depending on the area considered, the context of the conflict, as well as its timeframe. The Persian Gulf case study conducted confirms the assumptions put forward in this article regarding flaws in current debates on anti-access, and lead to three conclusions.

Contrary to the impression emerging from most of the defense literature, the anti-access threat extends beyond its sole military dimension. The latter is strongly influenced by the particular political context of each intervention; therefore, only by taking into account this dimension can one eventually assess the threat that regional anti-access strategies really pose. For instance, neglecting the context and focusing only on Iran's capabilities amounts to overestimating Teheran's freedom of action. It also means losing sight of the fact that there is no option for Iran to free itself of the political constraints under which it would have to operate.

The first conclusion of this study is that, in the short term, the threat posed by Iranian capabilities to Western projection forces is no cause for alarm – as long as Iran fails to procure last-generation air defense systems, such as S-300-type missiles, and to build a modern, integrated air defense system. This conclusion was reached for one simple and disquieting reason: it is based on the assumption that the US would almost certainly get involved in a conflict with Iran. As such, this illustrates once again weaknesses that would make it impossible for European countries to conduct certain missions autonomously unless they tolerate higher risks of casualties. European air forces lack SEAD capabilities, which are a preliminary step toward securing maritime approaches and conducting forcible entry operations. Apart from certain residual capabilities, SEAD does not currently rank among the European militaries' priority axes.

The second conclusion has to do with France and its upcoming capacity choices. The anti-access issue is largely absent from French strategic debates, which is surprising, knowing that France is an expeditionary power and that one of the priorities identified in the 2008 White Paper aims at providing French armed forces with the capabilities to

conduct forcible entry operations and make France a legitimate “lead nation” in a coalition. It would be unthinkable for France to emulate US technological responses against anti-access threats (stealth, seabasing, global strike, etc.), as these are beyond its reach. Nevertheless, developing certain capabilities (especially projectable MCM ships or SEAD assets) could be a means to fill existing capability gaps doubly detrimental as they significantly limit Europe’s autonomy and erode its credibility as a coalition partner with the US.<sup>95</sup>

The third conclusion one can draw is that the political constraints that accompany foreign interventions appear inescapable. Dependence of projection capabilities on facilities based on allied territory has been repeatedly underlined, but, as of today, no technological fix can supersede this situation entirely. Naturally, carrier aviation and other seabasing options can counterbalance certain political difficulties, but these capabilities are currently insufficient for major or protracted war operations. Diplomatic negotiations on access rights to facilities and overflight rights over national territories are expected to remain important constraints, unless an overwhelming threat that gathers unanimous opposition emerges. In the absence of such a threat, one of the responses to these political difficulties could consist, in theory, of multiplying the number and diversifying the location of bases close to potential theaters of operations. In practice, however, – provided it is at all possible to identify new locations – extending the network of bases appears unfeasible, as it would further increase the heavy costs borne by those European states that choose to put force projection at the heart of their strategic posture.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Iranian case study presents certain shortcomings. For now, Iran possesses the assets of a regional power, which do not represent the full spectrum of capabilities that could be mobilized as part of an anti-access strategy. The People’s Liberation Army possesses capabilities both more numerous and more sophisticated to hinder US projection forces. For example, the DF-21D conventional anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) is only one of the most recent and worrisome illustrations of Chinese progress in this field, which – unlike in the Iranian case – concerns all the “global commons”.<sup>96</sup>

Beyond these two particular cases, if the trend toward the diffusion of advanced technologies seems clear, its global consequences remain

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<sup>95</sup> See also Louis Gautier, “Les chausse-trappes du Livre blanc”, *Politique étrangère*, 4/2007, p. 752.

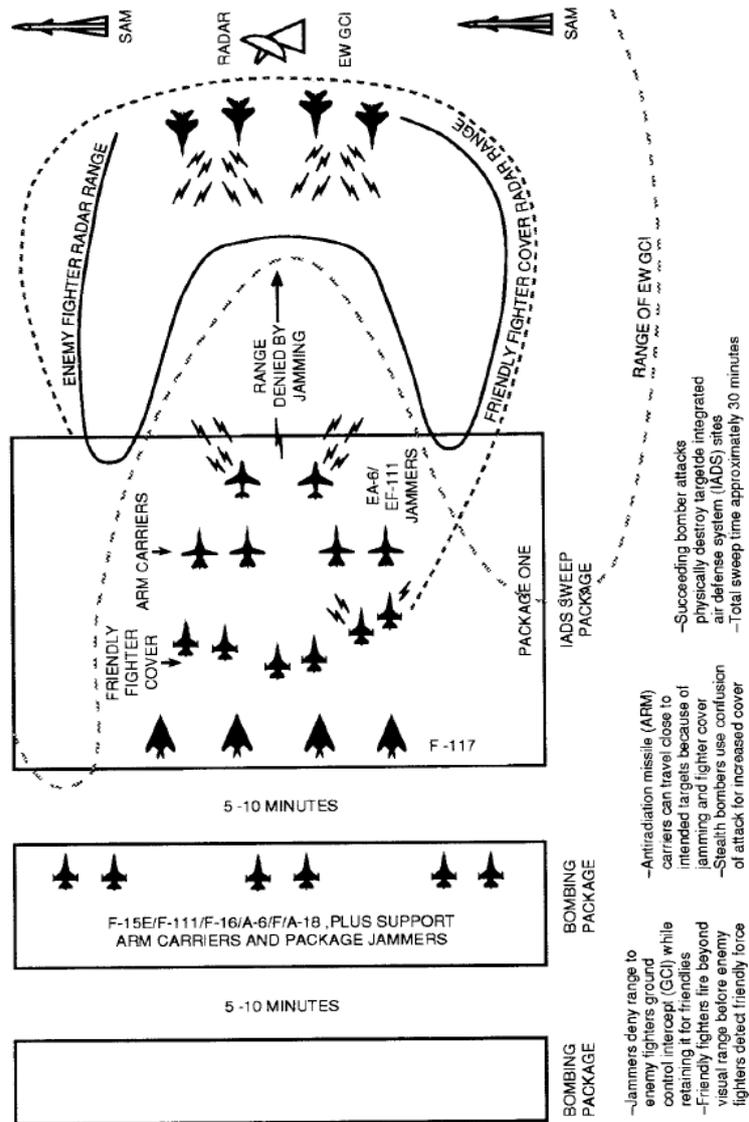
<sup>96</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and David D. Yang, “Using the Land to Control the Sea? Chinese Analysts Consider the Antiship Ballistic Missile”, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Autumn 2009, pp. 53-86; Eric Hagt and Matthew Durnin, “Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile. Developments and Missing Links”, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Autumn 2009, pp. 87-115; Mark Stokes, *China’s Evolving Conventional Strategic Strike Capability. The anti-ship ballistic missile challenge to U.S. maritime operations in the Western Pacific and beyond*, Arlington, Project 2049 Institute, 14 September 2009. For a skeptical opinion on the impact of such weaponry, see Craig Hooper and Christopher Albon, “Get Off the Fainting Couch”, *Proceedings*, Vol. 136, No. 4 (April 2010), available at: <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2010-04/get-fainting-couch>.

uncertain. In an optimistic scenario, current military balances – globally favoring the West when it confronts regional powers – would remain stable, with the West unable to project forces only against adversaries such as Russia or the PRC. In the longer-term, one cannot rule out the possibility that the combination of limited Western interests, growing naval, air and space anti-access capabilities, and the high cost of forcible entry capabilities will compel the West to an increased selectivity in regards to expeditionary operations. Ultimately, this could even lead to a global containment of the West, which would constitute a fundamental break in modern history.



# Appendix

Diagram of a SEAD operation<sup>97</sup>



<sup>97</sup> Source: James R. Brungess, *Setting the Context: Suppression of Enemy Air Defense and Joint Warfighting in an Uncertain World*, Maxwell, Air University Press, 1994, p. 195. Reproduction kindly authorized by the editor.



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