



# FORWARD-LEANING Global Security Report



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PROPRIETARY CLASSIFICATION: BUSINESS-IN-CONFIDENCE

## THE MONEY QUOTE: WITH IRAN, "RISK AVERSION CAN BE AS RISKY" AS RESTRAINT

Our forecast for an asymmetric attack by Iranian forces, made repeatedly for months but most recently one week ago,<sup>1</sup> was mirrored yesterday by Michael Singh, Managing Director of the WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY. From Iran's inability to close<sup>2</sup> the Strait of Hormuz to the brazen unpredictability<sup>3</sup> of the naval arm of *SEPAH PASDARAN* (IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS), Mr. Singh made many of the same points we have made about the nature of a likely Iranian assault. Said the former expert on the region at the NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL and the STATE DEPARTMENT:

Iran's navy -- especially the naval arm of Iran's REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS -- has invested in vessels and armaments ... well-suited to asymmetric warfare, rather than ... [a] ship-to-ship conflict that Iran would surely lose.... [They] have ... increasingly sophisticated mines, midget submarines, mobile anti-ship cruise missiles, and a fleet of small, fast boats ... [and] ... a naval special warfare ... capability.



**Center of Gravity and Metacentric Height be Damned!** It's just a runabout, the coxswain can hardly see where he's heading and the boat is far from seaworthy, but just one of those **M-08 contact mines** can ruin a seafarer's entire day. Just ask Paul Rinn, this writer's classmate from NAVY SURFACE WARFARE OFFICERS' SCHOOL COMMAND, or read **NO HIGHER HONOR**, how then-CDR Rinn and his crew saved USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS (FFG 58) when she struck an M-08 mine in 1988. The mining of "Sammy B" sparked **Operation Praying Mantis** and virtually eliminated Iran's Navy. (*Un-marked photo of last year's Exercise Velayat-90 from a source.*)

<sup>1</sup> **"Flash:** Iranian Naval Commander Says Closing Strait of Hormuz as Easy as 'Drinking Water.'" *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 11-177 28 December 2011. We had assessed previously that it was "highly likely" that Iranian naval forces would board vessels in the Strait of Hormuz or mount other asymmetric attacks. On 28 December, we updated that forecast, judging that seeing such actions play out were only a "matter of time." Also germane: Earlier in December, we stated that a "monumental mistake at sea" by Iranian forces could well be the "Black Swan" (wildly unpredictable event) that plays out in the Arabian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz or the Gulf of Oman. See: "The Money Quote: Deep Iranian Concern of Surprise Military Strike." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 11-169 6 December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> We have made that appraisal repeatedly. One example: "Analysis & Assessment: Closing the Strait," under "Great Prophet V: Completely Out of the Ordinary." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 10-068 22 April 2010.

<sup>3</sup> ^ *Ibid.* ("Great Prophet V: Completely Out of the Ordinary," Page 2.)

All the resources Singh listed – mines, subs, cruise missiles, go-fasts and commandos – were drilled at sea and ashore during Exercise Velayat-90 that concluded Monday<sup>4</sup> – **the resources Iran is most likely to bring to bear against the U.S.**

- **THE CHINA CONNECTION.** We enjoyed snorkeling with Michael Singh as he followed China in the Arabian Gulf, Iran’s best oil customer and the leading importer of Saudi Arabian crude. **Beijing’s economic lifeblood makes the Gulf run Red, and China returns Iran’s courtship with weapons and diplomatic cover at the U.N. Would Tehran slam the door on its Asian courtesan? Not likely:**

[A] move to close the Strait would backfire strategically by harming the interests of – and likely alienating – Iran’s most important patron and cutting off Iran’s own economic lifeline, while doing little to imperil U.S. supplies of crude. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that China quickly dispatched Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun to Tehran in the wake of Iran’s bellicose statements. In typically opaque fashion, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said only that “China hopes that peace and stability can be maintained in the Strait;” this is essentially diplo-speak for “Cool it.”

China was indeed “tight-lipped” about that meeting, reported the Israeli news outlet **ARUTZ SHEVA**.



Yesterday. Western Pacific. Hornets enter the pattern to return to their nest in USS CARL VINSON (CVN 70). (Public domain photo by MCSN George Bell, U.S.N.)

- **RISK AVERSION VS. A MORE “ROBUST POSTURE.”** In response to the latest Iranian provocation, Washington said yesterday that “no one in this government” sought “confrontation,” adding it was “important to lower the temperature.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Mr. Singh calls for a much more “robust posture” than showing *SEPAH PASDARAN* the fantail of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier:

<sup>4</sup> See “Exercise (Asym-)Metrics” under “Another Iranian Threat, Another Mixed Message from Washington.” **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 12-001 3 January 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The comments on “confrontation” and “lower[ing] the temperature” were made yesterday by Dr. George Little, new chief Pentagon spokesman who also referred to the body of water involved as the “Persian Gulf,” the name endorsed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Just in case someone dismisses that international blunder as inconsequential, it’s important to remember that words matter. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton knew this well when she stood on the main deck of USS FITZGERALD (DDG 62) in Manila Bay, pledged to the Republic of the Philippines that the U.S. would “stand and fight with you,” and referred to that portion of the South China Sea off the RP coast as the “West Philippine Sea,” the name *Manila* prefers and the name Beijing considers “insolence.” In diplomacy, the only King is perception and, until the

Excessive risk aversion that results in a failure of deterrence and feeds Iran's sense of impunity may, paradoxically, be just as risky [as restraint].

**Singh's mention of deterrence is critical.** First, should the U.S. and the West fail to deter Iran's quest for nuclear weapons, the fallback position is one of containment, strategic deterrence and the placement of regional allies under the U.S. "nuclear umbrella." **Such a posture and capability are new, however, and (a) do not currently exist and (b) would entail high costs and high risks.**<sup>6</sup> Second, the radicals who have the ear of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continually preach that (a) the U.S. is already at war with Iran (**their message being, fight it**)<sup>7</sup> and (b) the U.S. is inherently weak, and **it is Tehran that deters Washington, not the other way around.** Today, GEN Nasser Arasteh made the case that strategic deterrence in the region is wielded by Iran – **important not because it is empirically true, but because Khamenei and his closest associates believe it to be true.** Conveniently forgetting 1988's **Operation Praying Mantis**, Arasteh, the top military aide to Khamenei said:

The U.S. has repeatedly threatened us during the last 30 years but has not been able to put its threats into practice even once. This signifies the Iranian Armed Forces' deterrent power and might and their Commander-in-Chief's might and power [their CinC being Khamenei].



Yesterday. Arabian Sea. One the WIZARDS of ELECTRONIC ATTACK SQUADRON ONE THREE THREE, an EA-6B Prowler aircraft makes an arrested landing aboard USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74). (Public domain photo by MC3 Kenneth Abbate, U.S.N.)

**For its part, Iran's REVOLUTIONARY GUARD does not seem the least bit risk-adverse.** MGEN Ata'ollah Salehi warned USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74) to stay out of the Arabian Gulf – **quite a threat in light of the fact that the U.S. FIFTH FLEET is homeported in the Gulf nation of Bahrain.** Hours later, the deputy commander of the GUARD CORPS raised the bidding, stating that the situation with the U.S. has reached "a sensitive and critical point." Iran's FARS NEWS AGENCY quoted GEN Hossein Salami as saying (*emphasis added*):

**Our position against the enemy has moved from has moved from strategic to operational.**

Marines roll ashore, the only weapons are words. "Australia & the U.S. Unveil the AIR-SEA BATTLE Protocol New Security Arrangement." **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 11-162 17 November 2011. See also: "The Money Quote: 'We Will Stand and Fight with You.'" **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 11-163 18 November 2011.

<sup>6</sup> "Washington Adopts New, More Aggressive Policy Toward a Nuclear Iran," particularly "Alarming Glimpse of America's Plausible Future in the Middle-East." **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 11-176 23 December 2011.

<sup>7</sup> The "already-at-war" message originates from Hossein Shariatmadari who believes the U.S. and the West generally are "fragile" powers "being eaten by worms from the inside" and whose leaders are "stupid." A sign of Shariatmadari's influence, Khamenei used the "eaten by worms" phrase in an address to the graduating class of a Tehran military college in November 2011. **Importantly, the recommendation that Iran mount "selective boardings" of merchantmen in the Gulf and the Strait is Shariatmadari's.** **Flash:** Iranian Naval Commander Says Closing Strait of Hormuz as Easy as 'Drinking Water.'" **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 11-177 28 December 2011.

For Michael Singh's essay at the WASHINGTON INSTITUTE, **LOOK FURTHER.**

• **THE SILENT SENTINELS SPEAK LOUDEST.** The price of **Brent Crude**, a benchmark of oil market volatility, kissed \$110 a barrel in London yesterday. Analysts expected crude oil prices to go down slightly in the New Year, but Brent surged higher today, passing \$112. Yesterday, **gold** posted its best single day since 25 October after climbing \$38.39 an ounce and orbiting today around \$1600.



**Yesterday. Western Pacific.** An F/A-18C Hornet launches from USS CARL VINSON (CVN 70). Her sea-camo paint is self-explanatory, but the yellow-and-black aft of the canopy identify this hornet as one of the "STINGERS" of STRIKE FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE ONE THREE. (Public domain photo by MSCN George Bell, U.S.N.)

PROPRIETARY CLASSIFICATION: BUSINESS –IN- CONFIDENCE

**TURN TIGHTER, GO FASTER, LOOK FURTHER™**

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