Navy Role in Irregular Warfare and Counterterrorism: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Statements from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and other Department of Defense (DOD) officials suggest that the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) that is currently in progress may lead to an increased emphasis in future U.S. defense budgets on capabilities for conducting irregular warfare (IW) operations, such as counterinsurgency operations. In addition, counterterrorism (CT) operations have received an increased emphasis since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The Navy for several years has carried out a variety of IW and CT activities, and has taken some steps in recent years to strengthen its ability to conduct such activities. The overall issue for Congress is how much emphasis to place on IW and CT activities in future Navy budgets, and whether decisions reached by DOD on this issue in the QDR are appropriate. In addition to this overarching issue, the Navy's IW and CT activities pose some specific potential oversight issues for Congress This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Introduction

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The Navy for several years has carried out a variety of IW and CT activities, and has taken some steps in recent years to strengthen its ability to conduct such activities. The overarching issue for Congress is how much emphasis to place on IW and CT activities in future Navy budgets, and whether decisions reached by DOD on this issue in the QDR are appropriate.

Background

Longstanding Navy Activities

The Navy for several years has carried out a variety of IW and CT activities, including the following:

- Navy sailors, many of them individual augmentees (IAs), serving on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan in various mission areas, including but not limited to medical and construction support;
- Tomahawk cruise missile attacks on suspected terrorist training camps and facilities, such as those reportedly conducted in Somalia on March 3 and May 1, 2008,[1] and those conducted in 1998 in response to the 1998 terrorist bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa;[2]
- operations by Navy special operations forces, known as SEALs, that are directed against terrorists;[3]
- surveillance by Navy ships and aircraft of suspected terrorists overseas;
- maritime intercept operations (MIO) aimed at identifying and intercepting terrorists or weapons of mass destruction at sea, or potentially threatening ships or aircraft that are in or approaching U.S. territorial waters—an activity that

[1] Edmund Sanders, "U.S. Missile Strike in Somalia Kills 6," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 2008; Stephanie McCrummen and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Airstrike Kills Somali Accused of Links to Al-Qaeda," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2008: A12; Eric Schmitt and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Qaeda Leader Reported Killed In Somalia," *New York Times*, May 2, 2008.

[2] For a recent article on the 1998 strikes, see Pamela Hess, "Report: 1998 Strike Built bin Laden-Taliban Tie," *NavyTimes.com (Associated Press)*, August 22, 2008.

[3] SEAL is an acronym that stands for Sea, Air, and Land. For further discussion of the SEALs, see CRS Report RS21048, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

includes Navy participation in the multilateral Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI);[4]

- working with the Coast Guard to build maritime domain awareness (MDA)—a real-time understanding of activities on the world's oceans;
- assisting the Coast Guard in port-security operations;[5]
- protection of forward-deployed Navy ships, an activity that was intensified following the terrorist attack on the Navy Aegis destroyer Cole (DDG-67) in October 2000 in the port of Aden, Yemen; and
- protection of domestic and overseas Navy bases and facilities.

Initiatives Since 2005

Since 2005, the Navy has implemented a number of initiatives intended to increase its IW and CT capabilities, including the following:

- establishing a Navy Irregular Warfare Office;
- establishing a multilateral **global maritime partnership** (originally known as the "1,000-ship navy" concept) for ensuring global maritime security;
- establishing the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC);
- reestablishing the Navy's **riverine force**;
- establishing small sea bases called **Global Fleet Stations (GFSs)** in various regions around the world;
- establishing a reserve civil affairs battalion, an MIO intelligence exploitation pilot program, an intelligence data-mining capability at the National Maritime Intelligence Center (NMIC), and a Navy Foreign Area Officer (FAO) community consisting of officers with specialized knowledge of foreign countries and regions;
- assuming command of a joint task force in the Horn of Africa, the detainee operation at Guantanamo, Cuba, and Fort Suse, a high-security prison in Iraq, and assuming the lead in defending the Haditha Dam in Iraq;
- procuring Automatic Identification Systems (AISs) for surface ships;[6]
- developing a CT mission module for the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS);[7]

[4] For more on the PSI, see CRS Report RL34327, *Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)*, by Mary Beth Nikitin.

[5] See, for example, Emelie Rutherford, "Navy's Maritime Domain Awareness System 'Up And Running'," *Defense Daily*, September 4, 2008; and Dan Taylor, "New Network Allows Navy To Track Thousands of Ships Worldwide," *Inside the Navy*, September 8, 2008. For more on the Coast Guard and port security, see CRS Report RL33383, *Terminal Operators and Their Role in U.S. Port and Maritime Security*, by John Frittelli and Jennifer E. Lake, and CRS Report RL33787, *Maritime Security: Potential Terrorist Attacks and Protection Priorities*, by Paul W. Parfomak and John Frittelli.

[6] The AIS is a transponder-like device that transmits a ship's identification, position, course, speed, and other data to other ships and relevant authorities.

[7] For more on the LCS, see CRS Report RL33741, *Navy Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) Program: Background, Oversight* (continued...)

- developing Global Maritime Intelligence Integration (GMII) as part of Joint Force Maritime Component Command (JFMCC) and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA); and
- engaging with the U.S. Coast Guard to use the National Strategy for Maritime Security to more rapidly develop capabilities for Homeland Security, particularly in the area of MDA.

In discussing its IW and CT activities, the Department of the Navy, which includes the Navy and the Marine Corps, stated in 2008 that naval forces:

> provide the bulk of the nation's worldwide rotational military presence and an increasing portion of the required support for ground units in Operations Enduring Freedom / Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) [i.e., Afghanistan and Iraq]. These operations support our nation's interest by continuing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions, expanded maritime interception operations, and counter-piracy and counter-drug patrols. There are over 11,300 sailors ashore (including Individual Augmentees supporting ground forces in core mission areas and new capability areas) and 12,000 at sea in the U.S. Central Command region alone engaged in the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism].
>
> Since assumption in FY 2007, the Navy continues command of the detainee mission in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and at Camp Bucca, a high-security prison in Iraq. Additionally, Executive Agent responsibility remains in effect for command of the GWOT related Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA) in Djibouti. Our presence in the Horn of Africa, which is an impoverished part of the world that struggles with disease, drug running, human trafficking, smuggling and pockets of extremism, is a key to ensuring that terrorism doesn't gain a foothold in the region. CJTF HOA was initially formed in November 2002 as a seafaring force aimed at blocking terrorists fleeing Afghanistan from establishing a new safe haven. Soon after, the task force moved ashore and its mission morphed into a blend of military cooperation, military-to-military training and humanitarian assistance over a massive, eight-country region. The Navy is now engaged to help bring stability, security and hope to the region....
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> The Navy spearheads OEF by providing sovereign deck space from which to launch combat sorties into Afghanistan, continues to support ground operations in Iraq from the sea, in the air and on the land as part of OIF, and conducts deterrence operations in the Persian Gulf. The Navy also responds to humanitarian crisis, patrols for pirates, interacts with the developing navies around the world and supports counter-terrorism operations in the Philippines....
>
> Under the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD-41), we are continuing to cultivate relationships and develop capabilities to maximize the advantage that operating in the maritime domain brings to homeland security. Because more than 90 percent of the world's commerce moves by sea, protection of merchant shipping from potential terrorist networks is critical. United States naval forces are well trained to carry out the mission of deterring, delaying, and disrupting the movement of terrorists and terrorist-related material at sea. However, the United States cannot accomplish this monumental task alone. We are broadening our relationship with the navies of international allies to prosecute the GWOT. We are expanding the Proliferation Security Initiative to other countries and working bilateral boarding initiatives in all hemispheres.

(...continued)

Issues, and Options for Congress, by Ronald O'Rourke.

> We are also integrating intelligence and command and control systems with other government agencies like the Department of Homeland Security to effectively evaluate the maritime environment and anything that could adversely influence the security, safety or economy of America and our allies. We continue to develop the Navy's role in the Maritime Domain Awareness concept, including ship tracking and surveillance, to identify threats as early and as distant from our borders as possible in order to determine the optimal course of action. We are working with the Department of Homeland Security to develop a comprehensive National Maritime Security Response Plan to address specific security threats and command and control relationships.[8]

Navy Irregular Warfare Office

In July 2008, the Navy established the Navy Irregular Warfare Office, which is intended, in the Navy's words, to "institutionalize current ad hoc efforts in IW missions of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency and the supporting missions of information operations, intelligence operations, foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare as they apply to [CT] and [counterinsurgency]." The office works closely with U.S. Special Operations Command, and reports to the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for information, plans, and strategy.[9]

Global Maritime Partnership (Previously 1,000-Ship Navy)

The Global Maritime Partnership, previously known as the 1,000-ship Navy concept, is a U.S. Navy initiative to achieve an enhanced degree of cooperation between the U.S. Navy and foreign navies, coast guards, and maritime police forces, for the purpose of ensuring global maritime security against common threats. The Navy states that

> the future of maritime security depends more than ever on international cooperation and understanding. There is no one nation that can provide a solution alone. A global maritime partnership is required that unites maritime forces, port operators, commercial shippers, and international, governmental and non-governmental agencies to address mutual concerns. Ongoing discussions of a "1,000-ship navy" continue. The name itself captures the scope of the effort. The concept is not actually about having 1,000 international ships at sea. Rather, it is more about capabilities, such as speed, agility and adaptability. Membership in this navy is purely voluntary and has no legal or encumbering ties. It is a free-form, self-organizing network of maritime partners—good neighbors interested in using the power of the sea to unite, rather than to divide.[10]

Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC)

The Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC), headquartered at Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, VA, was established informally in October 2005 and formally on January 13, 2006. The Department of the Navy states that NECC

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[8] U.S. Department of the Navy. *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY2009 Budget*. Washington, 2008. (February 2008) pp. 2-1 through 2-3.

[9] Zachary M. Peterson, "New Navy Irregular Warfare Office Works to Address ISR Shortfall," *Inside the Navy*, September 1, 2008.

[10] U.S. Department of the Navy. *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY2009 Budget*. Washington, 2008. (February 2008) pp. 1-3 to 1-4

> will help meet the irregular challenges of the 21st Century. It will serve as a functional command to organize, man, train, and equip forces that operate in an expeditionary environment. It will be the single advocate for all Navy Expeditionary Forces to include Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Naval Construction Force (NCF), Maritime Expeditionary Security Force (MESF, formerly Navy Coastal Warfare) and Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group (NAVELSG), and key new capabilities: Expeditionary Training Command (ETC), Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC), Maritime Civil Affairs Group (MCAG) and Riverine Force. These forces will conduct Maritime Security Operations and Theater Security Cooperation and are capable of protecting critical infrastructure, securing the area for military operations or commerce, preventing the flow of contraband, enabling power projection operations, joint, bi-lateral or multilateral exercises, personnel exchanges, and humanitarian assistance. Whether extending a helping hand or finding and prosecuting our enemies, we are redefining the limits and meaning of 21st Century Seapower.[11]

Riverine Force

The riverine force is intended to supplement the riverine capabilities of the SEALs and relieve Marines who have been conducting maritime security operations in ports and waterways in Iraq. The consists of three squadrons of 12 boats each, and include a total of about 900 sailors. The Navy established Riverine Group 1 (which oversees the three squadrons) at the Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, VA, in May 2006. The first riverine squadron was established in FY2006, deployed to Iraq in March 2007, and returned in October 2007.[12] The second squadron was established in February 2007 and deployed to Iraq in October 2007 to relieve the first squadron.[13] The third squadron was established in July 2007.[14] Following the completion of the first squadron's deployment, the Navy in 2007 reportedly was considering expanding the riverine mission to other parts of Iraq.[15]

Global Fleet Stations (GFSs)

The Navy envisages establishing as many as five GFSs around the world, each of which might be built around a single amphibious ship or high-speed sealift ship. Under Navy plans, GFSs could host or support Marines, Navy LCSs or patrol craft, Coast Guard small boats, and Army and Air Force personnel. GFSs under Navy plans would be capable of conducting or supporting various operations, including some that could relate to CT or IW.[16]

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[11] U.S. Department of the Navy. *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY2009 Budget*. Washington, 2008. (February 2008) p. 2-2.

[12] For a discussion of this deployment, see Tim Fish, "RIVRON 1 Claims Success in Tackling Iraqi IEDs, But New Boats May Be Needed," *Jane's Navy International*, January/February 2008: 12-13. See also John Suits, "RIVRON 1 Sailors Return Home," *Navy News Service*, October 23, 2007.

[13] "Riverine Squadron 2 Deploys," *Navy News Service*, October 4, 2007.

[14] Louis Hansen, "Third Riverine Squadron Formally Established At Yorktown," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, July 7, 2007; Chris Johnson, "Navy Creates Third Squadron For Riverine Missions in Iraq," *Inside the Navy*, July 9, 2007; Matthew D. Leistikow, "NECC Establishes Riverine Squadron 3," *Navy News Service*, July 10, 2007.

[15] Chris Johnson, "Navy Mulling Expansion of Riverine Mission to More Areas in Iraq," *Inside the Navy*, July 23, 2007.

[16] For more on GFSs, see CRS Report RS21338, *Navy Ship Deployments: New Approaches - Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

Potential Oversight Issues for Congress

IW and CT in Future Navy Budgets

An overarching oversight issue for Congress is how much emphasis to place on IW and CT activities in future Navy budgets, and whether decisions reached by DOD on this issue in the QDR are appropriate.

Supporters of placing increased emphasis on IW and CT activities in future Navy budgets could argue that the experience of recent years, including U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, suggests that the United States in coming years will likely need to be able to conduct IW and CT operations, that the Navy has certain specialized or unique IW and CT capabilities that need to be supported as part of an effective overall U.S. IW or CT effort, and that there are programs relating to Navy IW and CT activities that could be funded at higher levels, if additional funding were made available.

Opponents of placing an increased emphasis on IW and CT activities in future Navy budgets could argue that these activities already receive adequate emphasis on Navy budgets, and that placing an increased emphasis on these activities could reduce the amount of funding available to the Navy for programs that support the Navy's role in acting, along with the Air Force, as a strategic reserve for the United States in potential conventional inter-state conflicts.

Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following: To what degree can or should Navy IW and CT activities be used to reduce the burden on other services for conducting such activities? Are the Navy's steps to increase its role in IW and CT partly motivated by concerns about its perceived relevance, or by a desire to secure a portion of IW and CT funding? Is the Navy striking an appropriate balance between IW and CT activities and other Navy concerns, such as preparing for a potential future challenge from improved Chinese maritime military forces?[17]

Regarding how issues relating to Navy IW and CT capabilities might be discussed in the QDR, an April 29, 2009 press report stated that:

> The Navy and the nation need to have a lively discussion about the maritime domain and what it takes for the service to operate in that area—including the ability to support and maintain sailors and ships dispersed around the globe, according to [Admiral Gary Roughead,] the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO).
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> Additionally, the Navy is looking to flush out its requirements for the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC) during the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), hoping those discussions will create an opportunity to see how the NECC should evolve....
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> As the Navy enters into the QDR, Roughead sees the opportunity for discussions about the military at large and the role of the various components within the military, as well as, discussions on the naval capabilities the nation needs, the capacity of those capabilities and the numbers of those capabilities. "That's what we are going to be doing in QDR."

[17] For additional discussion of this issue, see CRS Report RL33153, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities - Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

One topic Roughead is looking to discuss during the QDR is the NECC.

"Clearly, I think we are going to be looking at that under the rubric of irregular warfare…what are the components that make that up," he said. "For the first time we did a force structure assessment on the expeditionary combat command and remarkably as we went out into the COCOMs there was not a definitive requirement that came through loud and clear on riverine [capabilities]. I want to get into that."

But the lack of a definitive requirement from the combatant commands should not be seen as the possible demise of the riverine force, Roughead said.

Proof of his support for NECC was demonstrated this year as he pulled funding for the command from the supplemental and, for the first time, placed it into the Navy's baseline budget.

"My position was, if we are going to have this capability you can't be hanging it on supplemental funding because if it goes away where are you? So we are migrating NECC into the base budget," Roughead said. "We've developed some costing models for NECC that allow us to better predict what the costs are."

Roughead views the QDR as a good opportunity for the Navy to also explore where it wants to grow NECC because, in some instances, the sizing of that capability is influenced by the other services as well, he said.

For example, Roughead pointed to the Seabees. "How many do you need? Because of the work they are doing, they are pretty much exclusively focused on Iraq and Afghanistan. So what's the growth in Army engineers? That's why the QDR is going to be a good process."

If the Navy needs more combat engineers and looks to grow its force, and the Army is growing its engineering force, too, is that the optimum way to do that? Roughead said. "The QDR is going to let us get into things like that. The QDR will allow us to better flush out the riverine portion."

Roughead said the NECC is performing a really good mission and he is trying to get his arms around how much bigger it should grow.

The capability is so good, Roughead said, he has been working with his foreign counterparts to explore a riverine exchange program.

Because of the varying locales the riverine force could operate in—from operations in Iraq to densely forested or complex delta environments—Roughead wants the force to get some different experiences.

"The boats we have are great where they are operating, but how do they hold up in shallower, muddier, thick vegetation areas? I want to find out more about that," he said.

In the past year and a half, Roughead said he has taken steps to legitimize and put in place things that portend a good future for NECC.

"A future based on getting it into our base budget, getting force structure analysis—not just what people think we should have—but where do we think the demands are going to be? And then getting in and looking at what the internal structure and manning concept should be

for NECC," he said. "I would say we are doing some good substantive work and good foundational work to really get NECC forward."[18]

Specific Oversight Questions

In addition to the overarching issue above, the Navy's IW and CT activities pose some specific potential oversight issues for Congress, including the following:

- How many Navy personnel globally are involved in IW and CT activities, and where are they located? How much funding is the Navy expending each year on such activities?
- Is the Navy adequately managing its IA program?[19]
- Is the Navy devoting sufficient attention and resources to riverine warfare?[20]
- Aside from the establishment of the riverine force and a reserve civil affairs battalion, what implications might an expanded Navy role in IW and CT have for Navy force-structure requirements (i.e., the required size and composition of the Navy)?
- Is the Navy adequately coordinating its IW and CT activities and initiatives with other organizations, such as the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and the Coast Guard?
- Are the Navy's recent IW and CT organizational changes appropriate? What other Navy organizational changes might be needed?

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[18] Geoff Fein, "CNO Sees Need For Discussion On Maritime Domain," *Defense Daily*, April 29, 2009: 1-2. Ellipsis in quote as in the original.

[19] For a discussion of the Navy's management of the IA program, see Andrew Scutro, "Fleet Forces Takes Charge of IA Program," *NavyTimes.com*, July 7, 2008.

[20] For an article that discusses this question from a critical perspective, see Daniel A. Hancock, "The Navy's Not Serious About Riverine Warfare," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 2008: 14-19.