

An Iranian military official said late last month that their navy plans to send vessels to international waters off the Atlantic coast of the United States in a clear threat to American population centers.

In the minds of most Americans, there are two possibilities. Either the Iranian navy is blustering in the same manner as countless leaders of that country over the years, or this is designed to be a military provocation of the United States. From the perspective of a free nation facing a constant threat of warfare from abroad, America must view this statement as provocative and aggressive.

Iran is on a fool's errand to intimidate the United States.

During the cold war, aggressors of the United States played this dangerous game, conducting war games and advancing military assets right up to the limit of the American threshold for risk. Those provocations were part of the conflict in an age of nuclear deterrence, but the conflict today between the U.S. and rogue regimes around the world is even more dangerous.

The military and political strategy of states like Iran, North Korea and Venezuela ranges from making radical speeches at the United Nations to openly backing terrorist regimes and organizations.

Whether the Iranians attempt to send ships into the Atlantic or not, their strategy is clear: they are taking advantage of the clear threat that terrorism poses to the security of the American homeland. While their threats are likely no more than a publicity stunt, the Iranians' desire to provoke the American public with rash actions sends an unintended message to our country. Iran is making an argument for a robust, active, energetic system of national defense in the United States. We cannot afford to let our guard down for one moment, to overextend our military any longer, or to ignore the smallest international threats to our shores.

If military conflicts often divide American public opinion and create fractious arguments in Congress, then the readiness and capability of our national defense systems are issues on which all Americans can agree. There are still many leaders of other countries in the world who

wish to do us harm. For their personal political gain or out of sheer madness, they continue to target our free society.

These situations should be met resolutely in the United States by people and leaders who understand that our freedoms are the real object of the threats (whether or not they are backed up by actual aggression). In fear or anger, we are legitimizing the regimes that seek a reaction. By reaffirming our freedoms and our willingness to defend them, on the other hand, we counter their message with a response befitting the service of our men and women in uniform.

Patriotism in the United States has never been about being better than other nations, even though the free society we have built makes us the greatest nation in the world. The nations which oppose us know they cannot destroy this spirit with a bomb or an attack; they know they must deceive us into giving up our greatness by becoming lazy, weak or angry. The chances of that happening are about as good as the chances of an Iranian vessel making it to within 12 nautical miles of the U.S. shore.