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MARITIME ACTION GROUPS: THE EXPEDITIONARY BUILDING BLOCK OF THE FUTURE

by

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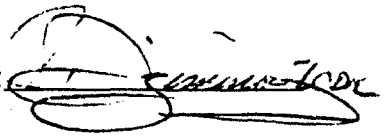
An essay submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College for the Operations Department.

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

Signature: 

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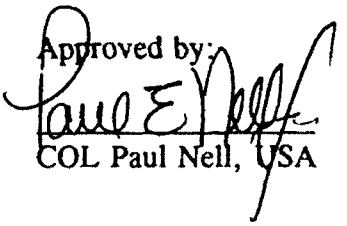
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The end of the Cold War has shifted our National Military Strategy towards a regional focus. This regional focus requires the Navy to develop expeditonary forces which are shaped for joint operations, that will operate forward from the sea and are tailored to national needs (From the Sea, p. 2). While the carrier battlegroup (CVBG) is part of this expeditionary force, it is often too large to efficiently apply across the full spectrum of conflict. Furthermore, because of the downsizing of the military, which accompanied this change in threat, a CVBG will not always be available.

A smaller expeditionary building block is necessary. The maritime action group (MAG) as developed by Vice Admiral William A. Owens (N8, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Resources, Warfare Requirements and Assessment), provides a superb foundation for the Navy's new expeditionary force. The MAG has the required capabilities, (command, control and surveillance, battlespace dominance, power projection,

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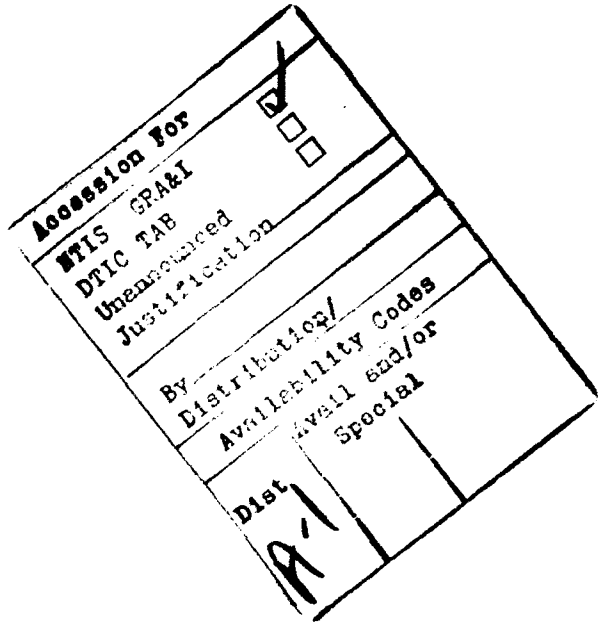
and force sustainment) as specified in "From the Sea". Furthermore, the MAG lends itself particularly well to joint and coalition operations. It can be shaped to provide a number of flexible options specifically tailored to regional areas or crisis response. It is an efficient use of our existing assets and it is a viable alternative answer to the question, "Where are the carriers?"

The MAG has its limits though, and is no way an equal replacement for the carrier. But, innovative employment of the MAG will preserve our carrier force for those areas and times where it is needed most. Breaking the operational traditions of the past won't happen easily but new ideas for maximizing the capabilities of our total forces are essential in securing our future. The MAG concept is one of these ideas.



ABSTRACT

The end of the Cold War has shifted our National Military Strategy towards a regional focus. This regional focus requires the Navy to develop expeditionary forces which are shaped for joint operations, that will operate forward from the sea and are tailored to national needs (From the Sea, p.2). While the carrier battlegroup (CVBG) is part of this expeditionary force, it is often too large to efficiently apply across the full spectrum of conflict. Furthermore, because of the downsizing of the military, which accompanied this change in threat, a CVBG will not always be available.

A smaller expeditionary building block is necessary. The maritime action group (MAG), as developed by Vice Admiral William A. Owens (N8, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Resources, Warfare Requirements and Assessment), provides a superb foundation for the Navy's new expeditionary force. The MAG has the required capabilities, (command, control and surveillance, battlespace dominance, power projection, and force sustainment) as specified in "From the Sea". Furthermore, the MAG lends itself particularly well to joint and coalition operations. It can be shaped to provide a number of flexible options specifically tailored to regional areas or crisis response. It is an efficient use of our existing assets and it is a viable alternative answer to the question, "Where are the carriers?"

The MAG has its limits though, and is no way an equal replacement for the carrier. But, innovative employment of the MAG will preserve our carrier force for those areas and times where it is needed most. Breaking the operational traditions of the past won't happen easily but new ideas for maximizing the capabilities of our total forces are essential in securing our future. The MAG concept is one of these ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union has changed the world. Strategically, this means operating in a world where the threat environment has changed. This change provides the services a unique opportunity to restructure their forces to meet the challenges of a new era in U.S. military operations.

For the Navy, this means a change in directions. "From the Sea"[1] defines these new directions as naval expeditionary forces which are shaped for joint operations, operating forward from the sea, tailored to our national needs. While there are no simple solutions to the many difficult challenges ahead, the Navy must take two initial steps. The first step will be to expand our operational thinking beyond the confines of our Cold War "Maritime Strategy". The second step will be to focus our efforts on adapting our current forces to the demands posed by these new regional instabilities and opportunities. From these two initial steps, the Navy will have the framework necessary to begin building its new expeditionary force shaped towards the future. A future in which the Navy will be prepared to act either independently, jointly, or as part of a coalition across the entire spectrum of conflict.

Employing the framework above, this paper proposes that the maritime action group (MAG), developed by Vice Admiral William Owens*, be accepted as the fundamental maritime building block of this new expeditionary force. To build a case for accepting the MAG as the Navy's new building block, factors associated with the current building block, the carrier battle group (CVBG), are examined. This is followed by an explanation of the

* Admiral Owens directed the MAG's first deployment in July of 1991 as Commander U.S. Sixth Fleet. Today, Admiral Owens is N8, the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Resources, Warfare Requirements and Assessment.

MAG and how this concept can be expanded and employed in regional challenges. The final portion of the paper considers benefits and limitations of the MAG as the Navy's new fundamental maritime building block. The concluding object is to identify the MAG as a viable, useful, and innovative alternative approach to operating with the forces we do have.

> The end of the Cold War gives rise to a renaissance in our Maritime Strategy and necessitates innovation in the tactical employment of naval forces. U.S. naval forces must prepare to respond rapidly to a variety of military and humanitarian missions. The new world will be punctuated with multiple, unpredictable instabilities, spawned by world poverty, regional thugs, terrorism, drugs, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. To meet the challenges of this changed world, we will have fewer resources from which to draw, and traditional solutions may be impractical. Tactical innovation is the key.[2]
>
> Vice Admiral William A. Owens
> Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Resources,
> Warfare Requirements and Assessments (N8)

MARITIME ACTION GROUPS: THE EXPEDITIONARY BUILDING BLOCK OF THE FUTURE

The new focus on regional vice global conflict requires the Navy to change its operational perspectives. To do this the Navy must realign its operational force structure to include smaller maritime expeditionary building blocks. The maritime action group (MAG) which will be presented in detail provides one such alternative building block. These expeditionary units must be flexible, built from existing forces and applicable throughout the entire spectrum of warfare. To accomplish these objectives, these new maritime expeditionary building blocks must effectively combine joint and coalition capabilities into a credible regional force which reflects our national strategy. In this way, the Navy can better maintain its commitment to forward presence, while expanding its role in crisis response.

The latest direction for the Navy and the Marine Corps was "From the Sea". "From the Sea" introduced significant changes in naval priorities. First, it shifted our strategy from a global threat to a focus on regional challenges. Secondly, it shifted the naval operational emphasis away from open ocean fighting toward joint operations conducted from the sea. Thirdly, it called for naval forces to be restructured to expand on and capitalize upon its traditional expeditionary roles. The last priority shift was the development of a Air-Land-Sea battle doctrine as part of the sea-air-land team[3].

Implementing these shifts in priority requires an examination of how the Navy traditionally responds to regional crises in order to determine new alternatives. These new expeditionary alternatives must then be weighed against the potential threats of littoral warfare

and various crisis responses. Global politics, rapidly developing technologies, weapon proliferation, and declining defense budgets will make this process dynamic and challenging. The process of change cannot wait. The Navy must begin now if we are to achieve success within these new operational priorities. Finally, expeditionary warfare will require a multi-service effort to look at how traditional maritime operations can be more effectively integrated with joint/coalition operations ashore and in the corresponding air battle.

CARRIER BATTLE GROUPS (CVBG)

For the last half of this century, the carrier battle group has held the Navy's operational focus as its principal maritime building block. Testifying before Congress, Ronald O'Rourke, a chief National Defense analyst, stated that, "under current and longstanding U.S. Navy concepts of fleet organization and employment, the battle group is the fundamental building block of the surface fleet."[4] Successful employment of the old Maritime Strategy was hinged upon the carriers' ability to operate in a global offensive in support of the European land battle. Consequently, naval operational planning revolved around building a 600 ship force structure capable of accomplishing our Cold War maritime objectives. As a result, the Navy perfected a peacetime forward presence and crisis response based on the CVBG.

In a review of the political uses of military force from 1975 through 1984, Philip D. Zelikow, in his accredited research at the Naval Post Graduate School, discovered some interesting trends regarding the role of the CVBG. He stated that;

> Throughout the post war period the United States has turned most frequently to naval units as an instrument of crisis management and political influence. It should be noted that

> aircraft carriers were the frequent component of naval action, involved in 35 or 64 percent of recent incidents where naval forces were used.[5]

The carrier battle group's presence, however, did not necessarily guarantee a favorable outcome. In fact, one of Zelikow's conclusions was that it was difficult to modify an opponent's political behavior with just the threat of force and that success was more likely to be achieved when the size of the force matched the objective.

> This evidence suggests that, regardless of the general level of force being used, positive outcomes will remain likely if the force is used in a realistic mode and aimed at achievable objectives. As in the past, recent favorable results 'occurred far more frequently when the objective was to modify behavior...'[6]

Lieutenant Commander, William F. Hickman, makes this point clear in his critical assessment of the Navy's role in the Iranian hostage crisis in "Did It Really Matter?" He states, with respect to the Navy's assignment of two CVBGs in the vicinity of Iran;

> ...the naval presence served no useful role in the resolution of the hostage crisis. For the most part, the military options presented by the presence had military or political liabilities which reduced their political effectiveness... Whenever battle groups are to be used to influence a political situation, it must be recognized that at some point, if the presence has not induced the desired behavior, the continuation of that presence may produce negative results. What is intended to be a demonstration of strength and resolve may be perceived as weakness and indecision.[7]

In short, it would be useful to develop additional maritime flexible deterrent options (FDOs), which are still viable but a better match to various regional objectives. This concept of associated political applications of limited naval force was formally developed over twenty years ago by Sir James Cable in his book, Gunboat Diplomacy[8]. In summary, his renowned work stressed the critical importance of correctly matching naval force to the political

objectives. "Gunboat diplomacy is a screwdriver intended to turn a particular kind of screw. It is not a hammer that will bang home any old nail."[9] The CVBG, of course, remains applicable to the higher end of the spectrum of warfare and those crises which demand a strong naval air presence. "From the Sea" stresses, however, that "the art of managing crises in these areas is delicate and requires the ability to orchestrate the appropriate response and to send precisely tailored diplomatic, economic, and military signals to influence the actions of adversaries."[10]

The carrier battle group, while an immensely capable instrument, is too large a military tool to justify its employment across the spectrum of crisis management. Operational planners must develop alternative answers to the old cliche of, "Where are the carriers?" Unconsidered reliance on such cliches have often resulted in numerous unplanned CVBG deployments, reassignments, and extensions which, in turn, have triggered costly ripple effects throughout individual theaters and sometimes throughout the entire Navy. This is because of the immense effort required to match operations, maintenance, and training schedules of other carriers, air wings, escorts, supporting commands, etc.

In fact, even after this costly effort is expended, the political impact of the carrier's presence is easily mitigated if it is overused and restrictively employed. For instance, if the typical military response to a crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean is the carrier battle group its presence will begin to become a common fixture, particularly if it was not decisively employed. The impact of a carrier's presence is even further reduced, if the particular crisis area normally has a CVBG assigned as a matter of routine deployment policy. Crisis response with the CVBG has other significant hidden opportunity costs due to lost exercises

through restrictive operational tethers, because we wanted to be ready, but were unwilling to act. All these factors add up, making the ineffective application of the CVBG our most expensive response option.

While the carrier may be our most expensive option, it may not be possible to respond with a CVBG, because of the dwindling numbers of carriers and respective aircraft wings. "From the Sea" states: "The answer to every situation may [can] not be the carrier."[11] Commander Thomas Trotter in his recent article on "The Future of Carrier Aviation" contends that carrier air wings will be the limiting factor in future operations and that maintaining constant deployments to all three traditional "hubs" (Indian Ocean, Western Pacific and Mediterranean) will not be feasible when the force structure is reduced to twelve carriers.[12] In accordance with his conclusions, Commander Trotter made several specific recommendations, one of which was to "substitute Navy assets other than aircraft carriers for forward deployment and crisis response."[13]

The Navy must look for alternative expeditionary options to the traditional CVBG, because of two central factors. First, the carrier battle group is not always the most effective nor economical flexible deterrent option to exercise across the entire spectrum of crisis response. Secondly, it will be increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to maintain previous CVBG forward deployed commitments with the forces allotted.

MARITIME ACTION GROUPS

The Navy needs a smaller alternative expeditionary building block which will complement joint and coalition operations aimed particularly at the lower end of the spectrum of warfare. Vice Admiral William Owens, now Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, N8,

(Resources, Warfare Requirements and Assessment) and previously Commander, US Sixth Fleet, states that, "The Maritime Action Group (MAG) can be an alternative building block for naval operations in those situations for which a carrier battle group cannot be available."[14] The MAG concept, which Admiral Owens, as Sixth Fleet Commander, developed and implemented, consists of two surface ships (normally a cruiser with significant anti-air warfare (AAW) capabilities and a destroyer or guided missile frigate), attack submarine, and an alert P-3 aircraft. Captain Robert Crawshaw, USN, Commodore of the initial Sixth Fleet Maritime Action Group emphasizes that "the MAG is different because it is a single cohesive force. The individual components don't just support one another. They train, operate, and fight as one force."[15] Vice Admiral Owens describes the MAG:

> It is analogous to a naval force molecule, processing impressive communications and intelligence capabilities and probably representing the smallest independent unit of naval force that can provide significant AAW, [anti-surface warfare] ASUW, antisubmarine warfare (ASW) and strike (via Tomahawk cruise missiles) capabilities. And, like the 'compounding' capacity of a molecule, teaming the MAG with other systems generates much more capable task forces.[16]

Although new, the MAG has already proven itself in the Mediterranean. During the Gulf crisis, when left without a carrier, Sixth Fleet and our partners built a Mediterranean air net (MEDNET) around the MAG. The MAG, in conjunction with NATO early warning aircraft and allied (TACAIR) tactical aircraft, successfully combined to contribute directly to the defense of land forces while operating at sea.[17] Additionally, the MAG repeatedly proved itself as a important centerpiece in numerous bilateral and multilateral exercises. At one time or another, nearly all of our Mediterranean partners were effectively integrated into the MAG by supplying surface, submarine, or air assets. The results were well received, as

the MAG proved to be an invaluable vehicle in which operational and tactical ideas were exchanged between the Navy, other services and our coalition partners. Captain Crawshaw stated that:

> ...the MAG operates as a single force exercising with allied navies throughout the Mediterranean, with operational control alternating between U.S. and allied commanders. The advantages of coalition- building operations are numerous. Less intimidating than a carrier battle group, the MAG has been received eagerly by allied navies throughout the Mediterranean.[18]

Captain Crawshaw and the commodores who followed him to Sixth Fleet, demonstrated that when the combined, surface, subsurface and air power capabilities in communications, electronics, acoustics, firepower were effectively integrated, the MAG achieved the four key operational capabilities defined in "From the Sea". These capabilities are: Command, Control, and Surveillance; Battle Space Dominance; Power Projection; and Force Sustainment.[19]

Command, Control and Surveillance

Command, control, and surveillance can be provided by any of the MAG units, each offering its own operational advantages. For example, today's surface ships possess tremendous data link and communications capabilities. Submarines and air assets can significantly contribute to over-the-horizon (OTH) command, control and surveillance capabilities with the advent of satellite communications (SATCOM), inverse synthetic aperture radars (ISAR), global positioning satellites (GPS) and direct support elements (DSE).

The command and control requirements of different MAGs may vary widely, depending on whether they are paired jointly (i.e. highly sophisticated) or, by contrast, in a

coalition where its partners may be less sophisticated. In these cases, the MAG commander may have to resort to alternative methods to be effective. For instance, a heavily weighted reliance on satellite communications (SATCOM) for command and control may be impossible because most coalition members only possess line of sight HF/UHF/VHF equipment. Regardless of these limits, an extra effort will be required to break down familiar methods of operations in order to examine alternatives, which might not be as preferable, but just as successful. It is a question of developing the right mix. This requires an extra effort which will largely depend on the human element of our service. The success of this human element will rely largely on comprehensive joint/combined exchange programs, timely and realistic analysis, and open-minded approaches to solving new problems.

Battlespace Dominance

Battlespace dominance requires both coordination and firepower, one without the other negates the advantage. The MAG, when properly paired to the capabilities of joint and coalition forces, can act as a force multiplier throughout the entire battlespace environment. These capabilities encompass the complete battlespace maritime, air, land, and space environments. The effective firepower necessary in these environments exists in the MAG and more importantly can be expanded upon, as necessary, to defeat virtually any threat. The challenge is to employ the applicable force in a effectively coordinated manner.

A MAG possesses both the war fighting concepts and the equipment necessary to coordinate this increasingly complicated battlespace. The Composite Warfare Commander (CWC) is one such war fighting concept. And, while this CWC structure will continue to remain a valid and effective concept, it will require some modification to be consistent with

the operational structures of other services. For instance, each of the other services organize their operational structures around ground, air, and command elements. As a result, Navy operators will need to examine new ways of broadening the scope of the individual CWCs to incorporate these elements. For example, AAW commanders will have to learn how their actions can complement the efforts of joint/coalition air elements as part of a sea-air-land team. Concepts like these will require new emphasis on the operational training levels, doctrine development, and an increased effort in service exchange programs to be effective.

With respect to equipment, the SPY-1 radar (AEGIS) surface capable ship adds new meaning to battlespace dominance with its ability to automate the combat environment, close in and beyond the horizon. The AEGIS system has revolutionized surface warfare, but this is just one aspect of battlespace dominance. Further examples include: ships with upgraded hull mounted sonars; processing systems (e.g. SQS-53C); and LAMPS helos, which provide a superior close in ASW defense against the proliferating diesel submarine threat. P-3's and shore detachment based S-3's can effectively provide ISAR coverage and project offensive ASUW/ASW attacks in littoral areas. Submarines, with their inherent stealth advantage, can combine with the electronic surveillance measure (ESM) capabilities of silent forward operating ships to complete a lethal mix. In the final analysis, our ability to dominate the complex battlespace environment of the future with reduced forces, will rely on the well-honed coordination of joint/coalition forces and the full exploitation of our technology advantages.

Power Projection

The MAG can project power either seaward or landward. Seaward power projection

of the MAG retains all of the traditional capabilities inherent in our maritime forces. Landward, the potential of the MAG, as an expeditionary building block, becomes evident when it is employed with joint and/or combined forces ashore. The result achieved becomes a seamless crossover between maritime and land operations by effectively combining land, air, sea and space assets as a force multiplier.

The MAG, when teamed with the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and SOF units, can accomplish this purpose. An example would be to employ Air Force fighter squadrons as combat air patrol (CAP) for MAG Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) assets engaged in deep strikes operating as part of an air-land battle campaign. Another example would be to combine the surface to air missile (SAM) defense umbrella of a MAG with a ARG/MEU, in a power projection role against a hostile airport as support elements for the 82nd airborne in a joint operation. These are just a few of the many ways a MAG can project power whether alone or in concert with other joint or combined assets, which will be discussed later. Suffice to say, there are many alternatives to be explored, exercised and refined if we are to expand beyond the Mahanian concepts of navy-versus-navy and our nearly myopic CVBG operational focus.

Force Sustainment

Employing the MAG concept does not require a new sustainment force structure. In many cases, the MAG lends itself more readily to existing organic and coalition logistical support because of its smaller size as compared to a CVBG. In blue water scenarios, without the readily available access to a theater's regional infrastructure, the sustainment capabilities of the MAG may be limited. Many of these blue water sustainment concerns are reduced,

however, by the shift in focus towards littoral warfare. Additionally, most of these sustainment issues can be solved through precise logistical preparation.

The single MAG, however, still has its limitations with respect to these four essential operational capabilities. MAGs do not by themselves represent a one for one replacement for a CVBG. They do, however, represent an alternative to the CVBG in certain lesser contingencies. Furthermore, the MAG represents an expeditionary building block which offers a superb foundation for other units. These other units may be an ARG/MEU, SOF units, strike assets, coalition forces, etc, depending on the crisis and the forces available. In this way, the MAG is more than just two ships, a submarine and an aircraft. The MAG is a building block for a whole range of flexible options.

In many of today's Third World contingencies, the effective combination of these forces will be enough to resolve crises. There are, of course, those contingencies which still require a CVBG(s). For these situations, the presence of a MAG and its partners may be enough to control the crisis in a limited fashion until the arrival of a CVBG(s). In these cases, the operational commander must be aggressive and imaginative in his employment of the MAG, but equally careful to recognize those scenarios which are beyond the capabilities of his forces. More importantly, it will be critical for the Navy as a whole to envision its expeditionary role in crisis response as a larger part of an integrated joint and coalition response.

THE EXPEDITIONARY ROLE OF THE MAG

In the application of the MAG to a crisis, the operational commander must: first match capabilities to the threat and secondly provide the desired political, economic, military,

or psychological signal(s). Threat-wise the MAG's capabilities can be expanded or reduced to meet virtually any crisis throughout the spectrum of most lesser regional contingencies (LRC)s and can contribute significantly in situations which escalate into major regional contingencies (MRC)s. As an independent building block, the MAG's unique capabilities are especially applicable to the lower end of the spectrum of conflict. Some specific examples are in humanitarian operations, as a maritime interdiction force (MIF), in various non-combatant evacuations (NEO), or as part of low intensity conflicts (LIC). Expanding the MAG to include additional forces moves its capabilities towards the higher end of the spectrum.

Changing the shape of these MAG alternatives, changes the signals they send. To an opponent, these signals may indicate different threat levels. To a partner, these signals may indicate various degrees of cooperation or resolve. Sir John Cable, described these political applications (signals) of a limited naval force as definitive, purposeful, catalytic, or expressive in his book, Gunboat Diplomacy. To define each of these MAG alternatives and their associated signals (particularly in Cable's terms) would be exceedingly difficult and beyond the scope of this author's intent. However, some examples of a few of these MAG alternatives and their related signals are provided.

To many coalition partners, the MAG signifies a U.S. desire to operate more as a facilitator than the dominant centerpiece. With some less capable coalition partners, however, the MAG could be viewed as an overwhelming participant. Depending on the opponent and the crisis, the MAG may be perceived as a significant threat or as a force merely monitoring events. Expanding the MAG to incorporate joint or coalition assets

expands its capabilities and escalates the threat to an opponent. Combining the MAG with joint assets demonstrates a greater cross-service commitment to project power ashore. Combining a MAG with coalition forces, represents a stronger international resolve, and may legitimize the use of force when the U.S. would be hesitant to act alone. Adding an ARG or a CVBG elevates these signals again, through the additional threats of further air strikes or an amphibious landing. In each of these cases, changing the composition of the MAG and its components varied the intended signals, while providing several practical military options. Thus the MAG, as a building block for FDOs, can be very effective in matching various threats to provide an alternative answer to the question, "Where are the carriers?"

TAILORING THE MAG

The current conflict in Yugoslavia provides an excellent opportunity to apply the MAG in a NATO or U.N. peace keeping role. The primary advantage in employing the MAG with the existing NATO MIF forces vice a CVBG, would be that NATO or UN forces (like HMS Ark Royal, FS Clemenceau carriers) would remain the center of media attention. Furthermore, this may even be necessary if the U.S. carrier is closely tethered to the eastern mediterranean because of deteriorating conditions in Iraq. As part of a combined MIF, the computerized command and control systems of the MAG could form a powerful fusion center, merging NATO and U.S. efforts with national intelligence assets. Additionally, if the situation worsened and the UN decided to militarily support the use of force in the no-fly zones extended over Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, the MAG still presents a favorable alternative option through the incorporation of land based NATO, U.N. coalition, US Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps aircraft to project power ashore. Should the situation

warrant an increased use of force, carrier forces could then be employed, thus adding further American coercive leverage.

Other expeditionary missions are teaming the MAG with Special Operation Forces (SOF) for hostile insertions, ship take downs, or enemy reconnaissance. Incorporating SOF's new fast patrol crafts with a MAG, creates an effective capability against the treat of many littoral/riverine navies of third world countries. The Gulf War demonstrated the value of mine hunting assets and the necessity of their protection. Employing the MAG with coalition mine warfare assets in strategic choke points or in littoral areas, would provide the additional protection necessary in many of today's scenarios. The MAG can also escort fast sealift ships through dangerous regions without detaching critical units from forward areas.

As the scale of warfare increases, the MAG plus an ARG/MEU can perform a collection of missions from large NEOs to power projection and sustainment ashore. Employing USAF aircraft, in a conventional prestrike package against littoral targets, adds still another dimension. As part of a larger battle plan operation, a TLAM capable MAG can be employed as part of an integrated strike package with coalition strike aircraft like the British Tornado, French Mirage, or even Soviet MIGs.

With respect to the former Soviet Union, the MAG has the distinct advantage of being deployable to the Black Sea where as aircraft carriers are restricted from access by current political agreements. The MAG may thus be one of the few military FDOs which would be employable to influence events in many of the newly independent states like Armenia, Rumania or the Ukraine.

Finally, the MAG, combined with the CVBG as a separate entity, could be used for

deception operations, in diesel hunter-killer packs or provide a flexible flagship (the carrier maybe locked into a specific operational area whereas a MAG flagship would be unrestricted) for a JTF naval component commander. The options are limited only by the imagination of the operational planner, who must wisely integrate the war fighting capabilities of all his assets in order to support the CINC's mandate of accomplishing more with less.

OPERATIONAL FORCE STRUCTURE

The operational structure of all the services are undergoing dramatic change as the DOD and Congress adjust to the regional threats imposed by this unstable new world order. Without attempting to forecast or speculate on the levels this downsizing will bring, several factors appear clear. The first is that the application of military force by an individual service will be increasingly difficult. Consequently, individual services must explore non-traditional operational concepts both within their respective services and jointly. Furthermore, these non-traditional concepts must be built from existing forces. Lastly, new concepts should not create additional operational or logistical burdens, they must work to eliminate them.

The MAG is entirely consistent with each of these precepts. As previously discussed, the MAG provides a highly capable expeditionary building block for both joint and coalition assets. The MAG can be effectively combined with the unique capabilities of other naval assets in non-traditional ways (MAG+ARG/MEU, MAG+SOF patrol craft, etc.). MAGs can be built from the existing force structure without major modifications in homeporting or logistical support. Other than training and deployment cycles, significant changes in organizational structures should not be necessary. Substituting the MAG for some of the

CVBG's commitments will reduce part of the intense opstempo felt by our carrier force to meet an increasing number of requirements with diminishing assets. This would allow a portion of our carriers to remain in an Evolving Employment Cycle[20], or some similar system, like the one described by Admiral Paul D. Miller, USCINCLANTFLT. In this way, carriers would assume a reasonable opstempo which supports a better quality of life for our people, while preserving valuable aircraft service life.

From a regional perspective, CINCs will need to incorporate the MAG into individual theater planning schemes. Regional CINCs must then formalize these concepts in their respective Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) as part of preplanned FDOs so that they become incorporated into the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES) and accounted for in the Planning Programming and Budget System (PPBS). The complete onus is not on the CINCs, however, for nothing prevents subordinate commands from designing their own initiatives to support the CINC's regional strategy. In fact, they should be encouraged and rewarded for such efforts. In the end, it will take both a top-down and a bottom-up approach to make innovative ideas successful.

BENEFITS

What are the benefits of shifting towards the expeditionary maritime action group concept? First of all, the Navy may not have a choice. Maintaining our current levels of forward presence with fewer CVBGs will create unacceptable and exceptionally high operational costs in accelerated aircraft service life, deployments cycles, and quality of life issues. Substituting the MAG for the CVBG, when applicable, is simply cost effective and a better use of assets. The MAG concept also does not change the current forces structure nor

will it diminish existing naval capabilities.

Developing a naval operational focus towards expeditionary warfare will directly lead to greater effectiveness through increased interoperability. In time, the MAG will allow for greater flexibility and added stability in maintenance cycles. Deploying specifically tailored MAGs allows operational planners to send a greater variety of political, economic, and psychological signals, giving policy makers a greater range of FDOs. More importantly, the MAG will have less of a tendency to overwhelm our allies or coalition members and will foster stronger, more beneficial relations. Vice Admiral Owens states;

> To maintain our influence with our allies, we must shift our relationship from dominant partner to facilitator, moving from the kind of dominance we had during the Cold War to a 'central node' role. The notion of force enhancing fits this kind of a shift because it replaces the dependency Europeans once had on the United States for their survival with a dependency that stems from the utility of working with the US in pursuit of their foreign and security goals. From the national perspective of the US, it is also a different kind of dependency. It means an *interdependency* based on our ability to facilitate the things the Europeans want to do with their military forces.[21]

Exploring new joint and coalition operational initiatives will be less costly when done on a smaller scale. After these new ideas are ironed out, they can then be expanded for use in the CVBG. Developing the maritime action group as a truly joint force would promote further positive exchanges among the services and a better understanding of mutual requirements with the notion of saving money through joint procurement. Lastly, the logistical requirements of the MAG are easier met than a CVBG, particularly given the short notice aspects of most crisis responses.

LIMITATIONS

While the MAG's size offers certain benefits, it also has its limitations. Stealth becomes essential to mission success because the single MAG lacks depth of a battlegroup. MAGs have a fixed engagement rate which can be overwhelmed by an enemy. Consequently, deception, mobility and speed become even more critical to the MAG commander. Constant ploys to make an opponent believe all or part of the MAG are elsewhere is vital. Mobility adds confusion, so fixed area operations often associated with the traditional battlegroup must be avoided. MAGs are smaller so each unit is essential to the cohesive nature of the integrated force as a whole. Thus, the loss of one unit carries significant operational ramifications and in some cases, the entire mission could be delayed or even aborted.

Logistically, the MAG is more sensitive because they lack the support inherent in a battle group. As a result, MAGs will have a greater reliance on a theater's infrastructure for parts, consumables, people, etc, which may also be limited. Consequently, operational commanders will have to pay close attention to predeployment weapons loadouts with respect to numbers and variants. Additionally, close scrutiny to critical on board supply parts inventories could mean the difference between mission success or failure.[22]

The operational commander, however, can negate many of these limitations by correctly tailoring the MAG to the crisis and through meticulous planning. Tailoring the MAG to the crisis is achieved by first recognizing the operational limitations and then adding additional joint or coalition capabilities which mitigate these particular limitations. For instance, if the MAG's littoral ASW capabilities are weak with respect to a certain crisis

threat, then the addition of French Atlantiques or Spanish frigates with Spanish SH-60's would represent one possible solution. Meticulous planning and experience will also help eliminate many of the MAG's limitations. This is be because the group will have already anticipated the MAG's critical needs, associated vulnerabilities,and worked out a solution beforehand.

REQUIREMENTS- NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY

Finally, the maritime action group concept must satisfy the four pillars formulated in the Bush Administration's National Military Strategy as a future expeditionary building block. Strategic deterrence capabilities remain unchanged by this alternative because forces are not being abolished. Forward presence is enhanced through the assumption of a positive interdependency role as a facilitator. Our forward presence, also becomes more manageable given DOD budget realities. Crisis response has added FDOs which are tailored to handle wider spectrum of simultaneous conflicts through expanded interoperability. Reconstitution may initially be more demanding due to the increased effort required to repackage some of the various requirements associated with different joint or coalition forces. This is, however, a worthwhile tradeoff, and already a part of the military's new direction.

CONCLUSION

With a growing number of regional commitments and a decreasing force structure, regional CINCs must adopt new operational ideas which are politically precise, cost efficient, and militarily effective. The maritime action group is all three. MAGs provide both the National Command Authority and the CINCs a wide range of options which can be

specifically tailored to meet a host of today's regional challenges. MAGs are cost efficient because they can built from the existing forces without additional spending. Furthermore, prudent employment of the MAG will allow regional CINCs to preserve our carriers for when and where they are needed most. MAGs are militarily effective because of their proven war fighting capabilities. Additionally, the MAG provides a constructive foundation for the effective union of both joint and coalition assets.

The MAG and these concepts are not designed to eliminate the carrier's vital role in our national defense. The MAG is meant to compliment the carrier as a smaller building block which is capable of maximizing the efforts of all our forces.

The opportunity to change our traditional maritime perspectives has never been better. True leadership does not wait for the inevitable. Change in our operational focus is inescapable and the MAG is an integral part of this change.

ENDNOTES

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3. O'Keefe, pp. 1-5.

4. Ronald O'Rourke, The Cost of a U.S. Navy Aircraft Carrier Battlegroup, CRS Report to Congress (Washington: Library of Congress, 26 June 1987), p. 2.

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14. William Owens, Vice Admiral, USN, "Mediterranean Fleet, A Test Bed for Navy's Future," Armed Forces Journal International, July 1992, p. 33.

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19. O'Keefe, p. 7.

20. Paul D. Miller, Admiral, USN, "Doing The Job with a Smaller Fleet," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, April 1992, p. 59.

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