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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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... FROM THE SEA, AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS AN OPERATIONAL DICHOTOMY

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

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

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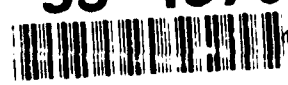
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ABSTRACT

Recent changes in the world have highlighted the possibility of regional crises the United State can expect to face in the future. Along with these changes has come a proliferation of sophisticated weapons available to third world nations. At the same time, the world changes have caused a rethinking of our national policy and military strategy. Forward deployed Naval Forces for responding to crises are expected to become more critical to our interest. Likewise, the capability of Naval Forces to project power has become a corner stone in our military strategy.

The U.S. has not projected amphibious power ashore in war, since Inchon. Recent experience in Desert Storm indicates the U.S. capability to do this in the face of a sophisticated defense is suspect and therefore the risk is unacceptable. If this is true, then why have amphibious forces? What can they contribute to future operations? This paper examines the contributions amphibious forces provide the Operational Commander despite perceptions that risk and limited capability restrict amphibious operations and forcible entry usefulness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It was thus a crisis which confronted the Navy with the ultimate question: What function do you perform which obligates society to assume responsibility for your maintenance? The crisis existed because the strategic concept which the Navy had been expressing, ... was no longer meaningful to the Navy nor convincing to the public.

SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON

The two years 1990 and 1991 were years of extraordinary events in the world which will have long term effects on the United States military strategy as well as the military strategy of our future opponents. While "the wall" was crumbling, the United States military was executing the Desert Shield and Desert Storm campaign plan, an example for our allies and opponents to study and learn from.

The fall of the Berlin wall signaled the end to the Cold War and the bipolar world. In response, the United States recognized its future holds a world of regionalism possibly fraught with hegemons seeking power and influence. To meet this revised threat the National Security Strategy has shifted focus to regional challenges and opportunities.¹ National Military Strategy is now focused on forward presence and crisis response to address this new shift in Security Policy. The Navy no longer must prepare for controlling the blue water oceans against a foe, capable of challenging the U.S.

Fleet. The end of the cold war resolved this issue. Now, the Naval Service must have forces which are structured to provide the War Fighting CINCs with flexible responsive capabilities, ready for joint operations.

To satisfy the change in National Strategy, the Navy and Marine Corps have developed a new strategy to prepare the Naval Service for the future. This new strategy, promulgated in the Naval Service White Paper ... From the Sea capitalizes on the expeditionary roles of the Navy / Marine Corps team and the ability to project power ashore from the sea. The Navy and Marine Corps will operate forward in the littorals of the world ready to respond to the CINCs requirements. For the purposes of this paper, projecting power from the sea implies conducting amphibious operations or forcible entry. In the context of regionalism this new focus by the Navy and Marine Corps is highly likely to be a concern for the regional hegemony throughout the world. Their perceptions will change with the uncomfortable realization that regional powers are now the primary targets for the might of the US Navy. We can rest assured they will be scrutinizing the lessons from the Gulf War to determine the best ways of denying naval expeditionary forces mission success.²

Ironically, our future opponents may have learned the wrong lessons from studying Desert Storm. There exist a perception that the U.S. will not commit amphibious forces if a strong defense is in place to increase the risk to U.S.

troops. This perception is in contrast to the emphasis the Navy and Marine Corps is placing on amphibious capability. No matter what future opponents do, if they border the oceans, the threat of U.S. Naval Forces being able to land on their soil will be genuine. Like our opponents in Desert Storm we relearned what the vulnerabilities and contributions amphibious operations bring to the fight. This paper will identify our weaknesses and also illustrate how the flexibility of amphibious expeditionary forces can also be a strength for the Operational Commander.

Chapter II examines the United States' relationship with amphibious forces from the perspective of future opponents and the shortcomings of our current power projection capabilities based on actions our opponents can take to counter the expeditionary forces. The limitations inherent in the forces must be known and understood by the Operational Commander and his staff in order to facilitate the employment of amphibious forces in operations or campaigns. Chapter III explores how the amphibious forces can be employed to support the Campaign strategy given the enemy has initiated defensive operations which reduce the plausibility of forcible entry. Finally, Chapter IV provides some conclusions regarding this dichotomy of amphibious operations utility.

CHAPTER II

OPPONENT'S PERSPECTIVE

The Navy also lost interest in the amphibious art, as it busied itself preparing to contest the Soviets on the high seas. As a result, Navy expertise in this form of war atrophied, as did its ancillary activities such as naval gunfire, close air support and mine countermeasures.

LTGEN BERNARD E. TRAINOR, USMC (RETIRED)

BACKGROUND

Throughout history the use of ships to land ground forces on the land masses owned by the enemy has proven to be a strategic capability which has at times turned the course of war and eventually history. During the Second Punic War the Romans landed forces in Spain, Northern Italy, and North Africa to overcome Hannibal's army and the Carthaginian State. Their capability to employ Naval Forces proved decisive in the war. For proponents of amphibious projection of power, World War II and later the landing at Inchon during the Korean conflict were examples of the success in war such capability can provide.

Although World War II may "justifiably be viewed as the golden age for amphibious warfare,"³ there have been detractors who did not place much credence in maintaining this capability. General Omar Bradley testified before Congress in 1949, that "large-scale amphibious operations will never occur again."⁴ Perhaps General Bradley was correct. Hopefully we will not be involved in a World War again and

therefore not require such vast amphibious forces as those required for the Pacific Campaign of World War II. According to a Brookings Institution study, completed in 1978, between 1945 and 1975, amphibious forces were used in 33% of all the incidents which the United States was involved. The study went on to say that in the last three years of the study the rate at which amphibious forces were used escalated 75%.⁵ The issue concerning the relative strategic value of maintaining amphibious forces in austere times of dwindling budgets continued since the end of World War II. The issue came to light again in 1976 when the Brookings Institution published a study entitled, Where Does the Marine Corps Go from Here? This study essentially concluded amphibious assault operations were politically and militarily obsolete.⁶ However, the reduction of forward based U.S. forces has rendered this opinion outdated. The requirement for naval forces in forward presence roles has gained strategic significance -- and therefore must be a viable deterrent. The new strategy of forward presence in our troubled world would certainly lend itself to a belief that amphibious forces will likely be used in the future.

This assumption brings us back to the current world situation. The world is still in the throws of many crises. Some of the present or future altercations in the world may have relevant national interest for the United States. Others may be important to the United States because we support

freedom, democratic ways and humane treatment of all people. Amphibious forcible entry capability may become more critical when we consider that of the 113 cities in the world thought to be significant to U.S. interest, 80 are within 75 miles of the sea.⁷

When examining projection of power from the sea -- the reasons for the United States getting involved in a conflict are not the primary concern. What is foremost is the operational employment of air, land, and naval forces in concert to realize the strategic goals of the operation. Caution would also suggest that we be well aware of our opponents ability to use modern defensive arms in a strategic concept to prevent our success.

Our future opponents have undoubtedly studied our actions in the Gulf War and have taken away many lessons. They are well aware that in a crisis, forward deployed naval forces will be early on the scene as a show of force or to commence operations at the direction of the President. If the magnitude of the crisis or the size of the opponents army requires additional U.S. forces, facilities for receiving deploying units and operating bases (facilities) will be required. To establish such facilities requires either a host nation provide them or forcible entry to establish a lodgement on the adversary's soil, "to prosecute further combat operations and/or to obtain a site for naval or air bases."⁸

Operations in the Gulf War did not require such a

lodgement since forward facilities were provided by Saudi Arabia. Our opponents learned at least one valuable lesson from this war. The amphibious forces (4th and 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigades) were not landed on the shores of Kuwait during the ground phase of the campaign. This amphibious force was to seize the port of Ash-Shjuaybah, south of Kuwait City, to provide an entry point to provide supplies to the First Marine Expeditionary Force pushing north from Saudi Arabia.⁹ Post war accounts and interviews with decision makers note the perceived risk and the potential casualties were principle causes for canceling this landing.¹⁰

THE DICHOTOMY

Changes in the world have caused us to rely more on having forward presence and crisis response capability with naval forces. The Navy and Marine Corps have responded by focusing the might of our naval power to meet this requirement. At the same time, past detractors of amphibious capability argue that the absence of large-scale amphibious assaults is not justification for abandoning the capability. "It is very likely their absence may be due to the deterrent effect of the United States' substantial amphibious forces. Future adversaries may have been dissuaded from taking action that would provoke an amphibious response."¹¹

The same changes in the world have given third world

nations the capability to purchase sophisticated weapons that can be of strategic significance to naval forces operating in the littorals. Iraq's ability to mount formidable beach defenses during Desert Storm and our lack of capability and resolve to execute an amphibious assault may have sent a message to future opponents. A dichotomy has developed. The Navy and Marine Corps are now emphasizing this power projection capability for the CINC's response while our opponents' capacity to counter it is increasing. At the same time we have displayed reluctance to face the risk associated with amphibious operations and forcible entry.

It is vitally important the CINCs are aware of the limitations an opponent can impose on the CINC's operational concept in conducting amphibious operations. Opponents can utilize new and old weapons system very effectively against amphibious forces. Just as important to the CINC is how we counter this capability and what therefore, can amphibious forces contribute to the overall operation or campaign?

COUNTERING THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT

Sea Control is fundamental to commencing amphibious assault operations. Battlespace dominance of the air, surface and subsurface environment by naval forces is essential to successful amphibious operations. Paragraph 106 of Joint

Chiefs of Staff Publication 3-02 (JCS Pub) states, "an amphibious force should be assured of naval supremacy against enemy surface and submarine forces, preponderant air superiority, and substantial superiority over enemy forces ashore in the objective area."¹² It is in the area of sea control and dominating the battlespace area that current capabilities do not match the existing and potential defensive prowess of our opponents. More specifically, mine warfare, surface to surface antiship missiles and a preponderance of direct fire guns has elevated the questions of risk, feasibility and acceptability for CINCs facing a crisis. Force Planning is not the issue for discussion in this paper. However, a short discussion of the proliferation of enemy capabilities and our operational concept to overcome the enemy is necessary to set the stage for addressing operational level contributions amphibious forces can make to the CINC's plans.

The proliferation and simplicity of sea mines presents a very prevalent counter to sea control especially in an Amphibious Objective Area (AOA). Mines are inexpensive and plentiful. "Forty-five states currently are credited with sea-mining capabilities and twenty-three countries have the capacity to produce mines."¹³ "The former Soviet Union is estimated to have 300,000 mines in its inventory."¹⁴ The 1500 mines laid by the Iraqis prior to Desert Storm were major factors in raising the potential risk for conducting an

amphibious assault. More worrisome is that after two months of mine sweeping with then existing U.S. and coalition mine sweeping vessels and MH-53 helicopters, only 250 mines were cleared.¹⁵

The Navy and Marine Corps are taking formal steps to establish a proponent with responsibility for developing true mine warfare capability. Development of responsive capability for the CINCs is a near to long term requirement that is susceptible to the austere military budgets which loom in our future. Until capability is fielded, the CINC must be aware of the options for employing the amphibious forces that exist in the face of a sea-mine threat. During the commander's estimate phase of the planning process this issue should surface in relation to the objectives, courses of action (COA) and the enemies capabilities. The strategic depth of the operational area will be critical to the contribution amphibious forces can make to the operation.

A similar situation exists when examining the proliferation of direct fire guns and surface to surface cruise missiles that are available to be integrated in to a strong shore defense. "An estimate this year puts the number at seventy states possessing sea and land-launched antiship cruise missiles.¹⁶ Iraq, positioned hundreds of S-60 antiaircraft guns along the shore of Kuwait. There were at least two guns every 500 to 1000 meters along the beaches. The guns have a high rate of fire and a range in excess of

5500 meters. They were to be used against airplanes, helicopters, and in a direct fire mode against amphibious ships and landing craft.¹⁷ U.S. ships will find it extremely difficult to detect and defend against missiles launched at close range from the cluttered background of a coastline. They could be fired in barrages that could overwhelm ship's defenses. Naval fire support ships for amphibious operations are limited to the short range of the 5" gun and will be at high risk when attempting to provide surface fire support for the amphibious force. Aircraft will have a similar problem. The proliferation of short-range SAMs and guns will raise the risk factor for aircraft attempting to provide support to the Marines going ashore. This situation will be exacerbated by the lack of naval surface fire support to provide suppression for the aircraft.¹⁸

With just the broad brush addressing of the counters to amphibious operations mentioned above, it becomes very clear that we must develop a strategy to give the operational commander the full flexibility amphibious forces can offer. To this end the concept of Over The Horizon (OTH) amphibious operations was born. The concept is simple: a seaborne force will launch its assault from more than 40 miles at sea to prevent detection and allowing for standoff from defensive weapon systems. The element of surprise is enhanced and the depth and width of the area these forces can assault adds to the strategic problem for the defender. Three capabilities

comprise the fundamental elements of the OTH concept. Fast air-cushion vehicles (LCAC) to carry heavy combat equipment (tanks, LAVs) have already been introduced to the Fleet. However, a replacement for the slow and short-legged CH-46 helicopter and the present amphibian assault vehicle (AAV) are questionable. As a result current OTH capabilities rest with the LCAC and the range and speed limitations of the CH-46.

Until our mine warfare, surface fire support, antiship missile defense, and "true" OTH capability come to fruition, the risk/casualty assessment will remain a looming factor in the CINCs' decision process. However, the CINC's plans must take full advantage of the strategic and operational capacity amphibious forces can contribute to the operational concept or campaign plan.

CHAPTER III

EMPLOYMENT OF AMPHIBIOUS FORCES

Amphibious flexibility is the greatest strategic asset that a sea-based Power possesses. It creates a distraction to a continental enemy's concentration that is most advantageously disproportionate to the resources employed.

LIDDELL HART

The criticality of the situation and the political climate will dictate to the CINC the time constraints in developing his courses of action and operational concept. To this end an operational plan will unfold. This plan may be large or small in scope depending on the situation and the capabilities of the opposing forces. For examining amphibious forces' contribution the instances cited in the following paragraphs assume Joint Operations with all forces available for integration by the Operational Commander. Amphibious operations may be the enabling force for others to follow; the only force which can be projected ashore within the time constraints; or they may be an integral contributing force to a larger campaign plan. How can amphibious force that are vulnerable to well defended shorelines contribute to execution of the operational plan?

STRATEGIC DEPTH

Planning for the operation must key on the mobility that amphibious forces offer to the concept of operations. The

mobility is resident in the very nature of the enemies shoreline. The length of the shoreline is directly proportional to the magnitude of the strategic depth problem he faces. While he has more to defend, the amphibious forces gain increased flexibility and can mass combat power at one of his weak points. The amphibious forces will rely on maneuver to avoid the enemy's strengths. Existing OTH capability and the mobility of the Amphibious Task Force (ATF) ships will allow for maneuver and projecting power at the vulnerable point in the enemy's defenses. For the staff developing operational courses of action (COA) and a concept of operations, the disposition of enemy forces must be paramount especially in regard to the objective.

If the amphibious force is the enabling force and must seize an airfield or port, it should be clear to everyone that this type of mission reduces the flexibility of the amphibious force and correspondingly the enemy's strategic depth problem is substantially reduced. However, the Operational Commander can add battlefield depth problems for the enemy. Our joint doctrine and the capabilities of our forces provide a myriad of options to his planning staff. They should incorporate surprise, deception, and maneuver in his overall plan to gain a strategic advantage. The Commander will have numerous forces that can contribute to developing a deception or facilitate a strategic surprise. In fact, capability to contribute to these principles is provided in

the maneuverability of the amphibious forces themselves. Executing a raid or demonstration which establishes a force on the enemies shore to deceive the enemy should be part of the plan as a supporting operation for the primary operation.¹⁹ Employing the amphibious force in conjunction with an Airborne assault is a strategy that contributes to increasing the battlefield depth problems for the enemy. Operating as the primary force or in support of other operations adds another dimension to applying operational art for the commander. The operational mobility or ability to move between engagements and battles within the context of the campaign or theater is the essence of what amphibious forces contribute and allow the Commander to exercise operational art.²⁰

OPERATIONAL ART

Amphibious forces can be employed to retain the offensive. By nature our Marines are offensive minded and their mobility can be used to maintain the initiative and tempo in executing a campaign. The operational rate of advance relative to the enemy can be sustained over time by landing forces behind friendly lines to relieve engaged units. This effort maintains the initiative and increases the tempo for the opponent thus gaining an advantage over the enemy. Tempo is also related to the culminating point, "a point where strength of the attacker no longer significantly exceeds that

of the defender, continued operations beyond this point risk over extension, counterattack, and defeat."²¹ The commanders intent here is to reach the objective as quickly as possible before reaching ones own culminating point. In larger the context of a campaign and in conjunction with the offensive, the amphibious forces can be used to fix the enemy. If the enemy believes the main effort will be an amphibious assault he will dedicate defensive forces to the area where he believes the landing will occur. History has shown us that he will also expend many resources and effort to build a strong defense to repel the amphibious landing. The mobility, flexibility, and inherent threat to the enemy the amphibious forces offer the Commander, provide him opportunity to shape the battle, set up the tactical commanders for victory and fix the enemy for defeat by the main effort. "Before any sizeable enemy force can be destroyed, it ideally must be "fixed" in place somewhere"²²

Even with an enemy fixed in place, the ability to conduct offensive maneuver can be pivotal to defeating the enemy. When the Commander's staff prepares the estimates to address the Courses of Action (COA), logistics capability may be a restricting factor to the Commander's overall vision of the battle. His capability to provide combat support and combat service support to the tactical forces can limit the COA and thus make the offensive more vulnerable to the enemy's capabilities and actions. In planning this phase of a

campaign the staff should realize and envision how amphibious forces can contribute to the objective of the offensive phase. The amphibious forces can be employed to secure a beachhead or port for the introduction of logistics support to the maneuvering force. Such an application actually reduces the length of the lines of communications which positively affects his culminating point.

Maneuver at the operational level can secure an advantage over the enemy which directly affects the campaign. It may be decisive enough to change the center of gravity, alter the campaign plan or phases of the plan. Maneuver even at the operational level does not have to entail use of massive forces or fire power on a large scale. It may be a strategic surprise for the enemy such as the landing at Inchon in 1950 which changed the whole focus of the war²³. Developing maneuver should be a goal of a Commander's staff as they devise the campaign plan. Amphibious forces should be employed for such operations because they are mobile (can get there) and once the momentum has shifted or the mission is accomplished they can be embarked aboard ships for subsequent employment. Maneuver at this level affords the Commander extensive flexibility and may even allow him to positively affect the campaign as well as shift the momentum when it is operationally and politically critical. The deployable nature of amphibious forces provide security in employment of these forces.

The mobility of amphibious forces naturally add to their security. These units can organize, rehearse, and train for combat away from the threat of enemy attack while other forces in the Area of Operations (AO) can be targeted by enemy forces. This mobility and requisite security may be important if the campaign plan relies on specific employment options by amphibious forces which affect future operations. The same security is available by sea-basing logistics so that they can be responsive to the landing force needs while unlike the large and more vulnerable rear area logistics stockpiles denying attack by the enemy.²⁴ Such capability adds strategic depth and creates offensive as well as defensive problems for the enemy.

In creating defensive problems for the enemy, amphibious forces can contribute to economy of force operations. By employing a relatively small force, to conduct raids and demonstrations the Commander can affect the tempo of the campaign and of course the enemy's ability to cope with numerous actions simultaneously. In addition, amphibious forces can be used to screen for other operations. These forces may become critical at the operational level if the main effort fails and must withdraw. Amphibious forces will then become integral to economy of force operations to delay or attack the advancing enemy. Such employment may be important to a campaign realizing a setback or a defeat which prevents the strategic objectives from being reached.

Amphibious forces can function as the operational reserve. In this role the force's mobility, maneuverability, and offensive nature would be critical in containing a breakout or stopping a penetration. When the mission is complete these forces can be reloaded aboard ship for subsequent use as a reserve force. The Commander must visualize the campaign and decide who, where, and when to fight or not fight. In doing so he should integrate into his plan the operational capabilities all forces, including amphibious forces contribute to the operation.

For the Commander, the mere presence of an amphibious force may convince opponents to comply with our policy. In the same way these same forces being present may also buy time - which is critical to diplomatic and economic efforts to resolve issues. While buying time the presence of the forces may even cause the opponent to take no military action. The show of resolve and force by amphibious forces may even bring the opponent to the negotiating table. At the very least if all else fails and the decision is made to extricate our diplomatic mission from the opponents territory and go home, the amphibious forces can execute such a mission.

"The very complexity and difficulty of amphibious operations dictate when they should be used. A full-scale amphibious operation is a high-stakes enterprise. It either succeeds dramatically or fails dramatically."²⁵ The Commander must use these forces selectively when the potential gains outweigh the risk.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The Operational Commander must develop flexible and adaptive plans that capitalize on the existing mobility and maneuverability of amphibious forces. Such planning and operational employment are necessary to address the emerging capabilities of third world nations to obtain sufficient sophisticated weapons to challenge United States efforts beyond the water's edge.

Amphibious forces may be the enabling force and thus be required to execute a forcible entry mission. Power projection from the sea in this manner is inherently a higher risk operation. The future regional crises the United States will likely face requires that amphibious forces may be employed forcibly even when the risk is high. The benefits in terms of world order and national interest may dictate power projection by Naval forces. Operational Commanders must be innovative and apply principles that allow amphibious forces to utilize existing OTH capability to the maximum extent. Combined and joint operations in concert with Naval power projection are keys to success and massing of capabilities to overcome the opponent.

As a nation the United States must continue to rely on Naval forces, support the Navy's focus on addressing operations in the littorals of the world, and be willing to

provide them the means to execute their strategy. In addition the nation and its leaders must be willing to commit these forces in forward presence and crisis response roles. The number of times amphibious forces cross a hostile beach should not be the measure of their worth. These forces contribute strategically as well as tactically to national policy attainment.

Finally, the Operational Commander and his staff must integrate the amphibious forces into the planning process early and take full advantage of the operational contributions these forces can make to the concept of operations or campaign. The staff must be aware of the complexities associated with amphibious operations and set the stage for the Commander to make critical decisions that will affect the utility of employing amphibious forces.

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