



The Unnecessary Front: Reconsidering The Corps's East Asian Bases

by Tim Caucutt

He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.
- Sun Tzu

Military surges are in vogue. Most recently, the US sent an additional 30,000 troops into Afghanistan. Looking farther back, the world remembers the influx of troops into Iraq. Now, another “surge” is underway—US marines are preparing to storm the beaches of Guam, set up residence, bring their dependents and attract thousands of contractors. The goal is to downsize their presence in Okinawa while maintaining guard against foreign threats. The plan is to spend \$10.3 billion relocating almost half of Okinawa’s marines, but the problem is that the move is a waste--the US no longer needs permanent marine bases in East Asia. Regardless if the Corps bases in Okinawa or Guam, their prominence in the East Asian strategy has ended. The United States should transition Okinawa’s marines to smaller, strategically located bases worldwide.

A History of Contention

Marines invaded Okinawa in 1945, and after the Korean Conflict, they remained to contain Communism. Defense policymakers reasoned that if North Korea reignited or the Soviet Union encroached upon US interests, marines could rapidly deploy to Asia’s shores.¹ They have remained in Okinawa for over sixty years.

Once Japan regained its independence, Tokyo signed the Mutual Security Assistance Pact and later the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, granting the US permanent basing rights in exchange for national security.² Okinawa, despite comprising less than 1% of Japan’s land area, bears the brunt of this agreement by hosting three-quarters of land consumed by US bases in Japan.³

The partnership has endured, but the strain of housing troops threatens the treaty. In 1995 three marines raped an Okinawan schoolgirl, sparking fierce protests and precipitating the

¹ Smith, P. (1999). Japan: The enigma of American power. *Washington Quarterly*, 22(2), 195. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

² Chanlett-Avery, E., & Konishi, W. (2009). The Changing U.S.-Japan Alliance: Implications for U.S. Interests: RL33740. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-23. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

³ John C. Wilhelm, “US Military Forward Presence in Okinawa, Japan,” US Army War College (August 2003): <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA415741>.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 10 MAR 2011		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Unnecessary Front: Reconsidering The Corps's East Asian Bases				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Fire Support Coordination Center Course,Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific,Coronado Naval Amphibious Base,San Diego,CA,92135				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 8	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

decision to remove thousands of marines.⁴ Nine years later a CH-53 helicopter crashed into a university, provoking further outrage.⁵ Finally, in 2006 Japan and the US agreed to move 8,600 marines and their 9,000 dependents to Guam, leaving in place over 9,000 marines.⁶ Additionally, officials negotiated to move the Futenma airbase north to Camp Schwab.⁷ The declared completion date is 2014, but local opposition to the Futenma relocation has stalled the plan until 2017.⁸ Further compounding matters, Pentagon reports suggest that environmental concerns may postpone the move until 2020.⁹

As negotiations wore on during the last decade, the Japanese (especially Okinawans) became disillusioned. Showing their distaste for the marine bases, voters tossed aside the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP), and opted for the left-wing Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) official platform: "...U.S. bases are...imposing heavy cost and burden on Okinawan people...The DPJ will work actively toward the consolidation and scaling-down of U.S. bases in Okinawa [sic].¹⁰" Once elected, DPJ candidate Yukio Hatoyama was unable to effectively challenge the US, and yielded to the original arrangement. His 70% approval rating nearly halved,¹¹ crumbling the DPJ party coalition.¹² In 2011 SECDEF Robert Gates declared his willingness to renegotiate the unpopular airbase relocation, but much to the residents' chagrin, he will not consider removing marines entirely.¹³ Clausewitz's "trinity"¹⁴ is thus upset—despite their government and military reluctantly supporting the current basing structure, the Japanese people refuse to stand behind the marines. Insisting that the Corps remains in Okinawa, according to Ichiro Fujisaki, the Japanese ambassador to the US, threatens US-Japanese relations.¹⁵

⁴ Chanlett-Avery, Emma, William H. Cooper, and Mark E. Manyin. "Japan-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress: RL33436." Congressional Research Service: Report (February 24, 2010): 1-22. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, EBSCOhost (accessed January 19, 2011).

⁵ "US helicopter crash in Okinawa" BBC News (August 2004): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3560944.stm>

⁶ Kan, S., & Nicksch, L. (2010). Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments: RS22570. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-7. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

⁷ Chanlett-Avery, E., & Konishi, W. (2009). The Changing U.S.-Japan Alliance: Implications for U.S. Interests: RL33740. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-23. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

⁸ "Marines: Don't Go Packing Your Bags for Guam Yet" Weekly Japan Update (August 2010): <http://www.japanupdate.com/?id=10556>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "The Democratic Party of Japan's Basic Policies on Security" The Democratic Party of Japan (June 1999): <http://www.dpj.or.jp/english/policy/security.html>

¹¹ Jacob M. Schlesinger, Peter Spiegel, and Yuka Hayashi. "Broad Issues in Okinawa Flap; Backlash Against U.S. Base Reflects Changing Dynamic of Military Relations." Wall Street Journal (Online), June 3, 2010, <http://www.proquest.com/>

¹² Martin Fackler, "Angry Over Okinawa Deal, Party Quits Coalition" New York Times (May 2010): <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/world/asia/31japan.html>

¹³ Martin Fackler & Elisabeth Bumiller, "Gates Signals US is Flexible in Moving Air Base in Japan" New York Times (January 2011): <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/14/world/asia/14military.html>

¹⁴ Harry Summers, "On Strategy: a critical analysis of the Vietnam War" Random House Publishing Group (1982): p 5.

¹⁵ Ichiro Fujisaki, "What is Next for the Japanese-US Alliance? Deepening Cooperation, 50 Years Later" Foreign Affairs (February 2010): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65969/ichiro-fujisaki/what-is-next-for-the-japanese-us-alliance>

Moving the marines is equally unpopular in Guam, where the US and Japanese militaries are expanding operations. The USAF has increased the scope of its Air Expeditionary Force in East Asia by deploying additional B-2 stealth bombers to Guam and building up its precision munitions stockpiles.¹⁶ The Navy added three nuclear attack submarines; now, US bases consume one-third of Guam's land area.¹⁷ After the move the US will allow the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF)--in addition to their current air and navy operations--to conduct ground drills on Guam.¹⁸ Despite a \$15 billion Integrated Military Development Plan to improve Guam's infrastructure, the territory's elected officials still worry that their island will be unable to meet increased demand for "utilities, roads, and water supplies."¹⁹ Susceptibility to typhoons is another concern; even more urgent is that the troop buildup will invite a terrorist attack.²⁰ Located far from any mainland or military base, Guam is rightly concerned that a military surge into the island's 212 square miles exacerbates the consequences of a man-made or natural disaster.

The deleterious effects on the US-Japanese alliance and the risks posed to Guam are considerable costs for the current basing structure. The US should only retain marines in the western Pacific if their forward deployment deters regional threats.

Yesterday's War

Large, permanent marine bases in East Asia are an anachronism. Two decades following the Cold War and over half a century after the Korean Conflict, the free world no longer requires eighteen thousand marines in East Asia. Since the time that marines marched into Seoul, nations have redrawn alliances and new enemies have emerged. Yes, the DPRK is vitriolic, but its provocations do not necessarily portend war. Moreover, if the US fought again in East Asia, marines would not compose the initial strike. Eighteen thousand marines spread between Okinawa and Guam is more a liability than a credible deterrent.

Primarily, policymakers opine that marines guard East Asia to thwart DPRK ambitions. The Corps's amphibious mission, its DPRK-based training scenarios (e.g. the Ulchi Focus Lens,²¹ in which the author has participated) and the close proximity of Okinawa to the Korean Peninsula, imply that the DPRK is their main focus. Since the 1953 cease fire, Pyongyang's WMD and missile tests have induced the Corps to train for another Inchon-type assault.

War, however, is unlikely. An aggregate view of US strategy reveals that while much attention is paid to the DPRK's weapon modernization, the PRC causes Washington more concern.²² China's advanced airpower and procurement of carrier-destroying missiles, funded by

¹⁶ Kan, S., & Niksch, L. (2010). Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments: RS22570. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-7. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lee, J. (2009). The Marines Rush On Guam. National Journal, 6. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

¹⁹ Kan, S., & Niksch, L. (2010). Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments: RS22570. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-7. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "US, SKorea launch joint military exercise," AFX News Limited (August 2007): <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/afx/2007/08/20/afx4034050.html>

²² Chang, Kuo-cheng. "The future of the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia." *Conference Papers -- Midwestern Political Science Association* (April 14, 2004): N.PAG. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost; see also Gertz, B. "China 'A2/AD'

an aggressive economy, pose the greatest risk to US hegemony.²³ The US will not relax its full court press against the PRC by expending scarce human and economic resources against a failing state. The DPRK, for its part, knows that war will surely bring about its regime's downfall. Both nations have much to lose and little to gain from armed conflict.

Operational Plan 5027 describes the strategy and challenges if the US combats the DPRK.²⁴ The document is highly classified, but what is known, is that the US' course of action is one of attrition through mountains and rivers and against impressive military barriers—wholly different from Saddam Hussein's rapid demise.²⁵ Countering the DPRK's sizable army and artillery fortifications would require nearly a million US troops; casualty rates would rival numbers from the world wars.²⁶ The DPRK has amassed an army of 1.2 million,²⁷ an arsenal of 1,000 missiles²⁸ and can use these weapons against US forces in Okinawa or Guam.²⁹ It is conceivable that during another Korean Conflict, DPRK fires will impede US marines in Okinawa. The nation has further hedged against a Marine Corps amphibious assault by lining their shores with surface-to-ship Silkworm and Samlet missiles.³⁰ For its southern defenses, North Korea deploys 13,800 DPRK artillery pieces, many of which are capable of engaging targets within 65 kilometers.³¹ Once the US wins the war, the Americans would likely rebuild the DPRK—an undertaking that SECDEF Gates says the US will avoid.³² The final product would no longer be two Koreas, but one democratic nation.³³ Achieving this objective involves an uphill diplomatic contest against the PRC, which is bent on resisting the formation of a nuclear, US-supported power directly on its borders.³⁴ One is left wondering if the reserves of American public support, already drained in Iraq and Afghanistan, are full enough to sustain a new war and another nation-building mission. Given the costs, the US will surely refrain from preventive war.³⁵ Only a severe DPRK provocation could incite America's war machine.

Pyongyang knows that initiating hostiles against the US will bring about the regime's downfall. For one, millions of invading westerners will delegitimize Kim Jong-Il's theocratic aura. Ben Anderson, a BBC reporter who filmed covertly within the DPRK, describes the Dear

threat*The Washington Times*". December. (2010), <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/dec/15/inside-the-ring-251245374/print/>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Dr. Dong Sun Lee, "US Preventative War against North Korea," *Asian Security* 2 (2006): 1-23. doi: 10.1080/14799850600575181.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Niksch, Larry A. "Korea-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress: RL33567." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (April 28, 2008): 1-23. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

²⁸ "Seoul estimates N. Korean arsenal has grown to 1,000 missiles." *East-Asia-Intel Reports*, March 24, 2010., 10, *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

²⁹ Niksch, Larry A. "Korea-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress: RL33567." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (April 28, 2008): 1-23. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

³⁰ "North Korea deploys missiles to southwest border area following artillery attack." *East-Asia-Intel Reports*, December 2010., 9, *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

³¹ "North Korea deploys missiles to southwest border area following artillery attack." *East-Asia-Intel Reports*, December 2010., 9, *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

³² Gates, Robert M. "Helping Others Defend Themselves." *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (May 2010): 2-6. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost

³³ Dick Nanto, Mark Manyin, Kerry Dumbaugh. China-North Korea Relations. *Congressional Research Service* (January 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/srg/crs/row/R41043.pdf>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bruner, E. (2003). North Korean Crisis: Possible Military Options: RS21582. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

Leader's grip on a "brainwashed" North Korea.³⁶ Kim has convinced his people that their nation is "superior to the rest of the world," and that when he was born, "birds sang in human voices."³⁷ Politically, this propaganda is the dictator's center of gravity, and he has likely contemplated his demise should North Koreans come face-to-face with western affluence and ideas. As for the nation's military defenses, a US-led coalition of Asian powers would eventually prevail over Pyongyang's arsenal.³⁸ Just below the DMZ lie the 2d Infantry Division, Patriot Missile batteries and a substantial number of USAF aircraft.³⁹ Off the coast, the US Navy's 7th Fleet⁴⁰ and additional missile batteries buttress forces on the Korean Peninsula.⁴¹ As the US Army withdraws from Iraq and, later this year, Afghanistan, Pyongyang can expect a rapid influx of soldiers if war commenced.⁴² Across the Sea of Japan, an increasingly militarized nation gives Pyongyang pause as well. Japan is advancing their ballistic missile defense technology,⁴³ fielding a spy satellite over the DPRK⁴⁴ and will soon procure unmanned aerial reconnaissance platforms.⁴⁵ Thus, the DPRK finds itself cornered by a US-ROK coalition to the south and one comprising US and Japanese forces to the east. War will be suicide.

The DPRK hardly intends to provoke a serious confrontation, preferring instead to profit fiscally from its technology. Proliferation is especially lucrative, as in the past 15 years the DPRK sold to Iran 18 Musudan missiles and 18 BM-25 mobile missiles.⁴⁶ North Korean weapons provocations also sustain the regime in another way, for seemingly with each demonstration, Pyongyang enjoys US "oil and food deliveries," intended to sway the regime toward pacifism.⁴⁷ From 1995 to 2006 Washington sent the North Koreans \$1.2 billion worth of food and energy assistance.⁴⁸ President Bush suspended aid, but in 2008-2009 the DPRK received over 100,000 tons of food as part of the US' ill-fated attempt to placate the nation.⁴⁹ The DPRK views its weapons programs as sources of income, not a means by which they will challenge the US.

³⁶ Ben Anderson, "Welcome to North Korea—a backward and brainwashed nation," Mirror News (May 2009): <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/05/28/welcome-to-north-korea-you-will-love-it-115875-21394846/>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dr. Dong Sun Lee, "US Preventative War against North Korea," Asian Security 2 (2006): 1-23. doi: 10.1080/14799850600575181.

³⁹ Bruner, E. (2003). North Korean Crisis: Possible Military Options: RS21582. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Rozoff, R. "America recruits Japan as Global Military Partner." January 15, 2011. <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/82062>

⁴² Bruner, E (2003) suggests that OIF and OEF would delay reinforcements arriving from these theaters, but in 2011 this concern in mitigated

⁴³ Axe, D. (2007). Eyeing North Korean Threat, Japan Bolsters Military Capabilities. World Politics Review, 2. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

⁴⁴ Chanlett-Avery, E., & Konishi, W. (2009). The Changing U.S.-Japan Alliance: Implications for U.S. Interests: RL33740. Congressional Research Service: Report, 1-23. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

⁴⁵ Rozoff, R. "America recruits Japan as Global Military Partner." January 15, 2011 <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/82062>

⁴⁶ Niksch, Larry A. "Korea-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress: RL33567." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (April 28, 2008): 1-23. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁴⁷ Joffe, Josef, and James W. Davis. "Less Than Zero." *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (January 2011): 7-13. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁴⁸ Manyin, Mark E., and Mary Beth Nikitin. "Foreign Assistance to North Korea: R40095." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (September 9, 2009): 1-21. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁴⁹ Ibid.

A New Warfare

As shown, there is little chance that the DPRK will provoke war. Still, the US is obliged to provide a contingency plan. Given that warfighting technology has evolved since 1953, weapons and tactics outside the Corps's purview characterize this plan. Indeed, an overview of US strategy reveals a picture of marines as stranded travelers, abandoned in Okinawa while the train of US strategy has left them behind.

The navy's operational focus illustrates how the scope of US defense in East Asia precludes a Marine Corps amphibious assault against the DPRK. Most strikingly, the navy has ceased procurement of the Zumwalt class destroyers, warships specifically designed to provide fire support during beach landings.⁵⁰ Even the new LPD-17 San Antonio-class amphibious ships lack fire support capabilities (in World War II the navy's artillery had a much longer range than anything in the modern fleet), while poor workmanship characterizes early models.⁵¹ Budget constraints have forced the production of fewer LPD-17s than planned.⁵² Ironically, the navy designed these ships to carry the now-defunct Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV). Alternatively, the navy deploys vessels whose primary mission is anti-air warfare and missile defense.⁵³ Further complicating matters, if the US Navy assembled its entire fleet of amphibious ships, Dakota Wood, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, estimates that only four full-strength marine battalions and two under-strength battalions—less than the number that took Inchon—could be transported.⁵⁴ Most of these ships lie outside East Asia; waiting for their arrival would delay an amphibious assault. By contrast, at Inchon two marine regiments stormed the beaches,⁵⁵ and many invaders had recently honed their amphibious skills during World War II.⁵⁶ The Corps is simply not supplied with the tools needed to sustain its amphibious mission.

In the 21st century, not only is an amphibious attack launched from Okinawa unfeasible, it may also be unnecessary. If a land war develops on the Korean Peninsula, the Army's Second Infantry Division, reinforced by 650,000 South Koreans,⁵⁷ is poised to strike first. Should the US need marines, they could be transported from outside East Asia alongside thousands of other troops required for a successful campaign. All told, Marine Corps bases in East Asia are no longer credible as a front line against the DPRK; the regional strategy has left them behind.

⁵⁰ O'Rourke, Ronald. "Navy DDG-51 and DDG-1000 Destroyer Programs: Background and Issues for Congress: RL32109." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (June 14, 2010): 1-31. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost; for a summary of the Zumwalt's reduced role in modern strategy, see Donnelly, T. "The Weekly Standard: Understrength Army." *The Weekly Standard*. January. (2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/21/133109252/the-weekly-standard-understrength-army>.

⁵¹ Defense Industry Daily, "LPD-17 San Antonio Class: The USA's New Amphibious Ships ." December 2010 <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/lpd17-san-antonio-class-the-usas-new-amphibious-ships-updated-02322/>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ O'Rourke, Ronald. "Navy DDG-51 and DDG-1000 Destroyer Programs: Background and Issues for Congress: RL32109." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (June 14, 2010): 1-31. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁵⁴ Dakota L. Wood, "Caught on a Lee Shore," *American Interest*, September-October 2010, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=859>.

⁵⁵ Dorschner, J. "The Inchon Landing." September 2005. <http://www.jcs-group.com/military/war1950/500915inchon.html>

⁵⁶ Montross, L. "The Inchon Landing - Victory Over Time And Tide (July 1951)." n.d. <http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/inchon-landing-victory-over-time-and-tide-july-1951>

⁵⁷ Niksch, Larry A. "Korea-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress: RL33567." *Congressional Research Service: Report* (April 28, 2008): 1-23. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

Strategic Defense

A better defense posture is in order. As an alternative to the status quo, US marines must be stationed in locations that allow them to respond quickly to emergencies worldwide. The new operational structure, proposed by then U.S. European Command commander General James Jones, should be to employ numerous small bases worldwide.⁵⁸ These “lily pads” or “warm bases” are more palatable to local residents and could be launching points in an emergency. Warm bases would be established near a host nation’s larger installations, housing far fewer military personnel than conventional bases.

The lily pad model is especially suited to the Marine Corps. General Jones and former SECDEF Rumsfeld conceived that the US Army would staff lily pads,⁵⁹ but marines are more culturally attuned to small, expeditionary operations. Seven Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs), each able to project, coordinate and sustain both air and land power, patrol the world’s oceans. Building on the MEU model, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (SP MAGTFs) allow marines to join with allied forces and assist security and civil military operations,⁶⁰ similar to the lily pad basing concept. Marines can train and work alongside local militaries, thereby implementing a lesson of counterinsurgencies, that success comes more readily when the US builds partner capacity.⁶¹ The military learned *ex post facto* with the Northern Alliance that training and equipping foreign militaries serves both to relieve US military involvement and build alliances. The lily pad basing concept is a more proactive strategy. Should war erupt, marines will pave the way for the main force by joining with local militaries and forming a front line. Opposition to the SP MAGTF concept points out that due to the Long War, the Corps cannot spare additional troops;⁶² however, removing the marines from East Asia will negate this problem. Acting alone,⁶³ the Corps is adapting General Jones’ strategic basing concept to their amphibious nature, demonstrating how and why marines will lead the next stage of strategic defense in the Pacific.

Both the Army and the Marine Corps have vindicated the lily pad basing concept. First, in 2005 a few hundred soldiers from the 21st Theater Support Command (TSC) proved that a small, strategically positioned installation can facilitate a rapid, first response to a foreign threat. US soldiers, operating in Bulgaria, partnered with local troops and established a forward operating base. Bulgarian and distant US bases supplied provisions and additional materiel.⁶⁴ The Corps must consider 21st TSC’s experience because, in case of a full-scale war, marines will need to pave the way for a larger force and provide initial retaliation against belligerents. The

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the basing concept, see Cambell, K. & Ward, C. “New Battle Stations: *Foreign Affairs*”. Septembe/October (2003), 95-103, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59188/kurt-m-campbell-celeste-johnson-ward/new-battle-stations>.; For an early (but brief) suggestion that lily pads replace the Corps’s East Asian base structure see John C. Wilhelm, “US Military Forward Presence in Okinawa, Japan,” US Army War College (August 2003): <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA415741>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ciuccioli, Vincent J., and David A. Anderson. “Marines Are Optimizing Forward Presence.” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 136, no. 11 (November 2010): 70-73. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁶¹ Gates, Robert M. “Helping Others Defend Themselves.” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (May 2010): 2-6. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost

⁶² Ciuccioli, Vincent J., and David A. Anderson. “Marines Are Optimizing Forward Presence.” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 136, no. 11 (November 2010): 70-73. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Capt David C. Chandler, Jr., “‘Lily-Pad’ Basing Concept Put to the Test,” *Army Logistician* 37 (2005): 11-13. Retrieved from International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center database.

Corps employs SP MAGTFs, but on-shore bases of the sort tested in Bulgaria will be useful to sustain operations inland.

Last year a SP MAGTF (CONTINUING PROMISE-2010) embarked on the USS Iwo Jima and provided several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with “health care and other...civic assistance.”⁶⁵ Modeling a concept that could help win wars before they begin, marines and sailors visited eight nations (including Haiti during the 2010 flood), and conducted over 161,000 medical services.⁶⁶ In other regions SP MAGTFs will hearken to SECDEF Gates’ call to “[help] other countries defend themselves”⁶⁷ by training and supporting allied militaries resisting non-state actors. The lily pad basing structure, both at sea and on shore, presents the best opportunity for marines to bulwark allies’ defenses, thus safeguarding the US into the 21st century.

Conclusion

Right now, the Marine Corps struggles to justify its existence. Two protracted land wars have left the Corps feeling little different from the Army, and convinced Washington to cut funds for amphibious weapons systems.⁶⁸ These cuts endanger the Corps’s expeditionary capacity, and may evince the defense establishment’s tacit design to impair the Corps’s potency.

Enter East Asia. The marines’ accomplishments there are legendary--now, however, they stand atop the conquered land, waiting for a new mission. Their presence has grown, even as warfare changes and local residents become hostile. Marines are too good and too scarce a resource to squander. The US should move Okinawa’s marines to warm bases where their expeditionary skills are essential to fostering alliances amidst the 21st century’s fluid threat environment.

Tim Caucutt is a Marine Corps sergeant. In 2005-2006 he participated in the Unit Deployment Program to Okinawa, then deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is an instructor for the Fire Support Coordination Center Course at the Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific on Coronado Naval Amphibious Base. He holds a B.A. in Political Science and placed 2nd in the Marine Corps Gazette's 2009 Chase Essay Contest (awarded 2010).

This is a single article excerpt of material published in Small Wars Journal.

Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2011, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our Terms of Use.

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Please consider supporting Small Wars Journal.



⁶⁵ For a record of the deployment, see United States Southern Command, "Continuing Promise 2010." November 19, 2010. <http://www.southcom.mil/appssc/factFiles.php?id=155>; See also Amos, J. "Gen Amos' speech to Surface Navy Association ." January 13, 2011. <http://www.marines.mil/unit/hqmc/Pages/GenAmos/speechtoSurfaceNavyAssociation.aspx>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gates, Robert M. "Helping Others Defend Themselves." *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (May 2010): 2-6. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost

⁶⁸ Baron, K. "Gates: Time has come to re-examine future of Marine Corps." August 12, 2010 <http://www.stripes.com/news/gates-time-has-come-to-re-examine-future-of-marine-corps-1.114465>; see also Dakota L. Wood, "Caught on a Lee Shore," *American Interest*, September-October 2010, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=859>.