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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**The Future of Distributed Operations in the Marine Corps
and its Vital Role in Forcible Entry from the Sea**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Preface

The Marine Corps finds itself in a similar situation to the 1920's and 30's. High officials such as, Secretary of Defense and other services question the validity of the Marine Corps' mission of forcible entry from the sea, and the current financial situation shrinks the budget. It would be productive to look at the elements that made the Marine Corps successful in that situation of some ninety years ago and see what elements can inform us for the current times. Having looked to history as a guide it is important for the Marine Corps to develop a concept that will have applicability across the variance of military operations, and applicability to what we now view to be the emerging threat. The concept of distributed operations - -that is, the coordinated interdependent action by dispersed small units that are task organized for the mission, throughout the breadth and depth of the battlespace, ordered and connected within an operational design focused on a common aim, and with increased access to functional support- - appears to be the best answer. This paper seeks to demonstrate that distributed operations will be necessary to success in forcible entry in the future, and by so doing to demonstrate that it has a very wide applicability as the Corps moves into an uncertain future.

First I must acknowledge the tremendous help and patience of my advisor John Gordon PhD. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous help readily offered by the following people: Colonel Vincent Goulding, USMC (Ret) (MCWL), Colonel Mike Lowe, USMC (Ret) (CETO), Keith Costa PhD. (CNA), Colonel Robert King, USMC (Ret) (MCCDC), Colonel Jim Haig, USMC (Ret) (MCWL), Lieutenant Colonel Jim Berry, USMC (Ret) (MCCDC), LtCol Ed Tovar (USMCR), and Lieutenant General Paul VanRiper, USMC (Ret). This is not an all inclusive list.

Executive Summary

Title: The Future of Distributed Operations in the Marine Corps and its Vital Role in Forcible Entry from the Sea

Author: Major Erick Clark, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The large scale employment of distributed operations enhance and enable forcible entry from the sea.

Discussion: History is the most instructive tool as one prepares for the future. The history of war informs us that there is a need for the U.S. to project force from the sea. In the face of existing and emerging anti-access and area denial weapons the U.S. must adopt a concept that will continue to ensure the force projection capability. The Marine Corps through the application of distributed operations can gain access in this environment. The concept of distributed operations in forcible entry from the sea will allow the Corps to operate below the enemy's targeting threshold. The introduction and sustainment of these forces from a seabase will obviate the need for a lodgment as the Corps establishes an "mitigation zone" to mitigate the enemy's anti-access / area denial weapons threat, and allow for the introduction of follow on forces.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the concept of distributed operations is critical to enable the U.S. to project combat power from the sea against the emerging threats of anti-access and area denial. The concept of distributed operations allows the Marine Corps to accomplish this task. The Corps needs to immediately develop the doctrine to support the organization and equipment that will be necessary for this concept's success.

INTRODUCTION

...in the House of Commons on 17 February 1792, barely a year before Britain was obliged to embark on twenty-two years of near continuous war with France, Prime Minister William Pitt (the younger) observed, without contradiction from the floor, that 'unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country when, from the situation in Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than we may at the present moment'.¹

Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee, 19 October 1949, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar N. Bradley stated: 'Large-scale amphibious operations such as those in Sicily and Normandy will never occur again.'²

The only certainty about the future is that it is uncertain. The two quotes offered above highlight the pitfalls of would be prophets. Prime Minister Pitt would see Britain embark on two decades of conflict with France, and General Bradley would see the Marines land at Inchon a year after his remarks. This author will make no predictions for the future; however, he will look to history for clues that will aid in establishing "sign posts" to guide our path forward. The Marine Corps needs to develop a concept that is applicable in the wide variety of military operations, achievable within the constraints of the budget, and necessary for success in future warfare. The explanation of the proposed solution will focus on what is likely the most difficult of high-end combat operations, *forcible entry*. JCS Publication 3-18 defines forcible entry as the "seizing and holding of a military lodgment in the face of armed opposition."³ The author would offer a refinement to this doctrinal definition, to state in "hostile territory" vice "in the face of

armed opposition,” this change would help to change the impression that forcible entry must occur across a defended beach. Moreover, the publication defines a lodgment as “a designated area in a hostile or potentially hostile operational area that, when seized and held, makes the continuous landing of troops and material possible and provides maneuver space for subsequent operations.”⁴ Shortsightedly, in a speech to the Marine Memorial Association in August of 2010 the Secretary of Defense Dr. Robert M. Gates followed in General Bradley’s footsteps when he politely questioned the need for the maintenance of a “large” force ready to conduct forcible entry from the sea.

It’s appropriate that I address this audience during an important point in the history of the United States Marine Corps and at a time of great challenge and change for America’s military...the Marines do not want to be nor does America need, another land army nor do they want to be nor does America need a U.S. Navy police force...The Marines’ unique ability to project combat forces from the sea under uncertain circumstances, forces quickly able to protect and sustain themselves, is a capability that America has needed in this past decade and will require in the future... Looking ahead I do think it is proper to ask whether large-scale amphibious assault landings along the line of Inchon are feasible though anti-ship missiles with long range and high accuracy may make it necessary to debark from ships 25 or 40 or 60 or more miles at sea. I, therefore, asked Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, and the Marine Corps leadership to conduct a thorough force-structure review to determine what an expeditionary force in readiness should look like in the 21st century.⁵

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

Secretary Gates hangs his doubts about the conduct of forcible entry from the sea on the emerging challenges of anti-access and area denial weapons. However, he falls into what this author considers an all too common practice of focusing his argument on technologies rather than a holistic view of the problem. This paper will demonstrate that history provides “sign posts” that the U.S. will need to maintain our force projection ability, and that forcible entry from the sea is a critical component of that capability.

The fall of the Soviet Union brought about the collapse of the dualistic world power structure. This in time led to an increase in the influence of non-state actors. Additionally, states have increasingly demonstrated a tendency to act in pursuit of individual national interest vice for the collective good, and international relationship have shifted to regional vice global alliances.⁶ This influence compounded by globalization, and the increased availability and decreasing costs of weapon systems previously reserved for use by states has led a greater role for non-state actors in warfare. This fact has manifested itself in the two most recent wars the U.S. has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. These relatively recent historical experiences have led many down the false path of declaring an end to interstate wars. These factors combine with the worldwide economic recession to create a situation in which the Marine Corps finds itself in a budget restricted environment with the Secretary of Defense questioning the relevance of forcible entry, a core concept that has been directly tied to the Corps’ role in national power since World War II. Many other voices joined the Secretary of Defense in driving for a shift in focus to combating non-state actors and sounding the death toll on the possibility of another Inchon.¹ Colin Gray, an accomplished author and an expert in American strategic studies, warns that, “All warfare is a race between belligerents to correct the consequences of the mistaken

¹ For more information on this topic, see Martin Van Crevald’s Transformation of War or William Lind’s concept on fourth generation warfare.

beliefs with which they entered into combat.”⁷ It may prove impossible to recover from the consequences of a failure to prepare to conduct forcible entry operations from the sea. This premise requires the U.S. to develop a concept for the introduction of forces from the sea that will remain relevant in the face of emerging threats. These emerging threats are the anti-access/area denial capabilities employed by states, and the proliferation of lower end anti-access/area denial capabilities by weak states or non-state actors. The large scale employment of distributed operations enhance and enable forcible entry from the sea. Forcible entry in the future will require the use of forces conducting distributed operations that are able to operate below the enemy’s targeting threshold and create a mitigation zone - - an area denied to the enemy from which he is unable to employ effectively anti-access or area denial weapons - - allowing for the transition of additional forces ashore as necessary.

CONTEXT

The Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025 lists joint forcible entry operations as one of the six core competencies of the Marine Corps. It states, “When access to critical regions or allies is denied or in jeopardy, forward deployed, rapidly employable Marine Corps forces are trained and ready to execute amphibious operations to *overcome enemy defenses* [emphasis added].”⁸ One must remain aware that the most effective way to overcome a defense may be to move around it. It is necessary to define two key concepts to enable forcible entry in the face of the emerging threat, distributed operations and seabasing. First, the definition of distributed operations proposed by this author is adapted from the former Commandant of the Marine Corps General Michael Hagee’s “A Concept for Distributed Operations” published by Marine Corps Warfighting Lab in 2006. Distributed operations is the coordinated interdependent action by dispersed small units that are task organized for the mission, throughout the breadth and depth of

the battlespace, ordered and connected within an operational design focused on a common aim, and with increased access to functional support.⁹ Units have been operating with increased dispersion since the introduction of the messenger to control forces beyond the commander's view. For the Marine Corps to truly transition to the concept of distributed operations it must break itself free from the current paradigm of fighting as battalions, and recognize that it needs to flatten its structure and begin to fight as companies and platoons. Many would argue that U.S. forces have been conducting distributed operations in the fights in Iraq and Afghanistan to cite only the most recent examples. However, one must distinguish the difference between operating in a distributed manner and conducting distributed operations. The Corps has used technology to stretch its units across larger areas, but has failed truly and effectively to tie its actions into the same operational design. Another concept that is necessary for understanding distributed operations in forcible entry from the sea is seabasing. "Seabasing is the rapid deployment, assembly, command, projection, reconstitution, and re-employment of joint combat power from the sea, while providing continuous support, sustainment, and force protection to select expeditionary joint forces without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operating Area (JOA). These capabilities expand operational maneuver options, and facilitate assured access and entry from the sea."¹⁰ Seabasing may use Maritime Prepositioning Forces (MPF), but that is only a possible piece in the overall structure. Seabasing is not a floating city. The Naval Operating Concept 2010 states that, "Seabasing is predicated on the ability to attain local maritime superiority. While a limited number of nations currently possess credible anti-access and area denial capabilities, naval forces are able to achieve sea control and sustain resilient sea-based operations in uncertain and hostile environments."¹¹

*It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent but
the one most responsive to change.*

Generally attributed to Charles Darwin

In the past decade the Marine Corps has conducted irregular warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Corps' involvement in Afghanistan began in 2001 with Task Force 58 conducting operations from the sea, projecting forces 400 miles ashore. In addition to this the Corps also conducted over 100 amphibious based operations since 1990.¹² (See Appendix A for a more detailed depiction of amphibious based operations) It has conducted peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) in Lebanon, humanitarian operations in response to the earthquake in Haiti, and near simultaneously conducted humanitarian operations in Pakistan while also providing close air support to units in Afghanistan, and conducting anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia with forces from the same Marine Expeditionary Unit. Concurrently the Corps has maintained an effort to support Theater Security Cooperation operations (TSC)² to both foster and improve relationships with strategically relevant countries around the world. All of these operations have led to a marked increase in the distance at which forces operate from their command and control nodes, and a reduction in the size of units conducting independent operations. A benefit of this has been a focus on smaller units, and the effective equipping and support to them because of this expansion in the size of traditional operating areas. Furthermore, while the land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the focus, the Corps ability to conduct operations from amphibious ships

² Theater Security Cooperation: operations to enable allies to build sufficient military capacity and capability to defend their own states, and to develop relationships that will enable U.S. military cooperation to resolve future crises. (Adapted from: Enhancing Theater Security Cooperation in the 21st Century: How the U.S. Navy Can Help, Jan 2008)

has allowed it to maintain its ability to project itself from the sea, although at an admittedly reduced level of capability. The majority of these amphibious operations occurred with access to our allies' air, land, and sea territories for the introduction and sustainment of our forces. The U.S. has not executed forcible entry from the sea with a large force since the Inchon landing in 1950. These circumstances coupled with increasing fiscal constraints has called into question the feasibility of maintaining the costly capability of forcible entry from the sea, contributing to the cancellation of the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) and the hold on purchasing the Joint Strike Fighter Short-Take Off Vertical Landing variant.¹³

An understanding of the nature of war will contribute to a better understanding of the thesis. Carl von Clausewitz recognized that war had two natures: the subjective nature, which changes over time with the myriad of factors that affect the conduct of war, and the objective nature that includes the enduring factors of danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance.¹⁴ The essence of the objective nature is that war is a violent contest of wills, and that contest is infused with tremendous complexity due to what Clausewitz called the "wondrous trinity" of violence, chance, and reason.¹⁵ The elements of this trinity interact with one another and create an absolutely unpredictable pattern of actions that is war. However, even with war's complexity history can inform and guide the mind, and aid in preparation for the future. John Lewis Gaddis tells us that history "like" art depends on metaphor, the recognition of patterns, the realization that one thing is "like" another.¹⁶ To find the "sign posts" that will guide one into the future it is necessary to first look back. The light of history is also helpful in seeking out the misperceptions that underpin the current beliefs on the utility of forcible entry.

The first misperception of the current era we will focus history's attention on is the belief by some that recent circumstances and developments in technology have made war between

states obsolete. As we look at similar declarations in the past, a common theme presents itself. In the opening of this paper, William Pitt predicted years of peace based on the strength of the British Empire, only to see the Empire almost immediately embark on a string of near continuous warfare with France. The technological developments that contributed to the stalemate of trench warfare in World War I had brought about the dominance of artillery and the relegation of infantry to a supporting arm. Additionally, another lesson from “the war to end all wars” was that forcible entry from the sea was a ridiculous concept, and doomed to failure because of Gallipoli. Following World War II, prophets again turned to technology, placing their faith in airpower and nuclear weapons. After the Vietnam War, many in the U.S. declared that they would never again find themselves in “that kind of war.” They wrapped themselves in the comfort of technology and refocused their efforts on the Soviet Union and regular warfare – that is two forces employing predominantly conventional tactics with the focus on some form of combat against the opposing force to achieve victory.³ The Joint Operating Environment 2010 points clearly to the follies of strategic estimates in the 20th century as it walks through each decade’s prevailing strategic insights, of which all ten proved to be wrong (see Appendix B). The lesson is that although technological advances have significantly affected the form and character of warfare, any declarations asserting that technology has brought about the demise of interstate war are historically uninformed. War is war is war, and will always require, for the most part, more of the same.⁴

The second point we will expose to history’s light is that technology will not be our savior. Colin Gray declared that once the duel has begun the belligerents race to recover from

³ For a more complete discussion of this see Martin Van Creveld’s The Transformation of War, or Collin Gray’s Another Bloody Century

⁴ For a more complete discussion of this point, please see Collin Gray’s Another Bloody Century, or Fighting Talk by the same author.

mistaken assumptions that shaped their strategic preparations for the fight.¹⁷ Williamson Murray, a noted historian, highlights two examples of successful innovation as states prepared for war. The first example demonstrates Britain's shift in focus from strategic bombing to the development of high-speed fighters and radar systems that would allow for the defense of the Island.¹⁸ Brittan also developed long-range bomber escorts prior to World War II that would allow them to project their air power from their island fort over the continent buying time to prepare for the invasion.¹⁹ The second example is the German development of "Blitzkrieg." The Germans were able to refine a concept, adapt their organization, and develop the technology to support "Blitzkrieg" between the two World Wars that brought them incredible tactical success on the battlefield.²⁰ These two examples demonstrate that getting it right matters; however, as we look at the successes of these two examples there were requisite failures on the part of their opponents as discussed in Robert A. Doughty's The Seeds of Disaster. Perhaps the most relevant historical example of successful innovation that relates most directly to this paper is the development of landing force doctrine, organization, and technology by the Marine Corps leading up to World War II. In the 1920's and 30's the Corps developed what became landing force and small wars doctrine as they sought to create a relevant force for an uncertain future.⁵ The Corps focused on solutions that had wide applicability until the future began to take a more recognizable form and then shifted its efforts to the more specific aspects needed to support the doctrine. All three of these examples highlight that technology is not important; rather what is important is how it is used. From our current perspective the future looks more complicated, unpredictable, and daunting than ever before in human history. But we face the same objective

⁵ For a further discussion of this see Allan R. Millett's Simper Fidelis: The History of The United States Marine Corps.

nature of war that has faced the opponents in the duel since the beginning. With history to inform us, is the future as daunting as we think?

The answer to the future is that it will resemble, as a rule, the past from a macro view. There will be regular and irregular warfare. States will not give way to non-state actors anymore than they did when the Goths moved out of Asia and smashed into the fringes of the Roman Empire in ancient times. States will continue to need to project power from the sea as when the Greeks sailed against Troy in the 12th Century BC. The U.S. will continue to seek and meet its security challenges across the oceans rather than wait for them to present themselves on our shores. The Joint Staff stated, "...power projection, enabled by overseas presence, will likely remain the fundamental strategic concept for our future force."²¹ The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and National Security Strategy "identify the need to preserve access to the global commons and to counter aggression in anti-access environments. In the QDR, 'deter and defeat aggression in anti-access environments' is listed as the fourth of six critical mission areas."²² Another state or an alliance of states will rise to challenge America's military hegemony. Regional actors will challenge American influence affecting its economic and energy security. The U.S. cannot afford to hedge its bets on coercing other nations to grant its military access to necessary ports and air facilities for the introduction and sustainment of its forces. Uncontested access was not a possibility in most cases during World War II. Other historical examples of the denial for the U.S. use of airspace or territorial access are France refusing the U.S. over-flight in the attack on Libya, and Turkey denying the U.S. access from the North in the Second Gulf War. Furthermore, we may find ourselves required to project power into an area that is beyond the control of any state due to non-state actors as we did in the Boxer Rebellion, the Banana Wars, Lebanon, and Somalia. Thomas G. Mahnken the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for

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Policy Planning argues that, "The ability of the U.S. armed forces to project military power worldwide deters aggression, bolsters alliance commitments, ensures access to natural resources, and ultimately fosters regional stability."²³ The Marine Operating Concept Third Edition declared that the Corps must do two things: assure littoral access, and respond to a crisis.²⁴ Since the 1990's the U.S. is a maritime nation; the maritime domain supports 90% of the world's trade, and two-thirds of the global petroleum transportation.²⁵ With the reduction of overseas bases the Marine Corps and its force projection capabilities become even more crucial to U.S. strategic policy interests. The number of overseas bases has declined by 75%, and the number of active duty personnel stationed overseas has declined by 56%.²⁶ Looking to history it is evident that it will be necessary to continue to have the capability to project our power over the shore in the future. The concept of distributed operations in forcible entry from the sea will ensure U.S. access to these geo-strategic regions. The concept of distributed operations is applicable to the great variety of military operations, and focuses the employment of Marines with technology as an enabler.

ARGUEMENT

Even in the best case, allies will be essential to providing the base structure required for arriving U.S. forces. But there may be other cases in which uncontested access to bases is not available for the projection of military forces. This may be because the neighborhood is hostile, smaller friendly states have been intimidated, negative perceptions of America exist, or states fear giving up a measure of sovereignty. Furthermore, the use of bases by the Joint Force might involve the host nation in conflict. Hence, the ability to seize bases in enemy

*territory by force from the sea and air could prove the critical opening move of a campaign.*²⁷

Joint Operating Environment 2010

It is evident that history provides a useful guide at the macro-level; however, as we move closer to the micro-level it becomes much more difficult and important to develop useful insight, and the likelihood that we will be wrong increases. As we develop the threat it will be helpful to discuss who will possibly fulfill the role of world or regional competitor or non-state actor, what the threat will possibly consist of, where the confrontation could occur, and discuss the role of distributed operations in a forcible entry from the sea scenario. To identify who will be our likely competitors we will begin by looking at who has the economic resources to support a military build-up. The four most significant developing economies are Brazil, Russia, India, and China.²⁸ Brazil and India have not demonstrated a desire to take a hostile position militarily to the U.S. Russia is experiencing serious problems in regards to its demography. Russia's population has been shrinking since 1992 marked by both low fertility rates and high mortality rates.²⁹ Russia is currently attempting to reestablish at least a shadow of its former influence in the world. In contrast to this desire in the future, Russia is likely to find itself consumed with solving internal issues related not in the least to its demographics situation that could change the very nature of what it means to be Russian and further aggravate ethnic hostility within the country. China stands out as the most likely competitor to U.S. influence and access as the world competes for energy and access to strategically valuable points around the globe. China has also steadily increased its defense spending since the beginning of the decade with a 7.5% increase

from 2009 to spend 77.95 billion in 2010, second only to the U.S., which is involved in two wars.³⁰ In the arena of regional competitors, Iran and North Korea are clearly hostile to the U.S. and stand out as future regional threats in the East, and Venezuela presents a challenge in South America. As we look at the non-state actors the ability to define who they will be becomes murkier. It will possibly be transnational criminal organizations (TCO) operating within the seams created around the world by weak or failing states. The author is not attempting to predict the future; he is attempting to develop useful threat models that will aid in moving towards a solution.

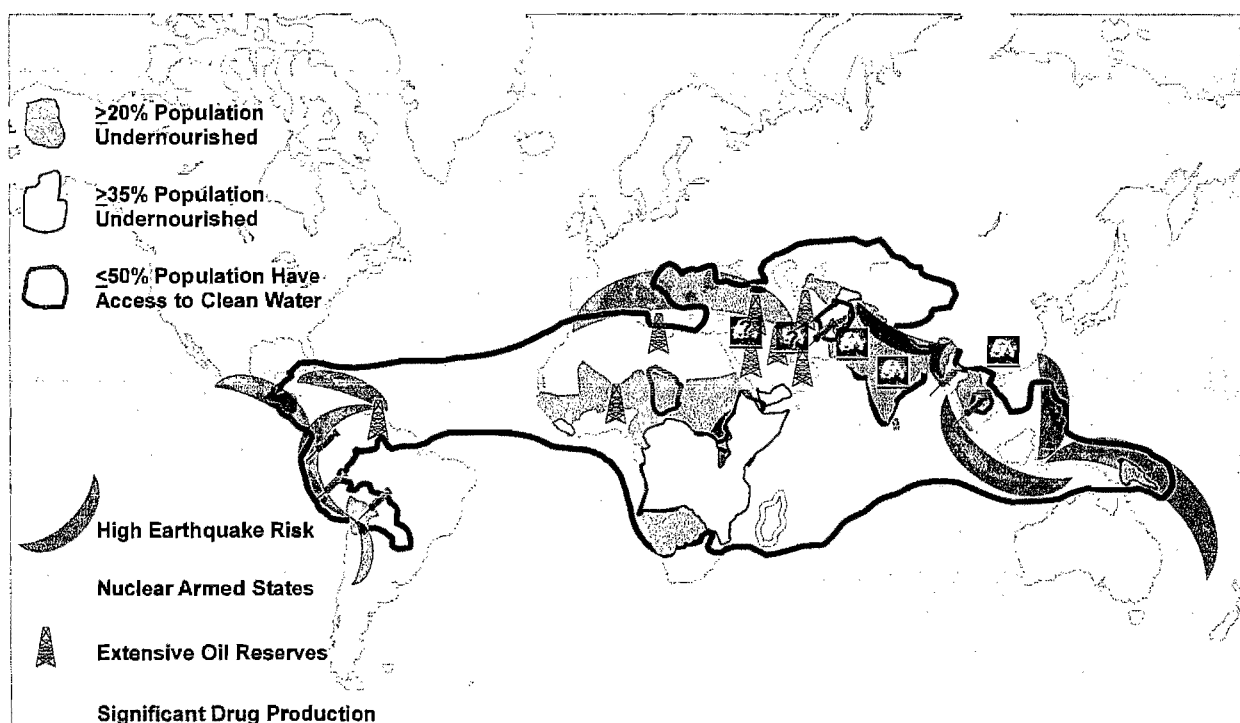
*The enemy is largely '...light infantry accustomed to local terrain and climate and skilled at employing both, and masters of tactics of elusiveness in a manner that serves substantially to neutralize their "modern" opponents' marked advantages in firepower and technology.' These challenges '...place a premium on rigorous physical and psychological conditioning, durable light infantry forces, logistical austerity, small unit cohesion, specialized and exacting training, and decentralized command authority...'*³¹

General James F. Amos

The threat we will face whether it is a state or non-state actor will likely initially seek to avoid engaging us in regular warfare, and instead look to irregular warfare and the use of terrorist and guerrilla tactics to achieve their policy ends. Recent history has taught a lesson to the world about massing forces against the most powerful and advanced military. This lesson has shown the need to attempt to deny U.S. forces access, and the freedom to mass firepower at its will. As Secretary Gates points out this will likely manifest itself in the employment of anti-

access and area denial technologies in an attempt to make it too costly for the U.S. to introduce and sustain its forces ashore. The U.S. will be faced with irregular warfare in the form of mining of sea lanes, mobile anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), guided-rocket, artillery, and mortar munitions (G-RAMM), as well as ballistic missile threats.³² States such as China may employ this character of warfare with their increasing focus on anti-access weapons, or non-state actors could employ these techniques such as Hezbollah firing a Chinese ASCM on the Israeli warship *Hanit* in July of 2006.³³ It is important to note that Hezbollah did not develop or purchase this technology; rather they acquired it in much the same way Afghan freedom fighters acquired anti-aircraft missiles during their conflict with Russia. Wherever one may find it necessary to project their power around the world it must be prepared to deal with this threat to varying degrees.

Future war is likely to occur within what commonly is called the “arc of instability.” It is necessary to understand the dominant factors used as indicators of instability within this area.



(Slide 5 from: https://www.mccdc.usmc.mil/featuretopics/21stCenturyUSMCBrief_27Sep07.ppt)

The Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) conducts a yearly study entitled “Flashpoints” that identifies the indicators and describes how these manifest themselves within certain countries. The ten factors considered by CETO are corruption, disease, education, gender, demographics, energy, governance, economics, religion, and water, with economics and governance being double weighted. Seven out of the top ten countries displaying at risk factors are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 34 out of the top 50 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Seven out of the top ten are accessible from the ocean. In 2050, nine billion people are expected to live on the Earth, and if coastal migration remains constant, approximately four billion people will live in the littoral regions by that time.³⁴ The ability for the U.S. to project power into these areas will be critical to its strategic interests. Through the employment of distributed operations for forcible entry from the sea, the Marine Corps will be in a unique situation to meet this strategic necessity.

It is productive to gain a greater understanding of how these factors manifest themselves to create instability. The three most informative factors are demographics, governance, and economics. The demographic factors considered in Flashpoints are young adults, urbanization trends, and infant mortality rates. Population growth can be a positive consideration, but it becomes a contributing factor to instability when populations begin to out match available resources.³⁵ The current global population of 6.4 billion is expected to reach nearly eight billion by the year 2025.³⁶ The fact that the majority of this growth will occur in developing nations will only further exacerbate competition for resources. Additionally, studies show that countries with “youth bulges” (40% or more of adults between the ages of 15-29) are 2.5 times more likely to experience civil conflict.³⁷ Furthermore, countries that have above average levels of infant mortality are three times as likely to fail compared to other nations.³⁸ Flashpoints defines

governance as “...a country’s ability to provide and maintain social peace, guarantee law and order, promote or create conditions necessary for economic growth, and ensure a minimum level of security.”³⁹ The factors considered to determine the level of governance were: accountability, political stability, effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, corruption, political and civil rights, and regime type.⁴⁰ Countries in transition between autocracy and democracy have been seven times as likely to fail.⁴¹ Economics is the final factor to be highlighted. Studies have found that a nation with an economic growth rate of 5% is 40% less likely to experience instability than a nation whose economy is contracting at a rate of 5%.⁴² The factors considered in evaluating a nation’s economy relating to the future risk of conflict were: gross domestic product, growth rate, unemployment rate, and percent of GDP based on agriculture.⁴³ Nine out of the top ten most at risk nations are in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁴ An additional aspect of this “arc of instability” is with the increasing competition between the U.S. and China for access and influence in Africa the world could see the continent become the main stage of a second cold war. These are some of the “guide posts” that allow one to focus their efforts. The “arc of instability” is a likely area for conflict to exist; however, it does not mean that U.S. economic and security interests are in this region alone.

SCENARIO

It will be instructive to place distributed operations within a scenario to create a clearer picture of the concept. We will employ a scenario that has also been utilized by the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) in which Iran has taken action that has blocked the Straits of Hormuz. Any closure of the Straits of Hormuz would result in the world energy crisis within three months when oil supplies are exhausted.⁴⁵ This scenario is situated in the year 2025. Iran’s strategic goals are to disrupt the world’s energy supply, and force other nations to lift any sanctions

allowing them to fully develop their nuclear capability at an increased pace. Iran intends to use anti-access and area denial weapons to prevent the conduct of mine clearing operations within the Straits of Hormuz. Additionally, Iran intends to attack any lodgment to ensure they retain freedom of employment of their anti-access/area denial weapons. To achieve this goal they will employ Anti-ship Cruise Missiles (ACSMs), Guided-Rockets Artillery and Mortar Munitions (G-RAMMs), ballistic missiles, and terrorist and guerilla tactics to attack amphibious shipping, soft targets, and troop/equipment concentrations. Iran believes this operational scheme will delay and destroy enough U.S. forces to prove that the goal of reestablishing freedom of navigation within the Straits of Hormuz is too costly. Additionally, Iran will use the threat of nuclear weapons to discourage the formation of a coalition aimed at defeating the regime in Tehran, and to discourage its neighbors from cooperating with the opposition.

In this scenario, Iran has emplaced mines in the travel lanes within the Straits of Hormuz. This obstacle is covered by shore based mobile ASCMs as well as organized small boat units that are deployed across the shore line to disrupt any attempt to clear the shipping lanes. Iran has not deployed any regular forces along its coastline to prevent the introduction of forces ashore. Instead, it is relying on irregular forces in small units to assist in detecting incursions and to aid in targeting any attempt to establish a lodgment with the employment of ballistic missiles, ASCMs, and G-RAMMs. Iran has deployed its regular forces throughout the rest of the country to ensure public order and to detect and delay any attempted invasion from its borders.

In the scenario, the U.S. has formed an international coalition with the stated goals of restoring freedom of navigation in the Straits of Hormuz. Within the coalition the U.S. will bear the immediate responsibility of creating conditions that will allow for the establishment of a lodgment. To accomplish this, the Marine Corps, utilizing seabased forces, will establish an

“mitigation zone” of 150 nautical miles along the Iranian coast off the Gulf of Oman. The Navy will establish “moving umbrellas of domain superiority around the various distributed elements of the landing force,” approximately 60 nautical miles from the coastline guarding against sub-surface, surface, air, and missile attack.⁴⁶ It is from this seabase that the Marine Corps will launch and sustain its forces to create the “mitigation zone” that would allow for the establishment of the lodgment and the introduction of follow on forces.

A Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) will project forces from the sea base via surface and air to quickly introduce forces across the breadth and depth of the battlespace. Portions of the force would be inserted across beaches with the use of the Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV) replacement, Landing Craft Air Cushioned (LCAC), and fast boats (the Swedish Combat Boat 90 is a good candidate). A possible way to accomplish the surface insertion is for the Navy to establish and secure lanes allowing for the closure of amphibious ships to press in from the sea base and launch the surface forces from within twenty to twelve nautical miles from the shore.⁴⁷ Elements in the replacement for the AAV would secure the beach landing site for a short period of time allowing for LCAC’s to offload equipment and personnel that would then move on to their operating areas either by foot or by vehicle. Fast boats could insert company size forces at low threat points along the coast or rivers. For the insertion of forces by air, the Navy and the Air Force would need to create insertion lanes for the V-22 Osprey or the CH-53E. Effective Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) along the routes and at the landing zones will be crucial to mitigate aircraft exposure to surface threats. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the entire MEB would not need to be inserted in a continuous flow of forces from the seabase, and neither would it be necessary for the U.S. forces to secure the sub-surface, surface,

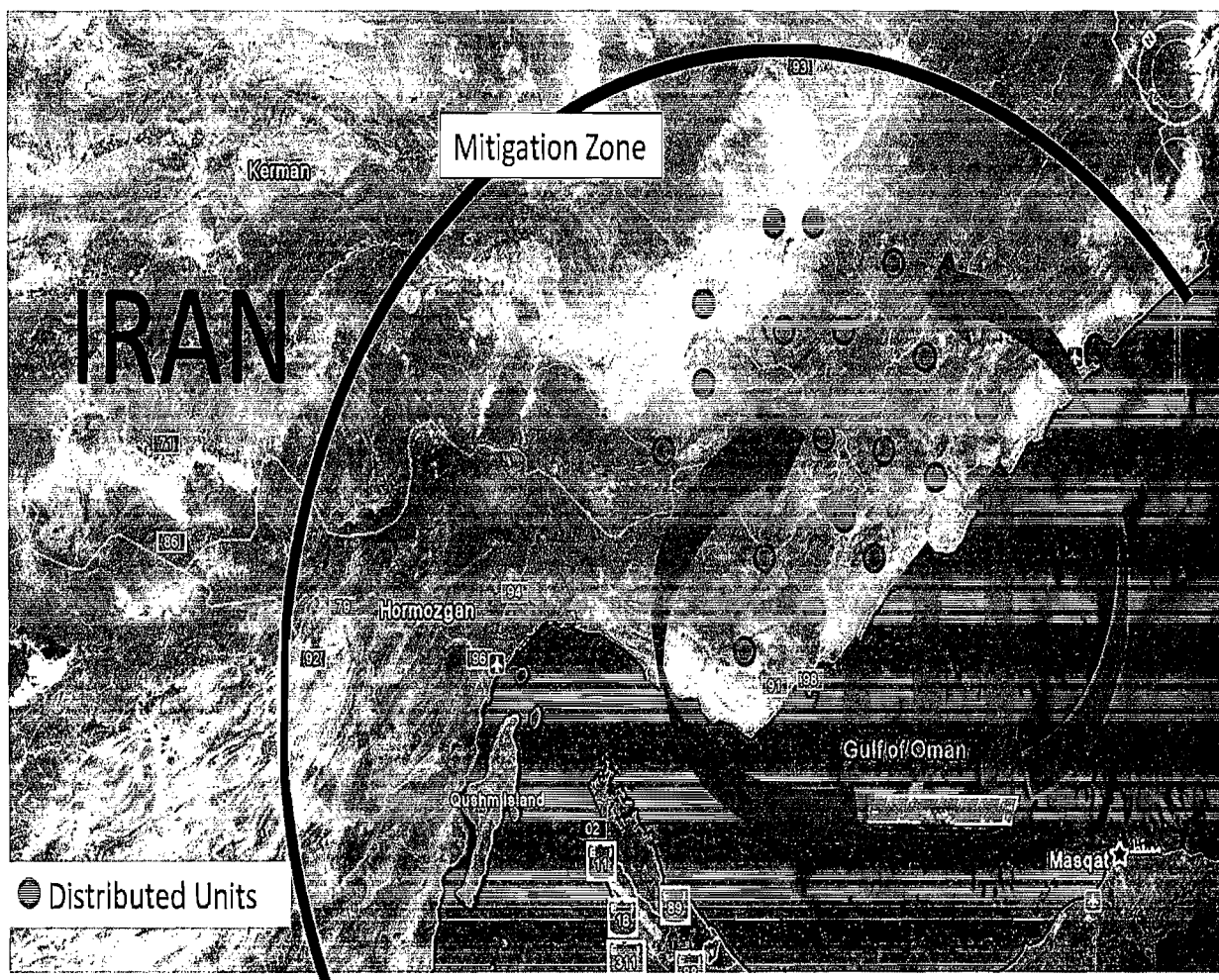
and aerial insertion routes for the entire time. U.S. forces would only need to achieve a temporary dominance for the insertion of forces.

“Moreover, to retain the initiative – not just react – we need to develop and apply new approaches and new tactics, staying a step ahead. Distributed Operations will provide a set of new capabilities toward these ends.”⁴⁸

Lieutenant General Hanlon

Once the forces have transitioned ashore, to the utility and necessity of the concept of distributed operations becomes clear. To allow for the clearing of the Straits of Hormuz it would be necessary to mitigate Iran’s ability to launch ASCMs, ballistic missiles, G-RAMMs, or small boat attacks against the clearance force. There is no necessity to change the regime or defeat the armed forces of Iran. The most acceptable course of action would be to deny Iran their geo-strategic leverage through the establishment of an “mitigation zone” that would allow for mine clearance operations to take place, and lead to the restoration of freedom of navigation in the Straits of Hormuz. Any attempt to establish a traditional lodgment along the coast of Iran would be detected and targeted. Although we would be able to affect Iran’s targeting cycle by limiting the means available to detect and communicate the location of the lodgment, it would not be possible to deny them required information for any extended period. Any defense system that we may be able to employ around the lodgment in an attempt to prevent its destruction could be overwhelmed through a coordinated attack that would launch more munitions at the lodgment than the defense mechanism could defeat. The logical way to protect ourselves from this occurrence is by not creating permanent lodgments for the enemy to target.

The use of distributed operations would allow for the introduction of considerable combat power ashore without the need to operate from a lodgment. The establishment of the mitigation zone would need to cover approximately 150 nautical miles inland to push the enemy's threat capabilities beyond the targeting range of the Straits of Hormuz. The size of element used to accomplish this task could be two regiments of Marines approximately 8,000 personnel. This is a large number; however, the forces would be operating in company and platoon size elements. The headquarters elements executing command and control ashore would be small and mobile to mitigate detection and complicate targeting due to their ability to relocate or this capability could remain afloat. Through executing distributed operations the enemy's targeting cycle is



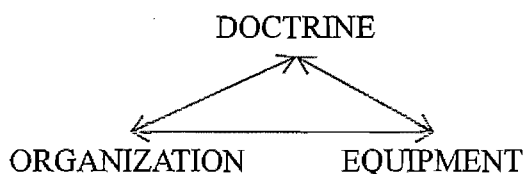
exponentially more complicated. Now the enemy is presented with as many as 100 mobile targets. To further aggravate his targeting problem these units are operating at such a small level they are below his targeting envelope. Iran will not want to expend a valuable and limited strategic asset on a company or a platoon. These distributed units can then focus on providing further input to the intelligence picture allowing for the location and destruction, or the removal of the anti-access/area denial systems from the mitigation zone. Additionally, personnel on the ground would drastically limit the effectiveness of decoys with their ability to confirm destruction of the targets.

A lower level scenario will further demonstrate the utility of the concept of distributed operations in forcible entry from the sea. In this scenario three Transporter Erector Launchers (TELs) carrying ASCM's have been observed entering a valley. ISR is unable to locate the vehicles; however, it has maintained observation on the usable routes leading out of the valley confirming that the TELs remain within this identified area. The MEB would then move a company into the valley and search for the TELs from the ground, locating and destroying them or calling in supporting arms to destroy them. This has a Special Forces "sound" to it; however, reinforced Marine infantry units would perform this task. Additionally, while Special Forces units typically operate covertly, the distributed operations of the MEB would be overt military action. The forces would move openly through the area using mobility and fire support for security rather than attempting to hide from the local population. The employment of distributed operations with units operating below the enemy's targeting threshold will enable the U.S. to

project power ashore, and conduct subsequent operations to set conditions for the establishment of a lodgment for the introduction of follow on forces.⁶

IMPLEMENTATION

There are three necessary elements to any concept: doctrine, organization, and equipment. This is a prioritized list; however, it is not a linear progression.⁴⁹ The below diagram is more representative of how the process should develop.



MCRP 5-12A defines doctrine as fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application.⁵⁰ This author believes that the current Marine Corps doctrine is insufficient to address the necessary changes in force employment to make the concept of distributed operations successful. Unfortunately, there is no effort within the Marine Corps to develop a doctrine for the application of distributed operations. This shortfall should be immediately addressed.

The failure to develop necessary doctrine is even more critical as the Marine Corps is moving forward with efforts to address organization and equipment. For the purpose of the construct of doctrine, organization, and training the organization piece includes task organization, training, and manpower management. It will be necessary to adjust the infantry table of organization to appropriately staff the battalion, company, and platoon with the

⁶ This scenario is based on a conversation with Dr. Keith Costa with CNA

necessary personnel to carry out the increased requirements for coordinating, executing, and sustaining operations. The Marine Corps' effort in developing Enhanced Company Operations has highlighted some key changes in this area. First, the need to support the conduct of command and control and intelligence functions at the company level requires additional force structure. Second, there is a need to assign a logistics Staff Non-Commissioned Officer to execute logistics duties. This addition will also allow the Company Gunny to focus on operations. Finally, the results of the ECO experiments demonstrate the need for augmentation of intelligence collection capabilities at the company level. (See Appendix C for task organization examples from ECO LOE 4)

Training is the second element of organization we will address. Current training efforts focus deliberately on better preparing small unit leaders to operate in increasingly independent situations, and training staffs to more effectively command and control units operating in a distributed manner. However, some major changes are required to see a shift to true distributed operations within the next ten years. The Corps must develop and train small unit leaders down to the squad level professionally, ethically, and tactically. To accomplish this the Marine Corps will need to adjust its Professional Military Education (PME) to shift from training to educating at the platoon level vice the field grade level as it currently does.⁵¹ The ethical development of small unit leaders will be critical as well. As physical distances from command structures and independence of action increase with the application of the concept of distributed operations, so will the possibility of unethical behavior that could poison the force from within. The increased requirements in tactical training will be significant as well. The small unit leader will have to conduct many of the functions previously executed by staffs, albeit on a larger scale. He will have to conduct command and control of units, maintain communications, handle fire support

planning and execution, and process information for intelligence value. To effectively train a Marine to manage all of these functions and to train the necessary Marines to support him will be a major personnel investment. The pushing down of support to the small unit will require both specialized training of currently assigned personnel, and the augmentation of qualified personnel at a much lower level to provide support in command and control, intelligence, fires, and logistics. Additionally, the Corps will have to make improvements in home station training facilities that will be able to handle the volume and achieve the quality of training that will allow for the proper development of the small unit leader before the larger unit is immersed in training at a major facility like Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (29 Palms California). The human element of the distributed operations concept is the most critical, and will take significant investment to ensure the concepts' success.

Manpower management is the third element of organization we will address. The infantry currently has the lowest recruitment qualifications and accepts more personnel with waivers than any other military occupational specialty. The infantry also has the lowest qualifying general technical (GT) score of any MOS to include open contract.⁵² The infantry is one of the few MOS programs that a multiple felon, or significant drug user can be assigned.⁵³ The necessary investment in the education and training of small unit leaders will require a major shift in the current method of recruiting, selecting, and management of personnel so that there is a capable pool from which to draw these small unit leaders. Additionally, the Marine Corps manpower paradigm needs to adapt to allow personnel to remain in operational units for longer periods to allow for the necessary training, and to ensure that the personnel remain with the unit to apply what they have learned. The Commanding General for the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab recommended that squad leaders need to be sergeants with four to seven years of

experience⁵⁴ While serving as the Commanding General Marine Corps Combat Development Command General James N. Mattis declared that the Corps' "... personnel policies [are] the primary impediment to small unit excellence."⁵⁵ It is clear that, "distributed operations will fail to deliver its promise if it remains rooted in outdated personnel procurement and manpower management policies."⁵⁶

The final portion of doctrine, organization, and equipment to be addressed is equipment. The Marine Corps must equip its unit to address two main problems in the application of distributed operations. First, ensure the units have the necessary capabilities to accomplish the mission. Second, ensure the units have the necessary force protection. Marines need to be equipped in four key areas to allow for the effective conduct of distributed operations down to the platoon level. The first is communications. Without communications the dispersed elements lose the ability to receive updated mission guidance, they are unable to coordinate fires to either accomplish the mission or protect the force, they are unable to fulfill their role as a sensor to develop further the intelligence picture, and they are unable to coordinate logistics support. The second area is fire support both afloat and ashore. Units access to all-weather fire support for both mission accomplishment and force protection. The essential elements of this problem are the fires platform, accurate target location, processing of the request, and communications. The third concern is logistics. With no lodgment, there are significant obstacles to the effective conduct of logistics operations. There will be little to no capability ashore to store, move, or conduct maintenance of anything. The Marine Corps must reduce current consumption levels of major consumables. The resupply of fuel, power sources, and water to so many disparate units could by themselves overwhelm any system. The final concern is mobility. This concern will

have to be addressed both by the use of vehicles and through the drastic reduction in weight Marines are required to carry in the fight.

The Corps is currently working on a “self healing” communications system that essentially can utilize any platform or person with a radio on the battlefield as a “repeater.” This technology will allow for low power and lightweight radios that are able to communicate across the battlefield without reliance on satellite access by 2025.⁵⁷ Additionally, lightweight, relatively small, and highly mobile command and control structure are necessary at the regiment and below to support the conduct of operations ashore. Other critical capabilities under development are personnel location down to the individual Marine, and the ability to have a usable data “pipe” at the squad level.⁵⁸

The most critical aspect of fire support is the platform. As the number of units dispersed across the battlefield increases, the requirement for fires follows. Marine Expeditionary Units currently have a three to five ratio for ground fires, and a one to one ratio for air fires for company sized maneuver elements.⁵⁹ The Marine Corps will need to achieve a similar ratio of fires platforms to dispersed units. This will require an increase in fire support assets, and an increased ability for our fires units to operate in smaller elements. Additionally, these assets will be under the same constraints as all of the other units ashore. In that, they will need to move to mitigate the ability of the enemy to target them, and to remain within range of the units they are supporting. Their requirement for ammunition will be vitally important to solve as well through effective and responsive logistics support. If weather conditions support manned or unmanned air operations then the outlook for fires is good. The only current all-weather shore based capabilities are the M777 155mm howitzer, the 120mm / 81mm / 60mm mortar systems. All-weather assets afloat will be able to take up some of the slack, but without some further efforts,

this would be an area in which the Corps would accept some risk if putting large numbers of distributed units ashore.

As previously discussed logistic support is both critical and difficult. The need for effective casualty evacuation is critical. The solution to this issue is likely to be an unmanned system. These systems are currently under development with MCWL; however, it could be a significant hurdle to get Marines to accept putting their wounded in an unmanned system for transport. Additionally, there is a significant effort on reducing the required logistics footprint with water purifying equipment to reduce the demand for water as well as energy solutions that will greatly reduce the need for fuel and batteries. As the Germans learned in World War II during the Russian Campaigns, the effective and accurate planning for the logistical support of operations is essential. This fact will become even more complicated when operating from a seabase.

The ground mobility solution will be a vehicle that is transportable inside an MV-22 Osprey. There is currently an internally transportable vehicle (ITV) that is used to tow the 120mm mortar. There is work being done to create a personnel carrying vehicle as well, but the Corps needs to be aware of the level of mine and direct fire protection this type of vehicle will be able to offer. There are also efforts underway to develop an unmanned infantry support vehicle to augment small unit mobility. An effective mobility solution for both foot mobile and motorized infantry units is critical to ensuring the realization of increase operational reach possible through distributed operations.⁷

⁷ The information presented on current equipment initiatives is based on a conversation with Col. Jim Haig (USMC Ret) currently with MCWL Science and Technology.

CONCLUSION

*"We are not likely to get the future right. We need to make sure we don't get it too wrong."*⁶⁰

General James N. Mattis

In conclusion, the concept of distributed operations is critical to enable the U.S. to project combat power from the sea against the emerging threats of anti-access and area denial. Through the use, history to inform preparations for the future it is clear that the U.S. must prepare for regular and irregular warfare, which based on experience, will require the projection of forces from the sea. In the face of current trends to produce and employ weapons to prevent the introduction of forces, the U.S. will need to employ a concept that establishes an "mitigation zone." This "mitigation zone" will push anti-access and area denial weapons outside their operating ranges and mitigate the danger to an established lodgment. To accomplish this task large forces will need to be introduced ashore to operate in small and mobile elements so that they are operating below the enemy's targeting threshold. Additionally, sustainment of these forces will occur from a seabase until the "mitigation zone" is established. The concept of distributed operations allows the Marine Corps to accomplish this task. The Corps needs to immediately begin developing the doctrine to support the organization and equipment that will be necessary to support this concept's success. It is evident that forcible entry from the sea will be required in the future and that the concept of distributed operations to establish the "mitigation zone" will be necessary to facilitate the follow on introduction of forces ashore.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

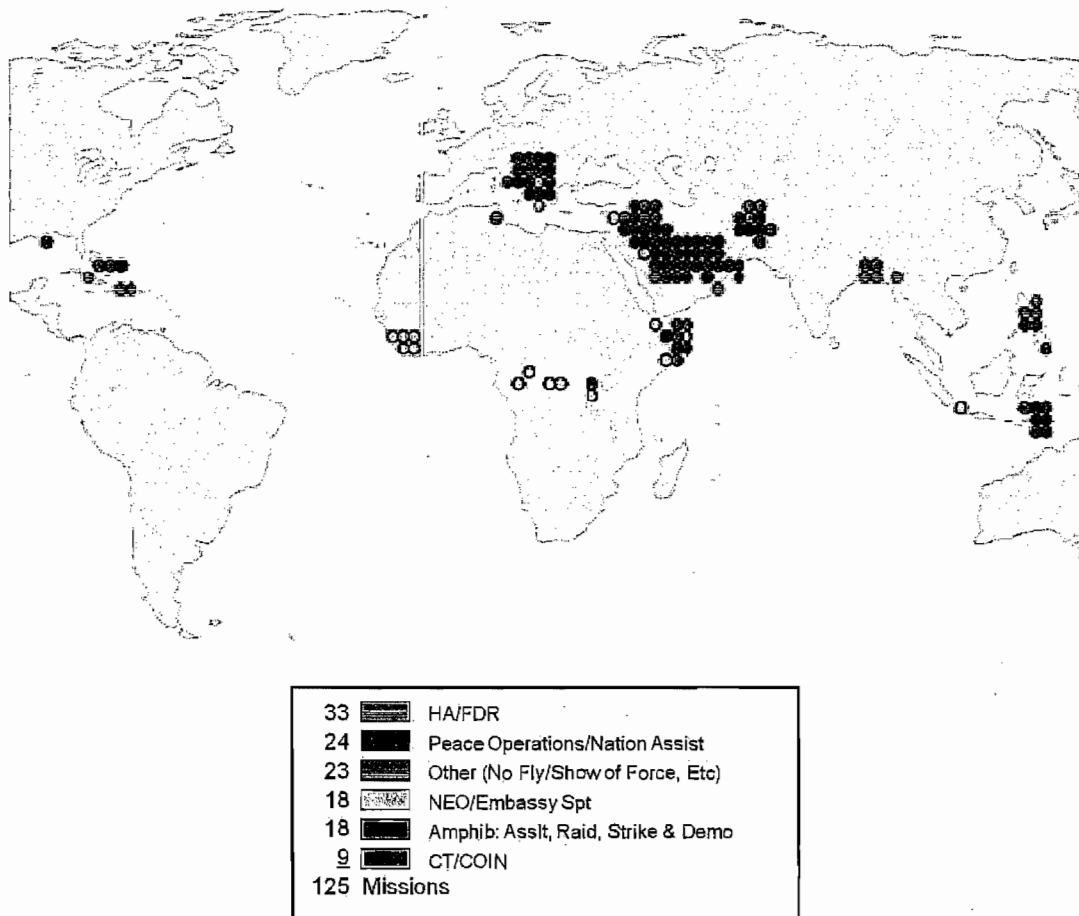


Figure 1 Global Distribution of US Amphibious Missions Since 1990

Diagram from Ship to Objective Maneuver version 2 *DRAFT* produced by Marine Corps Combat Development Command

APPENDIX B

1900: If you are a strategic analyst for the world's leading power, you are British, looking warily at Britain's age old enemy, France.

1910: You are now allied with France, and the enemy is now Germany.

1920: Britain and its allies have won World War I, but now the British find themselves engaged in a naval race with its former allies, the United States and Japan.

1930: For the British, naval limitation treaties are in place, the Great Depression has started, and defense planning for the next five years assumes a "ten year" rule – no war in ten years. British planners posited the main threats to the Empire as the Soviet Union and Japan, while Germany and Italy are either friendly or no threat.

1936: A British planner now posits three great threats: Italy, Japan, and the worst, a resurgent Germany, while little help can be expected from the United States.

1940: The collapse of France in June leaves Britain alone in a seemingly hopeless war with Germany and Italy, with a Japanese threat looming in the Pacific. The United States has only recently begun to scramble to rearm its military forces.

1950: The United States is now the world's greatest power, the atomic age has dawned, and a "police action" begins in June in Korea that will kill over 36,500 Americans, 58,000 South Koreans, nearly 3,000 Allied soldiers, 215,000 North Koreans, 400,000 Chinese, and 2,000,000 Korean civilians before a cease-fire brings an end to the fighting in 1953. The main opponent in the conflict is China, America's ally in the war against Japan.

1960: Politicians in the United States are focusing on a missile gap that does not genuinely exist; massive retaliation will soon give way to flexible response, while a small insurgency in South Vietnam hardly draws American attention.

1970: The United States is beginning to withdraw from Vietnam, its military forces in shambles. The Soviet Union has just crushed incipient rebellion in the Warsaw Pact. Détente between the Soviets and Americans has begun, while the Chinese are waiting in the wings to create an informal alliance with the United States.

1980: The Soviets have just invaded Afghanistan, while a theocratic revolution in Iran has overthrown the Shah's regime. "Desert One" – an attempt to free American hostages in Iran –

ends in a humiliating failure, another indication of what pundits were calling “the hollow force.” America is the greatest creditor nation the world had ever seen.

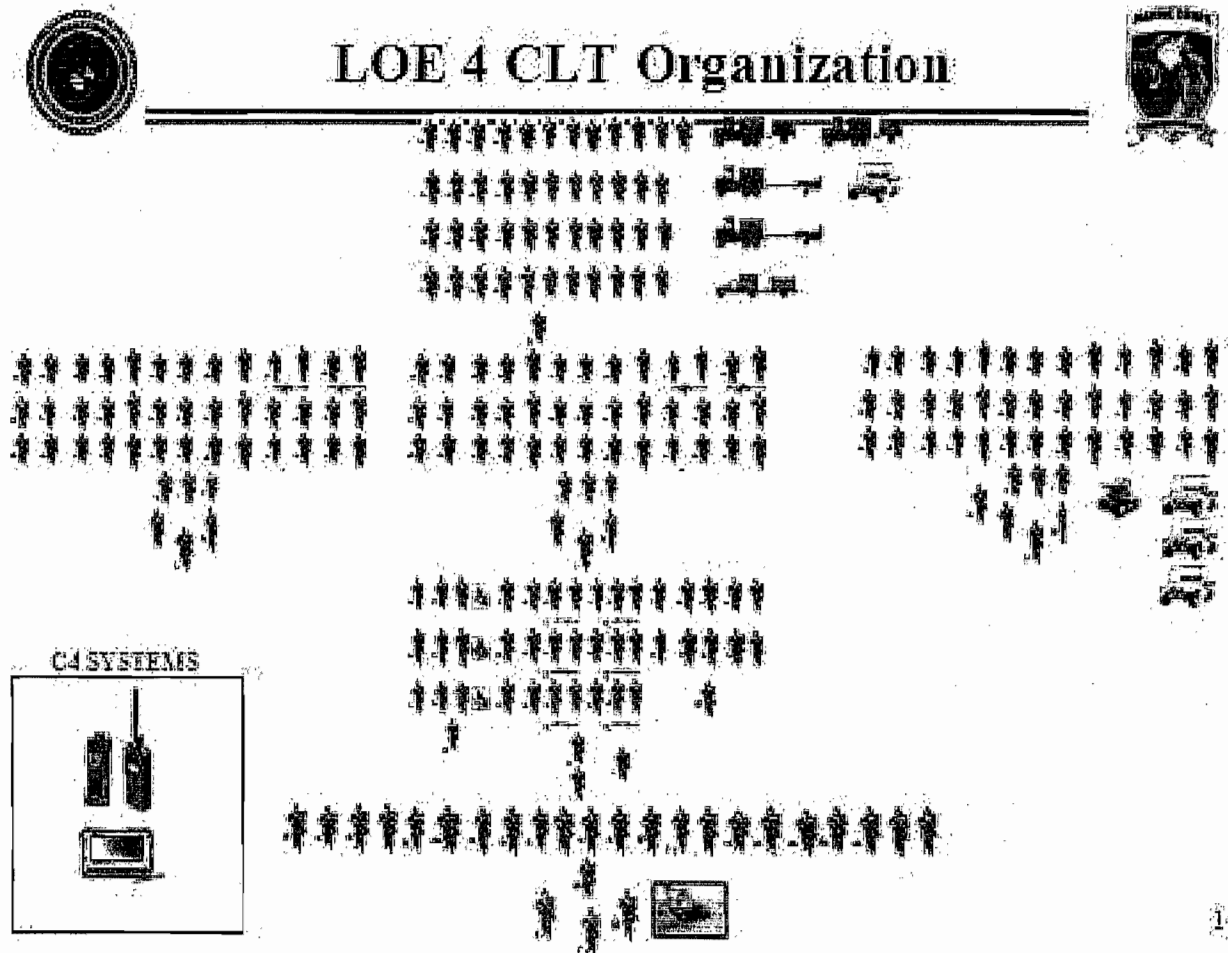
1990: The Soviet Union collapses. The supposedly hollow force shreds the vaunted Iraqi Army in less than 100 hours. The United States has become the world’s greatest debtor nation. Very few outside of the Department of Defense and the academic community use the Internet.

2000: Warsaw is the capital of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nation. Terrorism is emerging as America’s greatest threat. Biotechnology, robotics, nanotechnology, HD energy, etc. are advancing so fast they are beyond forecasting.

2010: Take the above and plan accordingly! What will be the disruptions of the next 25 years?

Joint Operating Environment 2010, page 9.

APPENDIX C



Glossary

Distributed operations: is the coordinated interdependent action by dispersed small units that are task organized for the mission, throughout the breadth and depth of the battlespace, ordered and connected within an operational design focused on a common aim, and with increased access to functional support.

Forcible entry: seizing and holding of a military lodgment in the face of armed opposition.

Irregular war: war in which at least one of the opponents is not focused on direct combat with the enemy. It is characterized by the use of guerilla and or terrorist tactics.

Lodgment: a designated area in a hostile or potentially hostile operational area that, when seized and held, makes the continuous landing of troops and material possible and provides maneuver space for subsequent operations.

mitigation zone: a zone established by pushing anti-access and area denial weapons outside their operating ranges and mitigate the danger to an established lodgment.

Regular war: two forces employing predominantly conventional tactics with the focus on some form of combat against the opposing force to achieve victory.

Seabasing: is the rapid deployment, assembly, command, projection, reconstitution, and re-employment of joint combat power from the sea, while providing continuous support, sustainment, and force protection to select expeditionary joint forces without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operating Area (JOA). These capabilities expand operational maneuver options, and facilitate assured access and entry from the sea.

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