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Naval Services Game '13

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Analytic Summary

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Abstract

Conducted from 27-31 January 2014 at the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, the Naval Services Game brought together 30 members of the Navy and Marine Corps for the purpose of exploring U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps integration. The intent of this integration is to develop forward deployed naval forces with integrated capabilities for engagement and crisis response. Participants were assigned to three, independent (BLUE) player cells. These cells were tasked similarly with players providing a perspective of the service component commander in theater initially, then the Service Chief. Each cell was provided a starting set of alternative force deployment constructs (FDCs) which could be modified or completely changed to address the demands of real world Combatant Commander (COCOM) steady state requirements ranging from medium to large scale exercises and engagements. Additionally, players were then presented with three crises in order to depart from routine, steady-state operations and determine how the alternative FDC would execute initial response. Accordingly, cells needed only to assign appropriate FDCs to handle the requisite naval response, not play out the tactical scenario. During game play, each BLUE cell was required to produce refined FDCs, complete individual surveys, engage in cell-based facilitated seminar discussions captured by members of the control team, and provide content to threaded discussions captured electronically. Each of these data streams was designed to explore the implications and challenges concerning the implementation, employment and maintenance of alternative Naval force deployment constructs.

A final session including RADM Sinclair Harris (USN), RADM Ted Carter (USN), BGen Kevin Killea (USMC), and RDML Rich Snyder (USN) was also conducted, during which the perspectives and insights of these senior naval services leaders was captured for inclusion in post-game analysis.

While players did develop final alternative FDCs, the specific solutions determined by one cell or another should not be seen as the key aspect of the game. Key innovative aspects of developed alternative FDCs will be highlighted in the final report and below on a limited basis. However, the focus of both products is on the reasoning and thought behind the decisions of the players and how that impacts the development and operationalizing of any FDC. This reasoning and thought was captured as game data for the purpose of developing key areas/themes and subordinate ideas. Analysis of data garnered from player data in this game suggests that three distinct areas were important to the players in terms of the FDCs and the capabilities which each includes. These three areas are as follows:

- Flexibility
- Aggregation
- Training

The ensuing section of this abstract discusses each of these three themes—flexibility, aggregation, and training (FAT):

Flexibility: Each of the three BLUE cells identified flexibility as the key value that must be considered in selecting the appropriate FDC or blending multiple FDCs. Indeed, integrating flexible capabilities within an alternative FDC was deemed essential to responding to the full spectrum of required missions, in both steady state and crisis response. It was determined that flexibility is a core competency of the Naval force, and elements must train to these critical capabilities to enable an appropriate speed of response. While each platform or unit will have its own specialties and capabilities, it must also have a baseline capability in the identified core competencies to have in order to be effectively integrated into force theater operations.

Aggregation: Each player cell identified a singular, preferred FDC. However, the three cells combined did not identify an optimal FDC (this was not a stated objective of NSG-13). All three player cells emphasized that the

aggregation of multiple FDCs would be necessary in the event of a major crisis. Players identified Command and Control (C2) as one of the primary challenges in aggregating and disaggregating the dispersed naval force. They suggested that a clear delineation of command relationships would mitigate the inherent C2 issues involved in aggregating previously dispersed Navy and Marine forces. Additionally, they proposed that integrated staffs should become the norm, with Marine officers routinely assigned to Navy staffs and vice versa, in order to provide cross-service insight and minimize confusion and culture conflicts when aggregation is required in response to a crisis.

Training: Lastly, players identified that training in the concept of force aggregation/disaggregation is essential to effectively integrating these capabilities to accomplish mission. All three cells emphasized that current doctrine and training procedures did not sufficiently address the challenges of force aggregation in response to a major crisis. They suggested that aggregation should become a core competency, and that the training cycle for each FDC should be modified to include exercises involving aggregation up to the level that would be required for major combat operations.

Introduction

The United States Naval War College (NWC) in Newport, Rhode Island, with the collaboration of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL), hosted the Naval Services Game (NSG) from 27-31 January 2014. The NSG was developed and executed under the sponsorship of the Naval Board. The purpose of the NSG 13 was to explore U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps integration, in effort to develop forward deployed Naval forces with integrated capabilities for engagement and crisis response. Specifically, the following two objectives were identified for this project:

- Identify alternative naval force deployment constructs to meet Combatant Commander steady state and crisis response requirements.

- Explore the implications and challenges concerning the implementation, employment and maintenance of alternative naval force deployment constructs.

Based on the Naval Board's interest in force integration, and after performing a review of related literature, the NWC's War Gaming Department (NWGD) and the MCWL's Wargaming Division (MWGD) jointly developed the following overarching research questions:

- What are the principles and force design criteria (FDCr) influencing decision making in construction and revision of force deployment constructs (FDCs) in order to accomplish a mission in steady state and during crisis response?

- Using a game provided alternative FDC, what are the issues and challenges that influence interoperability to the forward-deployed naval force?

- Given the alternative FDC and its corresponding naval force integration, can these capabilities be sufficiently integrated to accomplish mission in steady state and crisis response? Why or why not?

- In regards to naval force integration, what operational challenges are present in force re-aggregation, and how can they be overcome?

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- How do the naval services efficiently implement, employ, and maintain the alternative FDC in order to accomplish mission?

Game Structure

The NSG was a Secret-level one-sided, planning and seminar discussion war game. It consisted of three independent BLUE cells tasked similarly with players providing a perspective of the service component and Services. As a starting point from which players could subsequently deviate, players were provided alternative force deployment constructs (FDCs) that had been previously developed by a subject matter expert "tiger" team in a pre-event workshop. These FDCs were assigned to support real world COCOM steady state requirements ranging from medium to large scale exercises and engagements. Players were then provided three crises injects, which they had to assign appropriate FDCs to handle the requisite naval response.

NSG-13 was set in the year 2017, and featured a fictitious scenario employing real world geography, where BLUE capabilities played against realistic COCOM events for steady state and crisis response. Game designers derived the scenario's scale and scope from real world classified events, plans and data that represented the average availability of ships and units over a five month period that participated in medium to large scale exercises and engagements. The scenario was set in notional 2017 to allow for the use of developing capabilities such as MLP and LCS and the F-35B/C during game play. The details of the exercise and engagement activities were changed to drive different and more integrated approaches from the players. Participants reacted to three crisis injects in Weeks 4, 11 and 16.

During game play, each BLUE cell was required to collectively change and develop their alternative FDC in order to produce refined alternative FDCs, complete individual surveys, engage in cell-based facilitated seminar discussions captured by members of the control team, and provide content to threaded discussions captured electronically, which explored the implications and challenges concerning the implementation, employment and maintenance of alternative naval FDCs.

Participants

Thirty members of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, representing officer pay grades O-3 through O-6 served as players in the NSG. Players averaged 20 years of service per participant, including their warfare specialty level. Players were highly educated, with 57 percent of participants holding a master's degree or higher. With respect to warfare specialties, 33 percent of participants served in the surface/subsurface warfare community, 24 percent were USN and USMC aviators, 20 percent were USMC ground combat experts, 17 percent belonged to the USMC logistics specialty and 6 percent served in the NECC. Within the surface warfare realm, amphibious and CSG subject matter experts were represented. All BLUE cells were comparably matched in terms of players' education and expertise.

Cell-Based Outbriefs

On the final morning of the NSG (31 January 2014), all BLUE cells participated in the last combined plenary activity attended by distinguished visitors such as RADM Sinclair Harris (USN), RADM Ted Carter (USN), BGen Kevin Killea (USMC), and RDML Rich Snyder (USN). Perspectives and insights of these senior Naval leaders were captured for inclusion in post-game analysis.

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Research Methodology

In order to answer the five research questions considered in the 2013 Naval Services Game, six primary datasets were collected. These six datasets were as follows:

- Web-based Force Allocation Spreadsheets
- Microsoft PowerPoint of Google Earth screen capture of FDC Maps
- Participant Demographic Surveys
- Player Surveys
- Ethnographic Notes from Cell-Based Facilitated Discussion Sessions
- Microsoft PowerPoint Final Outbrief Slides

Data were analyzed using a variety of qualitative analytic techniques. Because a range of techniques were used to analyze disparate datasets, those areas where deltas could be identified between the data were deemed triangulated, and are included in this analytic summary as the major themes and insights borne from NSG-13.

Analytic Findings

It was not within the scope of the Naval Services 2013 war game to identify a specific, optimal FDC that will maximize capabilities both during steady state and in crisis response. Rather, the focus of NSG-13 was to identify key concepts germane to effective utilization of the naval force.

Accordingly, at this more macro-level, by performing structured qualitative analysis on NSG-13's six data streams (i.e., qualitative content analysis and grounded theory), three distinct areas were important to the players in terms of the FDCs and the capabilities which each includes. These three areas are as follows:

- Flexibility
- Aggregation
- Training

Flexibility: All three of the player cells noted the important role that flexibility plays in meeting the Commander's objectives. By combining, in an alternative FDC, capabilities that have generally been in separate FDCs, players were able to develop a flexible alternative FDC that was able to meet many different types of missions. This flexibility was key during the steady state and while moving from steady state to lower end (in the ROMO) crisis response.; That said, much of the desired flexibility was generated by players focusing on combining multiple alternative FDCs to meet mission demands, rather than seek to identify one optimal FDC with its attendant capabilities. As FDCs were merged and blended, FDCs and the Naval force as a whole required continuous aggregation and disaggregation. The importance of flexibility was identified throughout the game. Nowhere was this need for flexibility greater than in the transition towards major combat operations during crisis response. Lastly, flexibility and aggregation were inextricably linked with respect to the appropriate use of the naval force.

Aggregation: Along with flexibility as a core theme of NSG-13, players emphasized effective aggregation of the Naval forces as another key element. It should be noted that aggregation was a term which lacked precise

use and definition throughout the game. Yet, two distinct ideas developed around this theme. The first idea was the aggregation of capabilities through the combination of units and platforms. This first aggregation idea came from this combination within developed alternative FDCs as well as in the combinations of AFDCs within game play. The second idea of aggregation was the merging of command and control (C2) inherently required when units and forces are combined. Both of these aggregation ideas were especially key during the transition from steady state to crisis response. Moreover, the transition to Major Combat Operations (MCO) presented the greatest challenge to players as they aggregated AFDCs in order to accomplish mission. All three player cells identified C2 as the primary challenge in aggregating and re-aggregating dispersed naval forces. They suggested that a clear delineation of command relationships would mitigate the inherent C2 issues involved in aggregating previously dispersed Navy and Marine forces. Additionally, they proposed that integrated staffs should become the norm, with Marine officers routinely assigned to Navy staffs and vice versa, in order to provide cross-service insight and minimize confusion and culture conflicts when aggregation is required in response to a crisis. It should be noted that development of a consistent C2 structure was also identified as a significant theme in the 2012 Naval Services Game.

Training: Each of the three cells noted the importance of training. Training had three sub sections, the first two of which were borne from the mass of player comments, and the third emerging as an additional emergent theme.

The first is training towards operationalization of each AFDCs. The second is training as it relates to developing the capability for aggregation and re-aggregation of dispersed naval forces. The third element is training toward further Navy Marine Corps integration. They emphasized that current doctrine and training procedures do not sufficiently address the challenges involved with the operationalization of AFDCs. Additionally, they identified the challenge of returning to traditional force constructs (i.e. CSG and ARG/MEU) through aggregation, especially in the transition to MCO. They suggested that better understanding of aggregation both in theory and in practice, should become a core competency identified in Navy and Marine Corps educational curricula if AFDCs were adopted. Moreover, regardless of the scale of required aggregation, each FDCs training should be developed to include exercises involving aggregation up to the level that would be required for major combat operations. Cells further noted that the current OPLANs assume a greater level of steady state aggregation than that which would be present if the alternative FDCs were implemented. They further suggested that OPLANs should be rewritten to account for the steady state dispersal of forces and the time required re-aggregating in response to a major crisis. Additionally they brought up the need for standardization. By training to a common standard in how to conduct joint maritime operations, players noted that they would develop a greater appreciation for CONOPS, and be able to function more effectively as an integrated Naval force in the future, regardless of FDC structure. A final point of training was in regards to Navy and Marine Corp cross training to further integration. This training toward integration is key to future force integration effort be it in the form of FDC or total fleet operations.

Alternative FDCs (AFDCs): As stated above, it was not reasonable to identify one specific "best" Alternative FDC within the scope of the game. Additionally, there was no attempt to compare or evaluate AFDC between each other or in relationship to traditional force constructs. While the actual FDCs used to generate the data and characteristics described above were not intended to be rushed into experimentation for future deployment, some interesting and innovative ideas developed that are both consistent with the game objectives and warrant further examination. The first is the combining of non-traditionally combined capabilities with an AFDC. The second is the integration and operationalization of traditional MPSRON shipping with amphibious centric forces.

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Combining non-traditionally combined capabilities within an AFDC: All three cells found value and use in utilizing AFDCs that integrated capabilities in ways not present in traditional force packages. These AFDCs were useful especially in the steady state and during lower end (in the ROMO) crisis response operations. It should be noted that their effectiveness in MCO was not considered as the players generally assumed that there would be a drive to reform traditional force constructs. (This notion was challenged by senior leaders in the outbriefs, but still is present in all player efforts) This combined capabilities idea was evident in several forms, but in all cells the purpose was to achieve greater balance and flexibility across the force. In general, traditional amphibious force capabilities were combined with standoff strike capabilities. Some cells chose to assign an expeditionary raid force within an aviation centric strike force, other cells developed amphibious centric force with greater strike capability.. Each cell achieved this in different ways that had varying limitations. Specifically, one cell chose to embark an infantry CO (-) aboard the CVN while another chose to assign the LPD with embarked long range raid capability to an aviation centric strike force.. Also some cells completely dissolved the ARG/MEU, and developed several balanced the amphibious centric forces forces across the deployed Naval force with limited strike capability. It should be noted that effective connectors, aviation or surface, were a factor of concern and discussion for each decision. In general, all cells acknowledged that by combining capabilities, they accepted risk in higher end ROMO conflicts in order to better distribute balanced/flexible forces at the lower end. The senior leaders highlighted the fact that while risk comes from the time it takes to mass a more distributed force, higher end conflict usually have a longer lead time due to greater I&W that can better allow for the time required to respond.

Operationalization of traditional MPSRON shipping within AFDCs: All cells found utility in integrating and operationalizing traditional MPSRON shipping within AFDCs. Again, there was not one single solution. Rather, each cell utilized integrated MPSRON shipping in slightly different way to support the capability of an AFDC. There were several concerns noted around the issue of connectors, and civilian crew hours. So it is clear that these ideas would need detailed development. However, the concept seemed to provide increased flexibility and support to theater operations. MPSRON integration varied from each cell, one cell had MPSRON support centered around an LPD with ground assets and other surface combatants providing broad based capabilities. Another cell embarked its ground assets aboard the LMSR and T-AKE, providing a sea based SPMAGTF and TSC capabilities. All cells had an addition to the MPSRON by providing LCACs to enable rapid supply to shipping and ground assets. The last cell had more of a roaming FDC of just MSPRON assets, providing sea basing capabilities for theater assets as well as some steady state TSC and limited crisis response.

Additional Deliverables

The final game report will include more in-depth discussion and analysis of the three areas of focus identified in this game, specifically flexibility, aggregation, and training. Discussion of the preferred FDCs identified by each cell through these three lenses will allow for greater clarity on what is both effective and less valuable in the utilization of the naval force. Release of the final game report is slated for on or about March 31, 2014.