

The Operational Warfare Revolution: Leveraging Operational Art to Prepare the Marine Corps for Conflict in an Era of Great Power Competition

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The Operational Warfare Revolution: Leveraging Operational Art to Prepare the Marine Corps for Conflict in an Era of Great Power Competition, by Major Matthew J. Schultz, 52 pages.

On 16 July 2019, General David H. Berger, 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, declared that the Marine Corps is not manned, trained, or equipped for the challenges of the future operating environment. This reality, captured in his planning guidance, reflects the cumulative effects of protracted conflict ashore and the reemergence of great power competition. In catalyzing an operational warfare revolution, the Commandant aims to foster organizational change while realigning the Corps with its statutory role as the nation's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness. While material and organizational adaptations will play a central role in facilitating this revolution, the Marine Corps must also revise its theoretical approach to operations and its doctrinal hierarchy to enable the organization to generate greater value for the Joint Force. In a similar fashion to the Soviet Red Army when faced with a "New Epoch in Military Art," the Corps must shed its traditional focus on the tactical level of war and embrace operational art—a concept overlooked in Marine Corps doctrine—to retain enduring relevance during the conduct of naval campaigns in the context of all-domain, globally integrated operations that span the competition continuum.

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Abbreviations

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
CPG	Commandant's Planning Guidance
FM	Field Manual
JP	Joint Publication
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication

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Framing the Problem

Coming to recognize you are wrong is like coming to recognize you are sick. You feel bad long before you admit you have any of the symptoms and certainly long before you are willing to take your medicine.

—Norman Mclean, *Young Men and Fire*

On 16 July 2019, General David H. Berger, the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, officially confirmed that the Marine Corps is not manned, trained, or equipped for the challenges of the future operating environment when he published his commandant’s planning guidance (CPG)—the Corps’ strategic vision for the future. In very direct terms, the CPG describes the organization’s current crisis as resulting from the cumulative effects of two decades of protracted, limited liability conflict ashore in the post-Cold War era. The document also recognizes that significant changes in the strategic context of the global operating environment—the rise of peer competitors, the erosion of American technological and military advantages, and contested access to global commons—necessitate a return to the Corps’ cultural roots and statutory role as the nation’s naval expeditionary force-in-readiness to preserve the service’s relevance in “waging great power competition and conflict.”¹ By clearly identifying the sources of the Corps’ organizational crisis—to include an outdated Marine operating concept, a force designed against the twentieth-century paradigm of amphibious warfare, and misalignment with the 2018 National Defense Strategy—General Berger catalyzed a new revolution in Marine Corps organizational theory and behavior. In no uncertain terms, he built the CPG to emphasize the significant changes the organization must make as part of an operational warfare revolution to advance the Marine Corps beyond its paradigm of maneuver warfare and traditional amphibious operations. In short, the organization’s traditional excellence at the tactical level of warfare, while critically important and necessary to future success, is no longer sufficient in itself to guarantee the Corps’ relevance.

¹ US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 19.

Fortunately for the Marine Corps, an organization that has shown notable aptitude for reformation when confronted with past existential crises of relevance, the predicament represents an opportunity to innovate for the future as the Joint Force emerges from a period of strategic atrophy with many of its traditional military advantages eroded.² After all, as the historian of science Thomas Kuhn argued, the emergence of new theories depends upon the recognition of crises that are generally preceded by periods of “pronounced professional insecurity.”³ Thus, in 2020, the Marine Corps can look to its own past to find many commonalities with the shifts in strategic context that spurred the amphibious and maneuver warfare revolutions of the twentieth-century.⁴ Additionally, the organization can garnish important lessons learned by examining intellectual revolutions in the US Army and the Soviet Red Army when those organizations were faced with paradigmatic crises resulting from fundamental changes in the character of war.

This monograph argues that an enterprise-wide acceptance of operational art—a concept that the Marine Corps acknowledges as a partner in the nation’s maritime service but neglects in its own foundational service doctrine—can help pave the way for the implementation of the CPG while providing viable and timely options for the National Command Authority, combatant commanders, combined and joint task forces, and the naval service.⁵ Given the direction provided in an array of strategic publications—to include the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Defense Strategy*, the *National Military Strategy*, and the CPG—coupled with the realities of the everchanging global operating environment, the Marine Corps must institutionalize a service-

² US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 2018), 1, accessed 16 December 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 68.

⁴ Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 222-227.

⁵ US Department of the Navy, Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP) 1, *Naval Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 33.

oriented conception of operational art to enable the Corps to retain enduring relevance and generate value in a “new age of seapower.”⁶ Doing so will provide the Corps with an important tool that will allow it to—in conjunction with its partners in the Joint Force—design, plan, and organize tactical actions in a manner that delivers coherent, strategic effects in the context of all-domain, globally integrated campaigns, and operations that span the competition continuum.⁷ Additionally, the institutionalization of operational art will contribute to optimizing current and future force design efforts, the Commandant’s highest priority, as a means to enable the Marine Corps to adapt and structure itself to operate in fundamentally different and disruptive ways that integrate effects in the information and physical domains during naval campaigns and operations.⁸

While material and organizational changes will play a central role in achieving this aim, resolving the current crisis will also require intellectual and doctrinal reformation that postures the organization to meet the Commandant’s intent and prepares the Corps for the conduct of future joint combined arms operations.⁹ Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 emphasizes this point, stating that “doctrine must continue to evolve based on growing experience, advancements in theory, and the changing face of war itself.”¹⁰ Consequently, the conclusion of the current revolution, like all revolutions, requires a revision of foundational texts.

This monograph begins by outlining the evolution of operational art in the US Army in response to the organization’s post-Vietnam crisis. The piece will then briefly examine the varied

⁶ US Department of the Navy, *Surface Force Strategy: A Return to Sea Control* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-2; US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 1.

⁷ US Department of Defense, *Joint Concept of Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 6-12.

⁸ US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 4; US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 1.

⁹ US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018*, 4.

¹⁰ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 4.

conceptions of operational art across the Joint Force before evincing its absence in the Marine Corps' service-level doctrine. From there, it will recount the Corps' maneuver warfare revolution and demonstrate how a series of key events—specifically, the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the conclusion of the Cold War, and operations ashore during the Global War on Terrorism—have contributed to the organization's current crisis. Finally, after exploring how the Soviet Union developed a theory of operational art as a means to cope with the emergent challenges in a “new epoch of military affairs,” the monograph will conclude with an appraisal of how the concept can empower the Marine Corps to navigate the challenges outlined in the CPG.

This monograph will not present a specific definition of operational art for the Marine Corps. Instead, it argues that the Corps must develop its own service-oriented concept of operational art tailored to the organization's needs in the arrangement of coherent tactical actions in time, space and purpose in a manner that deliver strategic effects in the maritime domain. As demonstrated by the development of operational art in the US Army and the Soviet Red Army, useful, service-oriented conceptions of operational art emerge from deep reflection and design dialogue conducted over time. This piece simply aims to begin that dialogue, acknowledging that the concept of operational art, when stripped-down to its intellectual roots, ought not be confined to a specific echelon of command or level of warfare.¹¹ Thus, operational art represents a shift in mindset, and the current crisis provides an ideal context for the Marine Corps to implement an intellectual change that will enable greater unity of effort with the Joint Force.

The Catalyst

According to Henry Mintzberg, the first step of an organizational change process requires that people and organizations first “unfreeze” themselves from their basic beliefs.¹² General Berger's publication of the CPG began the process of “unfreezing” the Marine Corps and

¹¹ Milan N. Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹² Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 33.

reducing institutional inertia to the commencement of a new revolution with the purpose of adapting the organization for the future. Yet, in the absence of progress toward a desired aim, revolutionary processes devolve into wasteful and disruptive upheavals. After all, as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger theorized, “revolutions, no matter how sweeping, need to be consolidated and, in the end, adapted from a moment of exaltation to what is sustainable over a period of time.”¹³ Therefore, the successful conclusion of the current revolution, referred to as the Operational Warfare Revolution from this point forward, will require the Corps to be postured to thrive in the competition continuum and, as mandated in the *National Military Strategy*, build a force capable of employing “operational art through the integration of joint capabilities in all domains.”¹⁴ Consequently, the institutionalization of operational art will not only enhance the effectiveness of the Corps’ force design efforts, but it will also enable the organization to operate at the interface between the tangible realm of tactical actions and the abstractions of policy and strategy.¹⁵

The Evolution of an American Theory of Operational Art

Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States*, directs each service to be prepared to employ operational art to solve problems, stating, “joint force commanders and component commanders use operational art to determine when, where, and for what purpose major forces will be employed and to influence the adversary’s disposition before combat.”¹⁶ The document expounds upon the importance of the concept, stating that it provides a method to manage “the deployment of those forces and the arrangement of battles and major

¹³ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 224-225.

¹⁴ US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018*, 2.

¹⁵ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 1.

¹⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), I-8.

operations to achieve operational and strategic objectives.”¹⁷ As an organization that must remain ready and able to operate in an array of roles within the structure of joint and combined forces—either as a joint task force headquarters, an element within the Joint Maritime Component Command, or as a service component—the Marine Corps should, in a similar fashion to the other services, develop a service-oriented concept of operational art. The development of the concept in the US Army provides a useful model of the change process.

The US Army introduced an American theory of operational art in 1986 when it published Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, the second edition of its revolutionary AirLand Battle doctrine first unveiled in 1982. This document defined the concept as “the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or a theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns or operations.”¹⁸ Thus, the idea served as an intellectual extension of the operational level of warfare established four years earlier in Army doctrine.¹⁹ Taken together, the successive revisions of AirLand Battle addressed concerns with the tactical fixation of the Army’s Active Defense Doctrine while working to reconcile the paradoxical experience of the Vietnam War, where the inability to convert overwhelming tactical successes into meaningful strategic accomplishments plagued the US military.²⁰ While the Army’s codification of operational art in doctrine served as a forerunner to its eventual integration into joint publications, the intellectual advancements were not limited to theory and doctrine alone. The organization also leveraged its educational enterprise to develop its capacity for operational warfare.

¹⁷ US Department of Defense, JP 1, I-8.

¹⁸ US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 1986), 10.

¹⁹ Clayton R. Newell, “On Operational Art,” in *On Operational Art*, ed. Clayton R. Newell and Michael Krause (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1994), 11.

²⁰ Wilson Blythe, “A History of Operational Art,” *Military Review* 98 (November-December 2018): 37-46, 43, accessed 16 December 2019, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2018/Blythe-Operational-Art/>.

In 1983, the US Army founded the School of Advanced Military Studies as part of the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Operating under a charter to provide advanced professional military education to field grade officers, the school's first director, Colonel Huba Wass de Czege, built a curriculum that blended studies in theory, doctrine, and history to prepare its students for operational warfare.²¹ In addition to classical texts in military history, the school also incorporated studies of Soviet military theory as a means to broaden the conception of operational art and facilitate its transmission to the operating forces. Not only did these studies provide depth to the understanding of America's Cold War rival, it also allowed the school to serve as the proving grounds for the development of the 1986 version of AirLand Battle.²² In a similar fashion to the Corps' employment of Marine Corps schools to develop amphibious warfare doctrine in the interwar period, a time when many military professionals dismissed the potential of landing operations in modern warfare, the US Army leveraged the School of Advanced Military Studies to advance a theory of victory in future, large-scale combat operations.²³ Yet, since its inception, the US Army's concept of operational art has continued to evolve with the changing character of war and its diffusion into joint and sister service doctrines. In recent years, the concept has merged with the coevolution of operational design, a separate but complementary concept developed to assist commanders and their staffs to cope with challenges and seize opportunities while operating within complex adaptive systems.²⁴ Although each of the services, with the exception of the Marine Corps, posit nuanced views on the concept of operational art, the services have coalesced around a theory that provides a connective tissue for US military dialogue and education. As the American military enters an era

²¹ Blythe, 44-46.

²² Ibid.

²³ Krulak, 75-87.

²⁴ US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, July 2015), V.

of enduring competition conducted through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict, it does so with the concept of operational art firmly established in joint doctrine.²⁵

Operational Art in the Joint Force

Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Planning*, defines operational art as “the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, means, and risks.”²⁶ The publication also describes the complementary concept of operational design as “the conception and construction of the framework that underpins a campaign or operation and its subsequent execution.”²⁷ Taken together, operational art and design enable commanders and their staffs to create operational approaches that translate strategic guidance and operational concepts into actionable missions and tasks integrated in an executable plan.²⁸

²⁵ US Department of Defense, Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2.

²⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), IV-1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²⁸ US Department of Defense, JP 5-0., xxi.

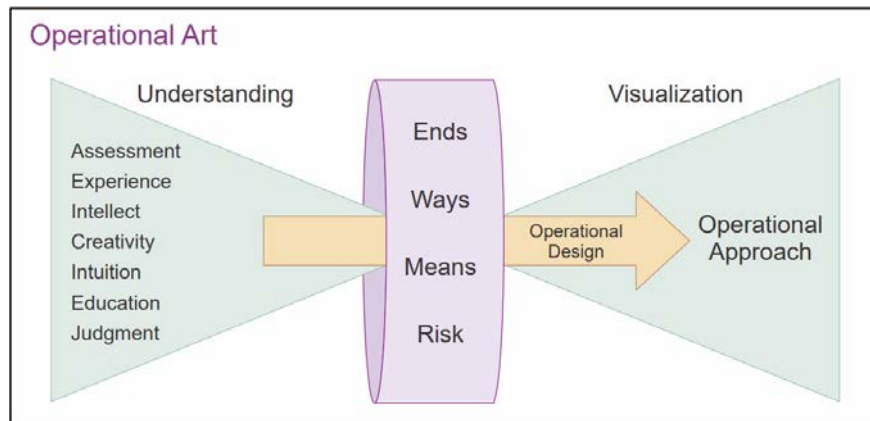


Figure 1. Joint Publication 5-0, *Planning*, proposes a theory of operational art echoed in the doctrines of each of the services except the Marine Corps. US Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), IV-5.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, *The Operations Process*, published in July 2019, echoes the same definition of operational art while emphasizing that the concept applies at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare. The publication states that the effective application of operational art “requires creative vision, broad experience, and a knowledge of capabilities, tactics, and techniques across multiple domains.”²⁹ Interestingly, while the service maintains the Army Design Methodology as a complementary tool to facilitate conceptual planning, ADP 5-0 demonstrates a level of convergence between design and operational art by incorporating seven of the joint elements of operational design as the elements of operational art shown in table 1.³⁰ Yet, while Joint and Army doctrine evidence the importance of operational art to today’s military, further examination of other service-level publications demonstrates that the acceptance of the concept extends across much of the Joint Force.

²⁹ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, July 2019), 2-10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-11.

Table 1. Comparing Joint Elements of Operational Design and US Army Elements of Operational Art

<i>Joint Elements of Operational Design (JP 5-0, June 2017)</i>	<i>US Army Elements of Operational Art (ADP 5-0, July 2019)</i>
Military end state	End state and conditions
Center of Gravity	Center of gravity
Decisive points	Decisive points
Lines of operation and lines of effort	Lines of operations and lines of effort
Arranging operations	Phasing and transitions
Operational reach	Operational reach
Culmination	Culmination
Objectives*	Basing*
Effects*	Risk*
Termination*	Tempo*
Forces and functions*	
Anticipation*	
Direct and indirect approach*	
* Concepts that differ between JP 5-0 elements of operational design and ADP 5-0 elements of operational art	

Source: Created by author.

The US Navy and Air Force both expound upon the baseline concept of operational art found in joint doctrine, providing additional insights into service-specific interpretations of the idea. For example, Naval Doctrinal Publication 1, *Naval Warfare*, a multiservice document for which the Marine Corps is a cosigner, states that operational art affords commanders and their staffs “the ability to anticipate, and the skill to monitor, assess, plan, and direct tactical actions in a manner that achieves the desired strategic result.”³¹ Similarly, the US Air Force adds to the concept by stating that operational art “uses the commander’s vision and intent to determine broadly what should be accomplished in the operational environment,” and that it is “guided by the ‘why’ from the strategic level and implemented with the ‘how’ at the tactical level.”³² Despite the prevalence of operational art in documents published throughout the Joint Force, the Marine Corps continues to ignore the concept in its foundational doctrine. One need not look any further

³¹ US Navy, NDP 1, 33.

³² US Air Force, Annex 3-0, *Operations and Planning* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Lemay Center for Doctrine, 2019), 10.

than Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1), *Warfighting*, to see evidence of this omission that extends through the organization's most important publications.

The Absence of Operational Art in Marine Corps Doctrine

The latest edition of MCDP 1, published in April 2018, holds an important position as the keystone of the organization's entire doctrine hierarchy. Since its introduction in 1989, the Marine Corps has revised and republished *Warfighting* on several occasions, with each commandant reiterating the importance of the piece as a critical part of every Marine's professional development. In fact, MCDP 1 remains the only doctrinal publication on the Commandant's Professional Reading List, featured as one of seven books from the Commandant's Choice publications that all Marines are directed to read on an annual basis.³³ Yet, despite its centrality to developing and maintaining the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy, it is completely devoid of any reference to the concept of operational art.³⁴ Surprisingly, this omission extends beyond MCDP 1.

In fact, the core publications of the MCDP series remains mute on the matter. For instance, MCDP 1-1, *Strategy*; MCDP 1-0, *Operations*; and MCDP 1-2, *Campaigning*, do not mention the concept once. This is concerning, given the importance of each of these documents in shaping the Marine Corps' theory of conflict and its role as an integral member of the Joint Force. Ironically, of the primary MCDPs focused on the three levels of warfare, only MCDP 1-3, *Tactics*, receives a single mention of operational art in its bibliography. Finally, even MCDP 5-0, *Planning*, the Corps' service equivalent to JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, fails to mention operational art despite the concept's ubiquity in the planning publications for each sister service. This exclusion reaches well beyond the Marine Corps' doctrinal publications though.

³³ US Marine Corps, "Revision of Commandant's Professional Reading List," 4 March 2019, accessed 19 November 2019, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/1773787/revision-of-the-commandants-professional-reading-list/>.

³⁴ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1-109.

In a similar fashion to the MCDP series, neither Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process* nor the *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century* reference operational art despite the pivotal role that both documents play in guiding the organization's planning for operations and force design. While these documents demonstrate the Corps' commitment to the development of design—an idea that the organization describes as the conception and articulation of a framework for solving a problem—neither document describes how planning or operational design connect to the complementary, yet separate, concept of operational art.³⁵

Further, the omission of operational art in MCWP 7-0, *Componency*, the guiding document to Marine commanders and staffs regarding the conduct of joint operations is cause for concern. This publication describes the responsibilities and functions of Marine forces in key roles with operational requirements, to include performing duties as a Marine service component, an element of a joint force maritime component, or a Marine logistics command with operational level sustainment obligations. Most significantly, it addresses the potential of Marine forces serving as a joint task force headquarters, a role that most certainly requires fluency and proficiency, amongst commanders and their staffs, in the application of operational art. This elucidates a fundamental disconnect between Marine Corps doctrine and both the intellectual and theoretical underpinnings of contemporary joint doctrine. It also highlights the risk of undermining the Corps' ability to maximize unity of effort and fulfill the responsibilities inherent within a joint operational construct.³⁶ After all, cooperation and dialogue amongst a joint force relies upon a shared lexicon and conceptual foundation that is built into the culture and rituals of each of the services.

³⁵ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 5-10, *Marine Corps Planning Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 1-3.

³⁶ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 7-10, *Marine Corps Componency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), Forward.

The exclusion of operational art in Marine Corps doctrine implicitly highlights the organization's tendency to view the world through a tactical warfighting lens. It also emphasizes the need for a concept that can serve as a bridging function that connects strategy, operations, and tactics, both vertically and horizontally.³⁷ Although the Corps has used design, as an element of the Marine Corps Planning Process, to fill this role since the concept's official implementation in 2010, the future operating environment demands a more holistic and dynamic method of orchestrating functions and activities across time, space, and purpose.³⁸ The Marine Corps' continued avoidance of the broad inclusion of operational art into the service's doctrine and culture places the enterprise's ability to generate value for the Joint Force at risk.

While some organizations within the Marine Corps, most notably the School of Advanced Warfighting, the service's advanced intermediate level school, have made concerted efforts to leverage operational art, the absence of the concept in doctrine leaves the preponderance of the force with little to any formal exposure to the concept.³⁹ This has significant implications for the Corps' ability to achieve General Berger's vision of naval integration and harmonious integration with the other elements of the Joint Force.⁴⁰ The erosion of maritime culture within the Marine Corps over the past two decades of warfare ashore

³⁷ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), xi-xii.

³⁸ US Department of the Army, ATP 5-01.1, V.

³⁹ School of Advanced Warfighting, "USMC School of Advanced Warfighting: Academic Year 2019-2020," Marine Corps University, 3, accessed 19 November 2019, <https://www.usmcsu.edu/Portals/218/SAW%20Inbrief-9%20Jul%2019%20%281%29.pdf>. SAW Mission Statement: An organization that "develops lead planners and future commanders with the will and intellect to solve complex problems, employ operational art, and design/execute campaigns in order to enhance the Marine Corps to prepare for and fight wars."

⁴⁰ Paul McLeary, "Commandant: Marines 'Not Optimized for Great Power Competition,'" *Breaking Defense*, accessed 12 October 2019, https://breakingdefense.com/2019/10/commandant-marine-not-optimized-for-great-power-competition-or/?_ga=2.195578924.1441897989.1570123282-474025783.1569942937&utm_campaign=Breaking%20News&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=77652236&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8-UkfD1-6zuRYwRp5Vyn1xoli2r0EoTE0wSJfHYeyQiWwiZGb3gnUGwUOGcyGKEjDP_f26-f_bDtRZVeraciowWXFNg&_hsmi=77652236.

amplifies these effects. After all, as maritime security scholar Milan Vego wrote in *Operational Warfare at Sea*:

Knowledge and understanding of operational art are essential for subordinate naval tactical commanders' success as well. To act in accordance with the operational commander's intent, they must understand a broader—that is, operational—picture of the situation. By understanding operational art, they can make decisions that will greatly contribute to the accomplishment of the ultimate operational or strategic objective.⁴¹

In this regard, operational art offers the service a means to contribute both materially and intellectually to the success of naval and joint forces in a new era of seapower while ensuring that the Corps can meet the Commandant of the Marine Corps' intent in revolutionizing its ability to think and interact with the Joint Force.⁴² As such, the adoption of operational art must be a central aspect to the ongoing revolution within the Corps.

While much has changed since the conclusion of the Cold War, an assessment of the contextual factors that fomented the intellectual and theoretical achievements in the Maneuver Warfare Revolution provides a historical case of the Marine Corps' organizational behavior when faced with an existential crisis. When combined with an assessment of the events that contributed to the current crisis, the case demonstrates how the Corps can liberate itself from constraints of its previous notion of war in preparation for the future. After all, if, as Peter Senge once wrote, “today's problems come from yesterday's solutions,” then an informed analysis of the current crisis must begin by tracing the course of the last revolution.⁴³

From the Maneuver Warfare Revolution to the Current Crisis

At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind—from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something “out there” to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience.

⁴¹ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 4.

⁴² US Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 1.

⁴³ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 57.

According to Kuhn, successful revolutions can only be concluded through revising, and in some cases completely rewriting, a community's guiding body of literature.⁴⁴ In this light, the Marine Corps began the process of crystallizing the Maneuver Warfare Revolution on 6 March 1989 when General Alfred M. Gray, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, signed the first official copy of Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1, *Warfighting*.⁴⁵ This seminal event, made possible by a cadre of military thinkers, marked a cultural watershed for the Corps. FMFM 1 provided the organization with a common philosophical baseline, rooted in theory, to address the post-Vietnam cultural crisis while posturing the organization to succeed in future operations across the conflict continuum.⁴⁶ In short, *Warfighting* outlined a method by which the Marine Corps, a chronically under-resourced military organization, could continue to bolster the nation's security even if forced to fight from positions of numerical and material inferiority in the nuclear age.⁴⁷ While today's Corps broadly accepts maneuver warfare as an innate aspect of the organization's culture, as a result of its institutionalization and reinforcement over the course of generations of Marines, the theory, as with all revolutions, required a crisis to foment its inception in the late 1980s.

Despite many triumphs on the tactical and operational level of war, the United States' ignominious exit from the Vietnam War marked a strategic defeat. Similar to the other services, the Marine Corps faced significant organizational turmoil and confusion. Not only did the Corps need to confront a cultural crisis stemming from ranks swollen with low-quality human capital, it

⁴⁴ Kuhn, 137.

⁴⁵ US Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1989), 1.

⁴⁶ Ian T. Brown, *A New Conception of War: John Boyd, The U.S. Marines, and Maneuver Warfare* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2018), xxvi.

⁴⁷ Marine Corps University, "Maneuver Warfare Panel," last modified 29 May 2019, accessed 19 November 2019, https://grc-usmcu.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=37713249.

also had to chart a way forward in a resource-constrained environment.⁴⁸ Above all, the Marine Corps had to engineer a new identity that addressed the woes of the Vietnam War while providing enduring value as the nation's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness.⁴⁹ This challenge was further complicated given the context of a peacetime military seeking change without the trust and confidence of the nation. In a similar fashion to the interwar period between the First and Second World Wars, the Marine Corps faced an existential crisis of relevance.

During the 1980s, General Alfred Gray, a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, served as a champion of the maneuver warfare revolution.⁵⁰ Using his military experience and education as a guide, he assembled a growing body of support that included contributions from a noteworthy cast of figures, including US Air Force Colonel John Boyd and Marine General Paul Van Riper.⁵¹ Over the course of the 1980s, the idea of maneuver warfare emerged during an era that Van Riper refers to as an "Intellectual Renaissance."⁵² Finally, with a broad base of support in place, General Gray's 1987 accession to the position of commandant of the Marine Corps set conditions for the official acceptance and implementation of the theory. In a sense, the document provided the necessary conclusion to the revolution.

The 1989 edition of *Warfighting*, numbering only eighty-eight pages in length, presented a descriptive—rather than prescriptive—philosophy of conflict and maneuver warfare as a guide for the development and socialization of all Marines. It reinforced its powerful message by providing a continuous, conceptual narrative across four chapters that described the nature and theory of war as well as how the Marine Corps would prepare for and conduct operations as an

⁴⁸ Marine Corps University, "Maneuver Warfare Panel."

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Brown, xxxiii.

⁵¹ Marine Corps University, "Maneuver Warfare Panel."

⁵² Ibid.

amphibious force in a Cold War context.⁵³ Under these conditions, the organization recognized the need “to shatter the enemy’s cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions” aimed at creating “a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope.”⁵⁴ This requirement rested upon a common understanding of the phenomena of war.

Starting from a foundational description of war as a “violent clash of interests between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force,” the document sets the tone for a philosophy for force structure, training, and leadership.⁵⁵ Aside from the importance of shaping a new culture, the most important aspect came from describing maneuver warfare. Unlike other military organizations that employ attrition-focused warfare to destroy an enemy’s capacity to fight, the Marine Corps adopted maneuver as its preferred “style,” focusing on defeating enemies through a system-centric approach that focused the application of force at a decisive point at the correct time.⁵⁶ Reinforcing the notion of maneuver with concepts such as commander’s intent, mission orders, and centers of gravity, *Warfighting* ultimately outlined a holistic approach for collapsing an enemy’s will while exerting minimal resources. In short, *Warfighting* delivered exactly what its visionaries imagined, and it served as an acceptable philosophical guide for the Corps—demonstrated by its endurance over the past thirty years.

Yet, as the CPG states, the Marine Corps is in need of significant change to retain its relevance in the future operating environment.⁵⁷ As a result, the Marine Corps must revise its underlying assumptions about war and about its role in future operations that span the competition continuum. Doing so requires the organization to reflect on its recent experience and

⁵³ Marine Corps University, “Maneuver Warfare Panel.”

⁵⁴ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 73.

⁵⁵ US Marine Corps, MCDP 1, 3.

⁵⁶ US Marine Corps, MCDP 1, 37.

⁵⁷ US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 1.

how the force will provide meaningful contributions to future naval campaigns. Although maneuver warfare should remain a tool, a viable theory of victory, available to the Corps in solving problems, the current geostrategic context of great power competition requires the Corps to advance beyond its foundational doctrine encapsulated in MCDP 1. After all, much has changed since 1989.⁵⁸

The Long Road to Crisis

Synchronous to the Marine Corps conclusion of its Maneuver Warfare Revolution, the seeds for today's crisis were sown as the US military pushed to complete a defense reformation process that had been underway since the end of the Second World War. While the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 brought many positive changes to the US defense apparatus, it had a number of unintended impacts on the Corps that, when combined with the subsequent conduct of the Gulf War and the Global War on Terrorism, would greatly alter the service's relationship with the Navy while changing the structure and culture of the Marine Corps.

Completed in the years immediately preceding the publication of FMFM 1, *Warfighting*, Goldwater-Nichols signaled the conclusion of a reformation effort that began with the National Security Act of 1947—a critical piece of legislation that codified the continued existence of the Marine Corps in law.⁵⁹ Not only did Goldwater-Nichols reinforce civilian control of the military, but it also streamlined the provision of military advice to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council.⁶⁰ From an operational perspective, the most significant impact

⁵⁸ US Marine Corps, FMFM 1, 1.

⁵⁹ Duane Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 339.

⁶⁰ Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of October 4, 1986, Public Law 99-433, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 100 (1986): 992, codified at *U.S. Code* 10 (1986), § 111, 1-4, accessed 16 December 2019, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/dod_reforms/Goldwater-NicholsDoDReordAct1986.pdf

of the act on the Marine Corps resulted from the implementation of the functional and geographic combatant commands.⁶¹ While Goldwater-Nichols improved cooperation and interoperability across most of the Joint Force, the same cannot be said for the maritime services. In fact, the act's forced separation of Navy and Marine Corps service components had a profound impact on the employment of Marine Corps forces, catalyzing the gradual erosion of the organization's traditional relationship with the Navy.

Although the impact of this separation was obscured by military success in the Gulf War and decades of uncontested naval supremacy following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this division ultimately resulted in the disappearance of the Fleet Marine Force that had provided Marine forces to the Navy's numbered fleets since 1933.⁶² The act also drove a wedge between the maritime services, allowing the Navy and Marine Corps to focus on their roles in providing separate and distinct contributions to joint operations. While the Navy focused on leveraging technology to enhance its naval warfare capacity, the Marine Corps reinforced the allure of its maneuver warfare philosophy through the service's operational successes ashore. Despite all of the benefits accrued to the American military through the implementation of Goldwater-Nichols, the legislation set the initial conditions for the rise of the Corps' current crisis and the decline of its maritime culture.⁶³

Many Marine Corps leaders, to include the author of this monograph, have not spent a single day afloat over the course of their careers, leading to an implicit paradigm of an organization that is amphibious in nature, but not in practice. Despite the benefits of Goldwater-Nichols, the legislation had the unintended consequence of severing the longstanding cooperation

⁶¹ Ibid., 21-29.

⁶² US Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 2.

⁶³ US Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 2

between the naval services.⁶⁴ The division and subsequent isolation of Navy and Marine Corps forces into separate service components, each resourced by their own funding streams, led the services to develop “a tendency to view their operational responsibilities as separate and distinct, rather than intertwined.”⁶⁵ Further, the conduct of protracted operations ashore over the course of decades served to amplify these effects while increasing the dissonance between Navy and Marine Corps operational concepts and doctrine.

The American military continues to hold the stunning display of success during the 1991 Gulf War in high regard. The rapid victory represented a watershed moment for the Joint Force, marking its transformation from “the industrial-age force designed for great-power conflict to the information age.”⁶⁶ The war also signaled that the nation had overcome the post-Vietnam organizational and intellectual challenges that plagued the military throughout the 1980s, while validating the Goldwater-Nichols Act through unprecedented levels of cooperation and unified military action in joint and coalition warfare.⁶⁷ In aggregate, the military performance embodied the convergence of organizational reform, military innovation, and overwhelming force to remove the Iraqi military, the fourth largest in the world, from Kuwait in less than one hundred hours of ground combat operations. Yet, despite the success of the war, the Marine Corps, as with the rest of the American military, continued to behold the decisive battles of the war as the idealized model of future warfare.⁶⁸ In a sense, the experience of the Gulf War typifies Colin S. Gray’s characterization of the American way of war as apolitical, astrategical, and profoundly regular.⁶⁹ This legacy continued well into the twenty-first-century.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ Worley, 339.

⁶⁷ Worley, 303.

⁶⁸ US Department of Defense, *Joint Concept of Integrated Campaigning*, 20.

⁶⁹ Colin S. Gray, “The American Way of War: Critique and Implications,” in *Rethinking the Principles of War*, ed. Anthony D. McIvor (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 28-31.

In a similar fashion to the Gulf War, the initial successes of the Global War on Terrorism—including the toppling of the Taliban in 2001 and the rapid defeat of the Iraqi military in 2003—served to further reinforce the United States military’s preference for tactics and technological solutions to military problems. The US military’s performance in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a similar pattern of behavior displayed the Germans in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), wherein strategy was supplanted by a perverted conception of decisive battle and overconfidence in their military preeminence.⁷⁰ While the Marine Corps gained much from the opportunity to cultivate the warfighting experience of a generation of Marines raised in combat ashore, it also paid a penalty in straining its relationship with the Navy and stunting the growth of its maritime culture.

Although the Marine Corps retains a lawful obligation to serve as the nation’s naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, the Gulf War and the Global War on Terrorism included relatively few instances of meaningful operations in the maritime domain. Aside from an amphibious demonstration in the Gulf War and General Jim Mattis’s famed seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino with Task Force 58 in Afghanistan, the preponderance of the Corps’ wartime experience since the publication of FMFM-1 consisted of actions ashore. And while it is crucial to remember and learn from the hard lessons of the battles of An Nasiriyah, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Marjah, to name a few, it is also important to note the impact of these hard-fought battles, as well as decades of protracted conflict ashore, have had on the force structure and culture of the current generation of Marines. Everett Dolman, a professor at the US Air Force Air Command and Staff College, echoes this thought, stating that the allure of tactical victory is strong and can have adverse effects on strategic thought.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Robert M. Cinto, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 306-307.

⁷¹ Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 9.

Reinforcement theory provides an explanation for this phenomena by emphasizing the tendency of humans to engage in and actively pursue behaviors that have been reinforced through specific experiences and desirable outcomes.⁷² In this regard, conflict is a paradoxical phenomenon, generating both beneficial and detrimental effects. In terms of organizational benefits, conflict provides organizations with operational experience, innovation resulting from competitive pressures, and cohesion amongst group members.⁷³ At the same time, conflict can also have negative effects, to include structural rigidity that contributes to a tendency for centralized control and a dependency on adhering to established procedures and behavioral norms. It can also lead to an increased emphasis on task performance and defeating competitors. While these are important pressures, they can also be counterproductive if pursued as an end of their own to the detriment of delivering operational or strategic outcomes. Further, according to Richard Betts, with the passage of time, organizations tend to “become oriented, not to the larger political aims they are enlisted to pursue, but to their own stability.”⁷⁴ Dakota Wood, a retired Marine and senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, explains this paradoxical impact of recent conflict on the Corps, stating that:

[L]and battle blinds the Corps because of the service’s preference for such combat. It is easy to envision. It creates an environment for the maximum use of all of the skills a combat-focused service spends so much time developing. It generates funding, attention, glory, stories and career advancement. It also provides a great deal of independence, enabling the Corps to conduct multiunit, large-scale combat operations in a way that leverages the full power of the MAGTF [Marine Air Ground Task Force].⁷⁵

Accordingly, the Corps, in an effort to meet the needs of successive administrations while also ensuring that the organization contributed materially to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,

⁷² John A. Wagner and John R. Hollenbeck, *Organizational Behavior: Securing Competitive Advantage* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 89.


⁷³ Wagner and Hollenbeck, 92, 230.

⁷⁴ Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 32.

⁷⁵ Dakota L. Wood, Special Report No. 211, *Rebuilding America’s Military: The United States Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 21 March 2019), 35, accessed 3 November 2019, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/SR211_0.pdf.

pursued a course of stability, reliability, and predictability that detracted from its statutory role as a naval force-in-readiness. In a sense, the Marine Corps behaved in a similar manner described by Betts, who noted that military forces have a tendency to “conflate strategy with operations, focusing on how to destroy targets or defeat enemies tactically, assuming that positive military effects mean positive policy effects.”⁷⁶ This phenomena is further supported by what Kahneman refers to as theory-induced blindness wherein organizations and individuals find increasing difficulty in detecting flaws in accepted theories.⁷⁷ Beyond the realm of organizational behavior, changes in force structure demonstrate the deeper impact on the Corps’ relationship with the nation’s maritime services.⁷⁸

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Figure 2. US Marines observe the deposition of a statue of Saddam Hussain following overwhelming success in large scale ground combat operations ashore in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Wathiq Khuzaie, *Marines and locals watch as a statue of Saddam Hussein is toppled at Firdos Square in Baghdad on April 9, 2003*, photograph, Microsoft Network, accessed 10 October, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/the-iraq-war-in-50-memorable-images/ss-BBKjp63?fullscreen=true#image=10>.

Between 1990 and 2018, the Navy’s amphibious fleet declined from a total of fifty-nine vessels to thirty-two. This trend reflects shifting priorities in the Navy’s investment strategy as

⁷⁶ Betts, 7.

⁷⁷ Kahneman, 277.

⁷⁸ Wood, 9.

the organization postured itself for a future of naval warfare that prioritized nuclear strike and power projection over littoral warfare. With uncontested command of the seas following the conclusion of the Cold War, the Navy had little appetite for capital ship investments that did not contribute materially to blue-water operations as technology progressively enabled smaller fleets to do more with less. The Marine Corps' participation in protracted wars ashore only heightened this decline, detracting from its ability to advocate effectively against the Navy's divestment of its amphibious capacity. The Navy was not the only service pursuing an investment strategy that drove an interoperability wedge between the Navy and Marine Corps.

In fact, the Corps' equipment investments during the Global War on Terrorism reflect a similar trend. For example, the Marine Corps' fleet of more than two thousand Mine Resistant Armor Protected vehicle variants provides evidence of the organization's strategic drift from its statutory role. While these vehicles were purchased through an accelerated acquisition process to meet urgent requirements for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, this fleet of vehicles has extremely limited utility in littoral operations, given the difficulty of embarking and transporting the massive vehicles in distributed maritime operations.⁷⁹ Similar observations about the Marine Corps' force structure are reflected in publications such as the Heritage Foundation's *Special Report No. 211*, as well as the CPG, which identifies force design and modernization as the Corps' highest priority.⁸⁰ Indeed, as the *Commandant's Planning Guidance* states:

While we can and should take pride in our ability to develop a deep reservoir of knowledge on counterinsurgency operations, we must now direct our attention and energy to replicating that educational effort across the force to create a similar knowledge base regarding naval warfare and naval expeditionary warfare.⁸¹

⁷⁹ US Marine Corps, "MINE RESISTANT AMBUSH PROTECTED (MRAP) VEHICLES," 2019, accessed 3 November 2019, <https://www.candp.marines.mil/Programs/Focus-Area-4-Modernization-Technology/Part-3-Ground-Combat-Tactical-Vehicles/Mine-Resistant-Ambush-Protected-Vehicles/>

⁸⁰ Wood, 38.

⁸¹ US Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 17.

A Revolution in Process

In conjunction with the aforementioned events and consequences, the current crisis represents a collection of statutory, intraorganizational, interorganizational, and adversarial tensions that must be addressed in the context of great power competition in a new era of seapower. The resolution of this crisis will require the organization to reflect deeply and leverage concepts such as operational art to design a force capable of delivering the desired strategic effects in an increasingly complex and dynamic operating environment.

From a statutory perspective, the Corps must depart from decades of conducting operations that detract from its lawful role and expose the organization to substantial risk. According to Title 10 US Code (USC) § 8063, the “Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.”⁸² General Berger echoes this principal requirement in his CPG, harkening the resurrection of the Fleet Marine Force and emphasizing that the Corps must fundamentally alter its current organization to ensure that it is “trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness and prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations.”⁸³ Neither US Code nor the CPG mention anything about the ability to win battles or excel in tactics, as those are assumed prerequisites in the successful conduct of naval campaigns and fleet operations. As such, they are means for the Corps rather than ends in themselves. Therefore, the Corps must fundamentally alter its conception of its role in competition and sever ties with the symbolic importance of victory in battle—a concept that Dolman claims “belongs

⁸² 10 US Code § 8063 (2018), United States Marine Corps: composition; functions.

⁸³ US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 1.

wholly within the realm of tactics.”⁸⁴ Part of the current crisis is the dearth of operational thought and the absence of operational artists capable of conceptualizing the role of Marine forces in the context of naval campaigns and fleet operations.

From an intraorganizational perspective, the organization must also overcome a number of sizable barriers to change. As with all organizations during times of change, the pressures generated by bureaucratic inertia, competing conceptions of the future, disagreement amongst internal constituencies regarding resource allocation, and culture all impact the progress and effectiveness of change efforts.⁸⁵ And while a sense of crisis can serve as a unifying force during periods of macro-organizational change, significant tensions are an inevitable part of the change process that seeks to modify patterns of thought, behavior, and interaction within an organization.⁸⁶ The process will inevitably involve modifications to the organization’s structure of rituals, symbols, and myths to achieve deep penetration with change efforts. These types of changes represent significant challenges to organizations wherein structural inertia—generated by structures, procedures, and norms established to maintain order and control—can often stifle organizational changes perceived as a disruptive threat to short-term success.⁸⁷

Similarly, the Corps’ organizational language, defined “as a collection of verbal symbols that often reflect the organization’s particular culture,” is insufficient to meet the needs of the Joint Force in conducting globally integrated, all-domain operations across the competition continuum.⁸⁸ While battle will remain an inextricable element in the grammar of war, part of the crisis stems from a lack of an operational lexicon that lines-up with the rest of the Joint Force.

⁸⁴ Dolman, 4.

⁸⁵ Wagner and Hollenbeck, 283-294.

⁸⁶ Wagner and Hollenbeck, 290.

⁸⁷ Michael J. Arena, *Adaptive Space: How GM and Other Companies are Positively Disrupting Themselves and Transforming into Agile Organizations* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2018), 109.

⁸⁸ Arena, *Adaptive Space*, 284.

After all, the success and direction of campaigns may be altogether different from the Corps' traditional understanding of victory since "success of campaigns is measured in war progress and the continuing impact on diplomatic, socio-cultural, economic, and information realms."⁸⁹ In this regard, the ability of the Corps to adapt, innovate, and win matters, but it is not sufficient in and of itself to prepare for the future.⁹⁰ Interorganizational tension within the Corps only serves to exacerbate the current crisis.

From an interorganizational perspective, the Marine Corps must also address the "pulling and hauling" of interorganizational conflict within the Department of Defense as General Berger charts a trajectory that departs from the status quo and as well as the expectations of the sister services and combatant commanders. Although the Navy and Marine Corps continue to toward a solution of future naval integration, the aforementioned case of amphibious shipping illustrates the challenges of relying on a different service to allocate finite resources to man, train, and equip forces required to provide critical warfighting capabilities to a different service. Similarly, General Berger's vision may not align with the vision and campaign plans implemented by each of the geographic combatant commanders. There is also a logical tension among service and combatant commanders between a role as a naval force-in-readiness that functions as part of joint force maritime component or the traditional paradigmatic understanding of Marine Air Ground Task Force as a rapidly deployable capability that can be leveraged as a discretionary force within a geographic combatant commanders' area of responsibility. The increasingly complex and chaotic global operating environment associated with the Information Revolution, described by Michael Cohen and Robert Axelrod as a phenomena requiring fundamental reform "and policy

⁸⁹ Dolman, 6.

⁹⁰ US Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 12.

interventions at every level of social organization,” only serves to amplify the tensions of providing a meaningful offering to the nation in an era of great power competition.⁹¹

Finally, from an operational perspective, the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, in conjunction with its accompanying *National Defense Strategy* and *National Military Strategy*, reflect the most significant contextual changes in the global geopolitical environment. These changes include the reemergence of great power competition, the atrophy of America’s traditional military advantages, and the need to exert wide-ranging influence to advance the nation’s interests in an increasingly interconnected world. These documents recognize the rise of revisionist powers, such as China and Russia, which seek to change the global order built through international institutions and norms following the conclusion of the Second World War. The documents also recognize the threats that rogue regimes, violent extremist organizations, and transnational criminal organizations pose to America’s citizens and her interests abroad.⁹² The *National Defense Strategy* expands upon the consequences of these competitive forces, to include China’s militarization of islands in the South China Sea and Russia’s grey zone activities in Ukraine and Syria that avoid triggering US military responses while extending influence in Eastern Europe and the Levant.⁹³ The document also discusses the regional instability generated by non-state actors such as the Islamic State as well as rogue regimes in North Korea and Iran that violate international norms while continuing to pursue weapons of mass destruction. Finally, the *National Military Strategy* uses current security trends—the decline of the post-World War II world order, the diffusion of technology, and the battle of narratives—to anchor its strategic

⁹¹ Robert Axelrod and Michael D. Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 24.

⁹² US Government, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), I.

⁹³ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 2018, accessed 16 December 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, 1.

approach for achieving the global integration in an increasingly complex operating environment. Collectively, these documents describe a chaotic operating environment wherein the US military must remain capable of delivering strategic effects in an era wherein “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism,” is the primary concern of American security.⁹⁴

According to former Secretary of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, a retired Marine general, the American military advantages displayed in the Gulf War and the initial phases of the Global War on Terrorism have eroded during the intervening decades.⁹⁵ The revisionist powers have studied American dominance in Iraq and Afghanistan and have invested considerable resources toward developing the means to counter US military advantages. These advancements include long-range fires, anti-access and area denial capabilities, and hypersonic weapons to name a few. They aim to deny the US its fundamental strengths of precision munitions, conventional warfighting capacity, and global power projection. Competitors have also applied significant effort to developing the ability to contest American military supremacy in arenas with lower barriers to entry, such as cyber and information warfare. These capabilities have the potential to disrupt American command and control capabilities while influencing the opinions of both domestic and foreign audiences in ways that undercut American interest. In addition to the readiness struggles that have resulted from continued employment of military forces in the Global War on Terrorism, the absence of sustained, predictable resources have detracted from the modernization of equipment and concepts to build a more lethal joint force for the future.⁹⁶

In an age wherein the democratization of technology and the proliferation of global communication networks have heightened the velocity, tempo, and volume of information transmissions, military leaders must face the reality of vertical and horizontal compression

⁹⁴ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁶ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5-7

through the levels of warfare. To further complicate matters, the Marine Corps must also confront the fact that its paradigm of war needs revision to accommodate the nuances of the competition continuum and a state of persistent campaigning. In fact, in his first public remarks delivered at the Heritage Foundation shortly after his ascent to the position of Commandant in July 2019, General Berger acknowledged that the Corps is not prepared for confrontation with rivals like China or Russia, specifically stating that it “is not optimized for great power competition.”⁹⁷ He also elaborated on the Corps’ inability to support naval campaigns and operations through essential functions such as the ability to exert sea control in littoral regions or provide credible deterrent value against peer or near-peer actors jeopardizing US national interests.⁹⁸

The current crisis, which requires the Marine Corps to address a wide range of organizational, ecological, and contextual problems, is unlike anything that the Marine Corps has faced in the past. While the Maneuver Warfare Revolution helped assure institutional relevance at the end of the Cold War, the current crisis requires an operational warfare revolution that enables the organization to cope with the complexities of naval campaigns and fleet operations in a new age of seapower. This requires a change in mindset toward the idea of campaigning “that recognizes joint force activities of all kinds, not just armed conflict, that should be continually adapted in response to evolving strategic conditions and policy objectives.”⁹⁹ The service must also find a way to circumvent what the moral psychologist Johnathan Haidt describes as the rationalist delusion wherein a group loses the ability to think rationally about the things the group holds sacred.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the Marine Corps, this includes reflecting deeply on the need for changes concerning its maneuver warfare doctrine, the Marine Air Ground Task Force construct,

⁹⁷ McLeary.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ US Department of Defense, Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, VI.

¹⁰⁰ Johnathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 28.

the value placed on battlefield preeminence, and the sense of security offered by the realm of tactics.

The Corps must find a new way forward for its needed intellectual revolution. And perhaps, rather than adhering to the traditional Jominian and Clausewitzian conceptions of Napoleonic warfare that fill the pages of MCDP 1, the Corps should expand its aperture and study the works of influential twentieth-century Soviet military theorists—to include Georgii Isserson, Mikhail Frunze, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, and Aleksandr Svechin. While their conception of operational art was, much like the US Army, focused primarily on land warfare, it nonetheless demonstrates how operational art offers a useful tool to solve intellectual problems that accompany grand shifts in the character of war. After all, there are more than a few commonalities between the challenges described in the aforementioned strategic documents and what the legendary Soviet military theorist, Brigade Commander Georgii Isserson, described when he wrote in the 1930s that “the blunt facts are that we are facing a new epoch in military art, and that we have to shift from linear strategy to deep strategy.”¹⁰¹

Although the Soviets were the primary threat to the US military during the Maneuver Warfare Revolution, their own intellectual renaissance may hold a number of important lessons for how a theory of operational art can help the Corps navigate its current force design, cultural, and doctrinal challenges in a period of great change. Rather than continuing to focus almost exclusively on Western theories based upon Napoleonic warfare, the Marine Corps should explore and reflect upon how Soviet thought may contribute to the design of creative, novel solutions to future problems if applied to the maritime domain in a globally integrated, all-domain context. Additionally, the range and lethality of modern anti-access and area denial systems capable of contesting access and freedom of action across expansive areas only serves to

¹⁰¹ Georgii Samoilovich Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 48.

reinforce the importance of studying how the Soviets adapted to changes in the scope and scale of conflict. Although maneuver warfare has served the Marine Corps well over the course of decades in war, it may well prove to be insufficient in tomorrow's fight. After all, as the British military historian, Hew Strachen, points out in *The Direction of War*, maneuver warfare draws a "reasonably straight line from Napoleon at Margeno or Jena to Norman Schwarzkopf in the First Gulf War."¹⁰²

The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art in a New Epoch of Warfare

The chief utility of history for the analysis of present and future lies in its ability, not to point out lessons, but to isolate things that need thinking about.

—Geoffrey Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*

Throughout history, the Russian homeland has been the target of many foreign incursions, ranging from the Mongols to Napoleon to Hitler. Cursed by its geographic features, including vast territorial spaces and limited access to the seas, Russia served as a target for exploitation in part because of its indefensible borders, perceived weakness, and vast geographical expanses. This legacy, which continues to influence contemporary Russian worldviews, exerted significant pressure on the incremental development of a Russian modern military theory that combines the paranoia of invasion with the necessity of protecting its ethnic population. As the progenitors of the concept, the military theorists of Imperial Russia, and their Soviet successors, established operational art as the keystone of an evolving theory of war.

The embryonic conception of operational art began in Imperial Russia in the decades leading up to the Revolution of 1917. It emerged as a means to cope with the evolving character of warfare and the perennial challenges to defending the Russian homeland from foreign

¹⁰² Hew Strachen, *The Direction of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

invasion.¹⁰³ Although observations from foreign wars, such as the Franco-Prussian War and the Wars of German Unification, contributed to the evolution of their theory of operational art, the first-hand lessons learned through Russian military catastrophes exerted an even greater influence in shaping a distinct theory of military art that differed greatly from the legacy of Napoleonic warfare in Western Europe.¹⁰⁴

The period between the Crimean War (1853-1856) to the Second World War (1939-1945) exposed the Russians to a number of wars wherein its military repeatedly found itself lagging behind its competitors. These pressures were further compounded by the great societal upheavals resulting from revolutionary, civil conflict. In a similar fashion to the American military in the post-Vietnam Era, the Russians used honest appraisals of their stinging military defeats to learn and theorize about the evolving character of war in the context of significant geopolitical, societal, and technological change.¹⁰⁵

The latter half of the nineteenth-century and early decades of the twentieth-century ushered in an era of great geostrategic and technological change resulting from the Industrial Revolution. Advancements in military technology and organization, to include the advent of breach-loading artillery, automatic weapon systems, and formalized staffs, had profound impacts on the tactical level of war. Militaries departed from the traditional conception of pitched battles in confined geographic locations when confronted with the exponential increases in battlefield lethality that characterized the new era of industrialized warfare. More importantly, this era witnessed the introduction of civilian sector advances in transportation and communications technology, influencing Russian perceptions of the evolving character of war.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Bruce W. Menning, “The Imperial Russian Legacy of Operational Art, 1878–1914,” in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, ed. by Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 2005), 189.

¹⁰⁴ Menning, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Gray, 28-26.

¹⁰⁶ Menning, 190.

The advent of steam power catalyzed a revolution in transportation that changed the character of war by expanding the scale, scope, and space of conflict. The employment of locomotives bolstered the industrial and agricultural capacities of nations, enabling them to finance powerful militaries for self-defense and the pursuance of interests abroad. Rail power also enabled the mass mobilization and subsequent concentration of military forces to achieve decisive results in war as showcased in the Franco Prussian War of (1870-1871).¹⁰⁷ Similarly, steam propulsion had profound impacts at sea, bolstering industrial era global commerce on the high seas, while also increasing the operational power projection capacity of the world's naval powers.¹⁰⁸ And while steam-powered ships were employed by the US Navy in the Mexican War (1846-1848), it was the confluence of transportation and communications technology in the Crimean War (1853-1856), a conflict that foreshadowed the emergence of operational warfare.¹⁰⁹ Yet, while transportation technology led to exponential increases in the ability of nations to mobilize, deploy, and sustain large forces over previously unimagined distances, the advancements in communications technology empowered nations and military headquarters to exert command and control over forces distributed abroad.

The telegraph, when combined with the ever-growing interconnectedness of railroad networks, exerted similar impacts on the conduct of land warfare around the globe, from the American Civil War in North America to the German Wars of Unification in Europe. Advances in telecommunications had similar impacts on the conduct of naval warfare. For example, during the Crimean War, the Royal Navy demonstrated the ability to exert command and control of fleet operations in the Baltic and Black Seas via underwater telegraph lines that connected fleets to higher headquarters command nodes ashore.¹¹⁰ Consequently, the telegraph demonstrated great

¹⁰⁷ Wawro, 79-84.

¹⁰⁸ Till, 8-17.

¹⁰⁹ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 5.

utility in both terrestrial and maritime applications in the ability to employ, command, and control during the conduct of widely distributed operations in war and in peace. Yet, the advancements in transportation and communications technology were only part of the changing character of war noted by the Russians. They also recognized the implications of the massive reforms in military administration, organization, and mobilization underway in Western Europe, only serving to increase the anxiety associated with Russia's perennial fears of invasion.

Although the *levee en mass* of the French during the Napoleonic Wars demonstrated the military power available through the mobilization of a nation's populace, it was not until the latter half of the nineteenth-century that the Prussians showcased the mobilization potential of trained national reserves. By combining the planning capacity of the Prussian General Staff and the aforementioned technological advancements, the Prussians were the first to employ a force designed specifically for the conduct of industrial warfare between massed armies deployed by steam propulsion and controlled over great distances by the telegraph.¹¹¹ With the administrative, logistical, and communications frameworks in place, the stage was set for a fundamental expansion of the size and scope of warfare by the turn of the century. Unfortunately for the Russians, who had already dealt with several military failures in the decades preceding the twentieth-century, Imperial Japan aimed to continue its pursuit of global recognition and showcase its emerging military might against the Russians.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) was the next notable military and strategic failure for the Russians. Not only did it allow Imperial Japan to surpass Russia as the preeminent Asian power, it afforded Japan with an opportunity to settle scores on a number of the perceived injustices that she suffered as a result of Russia's involvement in the Triple Intervention during

¹¹¹ Cinto, 148.

the termination of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).¹¹² In short, the Russo-Japanese War served as an unmitigated disaster for the Russians. Not only did Russia lose control of the Liaodong Peninsula and a naval base at Port Arthur, they also witnessed a failure of the entire Russian military apparatus at the hands of a rising regional power.¹¹³ First, the Japanese Navy destroyed Russia's naval power potential in the Far East. The Baltic Fleet was destroyed at the battle of Tsushima—the battle that Milan Vego identifies as the last decisive naval battle—and the Russians also lost access to a warm-water base at Port Arthur.¹¹⁴ The Russians fared similarly ashore, experiencing land warfare on a scope and scale unlike any conflict of the past. Further, Russian forces were subjected to the destruction wrought by the massed effects delivered by a combination of automatic weapons, smokeless powder, and modern artillery.¹¹⁵ Although Russian theory had already postulated how some of these technologies would impact future wars, the Russo-Japanese War presented them with a paradigmatic crisis as their traditional mainstays of human will, the bayonet, and the intellectual legacy of Napoleonic warfare provided little utility in operational warfare conducted along extensive fronts.¹¹⁶ The conflict portended coming military disasters in the absence of radical change and adaptation.

In short, the Russians recognized the need for a new intellectual approach to warfare that accounted for the expanding size, scope, and lethality of warfare that began to eclipse the traditional notion of the decisive battles bounded by time and space.¹¹⁷ Additionally, the Russians understood the threat of invasion, combined with expansive borders, represented a recipe for disaster in modern warfare. Given the changing character of war, the Russians concluded that

¹¹² S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 288-293.

¹¹³ Paine, 286-287.

¹¹⁴ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Menning, 191.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹⁷ Menning, 198.

their traditional strength in massed manpower—traditionally generated through the institution of Russian serfdom—would no longer suffice to protect the homeland.¹¹⁸ Where the Germans had applied military theory to develop tactically-focused regulations to govern large-unit employment, the Russians understood the need for an intellectual tool to couple engagements and battles with abstract policy and strategy produced at the highest levels of government.¹¹⁹ The experiences of the Russians in the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution only further emphasized the need for change. Necessity being the mother of innovation, Russian theorists began to develop and codify what would become the ideas of operational art and the accompanying concepts of deep battle and deep operations.

To carry on this intellectual revolution, Colonel Aleksandr Gerau combined ideas from both Russian and German military theory to coin the term *operatika* to describe the process by which commanders and staffs could arrange actions in time and space to accomplish specific aims.¹²⁰ According to Bruce Menning, Aleksandr Svechin and other Russian military thinkers in the 1920s replaced the term with the concept of *operativnoye iskusstvo*—operational art.¹²¹ This recognition coincided with the writings of the military theorist, Mikhail Frunze, the man whom the Red Army’s military academy, the Frunze Academy, would be named after.

Frunze recognized the Red Army’s need for a unified military doctrine as well as administrative and organizational reforms to cope with the challenges posed by the ever-evolving

¹¹⁸ Dima Adamansky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Military Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 43.

¹¹⁹ Cinto, 150. The Prussians were the first to publish regulations regarding the employment of units on the conduct of war on the operational level. The *Instructions for Large Unit Commanders* was published in 1869 and focused on the achievement of decisive results in rapid conflicts given Prussia’s inability to sustain protracted conflict with its neighboring states and competitors. Menning 199.

¹²⁰ Menning, 200.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

character of war.¹²² Not only did he recognize the value of leveraging the new generation of military officers in his reform efforts, but he also identified the need to mobilize society as a whole to fight wars rather than rely exclusively on a professional, full-time military.¹²³ Additionally, Frunze drew conclusions about the interplay between national character and geography as a necessary factor in shaping the nature and doctrine of the Red Army. In support of this point, he identified the rise of telluric Germany as an aggressive capitalist and authoritative land power in contrast to the existence of the British Empire as a colonial maritime power.¹²⁴ Given the nature of Russian geography, Frunze saw marginal value in the development of fortifications to protect the massive borders of the homeland. Similarly, he foresaw the need to counter the technological advancements from rivals while developing forces capable of operating over long distances with initiative and independence.¹²⁵ Unfortunately, for Frunze and the growing body of military thought in the Soviet Union, he did not survive what some historians have classified as an assassination during a medical procedure in 1925.¹²⁶ Yet his ideas impacted future generations of Red Army Officers who were educated in the Frunze Academy and later served as members of the Soviet General Staff created in 1935.¹²⁷

In 1936, prior to his execution during Stalin's purges of the Red Army Officer Corps, a preemptive action to address his fears of a military coup, Isserson characterized the Soviet adoption of operational art as a way to navigate "a new epoch in military art."¹²⁸ In his work, *The*

¹²² Mikhail Frunze, "Unified Military Doctrine and the Red Army," *Armiia i revoliutsiia [Army and Revolution]* 1 (July 1921): 1-2, translated by David R. Stone 2006, accessed 16 December 2019 <http://www-personal.k-state.edu/~stone/FrunzeDoctrine>.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁵ Frunze, "Unified Military Doctrine," 6.

¹²⁶ Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation 1955-1991* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 39.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁸ Isserson, 48.

Evolution of Operational Art, Isserson theorized about the need “to shift from linear strategy to deep strategy,” that proved capable of destroying enemy military forces in depth. In a sense, operational art developed in the context of great power competition, societal upheaval, and disruptive technologies that led to the linear expansion of warfare between “multimillion-man armies” equipped with advanced military technology.”¹²⁹ The expansive nature of conflict was accompanied by the challenge of mobilizing and deploying vast resources provided by national industrial and manpower bases to the correct locations at the right time to support activities on the tactical and operational levels of warfare.¹³⁰

Consequently, the prospects of cognitive shock delivered through the execution of deep operations surfaced as a solution to break the stalemates witnessed in the trenches of the First World War.¹³¹ This revolutionary approach to warfare, championed by Soviet theorists such as Mikhail Tuchchevsky—Chief of the Red Army General Staff from 1925 to 1928—required a total militarization of the Soviet Economy to provide the Red Army with the material requirements to mechanize the Red Army and transition it into a capable combined arms force able to conduct multi-echelon offensive operations.¹³² As opposed to the conception of pitched, linear warfare, the essence of deep operations aimed to fix enemies linearly before penetrating their system in depth with columnar formations and activities that shattered the internal coherence of the enemy system.¹³³ Not only did the concept call for the isolation and destruction of enemy forces in detail, it also aimed to disintegrate the ability of an enemy system to exert command

¹²⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹³¹ Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy*, 4.

¹³² Jacob W. Kipp, “The Origins of Soviet Operational Art 1917–1936,” in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, ed. Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 2005), 234-235.

¹³³ Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London, United Kingdom: Frank Cass, 1997), 185.

control its forces. Most importantly, Soviet deep operations aimed at the total de-coupling of an enemy system from its intended aim, leaving it susceptible to destruction in detail in the absence of capitulation.

While Stalin executed, imprisoned, and discharged up to a third of his officer corps during the purges, depriving him of many of his most talented military officers and theorists, many of the ideas of Soviet military art survived.¹³⁴ These ideas, when combined with the technological advancements in armored warfare and aviation, made the execution of deep operations possible in the Second World War (1939-1945).¹³⁵ As the international security scholar Kimberly Zisk argues, the Red Army's "offensive and defensive doctrines for operations in depth came to be the centerpiece of Soviet efforts in World War II, even though Stalin had silenced those doctrines with Mikhail Tukhachevsky's murder in 1937."¹³⁶ Thus, despite the impact of the purges on the development of Soviet military theory, the theorists and operational artists of the Red Army demonstrated the ability to advance the work of their predecessors and construct a theory of victory that accounted for the significant changes in the character of war.

Although the war on the Eastern Front began to shift in favor of the Soviets following the resilient defense of Moscow in 1941 after Hitler's Operation Typhoon, one of the greatest examples of Soviet operational art and operational warfare occurred in Manchuria in the final large maneuvers of the war in Asia. Recognizing the need to recapture and consolidate gains in China and Korea as the Second World War came to a close, the Soviets conducted a massive operation against the occupational Japanese Kwantung Army with a force composed of three fronts that achieved blistering surprise and success in a Cannae-like envelopment.¹³⁷ Ironically,

¹³⁴ Stuart D. Goldman, *Nomonhan 1939: The Red Army's Victory that Shaped World War II*, 29.

¹³⁵ Luttwak, 22.

¹³⁶ Zisk, 40.

¹³⁷ David M. Glantz, "Soviet Operational Art Since 1936," in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, ed. Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 2005), 266-267.

this success came against the perennial adversary that had done so much to expose the Soviets to the need for operational art in the Russo-Japanese War and the early maneuvers of the Second World War.

The Seeds of a New Theory of Action: Completing the Operational Warfare Revolution

Yet, largely because of this lack of material resources, we learned to use those we had in fresh ways to achieve more than would have been possible had we clung to conventional methods.

—Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory*

In his seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn described the process of resolving revolutions as a competition between existing and emerging paradigms when a community is confronted with anomalies that lead to crisis. For the Marine Corps, successive revolutions during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries spawned paradigms that provided solutions to the crises of different eras—the transition to a steam-powered, professionalized Navy; the complexity of amphibious assault operations in modern warfare; and the development of maneuver warfare in the Cold War. While these examples demonstrate how the Marine Corps designed tactical solutions to solve the crises of the past, today’s crisis is fundamentally different. It is, for all intents and purposes, a revolution that requires a focus on joint operational warfare in a globally integrated fashion. Given the context of great power competition, an increasingly complex operating environment, and the emergence of disruptive technologies, the Corps must redesign itself to confront the challenges of a new “epoch of military art” as the nation’s naval expeditionary force in readiness. Consequently, there are a number of reasons why the Marine Corps should institutionalize operational art as a critical aspect of bringing closure to the current revolution.

First and foremost, operational art will provide the Corps with an important tool that will allow it—in conjunction with its partners in the Joint Force—to design, plan, and organize

tactical actions in a manner that delivers desired operational and strategic effects during naval campaigns conducted in conjunction with all-domain, globally integrated operations that span the competition continuum. This is essential in the conduct of twenty-first-century warfare wherein “joint force commanders and component commanders [must] use operational art to determine when, where, and for what purpose major forces will be employed and to influence the adversary’s disposition before combat.”¹³⁸ Additionally, the institutionalization of operational art will contribute to optimizing current and future force design efforts as a means to enable the Marine Corps to adapt and structure itself to operate in fundamentally different and disruptive ways, as an integral member of the naval services.¹³⁹ Finally, operational art, and its ability to force Marines to think beyond tactics, will prepare the Marine Corps to resolve some of the most pertinent issues of the current crisis, including the revision of the organization’s doctrinal, conceptual, and educational enterprise; prepare the Corps for the future of joint operational warfare; and foster effective naval integration that enables meaningful contributions during the conduct of naval campaigns and fleet operations.

As General Charles C. Krulak, the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, wrote in his introduction to the 1997 edition of MCDP 1, “Military doctrine cannot be allowed to stagnate, especially an adaptive doctrine like maneuver warfare.”¹⁴⁰ Given the wide acceptance of operational art across the Joint Force, the time has come for the Marine Corps to introduce the concept into its own service-level doctrinal hierarchy. Not only will this provide a bridging mechanism that can join ideas horizontally and vertically across the levels of warfare, but will also ensure that the Marine Corps shares a common, operational warfare lexicon that is accepted across the Joint Force.

¹³⁸ US Department of Defense, JP 1, I-12.

¹³⁹ US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 4; US Marine Corps, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ US Marine Corp, MCDP 1, 4.

While many field grade officers receive exposure to the concept during professional military education experiences, operational art must be part of the doctrine that the Corps uses as a foundation to everything the organization does. After all, while every Marine is expected to read, understand, and act upon the guidance contained within MCDP 1, neither Joint Doctrine nor maritime service doctrine, such as NDP-1, *Naval Warfare*, will ever have the same penetration power or relevance as service-oriented doctrine.¹⁴¹ As Vego contests:

There should be some agreement within a naval service and among sister services about the meanings of key operational terms; otherwise, it is difficult to write sound service or joint doctrine. ... The lack of common terms, the abuse of commonly understood terms, or the use of existing terms interchangeably also greatly complicates discussion among theoreticians of various aspects of operational warfare at sea.¹⁴²

As a result, the Marine Corps runs significant risk in its ability to make relevant contributions to the Joint Force and combatant commanders if it does not institutionalize operational art as a common mental model. In an era wherein the dispersion of forces across the various layers of the global operating model will remain a necessity in operations ranging from cooperation to armed conflict, the Corps needs agile company-grade leaders and non-commissioned officers capable of thinking beyond tactics. The same holds true for senior leaders and their staffs in the conduct of joint operational warfare. The development of Marine Corps leaders at all levels—through education, training, and socialization—must therefore include deliberate, long-term exposure to the concept of operational art if the service desires to fight above its weight class.

Yet, the Corps need not simply adopt wholesale concepts of operational art or operational design from the Joint Force. After all, the development of operational art for the Soviet Red Army and US Army were conceived in the context of organizations focused on the conduct of terrestrial large scale combat operations. Given the Marine Corps statutory role as the nation's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, coupled with the need to achieve new levels of naval

¹⁴¹ US Marine Corps, MCDP 1, 4.

¹⁴² Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 205.

integration, the service must take a deliberate approach in developing a theory of operational art that prepares the organization for conflict in the littorals. Instead, the organization, should design its own service-specific version of the idea through exploration, experimentation, dialogue, and reflection. Doing so will allow the service to optimize its conception of operational art while providing greater value to the Joint Force. After all, the naval warfare theorist, Geoffrey Till, captures this sentiment when he states that “effective jointery is a tremendous advantage in military operations, but only if it is based on a clear recognition of the differences between the services as well as their similarities.”¹⁴³ As a service built to bridge the gap between operations at sea and operations ashore, it is particularly important for the Marine Corps to incorporate applicable aspects and nuances of operational art from each of the services insofar as they apply to the conduct of naval campaigning in all domains. Doing so will provide the Corps with a service-tailored concept of operational art that not only enables the organization to think on the operational level, but also allows it to maximize unity of effort and interoperability with the rest of the Joint Force.

Further, Marine commanders, and, perhaps more importantly, their staffs, must be capable of leading and coordinating the employment of joint, combined, or coalition forces to advance American interests and generate strategic results. After all, just as a Marine Air Ground Task Force can serve as the nucleus of a joint task force, Marine Corps service components must also be prepared to lead other operational warfare organizations. These responsibilities range from leading combined marine components and joint maritime components to the establishment of marine logistics commands to manage operational-level sustainment in support of joint and multinational operations.¹⁴⁴ In any of these cases, it is vital for commanders and their staffs to speak a similar language as the rest of the Joint Force. A continued reluctance to embrace the idea

¹⁴³ Till, 31.

¹⁴⁴ US Marine Corps, MCWP 7-10, 2-10 – 2-12.

of operational art in the Corps' doctrine and lexicon risks the ability of Marines to contribute to and lead military activities on the operational level.

Finally, operational art can also go far in realizing the future of naval integration. In an era wherein sea control and naval supremacy can no longer be assumed, the Marine Corps has an obligation to assist the maritime services in taking a comprehensive approach in preparing for a future in support of naval operations and campaigning.¹⁴⁵ After all, “Maritime campaigns and major naval operations cannot be successfully conducted unless the naval operational commanders [Marines included] and their staffs have a common view of the fundamentals of operational warfare at sea.”¹⁴⁶ This requires the Marine Corps to achieve a new consensus on future employment of Marine forces as an integral part of the maritime services since, according to Vego, the absence of such agreement “complicates the planning, preparation, and execution of a maritime campaign or major naval operations.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, when applied appropriately, operational art can help build consensus and shared mental models across the maritime services while also helping to guide them in advancing beyond their traditional conceptions of warfare and preference for the tactical level of warfare. In this regard, the effective application of operational art in the maritime domain requires imagination and creativity that allows operational commanders to overcome service parochialism and the inertia of tradition.¹⁴⁸

This is particularly important since maritime services often struggle to think on the abstract and emergent levels of strategy and operations—focusing instead on new applications of military technology, “targeteering,” and the idealized concept of decisive naval battle.¹⁴⁹ This, of course, makes sense with a history steeped in the great, decisive naval battles of centuries past, to

¹⁴⁵ Till, 58 -59.

¹⁴⁶ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 205.

¹⁴⁷ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 205.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁹ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, xii.

include Quiberon Bay, Trafalgar, Tsushima, and Midway. Yet, given the evolutionary changes in telecommunications, area denial capabilities, precision guided munitions, and the global dispersion of military capabilities, the prospects of decisive naval battles that destroy the entirety of an enemy's combatant fleet appear are little more than wishful thinking, if not suicidal, in the twenty-first-century. In this regard, the concentration of forces at sea in traditional naval warfare continues to lose relevance with the passage of time despite its allure.¹⁵⁰ Given all of the competing tensions in the conduct of future naval operations—service parochialism, institutional inertia, and resource priorities—operational art will enable greater interservice cooperation in the drive toward naval integration. As Vego states,

operational warfare at sea is the only means of orchestrating and tying together naval tactical actions within a larger design that directly contributes to the objectives set by strategy. A tactical concept for the employment of one's maritime forces cannot lead to victory if it is not an integral part of a broader operational concept.¹⁵¹

Ultimately, the success of tomorrow's joint combined operations and campaigns will depend on each of the services to generate operational and strategic effects through the orchestration of harmonious and coherent actions and activities on the tactical level of warfare. In an effort to prepare the organization for the challenges of great power competition and the global integration of operations, the Marine Corps must institutionalize operational art as a means to drive effective force design and enable the organization to play a critical role in designing, planning, and executing naval campaigns in the future. Operational art exists in the cognitive domain, and it represents a human-centric creative activity. Given the Marine Corps' continued focus on the centrality of human capital—as opposed to technology, weapons, or material resources—as the organization's key competitive advantage, success in the future will rest on the

¹⁵⁰ Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 511.

¹⁵¹ Vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea*, 20.

ability to harness the power of thought and ideas.¹⁵² Operational art is an essential element of the Operational Warfare Revolution, and its incorporation into the organization’s doctrine, culture, and lexicon offers the Corps the opportunity to bolster the its ability to “out-think, outmaneuver, and out-fight any adversary under conditions of disruptive change.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018*, 5.

¹⁵³ US Department of Defense, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018*, 5.

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