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Strategic Decision Space: The Marine Corps in the 21st Century

by

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STRATEGIC DECISION SPACE: THE MARINE CORPS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Strategic leaders desire as much decision space as possible before committing to a course of action and applying national resources during a crisis or conflict. The nature of the future security environment and the locations where dynamic global trends are converging to create instability requires the United States to exploit its' asymmetric advantage in expeditionary naval power. Assured access and crisis response capability throughout the global commons and littorals allow the US to project power and reassure our allies and partners. Forward deployed amphibious forces create options for the National Security Council (NSC) to maintain, or regain, relative advantage in the strategic decision space during an emerging crises or conflict. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) provides a sound construct for posturing credible and capable amphibious forces to protect and secure our national interests. When aboard naval shipping and utilizing the sea as maneuver space, the MAGTF can rapidly project capabilities across the range of military operations (ROMO) and set the conditions for the Joint Force to conduct follow-on operations. Whether responding to crisis or conflict, the MAGTF is postured to expand the strategic decision space of the NSC.

STRATEGIC DECISION SPACE: THE MARINE CORPS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

As the nation faces a period of fiscal austerity, and the military eyes significant cuts within the Department of Defense, it is a national security imperative to maintain a credible means of crisis response or assured access to the global commons. The chaotic nature of the international security environment requires an expeditionary force capable of mission sets across the range of military operations to provide strategic decision space for our national leaders.[1] By most estimates, in 2025, the world population will "increase by more than 30 percent and be more heavily concentrated within the littorals…[and] more than 60 percent of the earth's population will live in urban areas."[2] The significance of this global demographic migration will pose a challenge that requires a capability to operate in the global littoral regions; regions that combine the air, land, and sea domains to define its maneuver space.

Domain-optimized forces often times experience friction at the seams – the air, land, and sea – creating national security gaps that potentially shrink strategic decision space and reduce policy options. As a maritime nation, reliant on the global maritime commons for the exchange of commerce and ideas, the Marine Corps fills a unique niche and has "repeatedly demonstrated its institutional and operational adaptability by effectively bridging…the seams between domains."[3] And although the nation's requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan have focused the attention of the Marine Corps on land warfare, the enduring missions of assured littoral access and crisis response are uniquely Marine Corps capabilities.[4] Optimized for expeditionary employment during international emergencies and limited contingencies, the Marine Corps is a "crucial

aspect of the larger joint force effort to gain and maintain overseas access for operations in peace, crisis, or war."[5] Forward-deployed Marine forces aboard naval shipping have a long and varied history of being employed and sustained from the sea without reliance on host nation ports, airfields, or permissions – a critical capability to promote stability and mitigate uncertainty in the global commons and littorals.[6]

The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) is a fundamentally sound construct for employing Marine Corps forces in the global commons and littorals, and offers a variety of options across the range of military operations. The MAGTF's operational flexibility and array of capabilities are unique among the services within the Department of Defense; cross-domain capacity is a capability multiplier that supports Ship To-Objective Maneuver (STOM) by amphibious forces against hybrid threats. Furthermore, MAGTF modularity is a service-specific feature that supports force expansion or contraction as circumstances and objectives require, allowing scalable responses and high degree of flexibility for policy-makers. For example, "modern amphibious assaults…seek to avoid enemy strengths by exploiting gaps and weaknesses…[as demonstrated] by the Task Force-58 assault that seized key terrain south of Kandahar 450 miles inland in 2001."[7]

As Commandant James F. Amos reiterated in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, "The Corps is not a second land army….amphibious forces provide operational reach and agility, they "*buy time"* and *decision space* for our national leaders in time of crisis."[8] By expanding the strategic decision space, the Marine Corps alters the calculus by generating time and options for our national leaders to reassure partners, deter potential enemies, and respond to emerging crises. As one

element within the greater instruments of national power, the Marine Corps is uniquely positioned to be utilized by national leaders to respond to geostrategic challenges. This research paper will examine three primary concepts as outlined above; 1) What is strategic decision space, 2) How utilizing the sea as maneuver space generates strategic options in the future security environment, and 3) How the ability of the Navy-Marine Corps team to rapidly aggregate or disaggregate forces relative to crises and conflict expands strategic decision space.

Strategic Decision Space – Conceptually Defined

Strategic decision space, for the purpose of this discussion, is the concept of maneuvering through time with decisions to achieve equilibrium within the Clauswitzian Trinity. This balance increases the odds for the effective development and implementation of national policy during an emerging crisis or conflict, and aligns that policy to meet strategic ends. Strategic decision space includes structuring the use of time by maneuvering inside the decision space of an adversary or an emerging crisis. It is applying the instruments of national power to strategic ends to shape events, contemplate courses of action, and develop policy options within the time horizon of a crisis or conflict. In short, maneuvering within the strategic decision space is the manipulation of time by expanding its linearity to develop options, generate resources, and influence key actors toward our strategic ends.[9]

For the US, strategic decision space resides within the National Security Council (NSC) as the nexus between policy development and implementation authority. As illustrated in Joint Publication 1-0, “The NSC plays key roles in the integration of all instruments of national power facilitating mutual understanding, cooperation, and integration of effort.”[10] Furthermore, Presidential Policy Directive - 1 (PPD-1) states “the

National Security Council shall be the principal forum for consideration of national security policy issues requiring Presidential determination...and shall advise and assist me in integrating all national security policy as it affects the United States"[11] Ultimately, the President is the final arbiter regarding policy decisions, but the tools available to the NSC allow for the expansion or contraction of the strategic decision space relative to emerging crises and strategic ends.

It is worthwhile to note that each state or non-state actor has its own strategic decision space where they operate to determine their interests and achieve their distinct end-states. However, not all actors are created equal; the capacity to apply the instruments of national power is not uniform in the international system. Capability and capacity varies between each state and non-state actor, as does the ability to rapidly bring those instruments of power to bear on an emerging crisis or conflict. In these cases, their relative strategic decision space contracts; sub-optimal options due to the lack of capability, lack of capacity, or insufficient means of response constrain the pursuit of their distinct strategic ends. An asymmetry emerges between policy and capability, which begets an out of balance Clausewitzian Trinity – generally the first step toward strategic failure.

The purpose of this analysis, however, is to develop a conceptual approach that examines the readily available military instrument of national power that the NSC can apply to an emerging crisis or conflict to expand the strategic decision space. And it is within this decision space, relative to time, that the NSC is able to fully develop a balance between strategic ends and available means. Maintaining a crisis response capability ensures that the NSC can manage the tempo of events and generate

opportunities relative to an adversary or an emerging crisis. This does not ensure mastery over a crisis or conflict, but rather it simply alters the calculus in a manner that supports assessing optimal long-term policy solutions to meet strategic ends. The inherent complexity at the strategic level, however, is evident in the process of applying national means to achieve strategic ends. The capability to rapidly deploy resources across the spectrum of conflict is an imperative in order to expand the strategic decision space to shape of events in the pursuit of desired end states.

The complex interaction of state and non-state actors within anarchic international systems is dominated by dynamic decision-making relative to strategic ends. Dynamic decision making theory was developed to study those decision-makers who choose among various options along a given time continuum in order to control, structure, and sequence events to optimize their performance within a dynamic system.[12] Furthermore, dynamic decisions comprise three common characteristics: "(1) a series of actions that must be taken over time to achieve some overall goal; (2) the actions are interdependent so that later decisions depend on earlier actions; and (3) the environment changes spontaneously and as a consequence of earlier actions."[13] Consistent with the characteristics of emerging crises, conflict, or wicked problems, dynamic decisions are a distinct feature of the national security environment.

That is, the structure of the dynamic decision-making process distinguishes the strategic decision space of a nation. Organizational efficiency and capacity constitute the measure of a nations' crisis response capability. Furthermore, the dynamic decision-making process is unique to complex systems, where both exogenous and endogenous factors affect the system and can occur either sequentially or near

simultaneously. Therefore, relative to time, decisional inputs will generate feedback loops that further affect the system in near real time, and continually alter conditions and possible outcomes. This differs fundamentally from static, or classical, decision making processes that involve stable or closed systems that change slowly relative to time.[14]

During dynamic decision-making, the strategic decision space is the conceptual area where the NSC can evaluate long-term policy decisions and options relative to an emerging crisis. The malleability of the strategic decision space, through expansion or contraction, is realized by effective maneuvering via decisional inputs. This offers resistance to attractive short-term pay-offs that are associated with suboptimal decisions during the perceived immediacy of a crisis which often conflict with long-term strategic ends. It is within the perceived immediacy of dynamic decision-making that give rise to organization or individual cognitive biases. These landmarks, which are "salient contextual cues associated with particular states in the environment that serve as anchors or reference points to guide decision making and planning"[15] can derail the NSC when analyzing the events of an emerging crisis.

In effect, when a crisis erupts the strategic decision space often rapidly contracts due to the lack of accurate information, an increased level of uncertainty, and a high degree of complexity. In these instances, organizational and personal cognitive biases can result in anchoring on past decisions or experiences to reduce uncertainty and influence potential options or feasible courses of action. Lacking credible means to shape events and reduce uncertainty can reinforce past anchors, or landmarks, and decrease realistic alternatives. Or, when operating outside the tempo of an emerging crisis, or in the absence of a crisis response capability or capacity, the strategic decision

space will also contract relative to time. This can lead to sub-optimal policy choices that are based on short-term pay-offs and which often times are asymmetric to long term policy objectives. By applying what we know worked in one environment to another distinct and complex future security dilemma can potentially solve the wrong problem, or equally as devastating, ask or frame the wrong question.

To overcome cognitive bias and perform objective policy analysis, the NSC must efficiently and effectively maneuver in decisional time relative to an adversary or crisis. Gaining sufficient systemic understanding reduces the reliance on cognitive bias, mitigates the level of uncertainty, and reduces complexity. In turn, this can increase the efficacy of dynamic decision-making. Additionally, the discriminate application of the military instrument of national power can structure and sequence events in a manner compatible with long-term policy objectives. When done in concert with the unique nature of an emerging crisis or security threat, the strategic decision space can expand. Thus, possessing a credible crisis response capability across the spectrum of conflict that can shape events and generate favorable policy options across the DIME can enlarge the strategic decision space for our Nation's leaders. This in turn, allows the NSC to align strategy with policy, balance the Clausewitzian Trinity, and optimize the implementation of all the instruments of national power toward long-term policy objectives.

At the individual level, time is the currency of human of existence; at the strategic level, time is the currency of national existence, or more directly, the measure of a nation's decision-making process relative to an international crisis. [16] In and of itself, time is linear in form and unsusceptible to manipulation; it is a constant variable in the

decision-making calculus. That is, time is impervious to the human dimension inherent in conflict, war, or crisis that otherwise affect nations and determine the course of history. The passage of time will occur regardless of events, but decisions within the context of an emerging crisis structure the passage of time to the advantage or disadvantage of policy-makers and nations. Thus, in crisis and conflict, the benefit derived from compressing or expanding decision-making time is fungible; advantage passes between adversaries. Ideally, the proper structure and sequencing of decisions, and the available means to expand or contract decision space, will produce an advantage for policy-makers in the strategic environment and advance national interests.

Manipulating events within the linearity of time produces strategic opportunities and creates efficiencies. It allows the decision-making process within the NSC to fully mature, and offers a greater range of policy options that support national values, interests, and end-states[17]. And assuming decision-making time relative to an adversary or a crisis is a fungible commodity, it is imperative to increase the disposable time relative to an adversary or a crisis maneuvering in the same environment. In this sense, international events possess an internal clock, so to speak, that self-regulates the pace of activity; the inherent forces in distinct complex systems dictate the internal speed, pace, and tempo of events in the absence of an external variable.

For strategic decision-makers to attempt to manage a wicked problem, an adversary, or a crisis requires an external systemic input whose capabilities provide a range of options to alter events or decisional processes. Ideally, these capabilities will reflect the range of operations that can serve as a rheostat to expand or compress

strategic decision space through distinct and discriminate options. The NSC can employ escalation, de-escalation, compellence, or coercion to alter the calculus and form a more cogent response that is symmetrical with strategic objectives and balances the Clausewitzian Trinity. The rapid crisis response capability inherent in the military instrument of national power provides the NSC with a credible means of expanding the strategic decision space to favorable conditions that furthers our national interests and achieves strategic ends.

In effect, the NSC's manipulation of time through decision-making processes, available options, and the application of the DIME is a strategic-level equivalent to Boyd's tactical OODA loop.[18] The strategic decision space of the US – as it resides in the NSC – and the readily available and executable options across the DIME generate opportunities that establish peer competitor advantage in the security environment. Strictly speaking in the military sense, few nations possess the expeditionary capability and capacity to rapidly inject external variables into complex systems and emerging crisis. Forward deployed forces aboard maritime vessels offer a quick response capability to the NSC to swiftly react, and in discerning moments to proactively shape, a crisis or conflict. In this sense, the application of US forces via the global commons and littorals provide assured access and crisis response regardless of permissive, uncertain, or denied environments.[19] In any case, however, the external input changes the environment and permits a diplomatic maturation process – conducted in parallel – that increases options, dictates the tempo, and enables the NSC to alter the risk/reward calculus vis-à-vis national policy and strategic ends.

Furthermore, diplomacy requires negotiation, and for negotiation to be successful the nation needs leveraged strategic decision space; that space defined by the scalable application of the instruments of national power relative to time. A force that operates from the sea retains flexibility and scalability, operational and strategic reach, and possesses the inherent capability of generating a favorable strategic tempo. As Marine Corps Commandant James F. Amos stated, "there remains an imperative for a force that can respond to crisis situations immediately and create options and decision space for our Nation's leaders."[20] Not only do amphibious forces offer the nation's leaders a credible offensive capability, they also serve as a deterrent by creating dilemmas for our adversaries. Expanding our strategic decision space through the military instrument of national power demonstrates power projection, reassures our allies and partners, and creates diplomatic opportunity.

Character of Conflict in the 21st Century – Hybrid and Irregular

The overwhelming operational success of Operation Desert Storm in 1991 convinced many nations that force on force wars against the US are unwinnable. As a result, our adversaries have adopted the dispersed employment of conventional and irregular tactics and techniques to counter our conventional pre-eminence.[21] Additionally, climate change and demographic shifts to the urban littorals increase the likelihood of humanitarian disasters, areas of instability, and open conflict over scarce resources like water and food. Round the clock global news broadcasting and social networking will continue to increase international visibility, generating a demand for US action. Where these conditions merge, US forces can expect to respond across the range of military operations, and to assure access despite the permissive, uncertain, or hostile nature of the environment.

The character of conflict is evolving in a manner which is redefining the role of the military in future limited wars against "adversaries that employ a hybrid of traditional, irregular, catastrophic and disruptive capabilities through non-state or state actors to gain an advantage."[22] The US "can no longer consider unlimited war or 'overwhelming physical destruction' of an enemy as the exclusive driver of military capabilities."[23] Instead, conflict will reflect the dynamic process of human competition that seeks the ultimate prize of localized legitimacy. This will demand innovative applications of instruments of national power that generate options and increase strategic decision space. Most likely, increasing instability will drive non-great power conflict toward the irregular and asymmetric in the near-term. And this will generate a paradigm shift away from the traditional approach of military on military war. That is, warfare historically characterized by unit maneuver, logistical supply, and mathematical timetables and rather toward a blend of information operations, cyber-warfare, and a combination of conventional and irregular military tactics of extended duration against both state and non-state actors.[24]

Just as war is a catalyst of change, the conditions that precede conflict or crisis will have profound repercussions on the character and methodology of future conflicts and wars. As the global trends evolve, the requirement to engage in remote areas to deter aggression or provide stability will increase. From humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to offensive combat operations in remote regions of the globe, JOE 2010 predicts that "the Joint Force will be challenged to maintain both a deterrent posture and the capacity and capability to be forward-engaged around the world…to act in ways to both prevent and win wars."[25] Thus, the security environment demands a force that can

respond to crisis and conflict that is uncertain, yet with capabilities that are responsive to operational objectives that are aligned with strategic end-states. Optimizing cross-domain capacity in future crisis with "the ability to seize bases in enemy territory by force from the sea and air could prove the critical opening move of a campaign"[26] – as evidenced by TF-58's seizure of FOB Rhino, and follow-on capture of the airfield in Khandahar, Afghanistan in 2001.[27]

As the future security environment continues to evolve, the competition for resources will increase among great-powers and peer competitors, not to mention emerging nations who are struggling to expand their economies and modernize their societies. Weak and failing states that are rich in natural resources, but lacking legitimacy and security, will likely become sources of regional conflict and international friction.[28] Increasing littoral urban density and the rise of coastal mega-cities are converging with resource scarcity, uneven prosperity, and the struggle for governmental legitimacy and will contribute to increasing instability and sources of conflict.[29] Power projection via the global commons in this environment is essential to maintain peace, ensure stability, and promote economic vitality. Likewise, the threat posed by anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) weapons systems will challenge US influence in these dynamic regions and threaten our freedom of maneuver via the global littorals.

Decreasing defense budgets and the requirement to prioritize security requirements in the dynamic international system will naturally constrict the strategic decision space where the NSC operates. Events such as the Arab Spring in the Middle East, piracy off the coast of Africa and South East Asia, and growing instability in Central Asia will create security policy dilemmas as US grand strategy shifts toward the

Asia-Pacific rim.[30] The uncertainty and unpredictability of hybrid and irregular threats will dominate the security environment and present peculiar and distinct challenges to US interests. Although future security problems will have regionalized solutions, and the US should strive to act multi-laterally with capable partners, the instruments of national power have varying degrees of effectiveness when applied via coalition.

Thus, the NSC should expect the strategic decision space calculus to include a degree of agency loss in achieving strategic ends.[31] Acting unilaterally is becoming increasingly unacceptable and marginally effective politically when implemented across the international system. The regional nature of future security threats nearly demands a transnational composition to ensure legitimacy of action. Yet, in Priorities for 21st Century Defense, President Obama states that "the United States will continue to lead global efforts…to assure access to and use of the global commons..."[32] Therefore, power projection and assured access capabilities to operate in the global littorals must be retained by the US going forward. Because, "just as maritime trade has long been a key element of economic prosperity…sea power historically has been an essential ingredient in both protecting [US] national interests and promoting the stability of the global system."[33]

Dominating in the Global Littorals – Expanding the Strategic Decision Space

Forward deployed amphibious forces aboard naval vessels afford strategic advantages for the Nation. To the point, "the perception that U.S. forces cannot gain or sustain access or influence in regions of interest to our nation or those of key allies could severely undercut American diplomacy and deterrence."[34] The maritime advantage of the Marine Corps provides an "inherent speed and agility that buys time for our Nation's leaders."[35] More directly, the Marine Corps' "rapid response capability

presents unique opportunities to develop strategic options, shape the environment, and set conditions to deploy the full capabilities of the Joint Force and other elements of National Power."[36] When employed for crisis response or as part of a theater campaign plan, within the context of the military instrument of national power, the Marine Corps rapidly expands the strategic decision space.

The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) provides clear strategic guidance on the importance of overcoming anti-access challenges.[37] Within the context of an unpredictable and dangerous security environment, the QDR displaced Cold-War era planning assumptions and methodologies, and introduced creative and adaptive adversaries that are uninhibited by doctrine. The QDR succinctly captured the asymmetric nature of future adversaries and tactics highlighting the employment of systems, methods, and means that will offset historical US military dominance. In response, the QDR assigns the US military a key mission area to "deter and defeat aggression in anti-access environments."[38] Clearly, the QDR acknowledges that our enemies are looking toward new weapon systems and niche capabilities that exploit the availability of low-cost commercial and dual-use technologies to enhance legacy systems and deny us access to regions where our interests are threatened.

Projecting power abroad, a hallmark of US credibility, is increasingly being threatened. Multi-domain threats in the form of anti-ship cruise missiles, 'quiet' submarines, long-range air defense capabilities, advanced-technology mines, network-based computer threats and large numbers of small, fast-attack surface craft utilizing 'swarming' threaten unimpeded naval operations.[39] Sea-based expeditionary forces are well suited for overcoming many, if not all, of the constraints posed by the contextual

framework of the future security environment. Amphibious forces free the politicians from negotiating costly, and often times restrictive, use of existing ports or airfields. From the outset, forward deployed amphibious forces expand the strategic decision space of the NSC; sea-basing permits the avoidance of enemy force concentrations around key operational and strategic nodes, as well as the quid pro quo associated with political negotiation.

Using the relative security of the sea as maneuver space, the Joint Force Commander (JFC) can rapidly assemble and introduce amphibious forces directly into an objective area. The neutrality of international waters provides flexibility for the NSC to respond to a crisis or shape a conflict with the inherent capabilities of an Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU) that possess options across the range of military operations.[40] Furthermore, amphibious forces reduce strategic risk by employing littoral maneuver that seeks to exploit gaps and seams in the enemy's total defensive system. The operational surprise afforded by the ARG/MEU translates into strategic decision space: the adversary may know that amphibious forces are off the coast, "but the depth and breadth of the penetration points that the [amphibious forces] may employ can be hundreds of miles apart."[41] A forward and credible presence to project decisive combat power where our national interests are threatened create the strategic decision space to mature diplomatic solutions or impose our will through the use of force. In either case, the flexibility to choose from a range of military options expands the strategic decision space.

Since the end of the Cold War the extensive array of overseas US bases strategically located in proximity to likely threats has been significantly reduced. The

global network of bases, ports and airfields is continually diminishing, and US forces are transitioning toward a more expeditionary posture.[42] There is no indication that this trend will reverse anytime in the near future either, due to mandatory cuts in the Department of Defense's budget as a result of the Budget Control Act of 2011.[43] However, using the sea as maneuver space to employ amphibious forces will offset reductions in permanent overseas bases.

The *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* notes that "the most likely occasions requiring the commitment of joint forces will arise…in places where few or no forces are permanently stationed."[44] Strategic dissonance would occur between national strategic guidance if the US lacked a capability to reach geographically remote crises or was unable to negotiate diplomatic solutions that generate strategic options. Clearly, this lack of capability would rapidly constrict the NSC's decision space. Therefore, utilizing "the sea as maneuver space…to overcome diplomatic, geographic, and military impediments to access has re-emerged as a critical enabler for extending US influence and projecting power overseas."[45] Seabasing is a capability that exploits US strategic dominance in the maritime domain. Through power projection and assured access the US can continue to shape and respond to the security environment; developing and maintaining a robust amphibious capability is an imperative to maintain dominance in the strategic decision space.

Power Projection – A Strategic Requirement

Amphibious forces contribute to a fundamental strategic requirement; power projection. That is, in conjunction with US Naval and Air Forces that establish theater entry and maintain localized domain supremacy, amphibious forces extend the range of US power projection throughout the global littorals, and beyond. However, the

capabilities of amphibious forces across the ROMO also afford Geographic Combatant Commanders flexibility to secure US strategic interests in those areas where localized domain supremacy is unnecessary or too costly. The Marine Air/Ground Task Force (MAGTF), which by its nature is scalable and largely self-sufficient, allows the nation to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces "to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability."[46] Furthermore, the versatility and lethality of amphibious forces expand the strategic decision space at "the most dangerous and critical point of power-projection, the trans-domain environment at the air-sea-land interface."[47]

MAGTF's form the nucleus of Marine Corps amphibious operations and consist of "four core elements: a command element, a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, and a logistics combat element."[48] The organization, training, and equipping of a MAGTF is defined by its expeditionary nature and cultural pre-disposition; it is fast, austere, and lethal.[49] Strategic imperatives in the security environment require rapid deployment and force posturing to operate upon arrival or when directed by the President across the ROMO. For example, in the last ten years MAGTF's have conducted campaigns against Afghanistan and Iraq, counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, numerous Non-combatant Evacuation Orders (NEOs), frequent Humanitarian-Assistance operations, and countless security cooperation training events.[50] Creating space and generating options is the forte of the MAGTF; postured for rapid response to unanticipated crises, conflicts, or threats is the value of the MAGTF.

As the emerging security environment evolves, creating effects in the littorals will determine our maritime success and strategic dominance. Instability in ports of embarkation, threatened choke points along the sea lanes, and migrating populations toward coastal mega-cities has shaped the maritime challenges of the Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC).[51] MAGTF force packages satisfy the requirement for operational reach from the maritime domain to strategic objectives along the littorals or hundreds of miles inland – as evidenced by TF 58's seizure of FOB Rhino in Afghanistan in 2001 or 26 MEU's support of the NATO mission in Libya in 2011. The GCC's understand the strategic significance of amphibious forces. Whether through their deterrent effect or range of offensive and humanitarian options, MAGTF demand has increased across the GCC's by 30 percent since Fiscal Year 2008.[52]

Seabasing – Posturing for Crisis Response and Assured Access

Permanent US overseas bases and ports have steadily declined since the end of the Cold-War, and the current fiscal situation in the US will most likely accelerate that trend. In those areas where US forces are most likely to be deployed, limited basing or lodgments exist to support operations in pursuit of our national interests. Seabasing amphibious forces relieve diplomatic pressures and mitigate risk in high-threat or non-permissive areas by reducing the US footprint and minimizing targeting opportunities for enemy forces. Furthermore, "seabasing…will allow the joint force to fully exploit one of this nation's asymmetric advantages – command of the sea."[53]

Seabasing amphibious forces is inherently maneuverable, scalable, and networked to enable global power projection that responds rapidly to emerging crises and assures access in hostile and non-permissive areas.[54] Seabasing ensures US advantage in the international strategic decision space and provides the NSC with a

capability to initiate or sustain combat or humanitarian operations across all domains. Recent examples of operations that utilized the seabasing concept to achieve US strategic interests include: 1) Operation Tomodachi, disaster relief in Japan in 2011, 2) Operation Unified Assistance, tsunami relief in Indonesia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka in 2005, and 3) Joint Task Force Liberia, US response to the second Liberian Civil War. These instances, and countless others, validate the seabasing concept of amphibious forces and are indicative of future trends in the employment of US forces.

As the US pivots toward the Asia-Pacific region, the capacity for littoral maneuver and seabasing amphibious forces will become increasingly advantageous for Geographic Combatant Commanders and Joint Force Commanders. Although A2/AD weapons systems suggest that amphibious operations may be costly, they do not eliminate their necessity. Amphibious forces create dilemmas for the enemy and generate operational advantages for the US within a strategic context. During Operation Desert Storm, for example, Marine Corps forces aboard naval vessels in the Persian Gulf forced Iraq to make a strategic investment in defending the Kuwaiti coastline. The capacity to conduct amphibious operations expanded the strategic decision space of the Allied force and enabled a highly successful land campaign. Conversely, the Iraqi strategic decision space contracted rapidly once Marine Corps forces appeared off the Kuwaiti coast. Iraqi forces, to their peril, were compelled to assume risk in the desert to counter the possibility of an amphibious landing.

Given the nature of the future security environment, however, conflicts will most likely not resemble the Gulf War. In all likelihood, “future joint theater entry will often be mounted in areas away from existing ports, airfields, and logistics infrastructure

ashore."[55] Focusing on avoiding enemy strengths and maneuvering through, or over, the littoral regions largely negates adversary investment in A2/AD weaponry. Seabasing enables this critical capability and fulfills a strategic imperative to assure access and facilitates crisis response to maintain international order, reassure allies and partners, and deter potential adversaries.

Massing and Dispersing – The Strategic Effect of Amphibious Forces

Massing and dispersing amphibious forces via seabasing extends the littoral maneuver space of the Marine Corps.[56] The MAGTF, as an operational methodology to employ amphibious forces in conjunction with the joint force is a strategic multiplier for the NSC. Whether conducting over the horizon operations, forcible entry, power projection or humanitarian assistance, the ability to position and employ amphibious forces has significant strategic value. For example, since 1990 137 amphibious operations were conducted throughout the global and littoral commons across the range of military operations.[57] As the majority of those instances attest, "the ability to rapidly introduce maneuver forces…allows the JFC to seize the initiative and alter the initial conditions of a conflict."[58] Likewise, at the strategic level, the NSC can adjust the decision-making calculus and expand the decision space through the option of employing capable amphibious forces in crisis or conflict.

The strength of the MAGTF, and amphibious forces in general, lies in their ability to rapidly aggregate or disaggregate to achieve strategic effects across the ROMO.[59] That is, to perform crisis response with overwhelming advantage, or to conduct multiple simultaneous operations across the ROMO for strategic effect. As a hedge against risk, the Navy-Marine Corps team "provides time, space, and options to national leadership in times of crisis…[to] bolster diplomatic efforts with credible force."[60] The following

examples provide overwhelming validation of the concept of rapid aggregation or disaggregation of amphibious forces to achieve strategic objectives and expand strategic decision space:

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, two ARG/MEUs already afloat in separate theaters of operation aggregated off the coast of Pakistan to form Task Force 58 and was the first conventional force into Afghanistan. From a naval shipping seabase, TF 58 projected, supported, and sustained Marine Corps combat operations 450 miles from the sea. Furthermore, TF 58 opened and secured a lodgment for the injection of additional joint forces that supported the seizure of Kandahar and follow-on operations several hundred miles further inland.[61] By rapidly aggregating two MEU's, previously operating in two separate Geographic Combatant Command's Area of Responsibility, the NSC rapidly amassed combat power off the coast of Pakistan. This presence offered military options to the NSC, and presented a credible presence to assist in diplomatic efforts to persuade Pakistan for basing and overflight rights. Forward deployed amphibious forces were a decisive factor in the nation's ability to set the initial conditions and obtain relative advantage in the strategic decision space after the attacks on 9/11.

Operation Iraqi Freedom I required the aggregation of three ARG/MEUs already afloat as well as two amphibious task forces (ATFs) that originated from the United States. ATF East and West provided Marines to support the overland attack into Iraq, while two ARG/MEUs conducted operations in the Al Faw peninsula and provided reinforcements for the Marine Corps advance to Baghdad. The third ARG/MEU landed their Marines in northern Iraq to assist Kurdish forces after they liberated Mosul.[62]

Turkey's refusal to allow United States' forces to transit its territory created an operational, and by extension, a strategic dilemma for the United States. Without a two front campaign to divide and weaken Iraqi forces, the Joint Force Commander needed additional forces along the main axis of attack. Amphibious forces, by rapidly aggregating in theater, allowed the Joint Force Commander to maintain the operational initiative despite the politically induced adjustment of the operational campaign plan. At the strategic level, the NSC exercised a level of flexibility that most likely would not have been possible without forward deployed amphibious forces. Amphibious forces contributed to the operational advantage and strategic flexibility that enabled relative advantage within the strategic decision space during the invasion of Iraq.

The Peleliu ARG/15th MEU conducted sustained disaggregate operations in 2010 utilizing a 'split ARG' approach to conduct security cooperation events in Timor Leste, Indonesia, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. At the conclusion of the security cooperation events, the ARG/MEU was tasked once again to support simultaneous and geographically separate operations. In Pakistan Marine forces conducted humanitarian operations due to severe flooding, while at the same time flying combat sorties into Afghanistan. At the same time, disaggregate ARG/MEU forces were conducting simultaneous operations over 1400 miles away that included freedom of navigation operations in the Gulf of Aden and counter-piracy operations throughout the Horn of Africa.[63] Split ARG/MEU operations are a force multiplier at the strategic level due to the inherent capability to conduct multiple operations across the ROMO in geographically separate areas. As a crisis response capability, amphibious forces generate options for the NSC; simultaneous combat operations, humanitarian assistance, and security

cooperation engagements create strategic flexibility and expand the strategic decision space.

Conclusion

Strategic leaders desire as much decision space as possible before committing to a course of action or applying national resources to a security problem set. A capable and credible force that can gain contact at the onset of a crisis or conflict and build situational awareness of the operating environment expands the strategic decision space of the NSC. It is within this expanded decision space that the NSC can contemplate options to maintain decisional advantage relative to a crisis or conflict. Furthermore, the rapid injection of forward deployed amphibious forces is often the most readily available option for the NSC to gain initial contact with an emerging crisis. As the crisis matures and NSC awareness increases, the ability to maintain the initiative in the strategic decision space reduces the risk associated with committing additional national resources across the DIME or ROMO, whichever is more appropriate for the given crisis of conflict.

Where access is questionable, though, seabased amphibious forces provide flexibility. Unconstrained by diplomatic pressures to secure basing rights and overflight, or in the absence of a permanent US presence nearby, seabased forces utilize the oceanic expanse and global littorals to gain access to those areas where the security environment is most unstable. Moreover, seabased amphibious forces minimize risk by limiting the US footprint ashore, or simply bypassing adversary strong-points to secure or protect national interest. Utilizing the sea as maneuver space is an asymmetric advantage that seabased amphibious forces provide; unmatched US capability in this

domain can be exploited by the NSC to maintain relative advantage within the strategic decision space.

The utility of the MAGTF is a proven concept. Amphibious forces employed under this construct have validated their strategic relevance in past operations across the ROMO. As the future security environment remains uncertain and unpredictable, the need to maintain an amphibious capability that is adaptable and responsive is a strategic imperative. Most likely, modern amphibious operations will incorporate innovative approaches that supplant traditional amphibious assaults that were ponderous and reliant on brute force to achieve the desired results. The NSC, and by extension the Joint Force, will reap the strategic benefits of an agile amphibious force that can rapidly aggregate or disaggregate forces to service national interests across the ROMO. Furthermore, the MAGTF, by its very nature, is postured to expand the strategic decision space at the earliest indication of an emerging crisis or conflict. The persistent forward presence of amphibious forces, organized under the MAGTF construct, ensures the US can maintain, or rapidly regain, the strategic initiative when global conditions warrant decisive action.

Endnotes

[1] See, for example, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States,* Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 02 May 2007 Incorporating Change 1, 20 March 2009), I-15 - I-17, for a characterization of the future security environment and the requirements for the US military to operate effectively within it. Accessible online at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1.pdf.

[2] See, for example, U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Amphibious Operations in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, March 2009), 2. Accessible online at http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/seabasing/resources/Articles/amphib%20Ops%20in%20the%2021st%20Century.pdf. See also, U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment*, JOE 2010 (Suffolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 18February 2010), 12-60, for a detailed

analysis on trends influencing the future security environment, as well as a contextual framework for likely areas of future tension and conflict. Accessible online at http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyarchive/2010/JOE_2010_o.pdf.

[3] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, June 2010), 3. Accessible online at http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/uploads/files/MOC%20July%2013%20update%202010_Final.pdf.

[4] Despite prolonged operations in the Land Warfare domain, the Marine Corps has conducted 137 amphibious operations in the last 20 years. See, for example, General James F. Amos, *2012 Report to Congress on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps*, Posture Statement presented to the United States Congress, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, 16 February 2012), 2. Accessible online at http://www.marines.mil/unit/hqmc/cmc/Documents/CMCs%202012%20Posture%20Statement.pdf.

[5] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 9.

[6] With the proliferation of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) weaponry, this research paper operates under the assumption that Naval and Air forces will provide theater level access and freedom of maneuver as a precursor to effective littoral maneuver for the MAGTF embarked on naval shipping. This operating concept is similar to air supremacy, or localized air superiority, as a precursor to effective Close Air Support (CAS) in support of maneuver warfare. Or, depending on the level of national interest threatened, the existence and presence of A2/AD weaponry might mean that we need to be comfortable operating within the threat rings as crises erupt.

[7] General James F. Amos, U.S. Marine Corps, *The Future of the Military Services and the Consequences of Sequestration before the House Committee on Armed Services*, 2 November 2011, 5-6. See also, TF-58 Gazette article for a detailed analysis of the rapid aggregation of 2 MEUs to conduct the overland assault which originated, and was sustained for a prolonged period, from naval shipping.

[8] General James F. Amos, "Role of the United States Marine Corps," Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Washington, DC, 12 Sep 2011.

[9] George Geczy, *Identifying the National Security Council's Strategic Decision Space*, Strategy Research Project, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 23 March 2007), 2.

[10] U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, I-8.

[11] President of the United States, *Presidential Policy Directive – 1*, (Washington DC: The White House, 13 February 2009), 1-2. Accessible online at http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/ppd/ppd-1.pdf?ref=Presidential.

[12] See, for example, Jerome R. Busmeyer, "Dynamic Decision Making," Indiana University, 1999. See also, Amy Lynn D'Agostino, "An Investigation of the Role of Cognitive Style in Dynamic Decision Making," University of Connecticut, 2009.

[13] Busmeyer, "Dynamic Decision Making," 3.

[14] D'Agostino, "An Investigation of the Role of Cognitive Style in Dynamic Decision Making," 1.

[15] A Ross Otto, et al, "Navigating through abstract decision spaces: Evaluating the Role of State Generalization in a Dynamic Decision-Making Task", *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review,* no. 16 (Oct 2009): 957.

[16] Kenneth F. McKenzie, "Maneuvering in Time", *Marine Corps Gazette*, Feb 1991, 72. In this article McKenzie develops the concept of time as maneuver space relative to ground operations. Although his examples are land warfare domain specific, his notion of maneuvering in time can be extrapolated as one component of the strategic decision cycle, which forms the foundation of this authors' notion of decision space.

[17] For a detailed description of enduring National Values, Interests, and End-States, see Barack H. Obama, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010).

[18] For a complete description of Boyd's OODA (Observation, Orientation, Decision, Action) loop, see John R. Boyd "Patterns of Conflict", accessed at http://www.ausairpower.net/APA-Boyd-Papers.html on 27 December 2011. Although this conceptual model was initially designed for fighter pilots to gain tactical advantage in aerial combat, the model is appropriate as a framework to characterize the various phases of crisis interaction. This author utilizes this model due to its conceptual familiarity within the Department of Defense.

[19] U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint* Operations, JP 3-0, (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 11 August 2011), defines permissive, uncertain, and denied environments in the following manner: *Permissive Environment* – Operational Environment in which host country military and law enforcement agencies have control as well as the intent and capability to assist operations that a unit intends to conduct; *Uncertain Environment* – Operational environment in which host government forces, whether opposed to or receptive to operation that a unit intends to conduct, do not have totally effective control of the territory and population in the intended operational area; *Denied Environment* – An area under enemy or unfriendly control in which friendly forces cannot expect to operate successfully within existing operational constraints and force capabilities.

[20] General James F. Amos, *The Future of the Military Services and the Consequences of Sequestration before the House Committee on Armed Services,* 3.

[21] Some conflicts that illustrate the asymmetric nature of post-Desert Storm U.S. military interventions include; Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

[22] U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Maneuver From the Sea: The Capstone Operational Concept*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 25 June 2008), 2.

[23] Ibid, 1.

[24] See, for example, the works of Antoine-Henri Jomini, Karl von Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, and others for classical theory on more traditional and conventional military operations. See Thomas X. Hammes, Martin Van Crevald, and John Keegan for more modern theory related to 4th Generation, non-trinitarian war.

[25] U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment,* 60.

[26] Ibid, 63.

[27] Task Force 58 (TF-58), led by then Brigadier General James Mattis, conducted an amphibious assault over 400 miles into the land locked country of Afghanistan to establish the first conventional ground presence in the opening operations of Operation Enduring Freedom. Follow-on operations from FOB Rhino included the seizure of Khandahar airfield where US forces established the first permanent airfield that became a primary logistical hub for sustained operations against the Taliban. For additional details on TF-58 see, Commander TF–58, *Command Chronology*, in reality, a superb after-action report (AAR). Copies available from author.

[28] Areas of potential conflict based on this description can include Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caspian Sea Region, North Africa, the Middle East, and Southern and South-Eastern Asia.

[29] See, for example, United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2011*, accessed at http://foweb.unfpa.org/SWP2011/reports/EN-SWOP2011-FINAL.pdf, for a detailed analysis of the macro trends and dynamics that are facing the 7 billion people who inhabit the planet. Evolving population dynamics such as, large youth populations, population migration, increasing urbanization, population sustainment through water and food resources, and adequate health care, to name just a few, will all affect the future security environment and add layers of complexity to security policy options. See also, Robert M. Gates, *National Military Strategy 2011* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 08 February 2011), 2, for a succinct analysis of the impact of demographic trends.

[30] See, for example, Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century* Defense, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012).

[31] Principal-Agent Theory suggests that when employing others to accomplish a task that is of primary interest to you, and only a peripheral interest to the employee, there will be a loss of effectiveness and efficiency. For instance, someone you employ to mow your grass rarely does it the way, or to the standard, that you would if you had done it yourself. As the US faces budgetary constraints and strategic leaders are intimating that partner nations will begin sharing some of the international security requirements, there is an assumption that our interests will not met. In effect, there will be an agency loss in the global pursuit of our national interests when the US agrees to give partner nations the lead in an international crisis or conflict.

[32] Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, 3.

[33] Douglas M. King and John C Berry Jr., "National Policy and Reaching the Beach", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, 137, vol.11 (Nov 2011), 20.

[34] Robert O. Work, "Hitting the Beach in the 21st Century", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, 136, vol. 11 (Nov 2010), 17.

[35] General James F. Amos, *2012 Report to Congress on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps,* 2.

[36] Ibid, 2.

[37] See, for example, Robert M. Gates, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2010).

[38] Ibid, viii.

[39] Ibid, 31.

[40] The Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit is the baseline forward deployed amphibious force. Doctrinally, it consists of (1) Command Element, (1) Ground Combat Element consisting of a reinforced infantry battalion with armor and mechanized assets, (1) Aviation Combat Element consisting of a reinforced squadron with rotary and fixed wing assets, and (1) Logistics Element. The MEU, which consists of roughly 2,500 Marines, is berthed on three naval amphibious ships that can operate in aggregate, or in disaggregate distributed operations.

[41] F.G. Hoffman, "21st Century Amphibious Capability", *Marine Corps Gazette*, December 2011, 12.

[42] U.S. Department of the Navy, *Naval Operating Concept 2010: Implementing the Maritime Strategy*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, 2010), 59.

[43] See, for example, *The Budget Control Act of 2011*, S. 365, 112th Cong., 2nd sess. (5 January 2011), for the enforced discretionary spending limits associated with sequestration. Although the Act does not specify the closing of any overseas bases, this author's analysis assumes that a reduction in overseas investment and divestiture of overseas bases will accompany any reductions in overall Defense spending. Accessible online at http://rules.house.gov/Media/file/PDF_112_1/Floor_Text/DEBT_016_xml.pdf.

[44] Admiral Michael G. Mullen, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, 15 January 2009), 3.

[45] U.S. Department of the Navy, *Naval Operating Concept 2010: Implementing the Maritime Strategy*, 14.

[46] Ibid, 60.

[47] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 10.

[48] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 91. The largest MAGTF, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), is the principal warfighting unit for the Marine Corps and includes at least a Marine Division (MarDiv), a Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), and a Marine Logistics Group (MLG). The Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) is the "middleweight" MAGTF and consists of one reinforced infantry regiment, one Marine aircraft group, and a combat logistics regiment. The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) is the standard deployed MAGTF, and when attached to naval shipping is considered an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). It consists on a reinforced infantry battalion, a composite squadron on rotary, tilt-rotor, and fixed wing aircraft, and a task-organized logistics combat element. Lastly, a Special Purpose MAGTF, (SP MAGTF) is a non-standard organization temporarily formed to conduct a specific mission.

[49] See, for example, George Flynn, "Fast, Austere, Lethal: Marine Core Values", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, Vol. 135, No. 4, (April 2009), 46-51.

[50] See, for example, Douglas M. King and John C. Berry, "National Policy and Reaching the Beach", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, Vol. 137, No. 11, (November 2011), 20-24.

[51] See, for example, Samuel C. Howard and Michael S. Groen, "Amphibious, Now More Than Ever", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, Vol. 137, No. 11 (November 2011), 26-30.

[52] Ibid, 28.

[53] U.S. Marine Corps, *Seabasing,* Marine Corps Wafighting Publication 3-31.7, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, August 2006), 1-2.

[54] U.S. Department of the Navy, *Naval Transformation Road Map 2003: Assured Access and Power Projection From the Sea*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, 2003).

[55] Robert O. Work, "Hitting the Beach in the 21st Century", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, Vol. 136, No. 11, (Nov 11), 18.

[56] See, U.S. Department of the Navy, *Naval Operations Concept 2010: Implementing the Maritime Strategy,* for a joint Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard concept for utilizing the sea as maneuver space. NOC 2010 articulates how naval forces can be employed to support combatant commanders' operations, contingency plans, and theater security cooperation plans. Accessible online at http://www.navy.mil/maritime/noc/NOC2010.pdf.

[57] U.S Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Ship to Objective Maneuver,* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 16 May 2011), 1.

[58] LtCol (Ret.) F. G. Hoffman, "21st Century Amphibious Capability: Strategic and Operational Advantages", *Marine Corps Gazette*, (December 2011), 12.

[59] The terms aggregate and disaggregate are currently non-doctrinal. They are, however, becoming part of the lexicon within Naval and Marine Corps circles when discussing amphibious operations and the employment of the ARG/MEU in the future security environment. The idea of disaggregate operations for sustained periods of time has significant implications for the naval force, as well as logistical implications for Marine Corps forces embarked on naval ships. Marine Corps Combat Development Command is experimenting with definitions and concepts to introduce doctrine that will guide the future employment of amphibious forces under this construct.

[60] General Joseph F. Dunford, *Statement of the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Before the Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on Total Force Readiness,* 26 July 2011, 1.

[61] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 94.

[62] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 94.

[63] See, for example, John Berry, “U.S. Marine Corps in Review”, *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, Vol. 137, No. 5, (May 2011), 84-90.