



## Toward an “Open Source” Maritime Force Structure

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## **About the Author**

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The U.S. Navy’s updated *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* outlines several key themes and areas of development for the sea services as they continue the transition from the focus on the land wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Some are new, a few are traditional, and several provide an interesting perspective on previously gestating concepts. One item of particular interest, and the focus herein, is the call to “expand the practice of employing adaptive force packages, which tailor naval capabilities to specific regional environments.”<sup>2</sup> This seems like something that should be fairly intuitive, something that should evolve naturally as the sea services adapt to new and challenging circumstances. However, the argument here is meant to suggest something broader, a more conceptual rethink of how the maritime services, collectively, develop and deploy force structure packages. In short, all three maritime services should work toward the creation of an integrated, open framework for force development and deployment. A framework which replaces the practice of haphazard or incoherent deployment of assets, deployments with little or no connection between platforms deployed and overarching strategic aims. Abandoning a practice that indelicately pushes standardized—one size fits most—force packages into meeting unique operational requirements, and instead develop a system that identifies operational requirements and allows the relevant services (even when acting in concert with partner nations) to more precisely match particular capabilities to unique operational requirements.

An open source framework that incorporates the entire panoply of American maritime assets could radically improve the ability of service and theater commanders to make the most of available resources in responding to the necessities of policy and operational planning. At the same time, such a framework would translate the nuts and bolts of operational planning into a strategy-driven budgetary and policymaking process. Breaking the often-bemoaned cycle of budget planning driving strategy, the two would essentially become mutually reinforcing.

## 1.0 FORCE STRUCTURE PARADIGMS: PAST

While it would be simplistic to suggest that the Navy has only ever deployed in large carrier-centric battle fleets or carrier strike groups (CSGs), this would accurately reflect the bulk of naval deployments in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, for decades the de facto standard of amphibious force deployment has been the amphibious ready group (ARG), complete with its embarked Marine expeditionary unit (MEU), though there certainly have been exceptions. One exception of particular interest was the 1980s concept of the surface action group (SAG), a fairly utilitarian employment of selected smaller surface components, centered around the four remaining battleships.<sup>4</sup> That this surface action group concept has recently been brought back into discussions regarding “distributed lethality” is certainly a step in the right direction, but something far more comprehensive is required.<sup>5</sup>

The carrier strike group represents the purest and most potent expression of the modern battle fleet, and it will continue to do so. However, this concept of the surface action group, and others like it, might present the kernel of a much larger idea, better suited to meet the needs of American naval strategy when implementing the new vision of the *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*. Strategy, after all, is the balancing of ends, ways, and means. It is important, then, for sea service and theater commanders to develop the best possible system for precisely tailoring their ways and means to fulfill the desired ends of policy.

Likewise, the Marine Corps finds itself standing once again at a crossroads in history, even if it does not recognize its own vulnerable position. Its long excursion into land warfare has left its bonds

with the Navy, the Marines’ natural partner, increasingly atrophied and weak, and the joint forcible entry amphibious mission has evaporated under the glaring heat of new anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities fielded by the nation’s competitors. The Army, much larger and better equipped, is rushing to claim all aspects of ground war in an effort to shore up its own position within the spectrum of military operations, and the Navy itself has been oddly silent on the need for survivable amphibious ships in its out-year budgets. The Marines have spent the better part of four years attempting to keep a foot in both the land and maritime realms, positioning themselves as the nation’s all-purpose “9/11 emergency response force.” “The Few and the Proud” are oddly alone, and they seem to be the last ones to realize it.

This is not the first time that the Marines have faced a strategic inflexion point—that moment when an organization realizes that the lessons that have gotten them this far will not take them to the next level. On numerous occasions, the Marines have found themselves threatened by extinction, only to establish a new niche in the threat environment of their present day. The Marines started out as a shipboard auxiliary force to the early Navy, assisting in the defense of U.S. ships and taking a leading role in boarding parties attacking enemy craft. During the interim period of the early 19th century, Commandant Colonel Archibald Henderson pivoted the force toward small land campaigns, first against native indigenous populations and later as a force in the Mexican American War. Following the retreat of a small force at the First Battle of Bull Run, the Marines played only a small role in the Civil War, but the Spanish American War saw the Corps begin to emerge as a small-unit, maritime, expeditionary force. This was firmly cemented when the General Board charged the Marines with the mission of seizing advanced bases, and the Navy with providing support to the Marines to accomplish this mission. This mission evolved over countless small expeditions and during the inter-war period of rapid innovation when Commandant John A. Lejeune charged Major Earl “Pete” Ellis with working out the Marine Corps’ role in Plan Orange, the war plan that focused on the Japanese in the Pacific. Ellis’s effort, “Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia, 1921,” was quickly renamed Operational Plan 712D by the Commandant and committed the Marine Corps to perfecting methods of seizing bases in the Pacific through amphibious operations.

Korea and Vietnam witnessed the Marine Corps disembarking from Navy ships to fight land campaigns in order to maintain their relevance within those conflicts, but when those wars ended, the Marines returned to increasing complex and capable amphibious ships to re-man their units, re-equip their force, and re-train for their core mission of amphibious assault. However, today is different. When the Marines went into Afghanistan, they launched from a force of light amphibious carriers, landing platform docks (LPDs), and dock landing ships (LSDs). That is not the force they will be coming back to.

The maritime environment has grown exponentially nastier over the past generation. Only 20 percent of the world’s beaches are suitable for amphibious operations using the Corps’ present complement of utility landing craft. On a positive note, the United States knows where those beaches are. To the negative is the fact that our competitors do as well. Any landing onto a contested beach is sure to be met with combinations of mines, missiles, and precision strike weapons, all of which have matured technologically, increasing their lethality and rendering the approaches to most beaches a murderous kill zone. Historians might point out that the Marines have seen this before, and cite World War II amphibious campaigns as examples of the Marines facing overwhelming odds and prevailing despite high losses. However, Americans no longer fight wars like that, and no political leader would authorize an operation like the one at Iwo Jima wherein



18,000 Americans were wounded, and nearly 7,000 Marines were killed. Civilian and military leaders recognize this and have begun to back away from platforms needed to perform this mission, hence the recent cancellation of the expeditionary fighting vehicle. The Marines need to find a new role for themselves, separate and distinct from joint forcible entry/amphibious operations or once again risk extinction. This is why they have spent the past four years attempting to reconnect with the maritime environment and rebrand themselves in the American consciousness as the nation’s emergency response force, a nebulous assignment but one that at least suggests the possibility of maintaining their manning and their funding. Fortunately, there is always a home for them in the United States Navy, and a role in exerting “influence” across the spectrum of engagement.

## 2.0 FORCE STRUCTURE PARADIGMS: ADAPTING TO THE PRESENT

There have been a number of relatively recent proposals outlining new and innovative force structure concepts, to better apply available platforms and assets tailored to meet the needs of emerging operational requirements. By and large, these concepts are agnostic to specific geostrategic or geopolitical conflicts. They are tailored to meet a particular range of strategic and operational challenges, either current or envisioned, at various points in the broad spectrum of conflict scenarios. Two illustrative and widely discussed examples of this are the influence squadron and the U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command’s *Expeditionary Force 21* (EF21). Both of these concepts provide new, adaptive means of assembling and deploying available systems and platforms (means) that can be tailored by policymakers and theater commanders (ways) to accomplish the desired ends of policy. One could argue that both concepts reflect an emphasis on this notion of influence.

“Influence” is a critical, and yet ethereal, term within naval strategic literature. Mahan’s use of the word within his seminal *The Influence of Seapower Upon History* cemented it into the canon and yet left it largely undefined in the decades that followed. It became, almost as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once wrote about obscenity, something that could be recognized only when observed. The Court later recanted this opinion, which is unsuitable for the application toward influence and seapower as well.

Influence is described as the capacity to have an effect. It does not produce the effect, but rather, almost like a shadow, represents the object that casts it, suggests the potential effect, and nudges the actors in play toward the desired end state. Given the fluid nature of power at sea, Mahan made an inspired choice in the selection of the word. Today, influence is understood to cover the entire spectrum of military engagement, from routine presence missions to nuclear strategic deterrence patrols. Influence is generated and felt at every step of the inclined engagement ladder.

A recent area of focus on influence operations has focused on one of the most interesting and revolutionary lines of the 2007 *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower* (CS21) in which the leaders of the three United States sea services stated, “We believe that **preventing wars is as important as winning wars.**”<sup>6</sup> This statement was breathtaking. Recognizing that maintaining the peace was a critical function of military services, the document went on to state that the types of activities then can be viewed as peace-preservation, or “influence” operations: remaining forward deployed, maintaining naval presence patrols, providing security force assistance, building partner capacity in the maritime realm, and engaging in humanitarian assistance and disaster response. The thought is that providing assistance, such as rubella and polio vaccines to isolated littoral populations, or that having SeaBees dig wells so that villagers do not have to walk great distances for

clean water, can engender the type of goodwill that heads off conflict and extremism years before it can become a threat to the United States.

When first conceived, the “Influence Squadron” consisted of an amphibious “mothership” (likely an LPD), along with a destroyer, LCS, JHSV, coastal patrol ship, and M80 Stiletto.<sup>7</sup> The argument being, that this collection of maritime assets, with its range of reinforcing skill sets, would provide the optimal range of capabilities for partner engagement and low-level combat operations in certain environments. As Dr. Jerry Hendrix noted in his article outlining the concept:

These forces, operating every day around the world, would represent the preponderance of visible U.S. naval power. Their understated capabilities would epitomize America’s peaceful, non-aggressive intent, and would carry out the new maritime strategy’s stated purpose of providing positive influence forward.<sup>8</sup>

As first presented, the “Influence Squadron” concept sought to marshal the growing potential of new platforms. In the seven years since CS21 appeared, the Navy has taken large steps to solidify its commitment to low-end, influence operations, and its amphibious ships have been major participants in these operations.

Often sailing without their Marines embarked, these ships have served as the Swiss army knives of the Navy’s inventory. Equipped with hospitals, well decks, helipads, and aircraft hangers as well as the traditional missiles and guns that adorn other naval ships, they can respond to all forms of tasking, but they are very expensive. Their expense derives from two sources: mission creep and survivability. Their ability to do most any mission has led to their being tasked to do most any mission, and requirements for additional command and control (e.g., radios, radar, and combat information centers) have been tacked on to the bill with the passage of time. Survivability requirements come with the mission, however. Landing troops in the face of armed opposition in a littoral environment means taking some hits, and ships need to be able to survive those hits and keep fighting. For this reason, the amphibious force is built with the highest levels of survivability, and that comes with a cost.

As previously mentioned, the proliferation of anti-access/area denial technologies over the past 20 years heralds the end of opposed amphibious landings. Given this fact, there is cause to reconsider the ships to which Marines can and should be assigned. Marines have already begun to focus on new air and surface connectors that will enable future operations. The MV-22 and CH-53 helicopters, based from Expeditionary Transfer Docks (ESD)—formerly designated Mobile Landing Platforms—and Expeditionary Mobile Bases (ESB)—formerly designated Afloat Forward Staging Bases— built to commercial standards for less than one-third of the cost of a San Antonio class LPD, will be able to deliver discreet teams of Marines in waves to undefended locations, much as was done in Operation Rhino in Afghanistan in 2001. At this time, ESDs and ESBs are envisioned working with the present amphibious force of light amphibious carriers, platform docks, and landing ship tanks, but the addition of these platforms raises the potential of Marines working with other ships now entering the Navy’s inventory.

Both the Littoral Combat Ships and Expeditionary Fast Transports (previously designated Joint High Speed Vessels) have more in common with the ESDs and ESBs than meets the eye. Beyond their mutual high-speed capabilities, they also represent derivatives of commercial designs and were built with the intention of keeping costs low. (LCS did not meet this expectation.) Survivability was

not a priority in design as none of the platforms was intended to operate deep in a combat zone, and each possesses excess room and an open architecture command and control system to accommodate multiple roll-on/roll-off sensors and weapons over their service life. It is their roominess and open architecture that ought to interest Marines. Each of these ships offers opportunities for small teams of Marines to embark and operate, performing a multitude of traditional and non-traditional roles.

Here we begin to see the merits of a parallel concept to the “Influence Squadron,” the Marine Corps’ Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), outlined in the 2001 iteration of the Cooperative Seapower Strategy. In essence, the ESG sought to pair the amphibious power projection capability of the ARG-MEU with credible surface combat power through the addition of surface (and subsurface) combatants. The value of the ESG concept was in its inherent flexibility and its ability to provide the optimal maritime counter-terrorism force. This flexibility meshes quite well the Marine Corps’ recently developed *Expeditionary Force 21*.

### 3.0 HOW WE FIGHT

Emphasis on precisely this sort of flexibility has only grown in recent years, and seems set to continue well into the future. With the development and release of Marine Corps Combat Development Command’s *Expeditionary Force 21*-capstone concept, the Marine Corps has significantly expanded its push toward a more modular and adaptive force structure.<sup>9</sup> In addition to further pursuing cross-service integration with Navy and Coast Guard platforms and skillsets, the EF21 concept reflects another large step toward a more scalable force-deployment structure. However, while the capstone concept focuses on a select range of force-deployment capabilities, and places specific emphasis on the potential for these units to operate in a “disaggregated” fashion, it does not go far enough in providing a holistic system that can truly capitalize on the potential of cross-service integration.<sup>10</sup> Both concepts, and numerous others that are or might be gestating in and outside of the various service communities, provide new and useful ideas to be codified in doctrine and assimilated into strategic and operational planning. However, they do not go far enough. What is needed is a much large and broader conceptual redesign of maritime force structure development and deployment.

The structure of the recently released *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (a rewrite of the 2007 strategy) is perhaps just as telling as the content of the document. Section II, *Forward Presence and Partnership*, explores in a thorough and cogent fashion the varied dynamics of maritime cooperation across numerous geographic regions in which the maritime services operate. This, one must imagine, was quite deliberately separated from Section III, “*Seapower in Support of National Security*,”<sup>11</sup> wherein the specific strategic and operational paradigms were explored in a geographically non-specific fashion. This structure treats presence and partnership as concepts uniquely realized in each specific geographic and geopolitical circumstance, while not taking the same approach to the just-as-diverse range of national security concerns across the globe. But it is important to discuss on their own terms both specific geographical and geopolitical security concerns in the various regions in which the services operate. These region-specific security concerns, and the strategic and operational precepts they require, should guide future policy. Ultimately, the practice of strategy is applying the appropriate operational paradigm to specific geopolitical and geostrategic challenges.

There are, or will almost certainly be, classified annexes to the strategy, which detail specific approaches to specific regional concerns, but these could be counterintuitive to best practices, and

ultimately hinder the policymaking and strategymaking processes. To be sure, tactics and techniques, the specific means of war fighting, are and must be treated as sensitive material, but in the words of noted naval strategist J. C. Wylie, strategy is “everyone’s business.”<sup>12</sup> Wylie went on to write, “There is nothing ‘secret’ about strategy, per se,” emphasizing that the more people who know about and understand a strategy, the healthier our public discourse and democracy will be. “The Congressman voting on a military appropriation is, in a very real sense indeed, making a fundamental strategic decision, and he does not need very many ‘secrets’ to lead him toward sound decision.”<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, Wylie’s argument will likely be proven true. With such a significant amount of emphasis placed on increasing our forward posture and presence, in the newly released strategy, our allies and adversaries alike will discern strategic intent by observation. How and where we distribute our naval surface forces will be quite visible, regardless of the secrecy with which we try to treat such decisions. Rather than treat this as something to be hidden, we should embrace the diplomatic and deterrent value of clearly signaling our national strategic interests and resolute forward posture.

#### 4.0 TOWARD OPEN ARCHITECTURE

Instead of developing a range of semi-related, but structurally separate, concepts for adaptive force deployments, the sea services collectively should develop a new, more holistic, force generation paradigm. This new structure should be capable of incorporating those force packages already mentioned, while providing the means to better identify and develop unique force deployment packages tailored to specific strategic or operational requirements. This would not require new platforms or systems, though it should improve the ability of the services to identify what new platforms and systems are required, but serving instead as an open source system for what is now in service, while also adapting and integrating new platforms as and when they are developed. Thus, it would continually expand the options available to theater and combatant commanders in addition to highlighting gaps or shortfalls in needed capabilities as they seek to respond to the requests of policymakers.

There are two primary strategic advantages to an open system. The first is that it provides a readily applicable means of scaling force deployment to any specific situational need across the entire spectrum of potential conflict scenarios. From the sort of phase zero/phase one operating scenarios—for which the Influence Squadrons were envisioned—in order to better facilitate partner engagement and development, all the way through to the sort of high-intensity fleet battle for which the carrier strike group remains the predominant means of achieving victory. Also included within this spectrum are all manner and scale of surface action as well as amphibious force projection, and point-defense capabilities that might be required. Whether it be a squadron of ships preselected specifically to meet the challenges of littoral combat in a strait or archipelago, or a mixed white/gray hull task force conducting counter-piracy and counterterrorism operations, perhaps even an integrated ship- and shore-based point-defense system for continuing Ballistic Missile Defense operations. Such action groups could even be tailored for small seaborne special operations infiltration via submarines to kinetic ship to shore-raiding operations, and continuing up the spectrum toward large-force amphibious assault to secure the beachheads. In essence, forces could be tailored specifically to meet all of the needs and ways in which seapower becomes landpower.

The second major strategic advantage of an open system is that its inherent adaptability perfectly suits the re-emergence of specific, yet diverse, geo-strategic challenges. Recent scholarship, such as Sam Tangredi’s book *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering A2/AD Strategies*, explores the contemporary



and historical precedents to the anti-access challenges facing today’s naval strategists. Works such as Tangredi’s have shown there is, in fact, a tremendous amount of historical precedent to be found for the challenges faced by today’s maritime services. While, in broad terms, these operational paradigms and stratagems transcend specific political or regional circumstances, in specific instances they are, in fact, the byproduct of unique political and geographic circumstances. These circumstances have occurred throughout history and will continue to shape the character of wars conducted in a given physical space. Even within the same overarching conflict, however, geography can and will dictate that the scale, scope, and intensity of combat vary among and even within theaters.

Thankfully, the physical dynamics of those theaters are eternal and result in predictable tactical, operational, and strategic priorities and necessities. Prudent theater, combatant, and service commanders, through diligent staff work, can develop tailored force structures to meet the specific challenges likely to be faced in those domains.

While both the South China Sea and the Strait of Hormuz may pose broadly similar A2/AD challenges, they present very different geographical and political characteristics. As such, the ideal allotment of resources to counter these threats should not be the same. Assessing and identifying each of these geostrategic situational requirements and designing tailored, adaptive force development packages provide the most prudent and economical means of deploying the many maritime assets at the disposal of today’s commanders and policymakers.

One practical example would be to look at the diverse operational requirements of recent naval deployments off the Horn of Africa. A tailored deployment of assets to provide better pairing of skills to operational requirements might consist of a task force built primarily around an ESD or ESB, functioning in both a C2 and logistical support/sustainment role, paired with some combination of EPF, LCS, or perhaps even a partner nation’s small frigate or corvette. These assets, grouped together, would be capable of providing a range of maritime security options to the theater commander. If this grouping were expanded to include a national security cutter or offshore patrol cutter, it would be tailored to provide a robust package of military and law enforcement assets for counter-piracy and maritime security operations. By further (or alternatively) augmenting this grouping of assets, and utilizing the flexibility inherent in the ESD/ESB concept, a SOCOM detachment could also be included to expand the already-stated missions, to include a robust counterterrorism capability.

Other examples of this tailored approach could include groups comprising primarily one or more LCS (and/or the upcoming small surface combatant frigate [FF] version of the LCS hulls), paired with a Burke or Zumwalt class guided-missile destroyer (DDG), and an ESD/ESB with an embarked detachment of Navy, Marine, or even Army attack helicopter assets. This package could provide a robust, but specifically tailored, force to operate in a contested littoral area or strait, in either an offensive or defensive capacity. One example being a force that would exploit the mine-countermeasures skills of LCS, the mother-ship capability of an ESB to launch or control attack helicopters or small autonomous combatants best suited to countering swarming forces in a contested environment; while also harnessing the power of the DDG to provide an air defense umbrella and the powerful sensor packages of advanced Aegis systems to further increase the effectiveness of the surrounding assets. Variations on this concept could have a wide range of applicable geostrategic scenarios, from strategic choke points like the Dardanelles and the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, to confined sea spaces like the Aegean, Black, or Baltic Seas.

These eventualities are within the remit (broadly conceived) of what was suggested by the Influence Squadron concept. The subtle distinction is that each of these variations is and should be viewed as a unique composition of maritime assets, tailored specifically to the task at hand in the particular theater of operations. Although this open source framework would not, in and of itself, determine adequate force levels to meet the needs of a given challenge, it would highlight the skills required, which in turn would allow specific force levels to remain fluid. In peacetime, these force levels would likely be contingent on both budget and availability. In wartime, these force levels could be, to some reasonable extent, developed via existing practices of net assessment. In either context, the specific assets selected are and should be intended to meet the specific needs of the theater strategy and ongoing operational requirements. While influence is an enduring component of American naval power, the more specific needs of strategy and policy require the greatest possible means of adaptation.

In each of the above instances, the tailored force package would be designed to meet the unique needs of the operating environment, without relying on the carrier strike group, and in a fashion that would more readily incorporate the contributions of partner and allied nations. In addition to their corvettes and light frigates, an increasing number of our allies and partners, such as the French, Australians, and Japanese, are deploying new large-deck amphibious assault ships. Within the open source framework, they could complement or replace the ESB in any of the above scenarios, providing even greater capability and increased numbers of attack helicopters and other assets. An example of such collaboration in action include recent operations in Libya. Apache helicopters from the Royal Navy’s HMS *Ocean* operated in coordination with the USS *Kearsarge* Amphibious Ready Group, in furtherance of Operation Odyssey Dawn. An open source framework would make these kinds of peer-to-peer engagement with allies and partners, whether ad hoc or purpose-built, more easy to integrate in the overall planning and execution of operations and contingencies. This emphasis on scalability may represent the potential for a new era for the United States Marine Corps as it transitions from 3-Block warriors to 3-Role-operators.

## 5.0 3-TIER OPERATIONS

Fifteen years ago, General Charles Krulak, the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, coined the terms “3-Block War” and “Strategic Corporal.” Both continue to have relevance today. 3-Block referred to Krulak’s direction that Marines needed to be trained for full-on combat on one city block while also being prepared to provide peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance in the two subsequent blocks. The importance of the “Strategic Corporal,” or the lowest-level leader within the Marine Corps force structure, to carry out these operations became evident in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the actions of a single Marine could, and often did, have significant diplomatic implications. Training a force to have such a diverse set of capabilities was not easy, but the success of the Marine Corps in nearly every task assigned to them suggests the depth of their potential. Perhaps the essential part of their task, which is so overlooked so as to be assumed, is that Marines insist on doing every task assigned to them to near perfection. This characteristic makes them the ideal candidates for a new range of missions in the future security environment.

Tier one is dominated by those missions and operations that fall under the “preventing wars” rubric mentioned previously. Deployed in disaggregated groups the size of a platoon (36 Marines) or smaller on board Littoral Combat Ships or Expeditionary Fast Transports, these Marines would perform Influence missions such as providing security force assistance to partner nations that are experiencing local law or security challenges or building the capacity of that partner to provide their

own security and defense by training them to operate effectively in the maritime environment. Marines operating from these ships, which are known for their speed, could also respond quickly to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster response following hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, or any other natural or man-caused disasters that occur on a regular basis around the world. The goodwill built up by these operations should not be understated. In the village communities that characterize the littoral, the impact of an outsider saving one life can resonate in local lore for generations. Acts of goodwill can also provide resistance to later extremist recruitment efforts. Lastly, pushing training exercises, now routinely held at brigade levels or higher, down to platoon levels will allow the United States to engage with more foreign military and civil authorities in nations so small that their militaries more closely resemble port security forces at the level where they normally operate. The key challenge in this tier would be in identifying the required capabilities needed for local engagement, ranging from languages to medical training to police-security training, and ensuring that each team is equipped with the skill sets required to carry out its tier one responsibilities. In each case, these units, disaggregated across the span of a local theater, would have the opportunity to contribute to building a long and lasting peace by performing critical missions in the highly disciplined and professional manner that is the hallmark of the Marine Corps.

Tier two operations leverage the Corps' historical focus on ensuring that every Marine is trained to be an infantry rifleman and focused on those missions associated with a maritime infantry force, these comprise the types of operations that are most commonly viewed as the Marine's "traditional" missions with their Navy partners. The quotation marks are necessary because the last 15 years have represented a departure from these norms, with Marines spending much of the post-9/11 era disassociated from their ships and Navy brethren. However, it is clear that the Marines are well aware of this aberration and have spent much of the past five years attempting to reconnect with the Navy and to reacclimate to the maritime environment. Significant security challenges would trigger a tier two response from the Corps, causing platoons and squads spread out across a theater to reaggregate with their parent units, with their LCS and EPF ships rendezvousing with expeditionary mobile bases and other traditional L-class ships to consolidate a sea base for maritime infantry operations. This force would take the form of the standard Marine expeditionary unit, comprising an infantry battalion, an aviation combat element, a logistics element, and a command-and-control group, which, combined, add up to a 2,200-man force that can pack a punch across the spectrum of low-end combat operations.

The high end, or tier three operations, takes on a new nuance in warfare. The deployment of two aircraft carriers in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 triggered the development of a new generation of weapons systems focused on holding power-projection forces at arm's length. Emerging anti-access/area denial security environment of the future has arrived. Legacy systems, such as mines and coastal defense missiles, have been supplemented and strengthened by long-range sensors, and ballistic missiles armed with maneuvering re-entry vehicle (MaRV) warheads have rendered the ocean challenging at a distance of 1,000 miles and increasingly impenetrable for every mile of decreased range from the shoreline. Traditional forms of amphibious operations, with waves of assault craft being formed and launched to the beach to disgorge their marines and weapons, are nearly unthinkable.

What is thinkable, and required, is a force that is focused on enabling the Joint Force to operate under the A2/AD umbrella by taking down sensors and weapons systems, both from a distance and up close. The requirement for an anti-access force is readily evident. The type of work necessitates the training of an elite force that is equally tech savvy and exquisitely lethal. Given the

range of scenarios, combatants would need to be comfortable with cyber analysis, firing long-range missiles, and hand-to-hand combat. They would also have to be ready to work in small units; understand air, land, and surface craft; and possess experience in working in and around the small islands and archipelagic waters that dominate the Pacific basin. From every perspective, this job description just screams, “Marines.”

This future Marine force would need to adjust its training regimen to include high-technology systems. Its recruitment would have to resemble more closely the Air Force or Navy to ensure that its personnel could handle the technical requirements of the new systems assigned. These systems would need to be integrated into Marine and Navy shipboard architectures, and Marines would need to undertake regular training on their maintenance and operations. The operations themselves would be challenging, requiring offloading, insertion, perhaps stealthily, and assemblage. Missions may range from kinetic hard kill to cyber intrusions to degrade or destroy enemy systems without ever firing a shot. The integration of sensors, communications, and weapons under challenging, if not hostile, circumstances would require intelligence, discipline, and élan, but in the end creating an ability to penetrate, disrupt, and destroy an opponent’s A2/AD infrastructure.

## 6.0 TABLES AND NOMENCLATURE

The best means of systematizing this concept will likely be to develop a table (or perhaps a matrix) of all maritime platforms and assets, not unlike the Periodic Table of Elements. These platforms and assets would be aligned and/or categorized by the capabilities they provide; thus, highlighting the ways in which different systems could (or could not) effectively be paired together in a tailored force structure in order to achieve a specific style of force presence or level of force projection. Just as in chemistry certain elements of this table would require certain other elements, or perhaps would be rendered incompatible with certain elements. The ultimate aim of it all, however, is to provide a clearer picture of the full panoply of maritime assets, from black- or gray-hulled support/sustainment platforms to the white-hulled Coast Guard Cutters; from the gray-hulled surface combatants (such as PC, LCS, LPD, LHA, DDG, or CVN) to the Marine Expeditionary Unit or the SEAL platoon, from Apache, Cobra, and Seahawk (or Jayhawk) helicopters to Osprey tilt-rotors, and even the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the entire range of maritime assets should be included.

A systemic table that categorizes the available assets would also provide the basis for a new nomenclature or system of crafting and identifying each specific force designated and deployed. Further time and thought would be needed to develop a specific style or vernacular to express the character, composition, and, most importantly, capabilities of each product. It is not a stretch to envision something like the skill and educational identifiers used currently in military personnel-management systems. In any eventual system, the ultimate goal should be something not unlike the language and presentation used in the field of chemistry to represent the elements, compounds, and solutions that exist in the world today. Just as the Periodic Table is used today to create new tailored combinations to meet the needs of science or industry, so too can a similar system improve the services’ ability to meet the needs of policy.

## 7.0 THE WAY WE ARE LIKELY TO OPERATE

Creating a force that can operate effectively across the three tiers described above will not be easy. It would have to be an elite force, not only “special” in the martial meaning of the word, but also in

the intellectual aspect of modern warfare. The Marines have always been a standout military service, even before they claimed to be “The Few, the Proud” in a series of flashy, yet effective, ad campaigns. The country needs a new elite force that can operate in the unique maritime environment that is the Pacific basin, dominated as it is by deep blue waters interspersed by volcanic, archipelagic islands and rising anti-access capabilities. From a strategic organizational standpoint, this force might not suit the Marines’ desires. It might not justify the current size of the force or its current budget, either of which could go higher or lower, but these are not the attributes that should drive national strategy or service force structure.

In budget and force planning, there are two modes of operations that Department of Defense planners anticipate: Military planners focus on the way they want to operate, and civilian planners look at the way the services are likely to operate. History demonstrates that nearly 85 percent of the time, the Navy and the Marine Corps will be performing influence operations in a peacetime, low-level, security environment. Service planners will quickly (and correctly) state that you cannot plan a force around peacetime operations, but nor can you plan it totally focused on the high end. This logic, taken to its natural conclusion, would have the United States Department of Defense focusing almost exclusively on missiles and nuclear weapons as a means for anticipating the worst-case scenario. The post-Hiroshima era has shown us that modern operations will fall somewhere between the peacetime and nuclear extremes.

Military planners like to advance a robust, high-end security environment that highlights requirements for what they perceive to be their core capabilities. The Army likes to conjure images of the Fulda Gap or the broad planes of the desert to highlight the importance of armor and infantry. For the Navy, the next war will include another Battle of Midway, a battle it has been planning to fight, again, for seven decades. The Air Force forecasts the future security conflict as a battle for air dominance and strategic bombing, and the Marines are constantly planning another Inchon landing while also pegging their need to self-generate air and artillery support to a false memory of their “abandonment” at Guadalcanal. These environments drive budgeteers to worst-case scenarios and justify the purchase of high-end, exquisite, and expensive platforms. These, in turn, help the services to defend their portion of the budget, which is always a measure of success, inside the Pentagon. In reality, the conflict we are likely to fight is actually none of these scenarios, and yet all of them, just at a lower level of intensity.

The Navy must have balance in the force, a mixture of high-end capabilities in low numbers to meet dramatic requirements with low-end platforms in higher numbers to meet the day-to-day requirements of keeping the peace. This will be the major challenge of the immediate future, to maintain the peace while ensuring that the nation never has to go to war in the first place. This can be done by remaining forward deployed and present in sufficient numbers in those areas where the United States has national interests. The Navy can do this at sea and with its organic and inorganic airpower, but it needs a partner who can operate ashore with confidence and professionalism. This partner should be trained and equipped to provide “Influence” in everything from disaster recovery to local security in the littoral environments, and must be able to operate effectively in maritime infantry and as an anti-access force roles should a major regional war occur. Only United States Marines have the history, ethos, and background to perform these missions, and they are needed badly in small units on the new ships of the Navy, the Littoral Combat Ships, the Expeditionary Fast Transports, and the Expeditionary Mobile Bases around the world. It is time to re-form the Navy–Marine Corps team with a focus on influence operations.



A great deal of what is proposed here cannot happen in a vacuum; it will require broader changes. Structuring deployments using an open architecture system will surely have Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership & Education, Personnel, and Facilities (DOTMLEPF) implications, particularly in the training and manpower elements of preparing units for sea, but many of these issues are already present in Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard efforts to increase forward posture and presence. For the Navy in particular, these issues might be addressed collectively in the development of a new Naval Operations Concept, which in past iterations has followed closely on the heels of a newly released maritime strategy.

While it is important to highlight these broader implications, the real takeaways from what has been presented here should be the second- and third-order effects of this proposed change. Creating a new, systematic force structure paradigm could improve the way desired strategic ends link up with operational and tactical necessities. By clearly defining the specific platforms and systems needed to meet the specific local and theater-wide geostrategic environments, it is possible to identify more precisely the character and quantity of platforms required. This, in turn, would lead to a more rigorous allocation of scarce shipbuilding and personnel resources.

The second- or third-order effect of this is that in a very real and tangible way, strategymaking and budgetmaking become mutually fulfilling; instead of acting, as they so often do, at cross-purposes to one and other, to the detriment of sound strategymaking. Combatant and theater commanders would be afforded a more precise means to express the assets they require to the force-generating service chiefs; the service chiefs, in turn, would then be capable of providing to policymakers a more precise estimation of what tangible gradients of strategic effect can be provided, and at which levels of budget funding. Strategic planning and budgetary considerations would instead directly inform one another.

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<sup>1</sup> “U.S. Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower 2015 Revision,” USNI News, March 13, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/03/13/document-u-s-cooperative-strategy-for-21st-century-seapower-2015-revision>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> See also Victor G. Addison, “The Answer Is the Carrier Strike Group... Now, What Was the Question?” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, vol. 136, no. 7 (June 2010), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2010-07/answer-carrier-strike-group-now-what-was-question>.

<sup>4</sup> John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy’s Maritime Strategy 1977–1986*, Naval War College Newport Papers 19 (Newport: Naval War College, 2004); John B. Hattendorf and Peter M. Swartz, *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s: Selected Documents: Naval War College Newport Papers* 33 (Newport: Naval War College, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Rowden and Peter Fanta, “Distributed Lethality,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, vol. 141, no. 1 (January 2015), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015-01/distributed-lethality>.

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Navy, “A Cooperative Strategy For 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower” (October 2007), p.4 [https://www.ise.gov/sites/default/files/Maritime\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.ise.gov/sites/default/files/Maritime_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Henry J. Hendrix, “Buy Fords, Not Ferraris,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, vol. 13, no. 4 (April 2009), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2009-04/buy-fords-not-ferraris>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21: FORWARD and READY*, March 4, 2010,

[http://www.mccdc.marines.mil/Portals/172/Docs/MCCDC/EF21/EF21\\_USMC\\_Capstone\\_Concept.pdf](http://www.mccdc.marines.mil/Portals/172/Docs/MCCDC/EF21/EF21_USMC_Capstone_Concept.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> “New U.S. Marine Concept Re-establishes Maritime,” *DefenseNews* (April 6, 2014)

<http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140406/DEFREG02/304060015/New-US-Marine-Concept-Re-establishes-Maritime-Roots>.

<sup>11</sup> “Cooperative Strategy 2015 Revision” 19-26.

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<sup>12</sup> J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989) 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 12–13.