

Combat controller watches as C-17 Globemaster III, assigned to 17th Weapons Squadron, Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, lands on airstrip in Nevada Test and Training Range during joint forcible entry exercise, June 16, 2016 (U.S. Air Force/Kevin Tanenbaum)



Countering A2/AD in the Indo-Pacific

A Potential Change for the Army and Joint Force

By Hassan M. Kamara

The Commander-in-Chief, Far East, considers amphibious training to have unusual significance and importance in the Far East Command since the nature of troop dispositions and geography in the theater are such that a continuous requirement exists for the training of troops in over-water movement.

—LETTER FROM GENERAL HQ, FAR EAST COMMAND TO ACOFS G3 OPERATIONS, HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, APRIL 3, 1950

The nature of troop dispositions coupled with the expanse of ocean and numerous islands scattered in the Indo-Pacific region compels the redevelopment of conventional forcible-entry amphibious capability in the U.S. Army for deployment and maneuver. As Commander-in-Chief Far East, General Douglas MacArthur made this assessment over half a century ago, but it deserves intellectual inquiry and dialogue in the contemporary period based on the growing strategic competition and potential for conflict between the United States and its allies and China in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, this assessment deserves contemplation based on the Army's ongoing conceptualization of multidomain formations to help future joint force commanders apply the Service's capabilities across all domains, thereby

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Paratroopers of 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, conduct joint forcible entry operation during brigade's Mungadai event, on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, April 5, 2016 (U.S. Army/Jason Hull)

presenting multiple and compounding dilemmas for an adversary.¹

A conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific region will most likely involve regional access-denial efforts by China, resulting in a counter-antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) campaign by the United States and its allies. U.S. joint doctrine anticipates the possibility of engaging in a counter-A2/AD campaign and mandates that “the Armed Forces of the United States must be capable of deploying and fighting to gain access to geographical areas controlled by forces hostile to U.S. interest.”² U.S. forces conduct joint forcible entry operations to gain and maintain access to areas against armed opposition.

The redevelopment of conventional forcible-entry Army amphibious forces will enhance the joint forcible entry capability and capacity of U.S. forces in a potential counter-A2/AD campaign against China in the Indo-Pacific by enabling commanders to deploy and

maneuver the U.S. military’s decisive ground force (the Army) through the maritime domain.³ This proposed change is congruent with the mission of the Army as a component of the joint force. According to Army Doctrinal Publication 1, the Army’s mission is “to fight and win the Nation’s wars through prompt and sustained land combat, as part of the joint force.”⁴ Strategic and tactical mobility are inherent to the Army’s mission, and amphibious operation—as a basic means of deploying and maneuvering Army forces—is vital to the accomplishment of the Army’s mission and its role in the joint force.

It bears emphasizing that the Army has amphibious-capable logistics forces that support joint operations (for example, Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore). However, the Service lacks conventional (regular Army, non-special operations) combat arms formations that are organized, trained, and equipped to deploy

and fight as landing forces in joint forcible entry amphibious operations.

Landing forces are central to amphibious operations. In fact, Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, defines an *amphibious operation* as “a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force (AF) embarked in ships or craft with the primary purpose of introducing a landing force (LF) ashore to accomplish the assigned mission.”⁵ Also, a landing force can be comprised of either Army or Marine units.⁶

Justification for Studying Redevelopment

Contemporary advancements in military A2/AD capabilities and regional economic and security trends underscore the need to study this topic and foster dialogue. First, the sophistication of the integrated air defenses of America’s potential near-peer adversaries makes the contemporary construct of air superiority

as a condition for deploying and maneuvering ground forces unrealistic in future counter-A2/AD operations. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) acknowledges the challenge posed by modern A2/AD capabilities and argues that “integrated air defense networks complicate joint operations because hidden, lethal, and dispersed air defenses can allow the enemy to establish air superiority from the ground and take away an essential condition for effective joint force operations.”⁷ This anticipated contest in the air domain, and the potential that the United States could lose its forward bases early in a Chinese A2 campaign, precipitate the need to find ways and means of deploying and maneuvering decisive ground forces through potential corridors of opportunity in the maritime domain.

Contemporary economic and security affairs in the region further underscore the need to study this topic and foster dialogue. Armed conflict between the United States and its allies and China in the Indo-Pacific is likely because China views the South China Sea as a long-term resource vital to meeting its needs and so seeks to control it. This is evident in China’s ongoing construction and force buildup on artificial islands and its armed maritime confrontation with other nations over its appropriation of islands. Geoffrey Till concurs and writes that the South China Sea is a “stock resource” that China sees “as an economic resource vital to its future prosperity” because of the oil, gas, and fish that will support its growing energy and human needs.⁸ Robert Kaplan writes that “at some point, China is likely to, in effect, be able to deny the U.S. Navy unimpeded access to parts of the South China Sea.”⁹ This will precipitate conflict with the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Concepts and Framework of Analysis

Articulating the concepts and the framework used for the ensuing analysis is necessary to foster understanding. The concepts discussed include A2/AD, the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), and cross-domain synergy.

A2/AD. Antiaccess is described in the 2012 JOAC as “those actions and capabilities, usually long range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area.” The JOAC differentiates antiaccess from area denial. It states that “area denial refers to those actions and capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep an opposing force out, but to limit its freedom of action within the operational area.”¹⁰

The JOAC expects U.S. adversaries will use A2/AD strategies to offset U.S. strategic superiority in multiple domains, and it presents conceptual alternatives to counter them. In the Indo-Pacific, the joint force should expect China to employ an A2/AD strategy that will challenge theater access and freedom of maneuver in a potential conflict. Based on the ability of U.S. adversaries to challenge the joint force’s legacy counter-A2/AD capabilities, TRADOC writes that “the joint force should anticipate disrupted deployment and sustainment operations and degraded effectiveness of the standoff targeting and strikes currently required to gain access and seize the initiative.”¹¹

The 2012 JOAC. The 2012 JOAC describes how the U.S. military envisions its response to emerging A2/AD capabilities of potential adversaries, who seem to view the latter as a preferred method to counter U.S. strategic superiority across domains. Through its central thesis of cross-domain synergy and its principles or precepts, “the JOAC describes how the future joint forces will achieve operational access in the face of such strategies [anti-access and area denial].”¹²

Cross-Domain Synergy. The concept of cross-domain synergy outlined in the 2012 JOAC advocates the “complementary” versus the merely “additive” employment of joint force capabilities to optimize exploitation of the asymmetric advantages inherent in each Service’s capabilities.¹³

The Analytical Framework. The concept of cross-domain synergy as presented in the 2012 JOAC rests on certain precepts intended to help guide thinking and planning for future counter-A2 campaigns. The following analysis uses a selection of these precepts as a lens or

rubric to highlight how the redevelopment of forcible-entry Army amphibious forces would enhance the joint forcible entry capability and capacity of U.S. forces in a possible counter-A2/AD campaign against China in the Indo-Pacific.

Since these precepts are inherently oriented toward meeting the challenges that will be presented to U.S. joint forces by the A2 campaign of a potential peer adversary like China, their use as units of analysis is appropriate. In other words, these precepts are an excellent lens to highlight and appreciate the potential utility of the Army redeveloping conventional forcible-entry amphibious forces to enhance the joint force. The following are the selected precepts of operational access—highlighted in the 2012 JOAC—that comprise the units of analysis for this study:

- Seize the initiative by deploying and operating on multiple, independent lines of operations.
- Exploit advantages in one or more domains to disrupt enemy A2/AD capabilities in others.
- Maneuver directly against key operational objectives from strategic distance.¹⁴

The Precepts

Through the lens of the following precepts of operational access, it is conceivable that the redevelopment of conventional forcible-entry Army amphibious forces will enhance the joint forcible entry capability and capacity of U.S. forces in a potential counter-A2/AD campaign against China in the Indo-Pacific.

Seize the Initiative by Deploying and Operating on Multiple, Independent Lines of Operations. The redevelopment of conventional forcible-entry Army amphibious forces will enhance the joint force’s capability and capacity to mount multiple lines of operations across domains. The latter can compound the number of avenues of approach an enemy has to defend in its A2 campaign. The JOAC concurs and posits that “operating on multiple lines in multiple domains simultaneously can help joint forces to

seize the initiative by overloading the enemy's ability to cope."¹⁵

During his 1944 World War II Pacific campaign, General MacArthur successfully seized Saidor, New Guinea, from the Japanese by deploying Army, joint, and allied forces on multiple lines of operations across domains. His combat report following the seizure of Saidor proves this:

*We have seized Saidor on the north coast of New Guinea. It is a combined operation of ground, sea and air forces, elements of the Sixth Army landed at three beaches under cover of heavy air and naval bombardment. The enemy was surprised both strategically and tactically and the landings were accomplished without loss. The harbor and airfields are in our firm grasp. Enemy forces on the north coast between the Sixth Army and the advancing Australians are trapped with no source of supply and face disintegration and destruction.*¹⁶

Exploit Advantages in One or More Domains to Disrupt Enemy A2/AD Capabilities in Others. Growing conventional forcible-entry amphibious capability in the Army will enable joint force commanders to deploy and maneuver the Service's decisive ground forces through the maritime domain, not just the air domain, which creates a dilemma for an adversary's A2/AD campaign planning. This transformation will provide an asymmetrical advantage critical for maneuvering against enemy positions on the many disconnected land masses that will constitute objectives in a potential counter-A2/AD campaign against China. The British experience in the 1982 Falkland Islands campaign is instructive in this regard.

Following its full occupation of the Falkland Islands on April 2, 1982, the Argentinian military developed an integrated air defense system in and around Port Stanley with the aid of an AN/TPS-43 Search radar and a command, control, and communications center (*Centro de Información y Control*). According to Rodney Burden and his co-authors, Argentinian forces deployed several batteries of anti-aircraft guns, a Roland

surface-to-air missile unit, and several units of the Shorts Blowpipe and SA-7 Grail man-portable air-defense systems.¹⁷

British military planners were compelled to exploit the Royal Navy's capabilities in the maritime domain for deployment and decisive ground maneuver because the Argentine air defense threat precluded airborne forcible-entry operations. Additionally, there was no host nation bordering the Falkland Islands that could be used for forward staging and maneuver. Michael Clapp, the commander of the British Amphibious Task Group at the time, writes that quite early in their preparation, British military planners appreciated the disconcerting fact that "there would be no 'host-nation' and we would therefore have to offload (possibly during the opposed landing always considered so unlikely by the Government), protect ourselves and deploy forward using our own assets and fuel."¹⁸

Given the mass or troop strength of Argentinian forces on the Falkland Islands, retaking them required the decisive ground forces of the British army in addition to Royal Marine commando forces. This understanding required deploying both Royal Marine commando forces and the non-amphibious, decisive ground forces of the British army into a maritime-centric theater where the enemy was contesting access by air and sea. Michael Clapp writes that "it was clear . . . that merchant ships would be required and that the 3rd Commando Brigade, Royal Marines, would be enhanced by further Army forces."¹⁹

Clapp's statement compels contention with a major counterargument to redeveloping forcible-entry amphibious capability in the U.S. Army for employment in the Indo-Pacific, which is that the amphibious capability of the U.S. Marine Corps is prodigious enough to preclude the need for complementary amphibious capability in the Army. This counterargument indirectly suggests that redeveloping forcible-entry amphibious capability in the Army can make it duplicative and therefore capable of replacing the Marine Corps. This suggestion is groundless because the Marine Corps has

a unique role as America's elite light expeditionary ground combat force, a role for which the Army, with its greater mass for sustained ground combat operations, is ill suited. The transformation proposed in this article is not targeted at having the Army usurp the role of the Marine Corps but rather at giving future U.S. joint force commanders and planners the ability to deploy and maneuver the Army through temporary maritime corridors of opportunity provided by the Navy to apply its unrivaled capacity for sustained ground combat in the Indo-Pacific.

The counterargument that the amphibious capability of the Marine Corps is prodigious enough to preclude the need for complementary amphibious capability in the Army also fails to take into account the potential for China, like Argentina in the Falklands War, to field forces with capabilities and such mass that it becomes necessary to employ the Army for its mass and endurance in ground combat. This counterargument also neglects the possibility that an adversary may widely distribute its forces among the many disconnected land masses in the Indo-Pacific (consider Japan in the World War II Pacific campaign) to necessitate employing the Army's decisive ground forces as part of a joint and allied effort to dislodge them.

The British experience in the Falklands campaign shows that in a counter-A2/AD campaign, particularly in a maritime-centric region like the Indo-Pacific, the complementary versus the merely additive employment of joint force capabilities is critical to optimal exploitation of the asymmetric advantages inherent in each Service's capabilities. The British complemented the amphibious commando forces of the Royal Marines with shipborne army paratroopers to fully exploit the Royal Navy's sea control for deployment and decisive ground maneuver against Argentine forces.

Maneuver Directly Against Key Operational Objectives from Strategic Distance. Redeveloping forcible-entry amphibious capability in the Army will afford joint force commanders the flexibility of deploying America's decisive ground forces directly into combat from the U.S. mainland and other overseas



Marines take new Amphibious Combat Vehicle out for open-ocean low-light testing at Del Mar Beach on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, December 17, 2019 (U.S. Marine Corps/Andrew Cortez)

bases—thereby complicating enemy defensive preparations by wielding an Army that is not tied to fixed forward bases or restricted solely to deployment and maneuver through the air domain (for example, airborne forced entry). According to the 2012 JOAC, “some elements of the joint force will operate directly against key objectives from points of origin or other points outside the theater without the need for forward staging.”²⁰ The JOAC cautions that the assured regional access afforded by U.S. forward bases can be degraded by attacks on those bases and consequently “calls for some elements of a joint force to maneuver against key operational objectives directly from ports of embarkation.”²¹

According to a 2015 RAND study of U.S.-China military capabilities and capacity in simulated Taiwan and Spratly Islands campaign scenarios, the Chinese military will be able to contest U.S. air superiority through the use of conventional precision standoff weapons and

airpower against critical U.S. forward bases like Kadena Air Force Base, Japan, and Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. The study’s “analysis shows that China’s conventional missile forces have expanded their capabilities over the past 15 years to the point that the PLA [People’s Liberation Army] can now contest U.S. air base operations within roughly 1,500 km of Chinese territory. This capability will indirectly impinge on a much larger range of U.S. capabilities, complicating the air superiority battle.”²²

The British army’s experience in the 1982 Falklands War offers insight on the subject of maneuvering directly against key operational objectives from a strategic distance. Given that the airspace over the South Atlantic was contested by the Argentine air force, and the objective was an island without a land-bordering “host-nation,” the British army had to deploy and maneuver directly against operational objectives in the Falkland Islands from the United Kingdom using maritime

corridors facilitated by the Royal Navy’s control of the sea. Subsequently, the British military hastily requisitioned several merchant ships taken up from trade (STUFTs) to transport ground forces to the Falkland Islands. Many STUFTs were hurriedly retrofitted for transporting Army and Marine commando troops. Among the STUFTs was the North Sea ferry MV *Norland*, which transported 840 paratroopers from the British army’s Second Battalion, Parachute Regiment.²³ Another STUFT used to move troops in the counter-A2 campaign was the SS *Canberra*, a cruise ship.

The Way Ahead: Recommendation

There are many considerations inherent in redeveloping conventional forcible-entry amphibious capability in the Army. Two broad yet critical considerations are examined herein. First, as part of any effort to redevelop conventional forcible-entry amphibious capability

in the Army, this Service and the joint force as a whole should develop an intellectual foundation in the form of an operational concept that will facilitate force development, resourcing, and overall force management decisions. As part of this effort, the Army should review and update its legacy doctrine for amphibious operations in coordination with the Navy and Marine Corps.

In the 1960s, the now inactive Field Manual 31-12, *Army Forces in Amphibious Operations (The Army Landing Force)*, provided Army commanders and planners “the fundamental principles, doctrine, and procedures relative to the U.S. Army component of an amphibious task force.”²⁴ Obsolete doctrinal documents like this are worth revisiting to help rebuild the intellectual foundation of Army amphibious operations as part of the joint force.

Working in concert with the Navy and Marine Corps, the Army should consider identifying, training, and qualifying two brigade combat teams (BCTs) to operate as landing forces in an amphibious task force because these teams generally possess the command, ground maneuver, aviation, and logistics elements that will make them operationally effective as a landing force. For operational flexibility, one of the BCTs should be capable of conducting ship-to-shore movement by helicopter (air assault) and the other by surface (landing craft).

Additionally, selecting a BCT to serve as a landing force in joint forcible entry amphibious operations will ensure the Army provides the joint task force commander the doctrinally prescribed suite of combat and combat Service support capabilities. JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, mandates that “the Army maneuver battalion, brigade, division, or corps . . . be task-organized with appropriate combat and combat Service support capabilities.”²⁵

The redevelopment of conventional forcible-entry Army amphibious forces in the contemporary period could benefit the Army and the joint force in a potential counter-A2/AD campaign against China in the Indo-Pacific. Currently, the joint

force’s ability to deploy and maneuver America’s decisive ground force against an adversary like China in a contested maritime-centric region like the Indo-Pacific is limited to transit through the land and air domains. Redeveloping forcible-entry amphibious capability in the Army will afford future joint force commanders the flexibility of deploying and maneuvering the Army’s decisive ground forces from theater and strategic distances through temporary corridors of sea control afforded by the Navy. This will increase the overall cross-domain synergy of U.S. forces in a potential counter-A2/AD campaign against China in the Indo-Pacific. In his work on A2/AD, Sam Tangredi highlights the value of cross-domain synergy and writes that “militaries that can obtain cross-domain synergy are simply better, more capable [ones].”²⁶ JFQ

Notes

¹ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 6, 2018), iii, available at <www.tradoc.army.mil/Portals/14/Documents/MDO/TP525-3-1_30Nov2018.pdf>. The Army’s evolving concept of multidomain operations is congruent with the joint force’s efforts to integrate U.S. capabilities to fight in “all domains.” Speaking on changes in the character of war and the global strategic landscape, General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., emphasized that the “future force must remain competitive in ‘all domains,’ deny adversaries’ ability to counter our strengths asymmetrically, and retain the ability to project power at a time and place of our choosing.” See “Gen. Dunford: The Character of War & Strategic Landscape Have Changed,” *DOD Live*, April 30, 2018, available at <www.dodlive.mil/2018/04/30/dunford-the-character-of-war-strategic-landscape-have-changed>.

² Joint Publication (JP) 3-18, *Joint Forcible Entry Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2018), vii, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_18ch1_pa.pdf?ver=2018-07-03-125841-997>.

³ *Decisive ground force* refers to the Army’s unrivaled capacity (the combination of its superior mass, lethality, and sustainment infrastructure) for sustained (long-term) ground combat operations.

⁴ Army Doctrinal Publication 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, September 2012), 1–8, available at

<<https://caccapl.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/web/repository/doctrine/adp1.pdf>>.

⁵ JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, August 10, 2009), xi, available at <www.jag.navy.mil/distrib/instructions/JPub3-02AmphibiousOps.pdf>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II-7.

⁷ *Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st Century, 2025–2040*, version 1.0 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 2017), available at <[www.tradoc.army.mil/Portals/14/Documents/MDB_Evolutionfor21st%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.tradoc.army.mil/Portals/14/Documents/MDB_Evolutionfor21st%20(1).pdf)>.

⁸ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 319.

⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia’s Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2015), 15.

¹⁰ *Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)*, version 1.0 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 17, 2012), available at <https://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/JOAC_Jan%202012_Signed.pdf>.

¹¹ *Multi-Domain Battle*.

¹² JOAC.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ *Reports of General MacArthur, The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994), 132, available at <https://history.army.mil/html/books/013/13-3/CMH_Pub_13-3.pdf>.

¹⁷ Rodney A. Burden et al., *Falklands: The Air War* (London: British Aviation Group, 1986), 17–18.

¹⁸ Michael Clapp and Ewen Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault Falklands: The Battle of San Carlos Water* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰ JOAC, 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 45, available at <www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR392/RAND_RR392.pdf>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64–65.

²⁴ Field Manual 31-12, *Army Forces in Amphibious Operations (The Army Landing Force)* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, March 1961), 4.

²⁵ JP 3-02, II-7.

²⁶ Sam J. Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering A2/AD Strategies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 157.