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Littoral Operations, Maneuver Warfare, and Naval Doctrine

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Abstract

Warfare by maneuver is current JCS and naval doctrine. Naval maneuver warfare applies at the operational level, where it is nothing new. It is in a campaign along a littoral where the great value of sea power through a maneuver advantage is most evident. Tactically, maneuver warfare is a peculiar concept, because navies win battles by outscouting the enemy and striking effectively first. Navy tactics for littoral warfare are quite different from blue water tactics, and require attention now. Maintaining the longstanding *operational* advantage of sea power today will require intense *tactical and doctrinal* development for fighting on the littorals.

1 Introduction

For the indefinite future our nation's policies will be supported by a maritime strategy of influence and engagement across the high seas. The strategy is manifested at the operational level as Joint Littoral Warfare. For the Navy, littoral warfare has two salient aspects, neither of which is new in the sweep of military history. One is the close connection between naval operations and tactics, in Nelson's sense that "the order of sailing will be the order of battle." The nature of that operations-tactics interface will be my focus. The second aspect is the land-sea interface, in which modern littoral operations on land and sea are interwoven with air and space operations. For example, land-

sea missile attacks blur the tactical distinction between sea and land combat. It is a question whether the U. S. Navy should continue to speak of "naval operations in the littorals," or instead refer to "littoral operations that involve warships and naval aircraft." The question pertains whether or not joint operations are contemplated.

2 The Littorals: What's Different

This paper is organized in five components.

- A. The Environment
- B. Joint Operations and Tactics
- C. The Scouting Edge ("Dominant Battlefield Knowledge")
- D. The SLOCs and LOCs
- E. Doctrine's Contribution

3 The Operating Environment

European navies speak of fighting in "the narrow seas." My Singapore Navy friends say they must train to fight in congested waters. For a sailor, the littoral is "where the clutter is." By clutter I mean, coastal traffic, fishing boats, oil rigs, small islands, dense commercial air traffic above, hazardous shallow water beneath, and a host of other complicating factors. Operations in the littorals are further complicated by the lack of battle space, which lays an unprecedented burden of constant alertness on warships' crews. Since the end of World War II, the U. S. Navy has been used to coming to stay and striking from a Blue water sanctuary. No more. Inshore, without battle space which equals reaction time, staying ever alert in sustained operations will be exhausting and unsustainable. When fighting an enemy who

practices concealment, deception and surprise, damage free operations are unlikely. I take as a serious implication that damaged ships will have to be rescued. A tactical concept I favor is fighting in pairs: by doctrine for inshore operations, no warship to operate without at least one consort.

4 Jointness' Effects

Who can say whether stirring together all Services in a Joint stew is truly advantageous? When by law the Services organize, train and equip their own forces, talk of seamless communications and operations may be only talk even after heroic individual Service efforts. But by law and doctrine the question is moot. There are major consequences of jointness on the littorals. A flagship may serve a CJTF afloat for LICs, but a CINC will not likely stay afloat in LRCs and will not be afloat in MRCs. We have seen the need to improve operations by ATO, and I doubt we're out of the woods for smooth Joint execution. The JADO/JEZ efforts indicate an almost unimaginably intricate and dangerous air environment at the air-land-sea interface. Not since World War II has the Navy been put to the test in air defense by a competent opponent.

After Desert Storm the Army was forced to restudy the extent of fratricide on the ground. The historical numbers are ugly, but at least the Army knows how bad they are: 10 to 20% of all casualties suffered from World War II through Desert Storm were self-inflicted [Hawkins, March and June 1994, U.S. Congress, 1993]. I have seen no effort by the Navy to discern the comparable numbers at sea.¹ There is no reason to believe Navy fratricide will be less ugly than heretofore with aircraft and missiles whizzing about. We had a near-fatal incident on the day of the Silkworm attack on USS Missouri during Desert Storm [Ossage, 1991]. It will be a difficult task to destroy a talented enemy without hurting ourselves even after we make well thought out tactical and doctrinal adjustments for littoral waters.

¹ The sole exception [Gauker and Blood, 1995] is a medical survey and contains no percentages.

5 Win With A Scouting Advantage

The propitiousness of Dominant Battlefield Knowledge is neither tied to the littorals nor to joint warfare, nor is DBK new to the U S Navy. Winning by outscouting the enemy came to first prominence in the 1940s. In World War II, operational surveillance and tactical reconnaissance were critical if not decisive in both the Atlantic antisubmarine and Pacific carrier air campaigns. What is new is that the clutter along a coast will complicate detection, tracking and targeting. To appreciate our neglect, reflect on the last time a simulation, war game, or even a fleet exercise did justice to the clutter of the Yellow Sea, the Arabian Sea, the South China Sea, the Aegean Sea, the North Sea, the Persian Gulf, or the Straits of Formosa, Singapore, or Florida. In the rhetoric of Dominant Battlefield Knowledge, there is an almost naive faith expressed in the future capacity to paint a satisfactory picture. The problem will not be in the hitting but in the targeting.

On land, too, usually we can say, "When we can find 'em, we can hit 'em." Given competent foes, we must also say "When they can find us they can hit us." On land the Marines are wisely contending with this unpleasant symmetry with their maneuver warfare doctrine. Aspects of OMFTS are swift movement, concealment, C2W, and dispersal. If these are the keys to keeping a scouting advantage (DBK), then the Navy has a problem. The present fleet can neither move fast nor conceal itself, and the smallest unit of dispersal is one warship. Every U. S. warship is a high value target. In these circumstances of slow, visible, large targets we must always attack effectively first through a flawless scouting edge which, as I have said, is a cruel task against a stealthy foe when we dive into the littoral clutter.

The science of efficient search and screening was first well developed at sea in World War II for detection, tracking and targeting the enemy, and screening us from him. Here at NPS we have a project to adapt the methods of ASW (if we can find 'em we can hit 'em) to Theater Ballistic Missile Defense. The same science can and should

be applied more vigorously in guerrilla warfare, the drug war, and some aspects of MOOTW.

6 SLOCs AND LOCs

For want of time, I will give less than due regard for protection and destruction on the lines of communication. At the campaign level the ocean continues to afford her great advantages in moving large weights and volumes of material and firepower faster than over land or through the air. The advantage is the true, if pedestrian, basis of naval maneuver warfare doctrine when the littorals are the scene of action.

We are fairly cognizant of the Navy role and efficacy in attacking the land LOCs of the enemy in the critical region from water's edge landward for perhaps 100 miles. We aren't fully equipped for NSFS, but we accept it as a key Navy role. How about protection from water's edge for 100 miles to sea? Because we are dominant in Blue Water we tend to slight the need of a SLOC protection playbook near the goal line. The challenge will be to safeguard cargoes from attacks springing out of the clutter. In MRCs the critical cargoes will reinforce and resupply the Army and Air Force through a friendly port like Pusan, or even better, Inchon. My Army friends say they are much more anxious that every tank and barrel of POL arrive safely than that we make 200 more Tomahawk strikes. In LRCs and smaller conflicts the Marines want the same assurance of safe arrival through the clutter and over the beach--or should we call it "over the coastline" as their vision shifts to deep and flexible movement ashore?

7 Doctrine's Contribution

The power in doctrine lies in its ability to unite forces in cooperative actions. The stress is on *unity* and *actions*. Thus far, new naval doctrinal development has been at the strategic and operational levels. The richest payoff will be at the tactical level in which doctrine will help many units fight together. Combat is *action*. It is where sound thought in a campaign plan is fulfilled by sound activity in a battle. At the tactical level, the navy is attuned to and skillful in Blue Water combat.

Naval forces are also practiced at--in fact, only experienced in--delivering combat power from the sea in the form of strikes and Marine Corps operations. But inshore water as we have said is different from blue water, and so are their tactics. Doctrine for littoral combat is (to be generous) undeveloped. Why is this? In part it is a lack of appreciation of the differences between fighting with sea room and fighting in the clutter. But that is another way of saying we haven't developed the tactics of inshore warfare. Doctrine for fighting in congested waters will merely be a compilation of the tactics, once they exist. In the metaphor of doctrine as playbook, blue water tactics are plays for the middle of the field. The battle of the littoral is conducted inside the enemy's 10 yard line. That is where other countries plan their entire game! We need goal line plays (tactics) so we can call new signals from the playbook (doctrine).

8 Conclusions

I will sum up very simply.

On questions of Joint Policy and Strategy, those who deal with the nuances of Joint and Service doctrine may think there's a lot still to be done. From where I stand, we've arrived. Not the problem.

On questions of Navy Operations and Tactics conducted from out of Blue Water and into the clutter, we're not there yet. The fleet has a lot of tactical development to be do. We'll know we've arrived when the new and different tactical doctrine for winning in the clutter is written and taught.

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