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MARSOC SOF-MAGTF Capabilities Integrations Analysis and Operational Modeling

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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NPS NRP Executive Summary

Special Operations Forces - Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SOF-MAGTF)

Capabilities Integrations Analysis and Operational Modeling

Report Date: 11/27/19 Project Number: NPS-19-M271-A

Naval Postgraduate School, Graduate School of Operational and Information Sciences



NAVAL RESEARCH PROGRAM
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES - MARINE AIR-GROUND TASK FORCE (SOF-MAGTF) CAPABILITIES INTEGRATIONS ANALYSIS AND OPERATIONAL MODELING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

This research, leveraging the NPS Warfare Innovation Continuum (WIC) and working in conjunction with ongoing Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory efforts examining Expeditionary Advance Base Operations (EABO), analyzed Special Operations Forces - Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SOF-MAGTF) capabilities integrations in a future Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO). This effort focused on exploring, assessing and identifying SOF-MAGTF capabilities integrations to improve current and future EABO operations. It also analyzed and identified mechanisms that will allow Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to better serve as a bridge for capabilities integration with Special Operations Forces (SOF) and deployed MAGTFs, to maximize the complementary capabilities of each formation. This research was based on an exchange of ideas between MARSOC and NPS researchers to better understand current operational concepts and concerns, and identified six critical MARSOC issues for exploration. Specifically, we examined MARSOC, United States Marine Corps (USMC), and United States Navy (USN) cooperative missions in the South China Sea through wargaming and analysis studies. Our recommendations and findings directly support MARSOC in analyzing SOF-MAGTF capabilities integrations in a future DMO, in order to examine its ability to shape the operating environment and deter peer adversaries throughout the contact layer, while setting conditions to dominate in a conventional conflict.

Keywords: *wargaming, campaign analysis, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, EABO, Marine Air-Ground Task Force, MAGTF, Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, MARSOC, Special Operations Forces, SOF, Warfare Innovation Continuum, WIC, Distributed Maritime Operations, DMO*

Background

Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations is an evolving USMC concept for 21st Century warfighting across the 2018 National Defense Strategy's Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of competition and conflict (Department of Defense, 2018). Additionally, the MAGTF concept is central to the way the Marine Corps mans, trains, and equips its forces in this environment, and it is one of the very fibers of the Corps' strength: it is the way the Marine Corps fights. Marines and SOF are naturally aligned in terms of mission approach and execution, as their forces are forward-deployed in similar geographical areas, are actively engaged in shaping operations, and are able to respond immediately to crises, as well as perform operations in a sustained campaign.

The wargames utilized in our work familiarized participants and observers with USMC and USN expeditionary capabilities, concepts for joint and coalition employment, and assessment of potential locations and logistics requirements for expeditionary operations. Under the NPS WIC construct, NPS student team mini-studies, conducted in the Joint Campaign Analysis course, informed and underpinned

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the design and conduct of further research into our research's six critical MARSOC issues. These mini-studies were followed by NPS faculty-advised student wargaming teams in the Wargaming Applications course, that designed, developed, conducted, and analyzed two wargames leveraging the findings from the mini-studies. The wargames modeled MARSOC actions in the Contact Layer by, with, and through indigenous Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) partners to secure advantages and deter Chinese influence, and to best posture MAGTF and other conventional forces in the event of conventional combat operations in the Blunt Layer.

Findings and Conclusions

Our efforts resulted in findings and recommendations for each of the issues below:

1. What indirect opportunities exist to better succeed in the Contact Layer?
2. What actions can and should MARSOC take to capitalize on identified opportunities?
3. What actions can and should MAGTF take to capitalize on identified opportunities?
4. What indirect approaches in the Contact Layer could provide opportunities and advantages in the Blunt Layer and deter major conventional war?
5. What AFP partners are most effective and efficient for mission accomplishment?
6. What is the Contact Layer's risk assessment of indirect approaches/actions by MARSOC?

Issue 1: The Marine Special Operation Company (MSOC), is well postured to conduct Operational Preparation of the Environment and to provide reception, staging, and onward integration assessments of infrastructure/adaptive basing. MSOCs should become well-versed in Theater Special Operation Command strategic and operational plans, and Department of State (DOS) Integrated Country Strategy for the Philippines, and EDCA, during the inter-deployment training cycle (IDTC).

Additionally, per MARSOF 2030 (MARSOC 2018), MARSOC Leadership should attempt to attend the SOCPAC annual planning conference during their IDTC and/or pre-deployment planning/meetings with SOCPAC, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), United States Seventh Fleet (SEVENTHFLT) and Planning and Advisory Training Team (PATT). This would better align efforts between SOCPAC entities, 31st MEU, SEVENTHFLT, Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and United States Indo-Pacific Command. This approach enables a larger return on strategic, operational, and tactical investments, and ties these efforts with larger/long-term interagency and whole-of-United States Government strategy and nests efforts with AFP plans and initiatives.

Issue 2: SOCPAC entities, 31st MEU, and the SEVENTHFLT are not properly synchronizing Operations, Actions, and Activities (OAAs) during the IDTC or on deployment. Increased collaboration and future preemptive planning with the PATT, 31st MEU SOFLE (Special Operations Forces Liaison Element), and SEVENTHFLT staff during the IDTC will better align OAAs, concept of operations, and theater-security cooperation events for execution on deployment by the rotational MSOC.

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Issue 3: There is a need for increased command, control, communication, and intelligence with MARSOC during IDTCs and on deployments. To address this issue, we recommend 31st MEU personnel participate in MARSOC IDTC, validation of the 31st MEU SOFLE requirement, leveraging Joint Chief of Staff exercises and conventional exercises, and ensuring, prior to deployment, MSOC participation in the 31st MEU deployment readiness exercise.

Issue 4: Currently, MARSOC is too focused on counter terrorist (CT) efforts, and the 31st MEU is too focused on contingencies and the Blunt Layer, and increased non-CT OAAs are necessary to adequately counter-revisionist states. Therefore, improving dialogue between, SEVENTHFLT, 31st MEU, and SOCPAC will increase 31st MEU's contribution of capability and capacity in support of SOCPAC OAAs and the DOS integrated country strategy for the Philippines.

Issue 5: Leveraging MARSOC as a synchronizer, increased MAGTF capability and capacity will improve price and availability and influence to Conventional AFP Joint Task Force Commanders and sub-component commanders. However, AFP joint Conventional Force relationships should be built with U.S. Joint Conventional Forces, not strictly SOCPAC entities. As MSOC is not ideal for partnership with AFP sub-component commands, the 31st MEU should take on more partnerships with the AFP sub-component commands in the country, as SOCPAC entities do not have the capacity nor capability to take on these vital relationships for success in Phase 2+/Blunt Layer.

Issue 6: Although large joint combined exercises are a measure of deterrence and greatly increase warfighting readiness compared to small exercises, they increase the vulnerability of collection by adversaries due to large operating footprints. Therefore, the location and timing of joint combined exercises should vary, as the advantages of conducting multiple combined joint exercises each fiscal year outweigh the counterintelligence and Operational Security threats.

Recommendations for Further Research

The DMO and EABO are two nascent concepts that will require further operations research in order to better understand how the USMC and the USN can use them to interoperate more effectively, in order to establish and maintain sea control in any maritime environment. Essentially, these two concepts will need to mature through continued programs of wargaming and campaign analysis research, to best serve the U.S. Department of Defense.

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Acronyms

Armed Forces of the Philippines	AFP
Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao counter terrorist	ARMM CT
Department of State	DOS
Distributed Maritime Operations	DMO
Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement	EDCA
Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations inter-deployment training cycles	EABO IDTC
Marine Air-Ground Task Force	MAGTF
Marine Corps Forces, Pacific	MARFORPAC
Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command	MARSOC
Marine Expeditionary Unit	MEU
Marine Special Operation Company operations, actions, and activities	MSOC OOA
Planning and Advisory Training Team	PATT
United States Seventh Fleet	SEVENTHFLT
Special Operations Command Pacific	SOC PAC
Special Operations Forces	SOF
Special Operations Forces Liaison Element	SOFLE
United States Marine Corps	USMC
Warfare Innovation Continuum	WIC