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Fighting for the Land—from the Sea

Brian J. Dunn

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by

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ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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by Brian J. Dunn

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Preface

Seventy-five years ago, during World War II, the United States Navy and the Marine Corps spearheaded an offensive at a small island in the Pacific Ocean Solomon Islands. By the time the campaign was won six months later, the fight had escalated to a joint multidomain contest that demonstrated the need to sustain a fight by all services across all the domains to create synergy to defeat a determined and skilled enemy.

The new Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) is an improvement over the narrow focus on air and naval power to defeat anti-access and area denial weapons that can prevent a naval force from operating near a hostile shore. But JAM-GC continues to see the Army as an auxiliary whose only roles are anti-ship and anti-aircraft assets plus the provision of foundational support capabilities. The new concept fails to envision significant landpower in line with the Army's core competencies of combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security in a way that can build a true multidomain campaign—one that creates synergies to dominate all of the domains in a contest against a determined and skillful enemy.

No enemy should be able to rule out the possibility of facing a battle-hardened United States Army. The Army must take the lead in arguing for a significant, possibly multi-corps role—either alone, with the Marine Corps or with regional allies—to make the land domain a major factor in multidomain campaigns in the Asia-Pacific theater.

Fighting for the Land—from the Sea

From the Sea

The multidomain six-month campaign for Guadalcanal, begun 75 years ago, was centered around a drawn-out naval campaign between two powerful forces and is nearly unparalleled in naval history.¹ The surface, undersea, air, land, day, night and radio spectrum (mass media and radar as new factors) campaign was focused on the control of Guadalcanal Island and its Henderson Airfield, whose possession by either the Allied forces or Japan would determine control of the Pacific Ocean around the island.

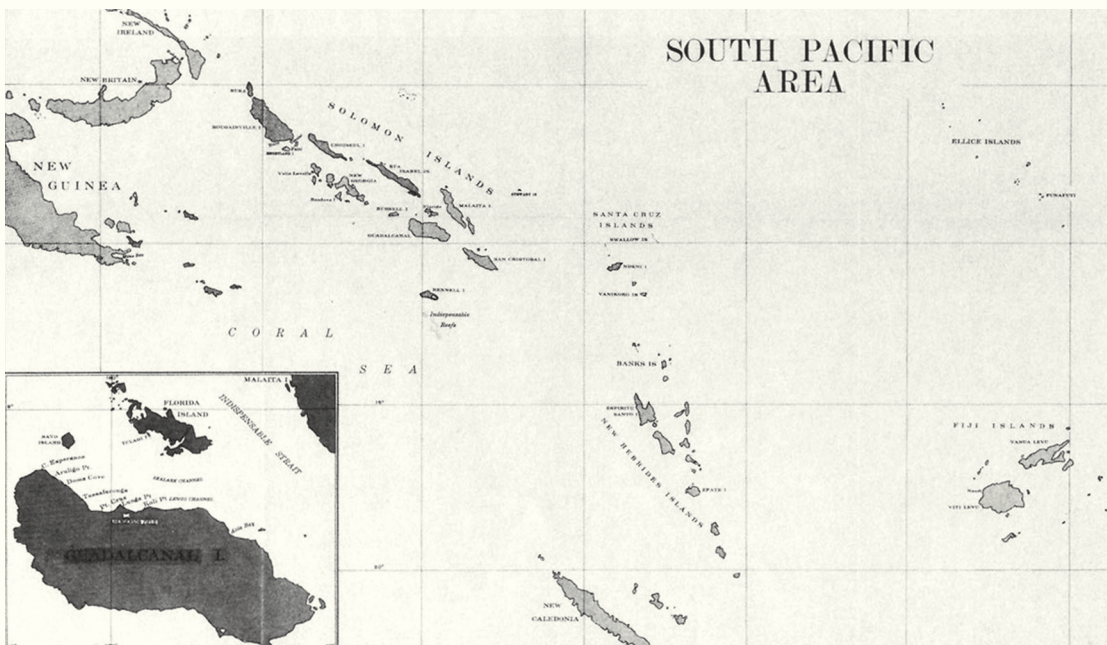
Today, America is once again focused on the Pacific and Asian theater. Yet the focus on defeating anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) weapons—which is central to the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC)—that might prevent the United States Navy from operating in the seas close to the shores of Asia obscures the reality that naval campaigns are about affecting events ashore. Edward L. Beach said it well:

It is an axiom of naval warfare that the entire purpose of navies and sea power is to influence the land. Mere possession of acreage of seawater has little intrinsic benefit.²

The multidomain campaign from August 1942 through February 1943 to take and hold Guadalcanal should remind us that naval combat does not take place in isolation. The effort that America was willing to make to control that small island should make it clear that the American military must be prepared to commit all elements of American power, including significant Army ground forces, to win a campaign against another powerful military, despite casualties and setbacks.

The Multidomain Fight at Guadalcanal

From a distance in time, Guadalcanal is a glorious chapter in Navy and Marine history, with Bloody Ridge and Iron Bottom Sound in the Solomon Islands chain reflecting the heroism and skill of those who paid the price for victory. What follows is merely an outline of the campaign, undertaken to frame a discussion of how American strategic thought about JAM-GC must reflect the shape and characteristics of Guadalcanal—not just remember the heroism and skill that it still inspires.³



Source: <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/b/battle-of-guadalcanal.html>. Accessed 10 July 2017.

Gaining a Toehold (7–20 August 1942)

Japan needed the Solomon Islands to defend their southeast bastion at Rabaul, while America needed them to prevent Japan from threatening the line of communication between America and Australia. A Japanese seaplane base at Tulagi and an airfield under construction on Guadalcanal provided American forces with the motivation to go on the offensive, especially after Japan’s advances following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Three American aircraft carriers and supporting American and Australian ships escorted the First Marine Division plus a regiment of Second Marine Division and other units to seize the islands and the surrounding area.

The strength of Japanese forces, however, made the effort a stretch for the Allies still recovering from Japan’s early victories. The American commander of the carrier force said that he would keep his ships near Guadalcanal for only two days, despite the requirement for at least four days to unload the transports.

The Japanese—still focused on capturing their Port Moresby objective to the west on New Guinea—underestimated Marine strength on the island. Despite the resulting disregard for the threat, Japan’s prompt air attacks slowed the unloading of American troops and supplies. American carrier-based fighters still managed to inflict losses on the Japanese, but the carrier force moved away 12 hours sooner than even the initial limited commitment. Thereafter, during this stage, long-range land-based planes were needed by both American and Japanese forces. American and Australian surface ships remained to shield Guadalcanal but were decimated by the Japanese in the 9 August nighttime Battle of Savo Island.

The Marines, dug in on Guadalcanal but short on supplies, could listen to American radio commentary from home. With the Navy carriers gone, it was unsettling to hear that the American people *hoped* the Marines could hold on; and to find that an Army Air Force general believed it was “foolish to try” to hold the island.⁴ For troops going into battle against the

Japanese (who had gained a reputation for ferocity after Pearl Harbor), this message was unhelpful, to say the least.

On 17 August, the Japanese launched their first counter-attack against the beachhead with an insufficient force that the Marines repulsed in the Battle of the Tenaru River.

And at the end of this stage, the first 31 Marine aircraft arrived on the finally completed and renamed Henderson Field to contest control of the air and to threaten the Japanese navy.

In the multidomain contest, America could lay claim to the land and day domains, largely from seizing the initiative to capture the Guadalcanal airfield in a region that was not Japan's priority at that moment. Japan ruled the night domain. The air and surface domains remained contested while the undersea domain was not yet in play. (In the radio domain, America stepped on a rake for a self-inflicted morale wound.)

The Marines certainly hoped they could hold their ground. But as tough as their job would be, naval and air power also had to win their battles for the Marines' sacrifice to matter.

Domain Competition (21 August–14 September 1942)

Completing the defeat of the first Japanese ground attack and putting the first elements of the Cactus Air Force (the nickname for Guadalcanal-based aircraft) into the air set the stage for continued struggles for the air and sea around Guadalcanal and for the island itself.

The Japanese committed their two-fleet carrier force in an effort to draw the American carriers into battle. Dangling a light carrier as bait, the Japanese pounced during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons (22–25 August), damaging one American carrier while losing their light carrier to an American carrier air strike. The other American carrier in the battle was saved by heavy anti-aircraft fire; the Japanese suffered heavy air losses. Of note, the American fleet never spotted the Japanese fleet carriers. Unfortunately, prior to the battle, the third American carrier in the theater was sent away to refuel based on faulty intelligence.

By the end of August, only one American carrier remained to hold the line at sea, as a Japanese submarine had torpedoed another carrier, putting her out of action for three months.

In a struggle to reinforce Guadalcanal, both sides pushed men and supplies to the island. Although American land-based fighters were inferior, they were able to exact a toll on Japanese planes flying at the edge of their range and to punish Japanese ships caught within range in daylight. While American supplies moved in the day, Japanese-escorted supply runs came by night in what was called "the Tokyo Express," bombarding Henderson Field and the Marines while offshore. Despite advances in American radar, the American military had yet to integrate it into battle. The Japanese also began to use fast destroyers to carry men and supplies.

On land, the Japanese built up their ground forces enough to launch a division-sized assault on the Marine perimeter. The Battle of Edson's Ridge (or the Bloody Ridge) raged from 12–14 September and ended with the Japanese decisively thrown back.

In the multidomain contest, as Japan seriously responded to the American offensive, American forces lost ground. Japan had the advantage in the night and undersea domains. In the air, the surface, the day and the land, the domains were contested. In the radio domain at least, ground victories over the vaunted Japanese negated the worries expressed on the home front.

As both sides escalated their commitment to the campaign, there were wins and losses all around, and the casualty count rose. But there was no victory in sight for either side.

The Crisis Passes (15 September–27 October 1942)

This period started with Japanese naval success. Their submarines damaged an American battleship and then sank a destroyer and carrier that were escorting an American convoy—the convoy landed a Marine regiment on Guadalcanal despite the escort losses. In this period, American ground strength reached 23,000 while the Japanese built up to 20,000 in two divisions.

Another naval battle arose from mutual reinforcing missions. The Battle of Cape Esperance was fought on 11–13 October. The Navy landed a regiment of the U.S. Army Americal Division on Guadalcanal. In a night battle, the Navy finally bested the Japanese convoy, surprising them and inflicting serious losses. Losses continued in the daylight, when American Guadalcanal-based bombers sank two more Japanese destroyers sailing away from the island. This naval success did not prevent the Japanese from bombarding the Marines on Guadalcanal in the following days, with both cruisers and the even heavier guns of two battleships.

Taking the American toehold on Guadalcanal more seriously and seeing the struggle as an opportunity, the Japanese planned a linked air–sea–ground attack to put an end to the persistent threat posed by American possession of Guadalcanal. The basic plan was for the Japanese army to finally overwhelm the battered Marines; take the airfield that crippled Japanese logistics support for their army on Guadalcanal; fly in naval aircraft from the two carriers and two light carriers earmarked for the mission; and turn the tables on the Americans by firmly extending Japan’s aerial umbrella to the waters around Guadalcanal.

The Land Battle of Guadalcanal, as the Japanese assaults around the perimeter are called, took place over 23–24 October. These assaults were uncoordinated, allowing the Marines to inflict heavy casualties as each attack came. This decisive American ground victory signaled the end of the Japanese threat to capture Henderson Field.

Although the Japanese joint plan was broken along the Marine perimeter, the American fleet intervened, resulting in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands from 26–27 October. The naval battle featured simultaneous American and Japanese carrier air strikes on the other side’s carriers. American planes damaged a Japanese light carrier and also put a fleet carrier out of action for nine months. America lost a carrier as the fleet withdrew and suffered damage to another. Yet, for this “victory,” the Japanese lost 100 planes and irreplaceable experienced pilots.

In the multidomain contest, America gained the edge in the air, the land and the day. Japan held the advantage undersea. The surface and night domains were contested, while the radio domain was not a factor. While not a domain itself, attrition was a major factor in domain competition. America could replace losses while Japan could not. Sometimes domain dominance consists not of skill and technology, but by being the last side to have assets in that domain.

The Americans on the ground, in the air and at sea at Guadalcanal had been battered, but the Japanese, who could ill afford their losses, were also battered and were unable to prevent the buildup of American land and air power on Guadalcanal. While Japan built up ground strength on Guadalcanal, America’s concurrent buildup provided the American perimeter more resilience to repel Japanese ground attacks. Close to three months after wading ashore, the Marines no longer needed “hope” to hold their position.

Accumulating Domain Dominance (28 October–8 December 1942)

American power during this period began to impose dominance over the Japanese military across enough domains to begin to seize the initiative. On the ground, Marine and Army forces

had sufficient strength to expand the perimeter around Henderson Field enough to make it safe from Japanese army artillery fire.

At sea, however, the Japanese could still roughly handle the United States Navy. The 3 November Battle of Tassafaronga resulted from eight Japanese Tokyo Express destroyers being struck by an American cruiser–destroyer force. When the American fleet hit and sank the first Japanese destroyer, the remaining Japanese ships turned and escaped under cover of a torpedo strike that sank an American cruiser in addition to badly damaging three other cruisers, with the loss of life of 400 Sailors.

A series of naval engagements fought on 12–15 November, the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, finally allowed American forces to impose enough control over the sea to strangle the Japanese on the island rather than just hinder their resupply. This shift in naval power was all the more critical for the Japanese, who actually outnumbered the American forces on the island for the first time by 12 November.

In the first clash, a night point-blank gun battle described as chaotic, a Japanese surface force lost two cruisers and the rest of their force was damaged. They did, however, sink two American cruisers and four destroyers and damaged all but one of the remaining American ships. The damaged Japanese battleship was sunk the next morning by American carrier planes flying in to land at Guadalcanal. The Japanese supply ships intended for Guadalcanal that were the purpose of the Japanese mission turned back.

Of note, the American carrier *Enterprise* sailed into action with a supply tender lashed to its side to continue repairs on the ship while underway.

In subsequent engagements, the Japanese sent cruisers to shell Henderson Field during the night, but in daylight hours, as the ships retired, they were hammered by American planes operating from the airfield.

The final Japanese naval offensive to push through a reinforcement convoy resulted in a night battle between Japanese ships that were led by a battleship and an American two-battleship force with four destroyer escorts. The Japanese rapidly sank two destroyers and put the other destroyers and a battleship out of the fight. The remaining American fast battleship, *Washington*, demonstrated how to use the American dominance in radar (in the radio domain) to target the Japanese battleship, leaving the Japanese ship and also a destroyer in sinking condition. The Japanese managed to land 4,000 more troops on Guadalcanal, but this battle was the last Japanese naval offensive that influenced events ashore.

In the multidomain contest, America could lay claim to the advantage in the air, surface, day, land and radio domains. Japan continued to contest the night, while the undersea domain was not much of a factor.

Multidomain synergy was clear as the Navy finally got the hang of using radar for night battles. Just as Japan reinforced their ground forces to compete with the Americans, increased Japanese logistical needs were tougher to meet in the face of a growing American land-based air power and the American ability to deny Japan's freedom to use the night domain at sea.

By the end of November, American airpower on Guadalcanal had swelled to 188 planes—the equivalent of two or three carriers' worth of planes. The Japanese night resupply effort was restricted to only fast destroyers in an effort to have a chance of escaping American air power when daylight came. The Japanese army, despite being reinforced to match the American

ground forces, could no longer count on a logistics effort to hold on and survive the harsh island conditions, let alone drive the Americans into the sea.

Land Victory (9 December 1942–8 February 1943)

This final portion of the campaign was signaled by the withdrawal of the long-suffering First Marine Division from Guadalcanal. The Second Marine Division fully replaced it and was joined by the Army Americal and 25th Infantry Divisions under the Army's XIV Corps.

American dominance at sea and in the air became so complete that the Japanese pressed submarines into service for supply runs. Their small cargo capacity was more than balanced by their survivability. Japan would lose Guadalcanal, but it would take two more months to finally achieve the victory over the tenacious Japanese ground forces, now reduced to defenders.

On 10 January, XIV Corps began an offensive that would last through 7 February. At the end of January, the Americans tried to use the ground campaign for the island to lure the Japanese navy into a trap. An American cruiser-destroyer force with two small escort carriers failed in that endeavor, enduring a Japanese land-based air attack that hit and later sank an American heavy cruiser while it was being towed to safety, in the Battle of Rennell Island, leading the American ships to withdraw and abandon the attempted trap.

Japanese naval activity, assumed to be reinforcing their ground forces, prompted the Americans at the expanding perimeter to dig in and prepare for another Japanese ground offensive. But in fact, the Japanese had called it quits and evacuated their remaining 13,000 troops from Guadalcanal without interference from 1–7 February. The Americans woke up on 8 February 1943 in full possession of the island, six months after their first toehold. In the multidomain contest, they had won dominance in all the domains except the undersea domain, which remained a small factor.

It is worth noting that, despite cross-domain American dominance, faulty American intelligence deprived the American corps of the opportunity to capture the surviving Japanese troops as they embarked and squandered an air and naval attack on the ships carrying those troops. Those Japanese soldiers pulled from Guadalcanal would live to fight again.

Multidomain Warfare and Modern American Strategic Thought

The Guadalcanal campaign was fought because America discovered that Japan was establishing air assets in the Solomon Islands and recognized the problem of Japanese air power based there. America, in response to that threat, would not bombard or blockade it. Instead, it seized and held the assets with ground forces to fully deny the assets to the Japanese and so eventually convert them to American use.

Joint action is required in contemporary warfare because the various domains cannot now be fought independently of the others. The multidomain linkage is obvious in the naval Battle of the Eastern Solomons, where Japan was drawn to send their carriers to fight because American forces held Guadalcanal. The naval Battle of Cape Esperance resulted from mutual reinforcement convoys. Indeed, the entire Tokyo Express was a long naval fight to get Japanese supplies through to the island, rather than a mere assertion of their freedom to sail off of Guadalcanal.

The Japanese explicitly linked the ground, sea and air domains with their October plan to take Henderson Field and then fly in carrier-based naval aircraft to use the airfield. America also tried to use the island to draw the Japanese fleet into battle in January 1943.

The ever-escalating ground presence by both sides compelled each to do battle in the air and sea to avoid losing the troops committed. By the end, what the Japanese initially believed to be an American raid became a corps of two Army divisions and a Marine division, with more than two wings of aircraft at Henderson. The Japanese at one point outnumbered the Americans, and despite their casualties still had 13,000 troops they could withdraw—a large commitment compared to the initial noncombat force sent to build an airfield.

The linkage of fully exploiting each domain to leverage dominance across all domains is clear in the Guadalcanal campaign; current strategic thinking must recognize the need to master this approach. The commanding general of United States Army Pacific wrote:

Inevitably, conflict today and tomorrow will be more complex and distributed, involving actions across multiple domains—land, air, sea, space and cyber—by multiple military services and of many nations, at times simultaneously.⁵

Modern domains of space (new) and cyber (replacing radio) do not change that basic synergy demonstrated at Guadalcanal across the domains of the era. The Navy accepts this as a general concept:

All domain access is the ability to project military force in contested areas with sufficient freedom of action to operate effectively.⁶

But does American strategic thinking really envision fully exploited landpower in the multidomain battle for JAM-GC? In explaining the new JAM-GC concept, a virtual multidomain author team fails to value ground forces as a means to gain access to—and the ability to maneuver in—the global commons.⁷

The new JAM-GC rightly moves beyond the narrow air and land focus of defeating anti-ship assets that A2/AD (understandably) prioritized to bring in all domain forces to overcome enemy power in a contested environment. Yet the overview clearly conceives of landpower projected ashore as a benefit of winning the JAM-GC campaign, rather than seeing landpower on a sufficient scale as one of the domain tools to win the JAM-GC campaign. This failure to use significant landpower to leverage the synergy of a true multidomain approach could be a fatal handicap against a determined enemy—as the Japanese proved to be in the lengthy multidomain Guadalcanal campaign.

In theory, the land is part of “all domains” that America will fight in if necessary according to the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*:

Should any actor directly attack the United States or our interests, the U.S. military will take action to defend our Nation. We are prepared to project power across all domains to stop aggression and win our Nation’s wars by decisively defeating adversaries.⁸

The Navy does aim for all-domain access, stating that it will “prioritize capabilities that gain and maintain access, when and where needed, across all warfighting domains.” Yet this is not a commitment to strategic landpower in the land domain, given that the Navy claims only that it will enable a division-sized Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) for larger operations.⁹

At Guadalcanal the upper limit was indeed a single reinforced Marine division. But the Marines were eventually reinforced by two Army divisions along with corps support elements.

Navy/Marine Corps doctrine formally accepts that a sustained power projection expedition ashore requires partnership with the Army:

[The] Navy, Air Force, and Army are optimized to dominate the sea, air and land, respectively, while the Coast Guard is optimized to safeguard our maritime interests. While the Marine Corps may operate on and from the sea, in and from the air and on the land, it is not optimized to dominate any domain. Rather, the Marine Corps is optimized to be expeditionary—a strategically mobile force that is light enough to get to the crisis quickly, yet able to accomplish the mission or **provide time and options prior to the arrival of additional forces**.¹⁰ [emphasis added]

In theory, the Army is on board with this hand-off as the land-domain “additional force,” as Army Field Manual 4-94 states:

Very large-scale combat operations may require the U.S. Army to conduct land operations with multiple corps-sized formations, either as part of a mature theater of war or under a joint or multinational command. This could require a theater army headquarters to expand and transform into an operational land headquarters (field army equivalent) exercising command over multiple Army corps and a Marine Expeditionary Force. This is the original purpose of numbered armies and the role performed by Third U.S. Army in both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom I. In this case, U.S. Army corps would operate as tactical headquarters alongside Marine Expeditionary Forces. Such a campaign may include large multinational forces and would operate under a joint or multinational land component.¹¹

This is potentially a significant commitment of American landpower. For planning purposes, a significant ground campaign could include seven divisions (Army and Marines) and 21 brigades, plus two corps/MEF headquarters.¹²

While a significant Army commitment may not be anticipated in the vast Asia–Pacific region in the JAM-GC concept, wars have a way of evolving beyond initial assumptions, as Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1 explains:

No major conflict has ever been won without boots on the ground. Strategic change rarely stems from a single, rapid strike, and swift and victorious campaigns have been the exception in history. Often conflicts last months or years and become something quite different from the original plan.¹³

In addition, pursuant to statutory guidance for the Army mission, the Army must be prepared to fight promptly and to sustain that effort for as long as necessary to win:

“Prompt” requires us to provide combat-ready forces immediately; “sustained” requires us to maintain Army forces in the fight until the President says otherwise. Therefore, the forces we provide require the endurance to continue the fight indefinitely.¹⁴

The strength of that effort is left unstated, and of course it depends on the mission, although it is clear that American power must be prepared to seize land as part of the defense of America.

Certainly, the Army cannot control *all* of the territory in Asia. But that scope is not necessary to play a significant role in JAM-GC. The Army can exert control over a small portion of the territory indefinitely, or exert control over a somewhat larger portion of the territory for a shorter duration—long enough to achieve a specific mission. Given that more limited scope, where is the push for even a framework for the option of a significant ground force in the Asia–Pacific theater? The land force currently envisioned is arguably too small for a joint campaign to seriously fight across *all* the domains. The USPACOM commander is seemingly content to

have the Army create and integrate anti-ship assets into the aero-naval network and to add air defenses to the network.¹⁵

The Army is also called to be more expeditionary, which is understandable when one recalls that almost all of the Army's brigade combat teams are now based in United States territory rather than forward-deployed abroad.

But how does defining this capability by looking at the French experience in Africa help the Army deploy long distances and fight unless "expeditionary" is defined in practice as the equivalent of "small"? If France's 2012 Operation Serval in Mali, reaching a strength of 5,300, is considered a model for the Army, how does the Army exert any influence at all in east Asia and the western Pacific?¹⁶ Others slightly more appreciative of landpower expand upon this capability for war and peace operations:

Execution of limited contingency operations (Operation Just Cause in Panama, for example), provision of specific capabilities such as missile defense, and military engagement and security cooperation are contributions that land forces will uniquely make in terms both of effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁷

This is still a limited vision that truncates American landpower potential. It does not meet the demands of fully joint power in support of multidomain dominance, as is envisioned in the Army Operating Concept, *Win in a Complex World*:

American military power is joint power. The Army both depends on and supports air and naval forces across the land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace domains. The Army depends on the other services for strategic and operational mobility, fires, close air support and other capabilities. The Army supports other services, combatant commands, multinational forces and interorganizational partners with foundational capabilities such as communications, intelligence, rotary-wing aviation, missile defense, logistics and engineering.¹⁸

To fully support other services across other domains, the Army needs to operate on the land with a significant force. Otherwise those foundational capabilities are fleeting and fragile contributions lacking resilience in the face of enemy action.

There is the basis for achieving even more in the Army Operating Concept:

When called upon, globally responsive combined-arms teams maneuver from multiple locations and domains to present multiple dilemmas to the enemy, limit enemy options, avoid enemy strengths and attack enemy weaknesses. . . . Army forces adapt continuously to seize, retain and exploit the initiative. Army forces defeat enemy organizations, control terrain, secure populations, consolidate gains and preserve joint force freedom of movement and action in the land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace domains.¹⁹

The basic problem with failing to include significant Army capabilities for the Asia-Pacific theater is that the Army's nominal participation in a joint campaign simplifies enemy problems. Again, from the Army Operating Concept:

The key to a Strategic Win is to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas. To compel enemy actions requires putting something of value to them at risk. Army forces allow joint force commanders to dictate the terms of operations and render enemies incapable of responding effectively. To present enemies and adversaries with multiple dilemmas,

this concept introduces the idea of Joint Combined Arms Operations, an expansion of the traditional concept of combined arms to include the integration of not only joint capabilities, but also the broad range of efforts necessary to accomplish the mission. Joint combined-arms operations allows joint force commanders to operate consistent with the tenet of initiative, dictating the terms of operations and rendering the enemy incapable of responding.²⁰

This approach to fighting across multiple domains is the basis for fully exploiting the land domain for joint access to Asia. Foundational capabilities are certainly beneficial capabilities that the Army can provide to other services, but they *are not what the Army does*, as ADP 1 explains:

The Army's indispensable contributions to the joint force—the core competencies—are combined arms maneuver and wide area security[.]²¹

Without the Army's core competencies, operations in the Asia–Pacific littorals concede a continent's worth of advantageous positions in the land domain that will enhance enemy abilities to contest the air, surface, undersea and cyber domains in East Asian waters. Luckily, the Army is already preparing to provide its core competencies to U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM):

Because economic, social and political pressures on the [Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea] leadership could lead to war or a collapse of the regime, the [United States] prepares for the deployment of substantial ground, air and maritime forces to operate as part of a coalition alongside Republic of Korea (South Korea) forces and in defense of South Korea.²²

America contemplates a large United States Army on the Korean peninsula, side by side with the South Korean ground forces, and fully intends to exert control over that territory to protect South Korea. It is vital to expand the areas of potential campaigns across the entire Asia–Pacific region to support JAM-GC efforts to overcome Chinese A2/AD operations and achieve the objectives of the campaign.

Despite the distance to Asia from the continental United States, where most brigade combat teams are located, the logistics network in Asia is robust enough to support a significant ground element outside of the Korean peninsula. Numerous treaty allies across the region allow port and airfield access to American forces, extending America's reach to large parts of the Asia littorals.²³

Army operations in the Asia–Pacific region can be bigger and therefore more decisive and must be part of the USPACOM tool kit to fully exploit the core capabilities of the Army, as *Win in a Complex World* envisions:

Army forces achieve surprise through maneuver across strategic distances and arrival at unexpected locations. Army forces have the mobility, protection, and firepower necessary to strike the enemy from unexpected directions. In high anti-access and area denial environments, dispersion allows future Army forces to evade enemy attacks, deceive the enemy and achieve surprise. Even when operating dispersed, mobile combined-arms teams are able to concentrate rapidly to isolate the enemy, attack critical enemy assets and seize upon fleeting opportunities. Forces conduct continuous reconnaissance and security operations to seize, retain and exploit the initiative over the enemy while protecting the force against dangers. During joint combined-arms operations, Army forces maneuver and project power across all domains to ensure joint

force freedom of action and deny the enemy the ability to operate freely across those domains.²⁴

Fighting for the Land

A true joint force in USPACOM requires land forces to carry out their core competencies. Marines bring sea-based early-entry capabilities. The Army is the principal land force for “sustained campaign-level ground combat” which, among other things, can “preserve joint force freedom of action.”²⁵

The Army accepts that it is part of a joint, interagency and frequently multinational effort that includes nongovernmental entities.²⁶ The Army’s multidomain operating concept states that the various domains in which the military operates are interconnected.²⁷ The Guadalcanal campaign of World War II amply demonstrates this multidomain synergy and demonstrates the centrality of the land and the importance of landpower in creating this effect.

Effective ground forces that are part of a joint force can compel enemy ground forces, if the enemy wishes to possess key terrain, to expose themselves to joint fires rather than remain dispersed and hidden. If they do not engage in ground combat they may lose that terrain.²⁸ This capability for sustained operations is unique and distinct from the ability to punish with fires. Its presence in USPACOM will reassure allies and partners of American commitment by demonstrating the capacity to aid them in war.²⁹

One of the pillars of America’s defense strategy is “the ability of the U.S. armed forces to deter acts of aggression in one or more theaters by remaining capable of decisively defeating adversaries.” This pillar “is critical to preserving stability and is fundamental to our role as a global leader.”³⁰ Just knowing that the United States is not committing significant ground power gives an enemy the advantage of knowing that they can operate in ways they otherwise would not.³¹

The Asia–Pacific region is daunting for land combat in its diversity of terrain and scale of potential foes. But it would be unusual for any contingency there not to need conventional and unconventional ground forces. The Army “does not have the luxury of preparing to fight only one type of enemy, at one time, in one place.”³²

The Army, ADP 1 states, has the responsibility to integrate the Army’s core capabilities into the joint force both by providing Army capabilities to other services and by utilizing other service capabilities as part of the joint effort:

This creates joint interdependence—an integration of complementary means at the tactical, operational and strategic levels.³³

The Army must be included in American defense strategy in USPACOM planning in ways that allow it to bring its core competency—winning large-scale land campaigns—to the joint multidomain effort as the core force for dominating the land domain in support of a campaign to operate freely in the global commons. The Army must promote and defend its role as a pillar of operations in the Asia–Pacific region, founded on the solid example of what joint forces achieved in the hard-fought Guadalcanal campaign 75 years ago.

Endnotes

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