



DEFENSE.info

Crisis Management



May 20, 2018

RESHAPING CRISIS MANAGEMENT	3
SPMAGTF-CR-AF AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF DAVID SUGGS, CO OF MCAS YUMA	5
THE BOLD ALLIGATOR EXERCISES AND CALIBRATED FORCE INSERTION	8
CAPTAIN RENE LUYCKX, CO OF HNLMS JOHAN DE WITT	10
COMMODORE R.A. KRAMER, COMMANDER, NETHERLANDS MARITIME FORCE	12
COMMANDER GREGORY BAKER	12
LEVERAGING INSERTION FORCES FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT	13
RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINE	14
THE EMERGENCE OF ISIS	15
OVERCOMING THE BOOTS ON THE GROUND VERSUS AIRPOWER DICHOTOMY	17
EVOLVING C2 FOR THE INSERTION FORCE	17
THE FRENCH INSERTION FORCE INTO MALI	23

Reshaping Crisis Management

05/15/2018

By Robbin Laird

The strategic shift is a crucial one for the liberal democracies.

That strategic shift is from a primary focus on counter insurgency and stability operations to operating in a contested environment with high tempo and high intensity combat systems as a primary tool set.

It is about managing conflict with peer to peer competitors.

On the one hand, the military capabilities are being reshaped to operate in such an environment, and there is a clear opportunity to leverage new platforms and systems to shape a military structure more aligned with the new strategic environment.

On the other hand, the civilian side of the equation needs even more significant change to get into the world of crisis management where hybrid war, multi-domain conflict and modern combat tools are used.

While preparing for large-scale conflict is an important metric, and even more important one is to reshape the capabilities of the liberal democracies to understand, prepare for, and learn how to use military tools most appropriate to conflict management.

This means putting the force packages together which can gain an advantage, but also learning how to terminate conflict.

Already we have seen two examples of crisis management using high intensity conflict forces under the Trump Administration, and both involved using military tools to degrade Syrian chemical weapons capabilities. The military strikes were the visible side of the effort; the back channel discussions with the allies and the Russians were the less visible one.

But crisis management of this sort is going to become the new normal, and rather than forming yet another committee of experts to lecture the Trump Administration on what Inside the Beltway thinks is proper behavior, it is time for some PhD brain power to be generated to deal with how to understand the new combat systems and how best to master these systems from a political military point of view to deliver significantly enhanced crisis management capabilities.

Recently, Paul Bracken provided some PhD brain power on the subject and he highlighted a key aspect of what I am calling the strategic shift to crisis management for 21st-century peer-to-peer conflicts.

The key point for today is that there are many levels of intensity above counterinsurgency and counter terrorism, yet well short of total war. In terms of escalation intensity, this is about one-third up the escalation ladder.

Here, there are issues of war termination, disengagement, maneuvering for advantage, signaling, — and yes, further escalation — in a war that is quite limited compared to World War II, but far above the intensity of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.....

A particular area of focus should be exemplary attacks.

Examples include select attack of U.S. ships, Chinese or Russian bases, and command and control.

These are above crisis management as it is usually conceived in the West.

But they are well below total war.

Each side had better think through the dynamics of scenarios in this space.

Deep strike for exemplary attacks, precise targeting, option packages for limited war, and command and control in a degraded environment need to be thought through beforehand.

The Russians have done this, with their escalate to deescalate strategy.

I recently played a war game where Russian exemplary attacks were a turning point, and they were used quite effectively to terminate a conflict on favorable terms.

In East Asia, exemplary attacks are also important as the ability to track US ships increases.

Great power rivalry has returned.

A wider range of possibilities has opened up.

But binary thinking — that strategy is either low intensity or all-out war — has not.

I want to focus on the following Bracken observation: *These are above crisis management as it is usually conceived in the West.*

The point can be put bluntly – we need to rethink crisis management rather than simply thinking the strategic shift is from fighting terrorists to preparing for World War III and musing on how we will lose.

And that is a key area of work facing civilian strategists, but only if they understand that the new military capabilities open up opportunities as well for something more effective than simply doing nothing or very little or launching major combat operations.

Figuring out how to leverage the new capabilities and to build upon these in shaping scalable and agile force capabilities is part of what civilians need to learn with regard to how to think about tools for crisis management.

The other part is to think through a realistic assessment of how to work with authoritarian leaders who are our adversaries in the midst of a crisis so that conflict termination can be achieved but without following the Chamberlain model.

At the heart of this is a fundamental change to C2, both for the military and for the civilian leadership which is supposed to provide strategic guidance.

But simply identifying a geographical location to send the military and then failing to find a time when the return ticket can be issued is not effective leadership.

My recent visits with the Nordics highlight a region thinking through these kinds of issues.

On the one hand, the enhanced military collaboration among the Nordics seen in things like Cross Border training or the coming Trident Juncture 2018 exercise in Norway is clearly about working through how to generate the combat power which can be tailored to a crisis.

On the other hand, the Nordics within the framework of NORDEF, or the working relationship with the United States as seen in the new trilateral agreement signed by the US, Sweden and Finland are examples of working through the civilian side of crisis management.

It is a work in progress and not one where the United States is clearly in the lead. Given that crises are regional, our allies have important contributions in shaping a way ahead to manage crises in their region as well.

And the Nordics are clearly doing this.

We need to rework our military C2; and even more importantly, put a rest to our civilian strategists simply campaigning for a place in the next Administration.

We do need to focus on how we can turn the Russian and Chinese anti-access and area denial strategies into a 21st century version of the Maginot Line. And we are already building systems and capabilities that can do so, but not without a transformation focus and effort.

But we need to learn to not self-deter and to explore ways to push the leaders of the non-liberal powers hard and to also understand how to engage with them as well.

This is neither the world of the High School Musical which the globalization folks seem to champion; nor the harsh world of zero sum conflict which hardliners to the right seem to live in.

It is a world where conflict and crisis management are the new normal between and among peer competitors.

SPMAGTF-CR-AF and Crisis Management: The Perspective of David Suggs, CO of MCAS Yuma

05/21/2018

By Robbin Laird

During my May visit to MCAS Yuma, I had a chance to sit down with the Commanding Officer of the Air Station who has significant electronic warfare experience and was part of the standup of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF.

The naming convention was changed multiple times.

The original name was SPMAGTF-AF operating out of NAS Sigonella, Italy.

This force was not a CR force and was designed to support Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) utilizing logistics combat element (LCE), no Air Combat Element (ACE), or Ground Combat Element (GCE).

The (CE) was limited in scope and tailored to meet mission requirements.

After 2013 the ACE, and GCE were added with a robust CE to support the Crisis Response (CR) mission requirements and hence became the SPMAGTF-CR.

We are focusing on the role of insertion forces in 21st crisis management and the birthing of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF & CENT is clearly part of that transition.

Our conversation focused around the standup of SPMAGTF-CR-AF and the way ahead with crisis management.

During the visit of Murielle Delaporte to Morón Air Base, Spain, Dec. 6, 2013, the initial standup of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF was described:

SPMAGTF-CR-AF is a self-command and -controlled, self-deploying and highly mobile maritime crisis response force allocated to U.S. Africa Command to respond to a broad range of military operations to provide limited-defense crisis response in the AFRICOM/EUCOM region.

The Marine task force can serve as the lead element, or the coordination node, for a larger fly-in element. It also can conduct military-to-military training exercises throughout the AFRICOM and EUCOM areas of responsibility.

Like other MAGTFs, the SPMAGTF-CR includes a command element, a ground combat element (GCE), an aviation combat element (ACE) and a logistics combat element (LCE). It is composed largely from II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, N.C., coordinating a balanced team of ground, air and logistics assets under a central command.

<https://www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/2014/04/filling-gap>

Col. Suggs provided an overview on how the standup and operation of the force provided a defensive insertion force, which empowered crisis response options but also triggered broader working relationships with allies in shaping convergent crisis response capabilities.

Crisis management requires both the forces and the convergent C2 and decision making to use those forces. And the standup and operation of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF facilitated both processes.

In effect, the formation of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF provided a bridging function for AFRICOM and EUCOM to be able to provide insertion forces able to deploy rapidly, a key means for triggering enhanced training with key allies in the Western Mediterranean.

This was especially important as the focus had shifted dramatically to CENTCOM and provided an important stimulus to American forces being able to work through with interoperability among crisis response forces.

SIPRNET is where Americans work with each other, and can become a limiting capability which inhibits broader and more effective collaboration with allies, the kind of collaboration central to allied crisis management.

And the Western Med collaboration in turn provided leverage back into broader NATO collaboration.

And all of this was driven by the stand up of the SPMAGTF-CR-AF as a forcing function force, so to speak.

“In fact, SPMAGTF-CR-AF itself was born from the Benghazi crisis.

“We did not have a reactive/sustainable force to operate in Africa and the AFRICOM and EUCOM relationship did not have in place the procedures for how to transfer forces from one component commander to the other in African operations in a timely manner.

“Having a complete understanding and the authority to launch a CR force from a sovereign nation can create additional bureaucratic delays if all participants are not on the same sheet.

“SPMAGTF-CR-AF created a catalyst and through collaboration with the Spanish and Italian MODs we were able to establish a clear common understanding allowing for quick response to a crisis.

“To me a crisis is my house on fire and I need to call the first responders right away and know the number to call. It’s about building connective tissue, or access to the right people at the right time.”

“We needed to set up the first responders and the 911 number.

“And it is not just a question of the physical force, but the working relationships among allies to allow that force to engage rapidly.

“We have logistics support units postured in Africa but we are not set up to operate in Africa for a sustained period of time unless we are operating out of Djibouti.

“And it was cost prohibitive to set up Djibouti West, if one might call it that.

Question: In effect, you were sizing a force that could be effective, but clearly defensive in nature, and one that could work with allies to get not just pre-positioning but de facto pre authorization for use?

Col. Suggs: The challenge was precisely that.

“SPMAGTF-CR-AF was set up to operate out of Morón Air Base, Spain, and worked closely with Naval Air Station (NAS), Sigonella, Italy.

“The Spanish have great forces operating from Morón Air Base and we had close proximity with the French.

“We have had a lot of coordination with French Forces and conducted routine training exercises to ensure proper techniques and procedures were established.

“We have introduced the Osprey to the Spanish, French, Italians, and UK, integrating forces conducting amphibious training on their ships. This increased readiness in not only our forces, but also to NATO forces.

“In effect, we were going back to the time when we used to have a MEU in the Mediterranean working with allies, but that has atrophied given the focus on CENTCOM.”

Col. Suggs highlighted that the SPMAGTF-CR-AF was a triggering for more allied cooperation as well.

“We created a number of second and third order effects as well as our small force contingents were able to work with other NATO allies, such as in the EUCOM Black Sea Rotational Force.

“There a small force of Marines led by a Marine Corps LtCol led the effort and we learned how to work more effectively together.

“The problem on the US side is that we rely primarily on SIPRNET for our communications and even though a significant amount of the content is actually unclassified, we are operating within our SIPRNET culture.

“Allies are not on SIPRNET so we need to train ourselves to become more interoperable and work with other communication and intelligence channels to deliver the kind of crisis management effect we are going to need.”

“This small little group is operating as a trigger for significant reworking by ourselves and our allies, way beyond the combat weight of what that force brings to the table.”

Question: It is important to focus on crisis management, not simply forces the US can deploy to an event.

How does your SPMAGTF experience trigger that kind of learning?

Col. Suggs: If we have a crisis to respond too, a key part of the response is ensuring that the relevant allies are all on the same page operationally and politically.

“Because we are training regularly with those allies but not bringing overwhelming force to the training, we shape common approaches and procedures, which are crucial to crisis management situations.

“It is about convergent forces, and convergent intervention approaches and shaping a capability to do so in the short time span which effective crisis intervention requires.

“It is not about bringing multiple Army battalions or Air Force Air Wings. It is about arriving at the right time; the right place and to get the right effect our outcome.

“When one’s house is on fire you want to call the first responders and expect them to show up.

“You are not calling the insurance adjuster’s first.”

The Bold Alligator Exercises and Calibrated Force Insertion

05/21/2018

By Robbin Laird

We are looking at how insertion forces can be shaped and leveraged as part of a 21st century approach to crisis management.

The strategic shift from relatively slow motion counter-insurgency wars, to higher tempo operations rests in part on having forces relevant to a crisis which can be inserted and have an effect.

We followed the Bold Alligator exercises since their inception as the USN-USMC team focused on the revival of the sea base as a key enabler of a 21st century approach to crisis management.

And as mobile basing becomes a key demand for the Army-USMC-Navy-Air Force team, the sea base becomes a key element within the overall solution set of mobile basing.

In this 2014 article, we looked at the Bold Alligator exercise that year and the focus on shaping a way ahead.

Land wars of the past decade have led the United States to a significant redirection of its military forces.

The key roles played in ground operations and support by the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and the US Navy (USN) to the land forces have been evident and reflected in the decisions and focus of the Department of Defence.

These land-based roles entailed large-scale and expensive logistics operations via land, sea, and ground, along with significant expenditures to support civilian contractors, such as Maersk, for specialized capabilities.

Although charged to military accounts and considered military ops, these are really support to land-based forces more than they are dynamic military operations.

A major centerpiece of this effort has been Counter Insurgency Operations and the training of local forces to support local governance – highlighting a significant role for nation building. Stability operations were prioritized over traditional conventional operations, and the nuclear dimension of the force structure reduced and largely de-emphasized.

However, this bulging towards the traditional land role makes little sense going forward.

It is not about mass and occupation; it is about insertion, sustainment, crisis management and crisis termination with air, ground and sea assets as appropriate.

For example, rather than setting up long-term facilities (and providing advisors as targets), the U.S. insertion forces are able to speedily engage and withdraw – and several core allies are shaping similar forces.

The ability to establish air dominance to empower multi-mission insertion forces that are able to operate rapidly, effectively, and then withdraw, is a core effort that now exists and is emerging as a more efficient way of war for 21st century conflicts.

The long-standing debate over ‘boots on the ground’ versus ‘airpower’ really does not capture the evolving capabilities each group has to offer as they capitalize on new technologies to provide for more effective and more lethal insertion forces.

Indeed, as General Hostage, the recently retired ACC Commander, put it:

The boots on the ground debate is a political, not a military debate. Nobody argues that putting boots on the ground will not give you better fidelity, better opportunities to identify the good guys and the bad guys, and put weapons on the forehead of the correct bad guy.

But it's not a military decision whether to do that or not, it's a political decision. I think it's a legitimate political consideration that our national leaderships deal with. They choose whatever path they choose, you could like or dislike it, but it's not a military choice, it's a political choice.

Sea-basing clearly provides an important capability to insert and withdraw forces for military operations, and to help modulate crisis response.

As the Commander in charge of the USS Arlington put it during the Bold Alligator 2014 exercise:

“We are part of the sea-basing initiative. The focus of which is: how do you build mass ashore without a huge logistical tail ashore? We get those land forces ashore and then we sustain them.”

Bold Alligator 2014 Overview

Bold Alligator 2014 is a crisis response exercise and continues the work of BA 2012 and BA 2013.

It is about calibrating insertion forces against various threats.

The forces are American and coalition with several nations contributing ships, and combat personnel to both the planning and execution of the missions.

A key aspect being tested in the operation is C2 to support operations against multiple objective areas and to shape a more flexible C2 system.

This ranges from inserting a Osprey-enabled force more than a 1,000 miles from the launch point and supporting that force with airborne C2 and ISR, to the operation of a Dutch ship as the key C2 center for the coalition operation, including launching an airborne and other assets against Fort Story, to the Expeditionary Strike Commanders working airborne and then on ships to direct the operation.

Shaping more flexible coalition C2 is clearly a key element of the BA 2014 exercise, and, of course, in mission success in real world operations.

Interviews conducted about the Dutch command ship the HNLMS Johan de Witt highlighted the C2 role of the ship.

These interviews were followed up with an interview with the Captain of the USS Arlington who highlighted the significance of enhancing the capabilities of C2 aboard the new generation of amphibious ships, precisely because of the expanded role which the sea base is being asked to play and can play.

Captain Rene Luyckx, CO of HNLMS Johan de Witt

Captain Rene Luyckx:

The ship was built in 2006.

It is built more or less along commercial standards; there is a lot of room for operations.

It is a small village.

There is an airport, a garage, a hotel, and a port in effect involved with the ship.

The difference with our ship compared to most ships of its class is that we have a large C2 area.

Question: Where have you operated the ship?

Captain Rene Luyckx : We have been on Exercise African Winds; twice we have operated as the command ship for anti-piracy operations off of Africa; and in the Caribbean as well.

Question: The kind of operations we need to do now require flexible C2.

How have you used it so far?

Captain Rene Luyckx:

This ship was the flagship for the EU task force off of Africa.

We will go again in January where Sweden will be in charge but they will operate off of our ship because of our C2 capabilities.

We intend to use the ship for a larger national force but it has become a very effective coalition asset.

And sea basing is crucial for you can operate independently, and provide support logistics aboard the ship rather than having to push them ashore. And we can do C2 for the entire force we might support ashore as well.

Question: The Osprey is part of BA-2014. How does it affect your thinking about operating as a coalition partner with the USN-USMC?

Captain Rene Luyckx:

We can land the Osprey aboard our ship.

And the Ospreys can go deep against an objective area.

And we can do other operations with our helos and landing craft.

And we can Command and Control all of this from the ship if we wish rather than having to put C2 ashore in a potentially hostile environment.

The Netherlands and Bold Alligator 2014

Commodore R.A. Kramer, Commander, Netherlands Maritime Force

In a discussion with Commodore Kramer in the C2 deck of the ship, the Commander talked about the approach: *The coordination going on here involves the forces landside as well as the movement of the vessels.*

The crew is multi-national and from various services as well.

There are 12 countries involved in working on the exercise as well.

The NATO procedures are crucial to being able to bring such a group together to do such an operation.

You cannot do it at the same level or same speed without NATO procedures and training.

We have been out here only a couple of days but we are functioning well after such a short time because of those common procedures and training.

Commander Gregory Baker

The discussions aboard the Dutch ship, naturally turned to C2 because of its role in the exercise.

But it is clear from Odyssey Dawn and the role of the USS Kearsarge and its role in that operation, that C2 enhancements are crucial for the amphibious fleet.

With a large deck amphib, like the USS America entering the fleet, and ships like the USS Arlington operating at much greater distances from other ships in the ARG-MEU, C2 is more importance now for the Gator Navy as that force transforms into an amphibious task force.

Commodore Baker was asked about this growing demand signal for enhanced C2:

We have a much more robust C2 suite than a traditional LPDs.

What does constrain me is the actually sailors we billet on board.

We have the capability to do the LHD or LHA can do, and we are prone to deploy more independently over time as we do disaggregated ops.

Question: C2 limits for the amphibious ships is butting up against the demand to use the sea base differently in doing insertion operations

How are you addressing this?

Commodore Baker:

The sky is the limit.

There are initiatives we are doing to upgrade skill sets.

We have sent to schools to get skill sets to increase our capability.

We have not tapped fully the capabilities of the ship expanding the C2 capabilities of the ship.

In short, the exercise involves working with an evolving C2 capability to manage forces operating throughout key objective areas.

The presence of the Osprey allows the US and its allies to operate against longer range objective areas as well as other objective areas reachable by rotorcraft and reinforced by landing forces.

The sea base is characterized by logistical integrity meaning the insertion forces can be supported by the sea base, and it is not necessary to build forward operating bases or to land significant supplies ashore in order to prosecute missions.

The ISIS threat reminds us that leaving equipment behind — which is required for land-centric forces — can lead to the arming of one's next adversaries.

It is a force tailored to crisis management, as opposed to having to rely on bringing significant forces ashore along with their gear in order to mount operations.

This article was first published on November 11, 2014.

Leveraging Insertion Forces for Crisis Management

05/21/2018

By Robbin Laird and Ed Timperlake

We are looking at how insertion forces can be shaped and leveraged as part of a 21st century approach to crisis management.

The strategic shift from relatively slow motion counter-insurgency wars, to higher tempo operations rests in part on having forces relevant to a crisis which can be inserted and have an effect.

It also requires political leadership having a mastery of how to leverage such forces, and manage the effect.

In this article which we first published in 2014, we highlighted an option open to the Obama Administration that they did NOT take, but was available to them.

But it is difficult to use an option for which an Administration has NOT been attuned to, organized for, nor have the will to execute.

The original article as published follows:

As the crises in Europe and the Middle East heat up, the debate quickly turns on which path is crucial to deal with evolving threats: boots on the ground or airpower with no boots on the ground.

The specter of responses to the 9/11 attack and the various engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq naturally shade perspectives.

Yet changing capabilities and concepts of operations are overcoming the classic distinction as the USMC has become the only tiltrotor enabled force in the world, as the USAF and USN have shaped highly integrated air grids, and advances in both the lethality and effectiveness of manned and unmanned aviation have grown.

And the past decade's experience of the need to shape a very large and expensive ground grid from which to feed Special Forces and ground operations is not one the US is going to repeat anytime soon.

At the same time, conflict is evolving as well.

The evolving pattern of 21st century conflict is emerging.

It is a pattern in which state and non-state actors are working to reshape the global order in their favor by generating conflicts against the interests of the democracies but which the democracies are slow to react.

The assumption of ISIS terrorists and Putin's Russian Ukrainian adventure and the Chinese leadership relying in part on the PLA to expand the domain of Chinese sovereignty is that the slow decision making cycles of democracies can be exploited to make gains.

And gains can be achieved on a piecemeal basis, rather than going for the big grab which can provide a dramatic event usable by democratic leaders to mobilize public opinion and generate resources to respond.

A mix of non-kinetic, kinetic and information warfare elements are blended into an assertive adversary political-military policy against democratic interests.

Russia and the Ukraine

A good case in point is that of Putin and his ongoing efforts to control Ukraine. The actions in Ukraine have included seizure of territory, the use of Special Forces, information war, the use of indigenous Russian armed and trained "separatists," and other techniques.

Vladimir Putin was a young KGB Officer who was active when President Reagan won the IW against the Soviet Union trying to stop the US and NATO successfully placing tactical nuclear cruise missiles in Europe as a major deterrence move.

In the Euromissile Crisis he learned how not to lose an Information War. Consequently he is shaping a 21st century blend of combining military moves with successful propaganda.

By seizing Crimea, Russia set in motion internal pressures aided by direct support to continue map writing in Ukraine and to reduce the size of the territory under the country of the government in Kiev. The Crimean intervention was destabilizing, and the enhanced role of Russian "separatists" aided and abetted by Moscow within the remainder of Ukraine is part of the Russian 21st century approach to warfare.

The shoot down of the Malaysian airliner by Russian “separatists” and the absence of any Western response to secure the site and work with the Ukrainians to bring the separatist operation to a halt was a key element of his successful strategy.

The US and NATO lost a significant opportunity to do a very good thing in protecting the victims bodies and rolling back literally drunken separatists that could have been achieved by the President of Ukraine calling in an insertion force of MV-22 enabled Marines.

Sadly an opportunity was missed, the US could have responded to the Malaysian shoot down in Ukraine by working with the Ukrainian government to bring in forces to secure the crash site.

If this was the pre-Osprey era, an insertion might be more difficult, but with the tiltrotar assault force the USMC can be put in place rapidly to cordon off the area. Had this occurred it would have signaled a credible global response to the disinformation campaign of Russia and its state-sponsored separatists.

Airpower dominance over Ukraine coupled with the Marines on the ground, and forces loyal to Kiev could have secured the crash site without becoming a permanent US military base. It is about using flexible military insertion forces in ways appropriate to the political mission.

The Emergence of ISIS

The 2014 USMC MV-22 insertion forces can also respond to ISIS threat. The emergence of ISIS is a political force challenging the US President on how to respond with an extremist group aggregating power, trying to build an army and shaping a leadership role in a volatile region. The ISIS rejection of all groups other than their own, a join us or die mantra had been proven to be a very powerful IW weapon.

ISIS is dedicated to the violent destruction of those who object to their leadership of a mythical Middle Ages dream which is directly opposed to any Western values of religious freedom, secularism and tolerance. When you have a group grabbing for power that Al Qaeda finds extreme the United States, Europe and many countries in Middle East, from Israel to Saudi Arabia have a major problem.

ISIS is shaping a brand via its military successes and its ability to eliminate religious opponents; it is a kinetic force using information war to spread the murderous fanatical brand to shape their evolving influence in the region.

The leader does not dress in black or fly a black flag by accident; it is part of the branding effort and the religious information war against their enemies.

ISIS is a rapidly moving target and needs a response that is not measured in the months and years of a return of the US Army to Iraq to re-start training an Iraqi Army which the Obama Administration has already clearly recognized as part of the problem not the solution. The total collapse of the Iraq Army after a decade of US investment is a testimony to failure, regardless of who is at fault in US planning and execution of Iraq Nation Building.

For defenders of COIN, it would have to be explained why time and continued effort would overcome what are clearly deeply rooted fissures within the political texture of Iraq: namely the Sunni-Shite cleavage, the role of Iran and the use of the military by Prime Minister Malki for his own political purposes?

In effect, Maliki has used his Shia-dominated military in ways similar to how Saddam Hussein used his Sunni-dominated military, namely to prop himself up in power and to shape domestic political outcomes to his benefit. Simply changing the name of the leader is not likely to change power realities.

And when the ISIS were able to aggregate forces, the absence of an air enabled ground force, demonstrated a fundamental fact often forgotten: it is not about airpower versus boots on the ground.

As Lt General (Retired) Dave Deptula has pointed out it is about an air dominance enabled ground force versus ones that are not, especially with a 21st Century ISR grid in the air not on the ground.

Consequently in addition to new tiltrotter MV-22 technology, a notable political difference between Iraq in 2014 and 2003 is the politics of the Turkish-Kurdish relationship and the ability of the US to build upon that relationship. Kurdistan with their Peshmurga fighting force is one area of Iraq that has immediate promise of thwarting, rolling back and to begin the process of destroying ISIS.

With respect to success in IW, the leaders of Kurdistan deserve great praise because of the tolerance and lifesaving physical sanctuary they provided to the Christians and others. The Kurds can now play a key role in shaping a relatively stable island in a violent region, and provide an important focal point for the United States and its allies. Working with the Kurds and augmenting their autonomy within Iraq, including control of critical oil infrastructure, is a clear objective for the operation of US forces.

Successfully employing airpower to destroy visible items of war such as ISIS captured, tanks, major artillery, rockets, and other road mobile transportation Humvees, MRAPS and their pick-up trucks with automatic weapons can be done.

Destroying this captured US military hardware, which enables ISIS to operate and maneuver, is a key priority.

If the ISIS forces loses their maneuver ability and their crew-served weapons and armored vehicles, especially tanks, to seize terrain and key choke points, they will be forced back into the cities or be forced hide in small units in the countryside.

If US forces can see them outside of cities they can kill them. City fights should be left to what is remaining of the Iraq Army.

ISIS was well on the way to fielding an Army when the US finally engaged.

Focusing upon what is needed to pulverize military capabilities of ISIS to move rapidly and lethally, can buy some strategic maneuver space to sort out what kind of aid the Kurds might really need to protect their augmented territory within a fragmenting Iraq.

Because the US has the option of leveraging our seabase in conjunction with whatever force capabilities might be shaped to support the Kurds, the US is NOT forced to have agreements with a collapsing regime to influence events. The sea-based force can function as the foundation for a force able to operate without the need for specific territorial agreements on basing with fractious factions of Baghdad.

And when they depart, they do not have to leave their equipment behind which can become later seized by hostile forces and used against the United States and its allies.

Leveraging both our sea base aviation strike assets throughout Iraq, and combined with the global strike reach, outside of Iraq of the USAF fighter, bomber and tanker fleet in support of US tactical jets, ISIS will encounter death from above delivered by Air Force and Navy combat pilots. This is war-tipping capability. We don't need to write a blank check for the insertion of forces of COIN-determined size packages and prop up an ally who is not; we have already done that one.

Buying strategic maneuver space for the immediate period ahead, and pulverizing ISIS's military capabilities – trucks, cars, artillery pieces, etc. — are the crucial objectives and is an airpower strike mission. It is about the ISR strike grid in the air rather than relying on the previous US Army way of war building an extensive and expensive operational grid on the ground.

Overcoming the Boots on the Ground Versus Airpower Dichotomy

In both the Ukrainian and Iraq cases, the ability to insert force empowered by airpower is crucial. What is often forgotten about Drones and Special Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan is the need for very large ground-based grid of support necessary to move the ground forces (helicopters), feed ground forces, provide medical assistance to ground forces to support Special Forces and also the vast targeting appetite for the Drone fleet.

By contrast, the ability to station and supply a Navy Marine Team anywhere around the globe, ready for immediate combat, demonstrates, yet again, why the US Navy Fleets of Carrier Battle Groups and ARG/MEUs are invaluable assets for American military power projection.

The USMC can easily setup a TEMPORARY FOB for 22nd MEU with their MV-22s somewhere in Kurdistan to conduct missions into Iraq proper to rescue Christians and eliminate any ISIS fanatics in the way in the process and then leave. USS Bush CBG could provide a real combat punch when ISIS mass their forces-or SOCOM/CIA identifies isolated groups. Just like they could have secured the crash site in Ukraine.

This is not about long term occupation and training; this is about ready now USMC sea based tiltrotor MV-22 assault forces coming to the aid of the Kurds and Christians, and setting up a forward operating base that can influence events in the Nineveh plain, helping move threatened minorities to Kurdish protection, all the while working with SOF in country, and then returning aboard ship.

The U.S. has insertion forces able to engage and withdraw, rather than setting up long-term facilities and providing advisers as targets. The ability to establish air dominance to empower multi-mission USMC insertion force able to operate effectively, rapidly and withdraw is a core effort that now exists in US way of war for emerging 21st century conflicts

The classic dichotomy of boots on the ground versus airpower really does not capture the evolving capabilities of either airpower or the evolving capabilities of ground forces capitalizing on those evolving capabilities to provide for more effective and more lethal insertion forces.

A version of this piece has appeared on **Breaking Defense**:

<http://breakingdefense.com/2014/09/its-not-airpower-vs-boots-on-ground-any-more/>

This was first published on September 21, 2014.

Evolving C2 for the Insertion Force

05/21/2018

By Robbin Laird

We are looking at innovations in reshaping insertion forces as part of a crisis management approach able to deal with crises in the period of the strategic shift.

Notably, the USMC has been focusing for some time on shaping new ways to operate which leverage new technologies but doing so from the standpoint of changing their concepts of operations.

In this 2015 article, we looked at innovations in C2 being worked by the USMC.

During my visit to 2d MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade), I had the opportunity to interview Major General Richard L. Simcock II, Commanding General, 2d MEB, and Major Marcus Mainz, lead 2d MEB planner for Exercise Bold Alligator 2014, where we had a lengthy discussion regarding the Marine Corps' innovative approach in addressing Combatant Commanders' requirements.

During the interviews, I was able to discuss 2d MEB innovations in C2 (command and control) with Mainz.

Although we discussed many aspects of the 2d MEB's approach to C2 for Marine Corps composited forces, the innovations evident in Bold Alligator provided several concrete examples of how 2d MEB is working through emerging C2 challenges.

Innovations in aviation allow Marines to extend their reach and provide greater flexibility for amphibious operations. The reworking of the amphibious fleet to deliver capabilities to project power from the sea and the ability of the infantry to implement innovations in maneuver warfare and force insertion require creativity in operational design and C2.

The very term command and control can be confusing because it suggests top-down control of detailed operational activities.

However, 2d MEB exercises C2 of scalable and modular forces by delegating it to a level where tactical operations are more effective.

This contradicts a growing trend of micromanagement of an expanding battlespace.

This construct facilitates mastery of the operational environment in a fluid combat situation by keeping focus at the appropriate levels. It gives the MEB CE (command element) the capability to focus on the operational art that bridges the strategic and tactical levels for political objectives.

Execution of the mission, empowerment of subordinate leaders at the appropriate level, and maintaining situational awareness of the overall situation is a key challenge for C2.

The complexity begins with incorporation of joint and coalition forces for CJTF operations.

Given that joint and coalition capabilities enhance response time and effectiveness of global operations, C2 takes on a whole new meaning when shaping the appropriate composite force for missions across the ROMO (Range of Military Operations), which makes it central to effective Marine Corps Operations.

2d MEB is hard at work on meeting this challenge.

MajGen Simcock explained in his interview that the importance of “providing the Combatant Commander with a force capable of plugging into various joint, coalition, and interagency requirements is essential. The realities of the 21st century security environment demand a smart power approach inclusive of all services of the military, our partners and interagencies, which play an integral role in fulfilling National Security Strategy.”

Integration of allied and partner nation operational capabilities and systems with the U.S. amphibious fleet will develop, in effect, a global U.S.-Allied amphibious fleet capability.

General Simcock also discussed emerging demand for partnership with 2d MEB in global security “since the Marine Corps has revitalized the MEB concept capable of world-wide deployment, we have been contacted by many of our coalition partners, allies and other nations interested in training and operating with 2d MEB.”

The way Major Mainz explained it:

Composite forces are created when you take disparate forces, which are underneath different command and control structures, and place them underneath one commander tasked with a specific mission.

The 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade is ‘a receiver of forces.’ We work various compositing options and shape the C2 for those forces coming together to perform the mission.

Major Mainz likened the 2d MEB CE to a Swiss army knife.

We want to be the Swiss Army knife of command and control.

We want to morph or adapt into whatever environment we’re in – coalition or joint.

2d MEB sees itself as a scalable CE capable of C2 for disparate forces, coalition and/or joint, to address the unique requirements of Combatant Commanders in uncertain environment.

The emphasis is upon shaping the force appropriate to the mission much as I discussed earlier the concept of insertion forces.

“We’re not trying to deploy something forward that’s not needed.”

Major Mainz explained the planning approach.

2d MEB needs three things to create a plan – battlespace, mission, and troops available, but given any of the two we develop the third. We offer the Combatant Commander a scalable force capable of operations across the ROMO.

This mental concept allows us to avoid a preconceived notion of what a C2 structure should look like. What makes us so different from any other Command Element is our lack of prearranged subordinate forces along with a training program rehearsing different C2 structures.

We have the mental flexibility to design a plan tailor-made to the unique mission and battlespace of any Combatant Command.

Exercise Bold Alligator 2014 was clearly about C2 and shaping a force that can work with coalition forces operating under a foreign commander.

“The unique term we used during Bold Alligator is we can become a Commander of MAGTFs, not a MAGTF Commander. What that means is we see our Command Element as so flexible we don’t have to go into a normal Marine construct.”

The Marines exercised C2 of multiple U.S. and coalition led MAGTFs while organizing additional structure to support them.

This mix and match approach was a crucial element of what was tested in Bold Alligator 2014.

For example, in Bold Alligator we used the T-AKE (Dry Cargo/Ammunition Ship) as a logistics combat element ship.

We had three different MAGTF’s involved but separately we had a logistics combat element operating off a T-AKE, an intermediate staging base and a land base.

We were trying to show the flexibility that we can mix and match whatever the situation actually demands. We don’t need one model or the other, we can create hybrid models.

Major Mainz explained how this approach worked with the Dutch who were in charge of a coalition operation.

When the Dutch did a raid during the operation, Marine Corps’ Aviation supported their raid.

And this required not only flexibility, but clear command and control relationships when those Marine Corps aviation forces were chopped to the Dutch during that mission.

One of the challenges faced in doing coalition C2 is the security restriction on the U.S. side, which is a key part of shaping effective joint C2.

When we provided them an American ship, American helicopters, and some Marines and said you’re in charge of that task force, we spent an enormous amount of time creating what they called command knee boards, to determine what can we ask of the coalition force.

During this intellectual rigor we realized the U.S. had information that was difficult to share in the original construct.

Our challenge was determining how to share relevant information within the constraint of the communications architecture.

We spent an inordinate amount of time getting it to a metric where we could share with the coalition.

Another aspect of the exercise was the USS Kearsarge the installation of CENTRIXS servers to handle coalition communications.

According to Major Mainz, those servers remained on the ship.

“The Kearsarge is now a coalition communications ship.”

In effect, Bold Alligator 2014 was not an exercise; “it was a mission rehearsal.”

A major effort developed from the need to communicate with coalition partners – the need to work on what the Major referred to as building an “information kiosk.”

The challenge was to shape ways to effectively exchange information.

How do we move things from SIPR net to CENTRIXS?

How do we transfer from NIPR net to CENTRIXS?

We dedicated significant manpower and intellectual rigor to these processes?

Major Mainz also discussed the execution of a flexible, scalable and an apportioned HQ for amphibious shipping and/or coalition and joint operations, another important aspect of C2 innovation during Bold Alligator 2014.

One of the things we did during Bold Alligator was to leave the majority of our force at Camp Lejeune as a reachback capability for the command element while we went out on the ships.

On average, MEB amphibious operations necessitate a two hundred man staff. We never put more than seventy people on that ship because we were testing our reachback capabilities.

The general says, ‘Get there the fastest with the mostest.’ Get out there, and get out there fast.

I don’t need to bring everything with me, bring just enough to be capable.

In short, C2 of a composited force is about flexible insertion appropriate to the mission, given its restraints, able to operate from land, air and the sea – not simply park forces on land.

It is about modularity; it is about scalability; and it is about pushing C2 to the appropriate level of decision-making.

And 2d MEB is hard at work on these 21st century innovations.

To do so, the Marines are focusing on evolving their capabilities beyond the PHIBRON (Amphibious Squadron) or ARG (Amphibious Ready Group)/MEU (Marine Expeditionary Unit) level by bringing forces together from across the theater of operations to composite forces.

The goal is to “provide timely and scalable forces for crisis response, allowing commanders to tailor forces to evolving missions and effectively composite modular MAGTFs (Marine Air Ground Task Forces) by combining forward-deployed forces with rapidly deploying forces.”

This article was first published on April 22, 2015.

Recently, the 2nd MEB worked with the Norwegians evolving USMC C2 working with the Norwegians who are reworking their national C2 as well.

According to a story written by Cpl. Victoria Ross of the 2nd MEF and published on March 15, 2018:

U.S. Marines with 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade battled freezing temperatures and snow while participating in Norwegian exercise Joint Reindeer 18 throughout various locations in Norway and north of the Arctic Circle from March 2-15, 2018.

Marines were augmented within a Norwegian unit, Norwegian Brigade-North, as they conducted an annual combined-arms exercise to bolster their military capabilities in a harsh cold weather environment. In addition, this training helped prepare the MEB staff for an upcoming exercise, Trident Juncture.

“It was a good opportunity to get a better understanding of Norwegian culture and how they do things,” said Cmdr. John Meeting, the staff medical planner with the unit. “It was a good learning opportunity to see some of the constraints you’re faced with in that type of environment.”

The training prepares the unit for future exercises and coping with the unrelenting arctic temperatures nations like Norway experience.

“Training such as Joint Reindeer 18 gives Marines the opportunity to work in a climate we often don’t see, giving us a better understanding of conducting operations in a cold weather climate,” said Staff Sgt. Steven Saitta Jr., the production and analysis chief with the unit. “Joint Reindeer presented Marines a unique opportunity to participate in an exercise led by another nation. The Norwegian Brigade-North took us in with open arms and made us feel welcomed.”

The training was designed to integrate Marines with the Norwegian Brigade-North to improve interoperability and share practices and procedures.

“I was on the part where patient movement was taking place,” said Chief Adrianna Foto, the health services support chief with the unit. “I was observing and learning about their processes like patient tracking and moving patients through the area. The harsh environment was a side that we are not very familiar with, so it was a good preview for exercise Trident Juncture.”

The MEB staff interacted with the administrative, intelligence, logistics, operations, communications and medical sections within the Norwegian Brigade-North command. Through this training, the MEB was able to focus on enhancing their command and control capabilities with partner nations.

“The biggest takeaway is our ability to quickly integrate with the Norwegian military and work together with ease,” said Saitta. “Training with foreign militaries gives us greater understanding of our allies and how we conduct operations in a coalition environment.”

The MEB provided advice and guidance in a coalition setting to improve cohesion among the two nations.

“The Norwegians were just as eager to learn from us as we were from them and took our input to heart and applied many of our recommendations to their exercise immediately,” said Saitta. “We arrived in Norway as strangers and departed Norway as friends.”

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/277035/enhancing-partnership-with-european-allies-marines-conduct-training-norway>

The French Insertion Force Into Mali

05/20/2018

By Murielle Delaporte

We are focusing upon ways to leverage military innovations as part of a broader rethink of crisis management approaches in the context of a strategic shift from the experience of the past decade for Western militaries.

In this article by Murielle Delaporte, based in part on her time in Mali with the French forces, French forces are seen as working through a different approach, one which is part of the strategic transition as well.

This article was first published on June 11, 2013.

The revolution in logistics seen in air and maritime support for ground forces can reshape how these forces operate. The French experience in Mali provides a case in point.

The French forces were requested by the Mali government to intervene to defend the capital and the southern part of the country almost at the last moment. Because of a rapid political decision-making process, because of French presence on the regional theater linked to ongoing military missions (Epervier ; Licorne), and because the French have been building a very integrated, and rapid deployment force – one forged around expeditionary logistics –, the French were able to intervene rapidly, and to move rapidly.

What this let the French forces do was to attack the aggregated enemy forces.

What is often forgotten is that extremist forces may well disperse to avoid destruction, but to have a real political effect from the use of their forces, one needs to aggregate the forces and seize territory. One only has to remember the teachings of Mao to understand this point. What this means as well is that an outside force configured and poised to attack aggregated enemy forces moving against definable territorial “prizes” can be attacked as such.

French forces entered at the beginning of the operation first with air power directly initiated from French air force bases and then rapidly with massive air-ground force. As a result, they have been forming a «21st century caravan» approach (as one French convoy commander refers to it), where logistics and operational elements had to be combined simultaneously into a single force.

There is no classic approach to the rear and the front.

The forces are expeditionary and carry their capabilities with them, adjusting their capabilities as they transition to the next phases of the operation.

In what could be called phase one of the operation, the French did their own version of “shock and awe.”

A rapid and massive offensive was generated to block the insurgents from reaching Bamako who were within reach of the capital within a matter of days. The French government on January 11th, 2013 after a request for help came from the President of Mali mobilized an insertion force.

A month later, as the Commander of the French Army Aviation in Mali explained, “the enemy has been taken by surprise and is now destabilized. Because of the lightning speed of the maneuver by the Serval [the name given by the

French to the operation] force, the insurgents are now fleeing and not willing to fight as they did not expect such concentration and mobility heading their way.”

This effort has been possible due to several factors.

The first factor is the speed of the French forces and their ability to act from the outset in a matter of hours as far as air operations were concerned. For example, on the Air Force side, the very first strikes made by the Rafale fighters taking off from the FAB Saint Dizier were done thanks to a nine hours and thirty-five minutes flight involving five air-to-air refueling.

On the Army side, it took only two days for the French Army Air Mobility Group (GAM for *Groupe aéromobile*) involving close to 300 men and 20 helos to be operational after a strategic airlift from the South of France to the capital of Mali and in autonomous operation with the help of the logistic battalion (BATLOG) simultaneously deployed with the strike force. As a French officer involved in the operation has noted: “after leaving Bamako for Sévaré five hundred kilometers further on January 26th, then leaving again for Gao on February 6th five hundred kilometers further, I have available the support tools of nearly a full regiment ranging from my air control tower (...) to spares allowing me to last for months.”

The rapid surge of the Serval force, which eventually grew to three battalion-sized Task Forces (GTIA for *Groupement tactique interarmes*), has also been facilitated by France’s historic presence and defense commitments in this part of the world (e.g. the *Epervier* operation in Chad since 1986 and the UN Unicorn operation in Ivory Coast since 2002). And France was able to leverage various national assets currently based in other African countries, as well as full support from these nations.

Mobility and concentration of forces have also been rendered possible by good C2 and joint training and experience between the French Air Force (Rafale and Mirage 2000D fighters and N’Djamena-based JFACC), the Navy (with the amphibious assault ship BPC Dixmude bringing ground elements ashore and with the Atlantique 2 maritime patrol aircraft crucial to coordinate CAS operations between Army aviation and ground troops) and the Army.

This is also true at a joint level, since good C2 and joint training have been key to operate the international transport and refueling fleet which joined in Serval.

While executing phase one, the French were preparing their transition to the next phase, a second phase in which regional peacekeepers and the Mali Army itself would become the key force to provide for stability.

The French themselves are keeping a modest force in place, one that can aid in the process but can also move rapidly within the country to defend themselves plus their allies.

From the beginning, the French intervention was not seen as an isolated event, but as one designed to clear the path for coalition forces to take over the mission.

For France, the North African region, in many ways, is as significant as is Mexico for the United States. And in a region of close proximity with high strategic consequences and many foreign nationals living there, ongoing engagement is a reality.

Regional support is absolutely key to prolong the deterrent effect of the French initial military action.

It has been made possible by the months of preparation, which took place before it occurred ahead of schedule, as is the one of the international community via the United Nations and/or other organizations.

The latter has been slowly, but surely picking up with a growing number of allied countries' logistic and support assets being gathered to help French and African armed forces' sustainability on a theater where vast elongations and the ability to hold a difficult territory are the key challenges.

Transport aircraft and tankers have been sent early on by the United States and European countries, while the Eindhoven-based European Air Transport Command played its role in providing needed assets.

From a French prospective, the goal has been to start reversing the balance between supported and supporting forces as early as April in order to prevent the “Afghanisation” of the conflict feared by some, but in a secure, responsible and coordinated manner, as well as to avoid a strictly national involvement according to the principle “First to enter, first to leave”, as recently stressed by the French chief of staff in front of the French National Assembly defense commission.

Indeed, as the COMANFOR, General de Saint Quentin, has been stressing, Serval not only boosted the Malian armed forces confidence to keep on fighting, but also played the role of a catalyzer in order for the African forces to mobilize themselves and play the regional role they have been aspiring to play.

Phase three could hence be characterized as the shaping of the post-insurgent Mali, and here working with the Mali government and African forces is central.

In this phase, European support and trainers will be a key part of shaping whatever is possible with regard to stability in Mali. European military training, which is also kicking in, will also be a key factor to make sure African ground troops have the best chances to secure the whole land of Mali.

In other words, the French experience in Mali is about building a first entry insertion force with expeditionary logistics fully integrated with the maneuver forces.

This force is then able to work within the region and to become a lead element in its own transition and withdrawal. The French approach is very much about how to intervene and to trigger coalition operations in order to stabilize the situation with regional partners, rather than to simply stay in place for a long time.

1. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cr-cdef/12-13/c1213074.asp>

*** *This article is based on interviews conducted with French forces who have operated in Mali.*

For Murielle Delaporte's regular coverage of the French military, see her articles on [Breaking Defense](#) or the French language defense journal of which she is the editor.