

Seabasing Capability Development

Article for newsletter

By G3/G5 DC CD/I Staff

The Commandant of the Marine Corps recently published his vision of the future Marine Corps of 2025. The vision describes how the Corps will fulfill its role in the defense of the nation in an inherently unpredictable future. One of the objectives set for the Corps is to create a Joint Seabasing capability that will give us the "...ability to cross wide expanses of ocean and remain persistently offshore at the place and time of our choosing."

The Corps' operational capstone concept, which was also recently published, sites the imperative of Seabasing. However, it points out "...the Seabasing capability currently resident in the Navy-Marine Corps is not sufficient to support large scale joint operations of extended duration."

The intent of this article is to inform readers of where the Marine Corps stands with the development of the Seabasing capability.

Why is it important to know where we stand with Seabasing? Because this may be the most important joint and multinational enabling capability we will have in the future.

Over the last 20 years, we have seen a significant reduction in overseas bases and basing rights. Expectations are for that trend to continue. Changing from a forward based posture to a CONUS based posture has been one of the most significant transformation issues for the US Military, especially in an era when the security environment strongly suggests a robust overseas, forward presence is necessary.

According to Col Steve Zotti, Director of the Marine Corps' Strategic Vision Group, "The problem with this basing reality is the widely-shared opinion among national security experts and politicians that in order to reduce the ability of extremists to attack our interests we must prevent them from gaining a foothold in weak countries."

Marine Corps leadership at the highest levels believes Seabasing is a large part of the answer.

"Given diplomatic, geographic, and infrastructure constraints, Seabasing is absolutely critical to overcoming area denial and anti-access weapons in uncertain or openly hostile situations," General Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, said during testimony before Senate Armed services committee on 28 February 2008. "In fact, we view Joint Seabasing as a national strategic imperative."

The concept of creating a base of operations at sea, essentially an afloat port and airfield, is not new. However, new and emerging technologies do suggest a much better capability to base at sea is in the offing. For example, new technologies will soon allow at sea arrival, transfer and assembly of vehicles, equipment and personnel, among many other advancements.

What's New

Currently, we have to fully unload prepositioning ships at a secure port then configure the force for the task at hand. However, that is changing.

"What's new is we have the technology to conduct at-sea arrival and transfer and assembly of personnel and equipment, thereby enabling people and equipment from all Services and multi-national partners to complete their pre-employment preparation and equipment configuration at sea before going ashore. Executing the mission, sustaining units ashore, and reconstituting the force once the mission is accomplished can also be done from the sea base. However, to do this we need to build cargo transfer, handling and stowage technologies into our new ships and field the high speed craft and connector capabilities that are currently in the design and testing phases." Jim Strock, Director Seabasing Integration Division at Quantico said.

Where we Stand

Capability development in the Department of Defense is accomplished through the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System (JCIDS). The JCIDS process starts with a concept, in this case the Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept, which describes how a Joint Force Commander conducts operations 8 to 20 years in the future. After the concept is approved, experimentation and a Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA) normally run concurrently to further examine the capabilities that might be required.

The CBA is an analysis process designed, ultimately, to determine Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities (DOTMLPF) changes required to conduct operations in the manner proposed in the concept.

It is a complicated process that can take years and millions of dollars to complete. However, according to the Joint Staff's CBA Users Guide, in simplest terms the Functional Area Analysis (FAA) "Defines what we are talking about," the Functional Needs Analysis (FNA) "Defines how good we are at doing it" and the Functional Solutions Analysis (FSA) "Says what we should do about it."

The results of the CBA are used to develop a Joint Capabilities Document (JCD) (based on the FAA and FNA) and Initial Capabilities Document(s) (ICD) based on the full analysis.

The product of the CBA process is one or several ICDs which enter the defense acquisition system for a possible material or capability solution. Which capabilities are analyzed for solution sets, and ultimately developed or procured is decided upon at the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC).

A quick snap shot of where Seabasing is in the process:

- The JROC directed a Seabasing CBA in Jun 04.
- An FAA was approved by the JROC in Dec 05.
- The Functional Needs Analysis (FNA) was approved by the JROC in Nov 06 that identified 17 capability gaps.
- The Seabasing Joint Capabilities Document (JCD), which captures the results of the FAA and FNA, and prioritizes high risk capability gaps (17 gaps identified in the FNA), was approved by the JROC in Dec 07.
- The JROC directed a Joint Seabasing Analysis and Wargaming (JSAW) group be established in order to conduct further analysis and further define the FNA 17 gaps for the FSA process. The JSAW is expected to be completed by late summer 2008.
- FSAs are expected to commence in October 08 and conclude during FY10. Pending JROC approval of the FSAs, solutions will enter the Defense Acquisition System (DAS) via Initial Capabilities Documents (ICDs) generated by FSA sponsors or be captured in DCRs...

What all this means

It means we need this Seabasing capability to be able to conduct simultaneous operations, across the spectrum of conflict, in multiple regions of the globe, most of which are harsh climatically, remote geographically, access prohibitive, and underdeveloped in almost every respect. Multi-capable, tailored force packages from multi-mission platforms are powerful and cost effective tools to broaden our leadership's range of options.

It means the best and the brightest in our military see Seabasing as a solution to future challenges. Your assistance in educating others on the flexible and will be valuable.

It is important for all Americans to understand where we are with the development of material solutions for this enabling concept and educate others on its importance to our nation and the world. As important as all the recent strategy and guidance documents say it is to be forward deployed helping to develop partner capacities, etc, we think development of this Seabasing capability should be a top priority. The ongoing JCIDS process will affirm this. To learn more about Seabasing (videos, articles, briefs), please visit <http://www.quantico.usmc.mil//seabasing/EW/index.htm>