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# **TRANSLATIONS**

Accelerating the Development of (PLAN) Marine Corps Combat Capabilities to Win in High End Maritime Warfare





# CHINA MARITIME STUDIES INSTITUTE CENTER FOR NAVAL WARFARE STUDIES U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE



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# Accelerating the Development of (PLAN) Marine Corps Combat Capabilities to Win in High End Maritime Warfare<sup>1</sup>

Rear Admiral Zhu Chuansheng<sup>2</sup>

At present and for a period into the future, numerous security concerns and threats will persist along China's periphery, in the far seas, and overseas. [China's] national security threats are primarily at sea, the focal point of military struggle is at sea, and the center of gravity for the expansion of [China's] national interest is also at sea.<sup>3</sup> As the elite amphibious combat force, the PLAN Marine Corps finds its primary theaters of operations in oceans, on islands, and overseas. It must closely monitor maritime and overseas security developments, accurately assess security threats, coordinate maritime and overseas operations, clearly identify military requirements, accelerate transformation and development, and continuously enhance combat capabilities. This will enable it to play a critical role participating in global maritime governance and winning high-end maritime conflict.

## I. Clearly Identifying the Marine Corps' Operational Role in Winning in Combat

[Our goal is to] build and develop the Marine Corps into a new quality combat force (新质力量) in the new era. How it should be built and what it should become are critical propositions and the constant concerns of Chairman Xi Jinping. Marine Corps development must be anchored to the goal of "winning in combat," implement guiding principle, determine force employment, and establish precise operational requirements to drive force transformation and enhance combat capabilities.

(1) The First Force in Strategically Decisive Victory. As the initial assault force safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, the Marine Corps should fully leverage its unique systemic advantages of being a highly integrated combined arms force to drive strategically decisive future operations. It must play a pivotal role in independently conducting operations, breaching front line enemy defenses, while relying on the broader naval warfare

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 祝传生 [Zhu Chuansheng], 瞄准打赢高端海战加速推进海军陆战队作战能力建设 ["Accelerating the Development of (PLAN) Marine Corps Combat Capabilities to Win in High End Maritime Warfare"], 军事学术 [*Military Art*], no. 1 (2025), pp. 9-12.

**Translator's Note:** *Military Art* is an internal PLA publication.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> **Translator's Note:** Rear Admiral Zhu Chuansheng is the Deputy Commander of the PLAN Marine Corps (Unit 91811).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> **Translator's Note:** Here the author is citing Xi Jinping's "Three At-Seas" (三个在海上), i.e., the strategic judgment guiding China's military strategy.

infrastructure to achieve strategic surprise, conduct multi-dimensional assaults, execute elite force raids, seize and control critical points and complete other missions, and rupture enemy lines to penetrate and exploit enemy centers of gravity.

- (2) The Main Force in Island/Reef Seizure and Control. As an important force in safeguarding maritime rights and national interests, the Marine Corps should project forces and fires from surface platforms and from positions on island/reefs to conduct tasks such as integrated amphibious operations, all-domain control (全域风控布势), precision maritime strikes, and coordinated amphibious operations for seizure and control. It can both conduct persistent domain awareness over disputed islands/reefs to deter enemy encroachments and rapidly retake critical islands occupied by adversaries to favorably re-shape the strategic environment. It can also conduct multi-domain operations to occupy uninhabited islands/reefs and establish forward strongpoints and counter enemy joint operations by pre-positioning integrated air defenses and sea control fires.
- (3) A Unique Force for Maritime Deterrence. The Marine Corps' ships, aircraft, and boats are highly integrated, and can form cross-functional modular units. It is tasked with the critical missions of safeguarding strategic maritime chokepoints and rapid response to a diverse array of threats to maritime security. It can both execute nodal strikes to breach the powerful enemy's blockade of important straits and passages and conduct vessel boarding operations for inspections and interdictions to prevent adversaries from exploiting maritime resources such as energy and fisheries. It can further infiltrate close to the powerful enemy's maritime bases to guide precision strikes, conduct special operations, and carry out other missions that deter the powerful enemy.

(4)	A Frequently Used Force for Overseas Operations. As an overseas expeditionary
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force (海外远征力量) operating from the sea to the land, the Marine Corps can leverage traditional friendly nations as strongpoints, supplemented by the overseas support bases of Chinese-invested enterprises, using overseas garrisons (海外驻防) and shipborne pre-positioning to create an integrated land-sea force disposition, sustain forward presence, and perform missions such as defense of critical nodes, escort operations and evacuations of Chinese nationals, armed rescue operations (武力营救), and limited punitive actions (有限惩戒). It can play a vital role in diverse military tasks to include the defense of critical overseas locations and precision punitive actions.

# II. Focusing on High-End Maritime Warfare: Innovating in Agile Assault to Achieve Victory

Today, advanced technology, as represented by artificial intelligence, is developing rapidly. It is fundamentally reshaping warfare and accelerating paradigmatic combat evolution. Maritime warfare that leverages advanced weapons systems and new domain/new quality forces (新域新

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Translator's Note: The term "powerful enemy" (强敌) is a common euphemism for the United States.

质力量) and focuses on autonomous and intelligent systems operating in a highly-distributed manner throughout the broad maritime frontier is emerging as a critical operational style (作战样式). The Marine Corps must closely monitor top-tier adversaries, advanced operational concepts, cutting-edge combat technologies, and highly integrated/combined warfare methods. With respect to the mechanisms to achieve victory, it must explore patterns of development and methods of force employment. It must develop operational concepts and typical tactical approaches to drive leapfrogging progress in combat capabilities.

(1) Employing "Speed" to Strike the Enemy: Proactively Pursuing Agile Force Employment. Agile/rapid response is critical in seizing the initiative and dominating the battlespace. The Marine Corps executes elite force operations where speed is the first domain in which forces compete. It must integrate organic and higher echelon collections resources to rapidly detect targets; establish multi-domain collaborative networks for swift command-and-control (C2) and decision-making; and streamline kill chains for rapid target engagement. By transforming operational concepts and integrating new-quality capabilities, we can exploit enemy vulnerabilities to create breakthroughs. Employing vertical, surface, and horizontal assault capabilities, we will achieve operational superiority across space, time, and sequencing. Conducting parallel attacks across the entire area of operations, we will rapidly seize and control target areas, denying the enemy time for reinforcements and denying extra-regional powers (域外势力) time to intervene.

# (2) Using "Control" to Counter the Enemy: Shaping a Multi-Domain Enemy Suppression Posture

High-end warfare, dominated by advanced technologies, leverages asymmetric combat advantages afforded by technological superiority. This places exceptionally high demand on precision command, operations, strike, and sustainment. The Marine Corps' primary areas of operations are in highly politically sensitive maritime and overseas [theatres]. It therefore must even more firmly conceptualize multi-domain precision operations, optimizing the "reconnaissance-control-strike-assess" operational kill chain, supported by cyber capabilities. Through precise multidimensional, cross-domain coordination in combined arms, it should organize unmanned systems, special operations forces, and airborne units to conduct infiltration and landing operations, while directing strike platforms to coordinate networked fires support over the landing area. It must employ distributed, optimized assault and targeting to limit enemy tactical mobility and suppress enemy fires, to resist and restrict enemy decision-space, to concentrate efforts to defeat key nodes and paralyze enemy systems, to favorably alter the balance of forces, and to establish comprehensive battlespace control.

(3) "Attrite" to Weaken the Enemy and to Proactively Establish Operational Advantages. Modern wars are fought with comprehensive [national] power and are fundamentally wars of attrition. Marine Corps amphibious operations at sea and overseas must contend with limited logistical support, necessitating the achievement of operational objectives with minimized casualties and cost expenditures. It must replace personnel attrition with materiel attrition, employ low-cost means to degrade high-value targets, increase the proportion of unmanned and intelligent combat systems, and employ tactics such as using unmanned systems against manned capabilities, and leveraging fires against enemy operational potential. Through effective fires and

unmanned systems-driven attrition, enemy manpower can be neutralized, creating conditions of asymmetric, asynchronous attrition where the enemy's amphibious defense system is rapidly degraded and enemy forces reach premature culmination.

(4) Prevailing over the Enemy through "Logistics Support": Precisely Sustain Operational Advantages. Cross-sea sustainment and support is a critical challenge in amphibious operations. The Marine Corps' distinctive characteristics of maritime presence and operating from the sea necessitate leveraging the amphibious task force design to establish integrated shore-to-sea and cross-sea support frameworks. Sustained, robust, and precise sustainment and support operations maintain the sharp edge of amphibious landing force assault capabilities. Simultaneously, enemy support and sustainment must be restricted by destroying enemy resources in reserve, striking enemy support operations from combat actions, thereby reinforcing and expanding our comprehensive operational advantage.

### III. Strengthening Cross-Functional Capabilities to Forge Elite Combat Forces

The Marine Corps faces diverse mission requirements, which demand multi-faceted capabilities. We must adhere to combat-driven development, thoroughly deconstruct and understand future high-end maritime combat requirements, determine core command capabilities, and extensively conduct realistic mission- and capability-based combat training.

- (1) Multi-Faceted Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Remote Sensing Capabilities. Focusing on operations across the near seas, far seas, and overseas domains, and to accelerate the integration of strategic, operational, and tactical level actions, the Marine Corps must develop amphibious surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, such as wide-area coverage, and real-time sensing, to be seamlessly integrated into joint operational systems. Additionally, it must establish tactical-level intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to support overseas crisis response, limited punitive actions, and maritime counterterrorism, and it must enhance multi-faceted deep sensing, track continuity, and multi-source target corroboration across the air, land, and maritime domains. It must improve rapid data collection and dissemination, sharing, integration, and fusion capabilities to provide highly timely and precise information support for Marine Corps operations.
- (2) Highly Efficient Command and Control. Addressing the Marine Corps' agile, distributed warfare characteristics, such as large-area mobility, flexible employment, and cross-domain coordination, we must strengthen networked information systems to develop multi-dimensional, interconnected command and control characterized by efficient direction and seamless coordination. On one hand, we must optimize amphibious warfare command, explore improvements to amphibious warfare command systems, operationalize amphibious task force command structures, and enhance the quality and effectiveness of amphibious force readiness. On the other hand, we must diversify multi-domain integrated command and control, integrate land-sea-air information linkages, close the OODA loop, and enhance capabilities for real-time

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battlespace domain awareness, multi-level decision-making coordination, timely and dynamic mission planning, autonomous collaboration in combat, and precise control over operations in progress.

- (3) Agile Fires Strike Capabilities. We need to develop mission planning systems and establish agile kill chains at both the operational and tactical levels to accelerate the generation of synergistic joint, combined arms fires. To accomplish this, we need to conduct combined training and joint drills involving precision fires support at close and extended ranges, including unmanned fires. We must prioritize specialized training in calls for fire, targeting guidance, and battle damage assessment, while simultaneously optimizing algorithmic target identification and standardizing command guidance procedures to enhance lethal effects in finding, fixing, and finishing targets.
- (4) Rapid Multi-Dimensional Assault Capabilities. We must focus on forward deployments which rely on our coast, ships, islands/reefs, and overseas bases as decisive points, relying on joint rapid forward deployment, positioning, and multi-domain assault capabilities via maritime, aerial, and land transport platforms. For rapid amphibious landing operations, we must intensify research on efficiently clearing coastal obstacles and quickly establishing lines of communications from lodgment, while organizing training in assault landing operations employing helicopters, hovercraft, amphibious troop transports, etc. For airborne operations, we must accelerate the development and employment of unmanned platforms including decoy and anti-radiation systems. Decoy drones must be trained to evade radar lock-on and to draw low-altitude/ultra-low-altitude enemy air defense fires, and to improve stealth penetration capabilities under unfavorable conditions. For the seizure of decisive points, we must adhere to practice of innovating while recognizing established principes (守正创新), strengthening research and training on conventional and unconventional tactics for multi-dimensional breakthroughs against enemy coastal defense systems to enhance our capabilities to rapidly seize critical points and establish lodgments.
- (5) Persistent Cyberwarfare and Electronic Warfare Capabilities. We must innovate and strengthen offensive and defensive cyberwarfare and electronic warfare measures to enhance full-spectrum amphibious capabilities. First, we need to strengthen electromagnetic suppression and protective jamming capabilities, such as enhancing cyber and electronic protection to eliminate or reduce enemy cyber and electronic systems' impact on our C2 information systems and unmanned control systems. Second, we must enhance anti-radiation hardening and antivirus capabilities, while strengthening the ability to disrupt or paralyze enemy C2 and communication systems, rendering them unable to see, hear, transmit, or connect. Third, we must enhance electronic jamming and cyber intrusion capabilities. Strengthening radiofrequency spectrum interference, deception capabilities such as the transmission of fake commands and enabling enemy self-attrition will disrupt enemy C2, decision-making, and movement and maneuver.
- (6) Sustained Support Capabilities. We must integrate self-sustainment, system-level, and unmanned combat support assets to achieve seamless amphibious integration, precisely aligned to operational requirements and able to rapidly replenish combat forces. First, this requires precise self-sustainment capabilities, with focus on accurately assessing and calculating sustainment and support requirements based on mission tasking, force structure, operational environment, and allocating support assets to prevent waste. Second, systems support capabilities

must be sustained, with emphasis on leveraging diverse platforms within the system, using platforms such as transport aircraft and roll-on/roll-off vessels to achieve uninterrupted forward and rear support through airlift, shore-sea transfers, and pontoon bridge relays (栈桥接力). Third, there needs to be diverse alongside support capability. This emphasizes integrating unmanned equipment like drones, unmanned vehicles, unmanned boats, and unmanned ground systems with traditional manned sustainment and support to achieve coordinated manned-unmanned combat support including replenishment, rescue, transport, and repair for amphibious operations.

### IV. Emphasizing Systems Capabilities to Accelerate Transformative Development

As a newer combat force in China's military, the Marine Corps executes elite operations within a joint operational system. In terms of both operational employment and force construction, it must urgently focus on the development of "three major strategic capabilities" (三大战略能力), fixate on prevailing in future high-end maritime warfare, adhere to systemic thinking and empowerment, plan with a holistic perspective, pursue long-term development, and integrate combat, construction, and readiness planning to achieve innovative development of combat capabilities.

- (1) Strengthen and Optimize Top-Echelon Planning Design. Aligning with national strategic development, the Marine Corps' transformation blueprint should be closely linked to national security imperatives and aligned with broader national strategic development The goals and plans for the transformation should be scientifically designed, enhancing the Marine Corps' ability to accomplish assigned missions. Top-echelon institutional development can be strengthened by drawing upon effective practices found in the U.S. Marine Corps to establish sufficient authorities and a dedicated agency, which will conduct research and development on major issues such as the duties and missions of the Marine Corps in the new era, its organizational structure, mission taskings, and operational principles, as well as planning for force development. Emphasize the guiding role of concepts of operations, build upon higher level operational concepts, and systematically develop operational concepts specific to this organizational level and disseminate them to the tactical level. Precisely guide the development of force design, weapons and equipment, and personnel.
- (2) Focus on Core Competencies and Accelerate the Construction of New-Quality Equipment. The U.S. Marine Corps' "Force Design 2030" emphasizes optimizing force structure through scenario-based planning and incorporation of unmanned concepts to design forces capable of supporting operations. Currently, our Marine Corps approaches force development and employment by centering on amphibious and light mechanized infantry formations supplemented by airborne capabilities to conduct multi-dimensional projection operations and traditional flat landing operations. However, this approach is not very compatible with the operational concepts of amphibious assault ship task force operations. It is imperative to accelerate the comprehensive development of aviation, naval, special operations, and information systems and equipment as tailored to the specific mission requirements of amphibious forces. [The Marine Corps must also] increase the proportion of unmanned, intelligent, and specialized equipment to establish equipment systems suited to Marine Corps specific missions, and in developing unique equipment support models well incorporated in

maritime and overseas operations. This will underpin the development of agile, over-the-horizon operational concepts and combat tactics, thereby enhancing amphibious combat capabilities.

(3) Prioritize Human Talent to Develop the Next Generation of Forces. Human talent is out	ır
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most important resource. As a major combat component of the Navy, the Marine Corps currently lacks branch-specific military academies to support talent cultivation, resulting in relatively weak personnel development. Future efforts must strengthen integrated training for the Marine Corps and amphibious forces more broadly. On one hand, we must intensify joint education and training within military academies, establishing a three-pronged talent development model involving military academies, training institutions, and military units. Proactive training for the five key personnel sources (new recruits, newly graduated cadets/officers, personnel attending specialized technical schools, new commanders, and staff officers) must be prioritized to meet urgent manning requirements. On the other hand, we must study and evaluate establishing a specialized academy for amphibious warfare, and refine training tasks and pedagogies to optimize the structural framework for amphibious warfare talent cultivation.

### (4) Deepen Amphibious Integration and Coordinate Amphibious Force Development.

Maritime presence, assault from the sea, sea-to-shore operations, and prevailing in ground combat operations underpin the operational logic of the Marine Corps. It is essential to sharpen the Marine Corps' "maritime" foundation, strengthen "ground combat" capabilities, and vigorously advance amphibious integration by continuously deepening the training framework across operational domains. Specifically, we must innovate the training model for amphibious task forces and integrate Marine Corps and amphibious surface vessel personnel in joint training and living environments. This integration should encompass fleet-level C2 exercises, training in basic modularized tasks, and joint combat deployments to enhance the integrated combat capabilities of amphibious task forces. Concurrently, we need to research and establish Marine Corps underway force organization as well as deployment and training rotation frameworks, and to promote operating base-centered deployment of amphibious forces, routinely forward deploy Marine Corps units to conduct long-range prepositioning as part of amphibious task forces, and drive fleet integration to generate effective amphibious combat systems.