

Development of Allied Amphibious Capability and the Policy of Rebalance

by

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In response to the territorial disputes in the East China and South China Seas and the ongoing build-up of military power in the Asia-Pacific region, many of the United States' allies and partners in the region, including Australia and Japan, have demonstrated renewed interest in the development of amphibious forces. China, a potential adversary, is also continuing to expand its capabilities. This paper argues the development of allied amphibious forces provides a wide range of diplomatic, military, budgetary, and economic benefits to the U.S. policy for rebalance in the Pacific. Specifically, it augments U.S. amphibious capability, promotes stability, improves multi-lateral relations, and directly and indirectly contributes to the U.S. economy. As a method of analysis, this paper evaluates the development and potential employment of Japanese and Australian amphibious forces as examples of states that seek the capability, though for different purposes.

Development of Allied Amphibious Capability and the Policy of Rebalance

In late 2011, President Obama announced the policy for “rebalance” in the Pacific as an acknowledgement the future security and prosperity of the United States is largely dependent upon the peaceful development of the Asian-Pacific region. The term rebalance implies the resources of the U.S. government are disproportionately applied to other less strategically important regions of the world; therefore, the policy of rebalance consists of efforts by to U.S. government to redistribute its diplomatic, economic, and military elements of power to the Asian-Pacific region in order to shape development in line with the interests of the United States.

In response to the territorial disputes in the East China and South China Seas and the ongoing build-up of military power in the Asia-Pacific region, many of the United States’ allies and partners in the region, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and India, have demonstrated renewed interest in the development of amphibious forces or are working to expand an existing capability. China, a potential adversary, is also continuing to expand its capabilities. This paper argues the development of allied amphibious forces provides a wide range of diplomatic, military, and economic benefits to the U.S. policy for rebalance in the Pacific. Specifically, it augments U.S. amphibious capability, promotes stability, improves multi-lateral relations, and directly and indirectly contributes to the U.S. economy. As a method of analysis, this paper will evaluate the development and potential employment of Japanese and Australian amphibious forces as examples of states that seek the capability, though for different purposes.

Rebalance and Amphibious Forces

According to the Congressional Research Service, the purpose of the rebalance is predicated on four primary issues:

- the growing economic importance of the Asia-Pacific region, and particularly China, to the United States' economic future.
- China's growing military capabilities and its increasing assertiveness of claims to disputed maritime territory, with implications for freedom of navigation and the United States' ability to project power in the region.
- the winding down of U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- efforts to cut the U.S. federal government's budget, particularly the defense budget, which threaten to create a perception in Asia that the U.S. commitment to the region will wane.¹

Additionally, the Asia-Pacific region is home to five of the ten largest militaries, more than half the world's population, and ten of the fastest growing economies including China, India, and Indonesia. It is also an area that has potential for major power conflict. The Korean Peninsula is technically still in a state of war and North Korea continues to inflame tensions with nuclear and ballistic missile tests. China's aggressive behavior to establish control over its territorial claims in the East China and South China Sea has also generated numerous disputes with other countries in the region. Finally, there is always the potential for catastrophic natural disasters as the region is prone to earthquakes, tsunamis, and violent storms.

It is vital to the United States' economic and security interests to ensure the Asia Pacific region continues to develop peacefully and in accordance with the established international order. The goal for the rebalance, according to National Security Advisor

Tom Donilon, is to ensure “international law and norms be respected, that commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded, that emerging powers build trust with their neighbors, and that disagreements are resolved peacefully without threats or coercion.”²

The United States’ military contribution to the security of the Asia-Pacific region is the most basic and visible aspect of its power. Currently, the U.S. remains committed to maintaining regional stability as evidenced by security treaties with South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Additionally, the U.S. armed forces regularly participate in theater security cooperation exercises which are instrumental in building relations, facilitating diplomacy, and deterring aggression. In order to support the rebalance, the U.S. military will increase its resources and presence in the region. This includes the shift of up to 60% of Navy ships to the Pacific Fleet, rotational deployments of Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF) to Darwin, Australia, and the Army’s new Pacific Pathways initiative.³

The military environment in the Asian-Pacific region can largely be classified as maritime in nature. The bulk of the population in Asia lives within 400 kilometers of an ocean and virtually every major city in the region is on or near the coast.⁴ Most of the trade to and from the region is conducted via the sea lanes of communication including the Straits of Malacca through which 40% of global trade passes.⁵ A significant portion of the region’s territorial disputes, including those in the South China and East China Seas, are over small islands and shoals, surrounded by large swaths of sea. Historically, access to coastal populations struck by natural disasters, and the follow-on provision of humanitarian assistance, has largely come from naval and amphibious

forces. In response to these realities, many U.S. allies in the Asia Pacific region have increasingly prioritized the development of amphibious capabilities.

U.S. Model for Allied Amphibious Forces

Many states in the Asia Pacific region look to the U.S. amphibious forces as the model to base the development of their own capability.⁶ The U.S. force of choice for amphibious operations is the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps, commonly referred to as the Navy-Marine Corps team. This partnership is responsible for the development of the modern amphibious doctrine, tactics, and equipment that have been refined over the past 75 years, and are frequently used by militaries around the world today. The U.S. Marine Corps is comprised of three active-duty divisions, three aviation wings, and associated logistics support, all trained and equipped for a wide variety of amphibious missions. The Navy's amphibious component, known as the "Gator Navy," is built around the 32 warships capable of transporting Marines and their equipment to foreign shores. Other elements of the Navy contribute various types of support including reconnaissance, mine-clearing, aviation and fire support, and logistics to amphibious operations.

The purpose of the Navy-Marine Corps team is to protect U.S. interests around the globe through the expeditionary projection of ground and air power from naval shipping. More specifically, they provide four key strategic benefits:

1. Freedom of action - amphibious forces can use the maritime domain as a base from which to conduct operations, loiter indefinitely in international waters, and maneuver ashore at the time and place of their choosing.

2. Deterrence - Some situations require the rapid insertion of sustainable combat forces, “boots on the ground,” to underscore the nations commitment to an ally or to protect our National Security interests.

3. Assured access - Amphibious forces contribute unique and essential capabilities toward the nation’s ability to take advantage of the freedom of the seas to enter a region without regard to access constraints and to sustain sea-based operations almost indefinitely without need for in-theater host-government support.

4. Uncertainty for adversaries - A credible forcible-entry capability compels potential adversaries to invest in a broad range of systems and spread their defenses over larger areas of concern.⁷

Amphibious operations are inherently joint and require more than just a navy and a landing force, especially when operating at the high end of the spectrum of conflict. The Navy-Marine Corps team forms the basic component of an amphibious Joint Task Force (JTF) that sometimes includes contributions from every branch of service in the U.S. armed forces. At the high end of the spectrum, an amphibious JTF can be tasked with such missions as forcible entry, seizure of advanced naval bases, raids, and capture of infrastructure near the coast to be used for follow-on forces. At the lower ends of the spectrum, it can be used to fight piracy, deter aggression, provide disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, and conduct military exercises with allies and partners.⁸

As U.S. forces have become available for tasking following the draw down from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Navy-Marine Corps team has been increasingly busy working with allies and partners in East Asia. Requests for training exercises with U.S.

amphibious forces exceed the resources available. The combination of forward deployed Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) aboard naval Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG) are prized by U.S. combatant commanders as rapid reaction forces for contingency operations and for their ability to conduct theater security cooperation exercises. Australia and Japan have plans to build a similar capability.

Australian Amphibious Forces: “A Capability of First Resort”

Australia’s national security strategy has historically been defined by its geopolitical dilemma; it has a relatively small population and a tight defense budget but also a large coast to protect (37,118 miles) and an economy based heavily on sea trade.⁹ It has therefore prioritized a national security strategy based on alliances with the world’s reigning maritime powers, specifically Great Britain pre-World War II and the United States in the post-World War II era. In exchange for the guarantee of its security, Australia has supported its primary ally’s foreign military interventions in distant theaters, although it has also sought a degree of self-reliance in defense of its home territory.¹⁰ This strategy has created a requirement for an amphibious capability that can support allied missions abroad while also supporting regional security interests in the South Pacific.

The stimulus for the development of the modern Australian amphibious forces came as a result of unrest in Fiji in 1987. During this incident, the Fiji Royal Military Forces staged a coup, overthrew the Fijian government, and forced the Australian Defense Forces (ADF) to plan for the evacuation of 4000 Australian citizens. The joint operation, called MORRIS DANCE, quickly exposed numerous shortcomings of the ADF in doctrine, operating concepts, and inter-service communications. Although the

operation was ultimately a success, it also demonstrated significant deficits in amphibious lift capability as the ADF struggled to support and sustain operations ashore for the 17 day period.¹¹

As a direct response to the lessons learned from MORRIS DANCE, the ADF acquired two surplus U.S. Navy tank landing ships with plans to refit them as Landing Platforms Amphibious (LPAs). Due to delays in the extensive conversion and retrofit process, the ships were not available for the contingency operations in East Timor in 1999. During this incident, the Australian Government took the lead of International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) to address a humanitarian and security crisis before the arrival of a United Nations peacekeeping force. Once again, the ADF was able to cobble together just enough amphibious lift from a few old ships to support and sustain operations ashore, but the lack of a modern amphibious capability was painfully apparent, especially after the U.S.S Belleau Wood, with its Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) and heavy lift helicopters, started to support the operation.¹² One of the ADF's key lessons from INTERFET was the continuing importance of amphibious forces; their contribution to the success of the mission was highlighted by the Australian Commander of the Operation, General Peter Cosgrove, when he stated that amphibious forces represented "a capability of first resort."¹³

In the past decade, Australia has recognized a shift in the strategic importance of the Asia Pacific region highlighted by the military and economic rise of China and the U.S. policy of rebalance in the Pacific. Australia, through a series of White Papers released by its Department of Defense, has established a new maritime strategy with objectives that emphasize the defense of Australia, support of regional security

operations, and contribution to U.S. global military contingencies. Specifically, the 2009 White Paper recognized the growing importance of the South Pacific as Australia's primary operating environment and that it "requires an expeditionary orientation on the part of the ADF at the operational level, underpinned by requisite force projection capabilities."¹⁴ Speaking alongside the American and Japanese ambassadors to Australia and the commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet in October 2013, Defense Minister David Johnston emphasized the critical importance for engagement and deeper relations with Australia's regional allies; he also emphasized amphibious capability as a new "strategic asset for Australia."¹⁵

Ultimately, Australia desires an amphibious capability that can respond to contingencies across the spectrum of conflict, including high end missions such as amphibious assaults and forcible entry operations. However, the Australian government does not currently prioritize the requirement for the high end missions, as it has no territorial disputes with its neighbors and generally has favorable relations with all the states in the Asia-Pacific region. Further, it does not foresee war between the great powers as likely. Instead, it envisions regional security missions as the priority to support Australia's economic interests and the U.S. policy of rebalance. The 2013 White Paper states "the ADF's joint amphibious capability will be a central plank in our ability to conduct security and stabilization missions in the region."¹⁶ It further states plans to develop amphibious capability with an initial focus on security, stabilization, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief missions.¹⁷

As a foundation for a modern amphibious force, Australia has acquired two Spanish-designed, 27,500 ton, Landing Helicopter Docks (LHD), the *Canberra* and the

Adelaide, with a 2017 initial operational capability for the *Canberra*. These huge amphibious ships will have the ability to land over 2,000 personnel by helicopter or by watercraft, a well deck for landing craft and a heavy/cargo deck, two aircraft elevators that can operate large helicopters, and a highly capable command and control architecture.¹⁸ As an augment to the LHDs, the HMAS *Choules*, a 16,000 ton Landing Ship Dock (LSD), entered service in 2011; it has the capacity to carry 32 Abrams tanks or 150 light trucks, well over 350 troops, and the ability to operate over the horizon using helicopters and landing craft.¹⁹

The landing force will be a combined arms capable, amphibious ready element (ARE). The 2d Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment is initially tasked with training as the foundation for the ARE with support from troop transport and armed reconnaissance helicopters, artillery, armored vehicles, and tanks from the 3d Combat Brigade. Once the LHDs come on line in 2017, the ARE will embark on the amphibious ships and form an amphibious ready group, based on the U.S. model, and will be capable of amphibious missions on the low end of the spectrum of conflict.²⁰

Although it is making progress in the development of its amphibious capabilities, the ADF still has many challenges it must overcome before it can execute the full spectrum of missions, specifically in a non-permissive environment. First, the ADF has no aircraft carriers or short take-off vertical landing (STOVL) capable aircraft that can deploy on its amphibious ships. This means, unless friendly airfields or allied aircraft carriers are available in its area of operations, ADF amphibious forces will not be supported by fixed wing aircraft. Second, the ADF has no merchant marine fleet, so sustainment of amphibious operations greater than 60 days will be problematic. Finally,

the ADF has limited ability to conduct amphibious operations as a joint force due to deficiencies in joint doctrine, differences in communications equipment, and a lack of training.²¹ Despite its shortfalls, the ADF is still on track to field a credible amphibious capability that will achieve its regional strategic objectives and serve as a valued partner to the U.S. in coalition operations.

Japanese Amphibious Forces: “A Response to Attacks on Off-Shore Islands”

Unlike Australia, which is initially building its amphibious capability for contingencies on the low end of the spectrum, Japan sees its security situation in a different light and is developing its amphibious forces as a tool to protect its national sovereignty. Japan has territorial disputes with several of its neighbors, including with South Korea over the Liancourt Rocks and Russia over the Kuril Islands. However, it is the dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands (Daioyu Islands to the Chinese) in the East China Sea that has significantly increased tensions between the two countries and has forced Japan to plan for the defense of island territories far removed from its home islands.²²

The Senkakus are a small, uninhabited group of islands and a distant part of Japan’s larger Nansei Shoto (southwest island chain). They are significant to both Japan and China for their proximity to plentiful fishing areas, strategic positioning along major shipping lanes, and access to potentially large oil and natural gas reserves. Japan currently administers the islands and denies there is even a territorial dispute, but China has aggressively patrolled the area and has declared the Senkakus, and all its claimed territories, a “core interest.” Further, in November 2013, China controversially

established an aircraft identification zone (ADIZ) over virtually the entire East China Sea, including the Senkakus, further stoking tensions with Japan.²³

Since the end of World War II, the United States has guaranteed Japan's security through a treaty to defend against foreign invasion. Article 9 of the Japanese constitution renounces war, but allows for a military force to conduct peacekeeping missions, respond to natural disasters, and to provide immediate defense while awaiting support from the U.S. It has thus been interpreted by the current Japanese government that although the use of amphibious forces to repel aggressors on a sovereign island is considered a tactically and operationally offensive mission, it falls within the parameters of a strategically defensive action; therefore, it is interpreted as allowed by the constitution.²⁴

In recent years, Japanese strategic planners have observed China modernizing its military and increasing its aggressiveness to establish control over disputed territories. They are concerned China's military power may someday rival the United States, at least within the Asia Pacific region. Japan also worries the U.S. may not be willing to risk war with China over third party territorial disputes. In 2010, intensifying tension between Japan and China led Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to declare "with respect to the Senkaku Islands, the United States has never taken a position on sovereignty, but we have made it very clear that the islands are part of our mutual treaty obligations, and the obligation to defend Japan."²⁵ Despite this statement of support, Japan has emphasized increased responsibility for its own security. This is evidenced by the current Japanese Prime Minister Shinto Abe's security policy called "Proactive Contributor to Peace." The policy's objective is for Japan to take a more

active role in its own security while also participating in regional and global security affairs; a key tenet of this policy is the continued development and employment of the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF or SDF).²⁶

In late 2010, tensions with China over the Senkaku Islands reached an all-time high. In both states, large nationalistic protests advocated for sovereignty of the islands and, in the vicinity of the islands, the Chinese military forces and the JSDF had several increasingly aggressive encounters. Shortly after a Chinese trawler collided with a Japanese Coast Guard Vessel off the coast of one of the islands, Japan released a document called the National Defense Program Guidelines that laid the foundation for the development of its amphibious capability. The Guidelines first published the concept for transforming the JSDF into a “Dynamic Defense Force” that deters aggression, or has the ability to rapidly counter in an armed conflict, in order to maintain sovereignty over its territory. At the heart of Dynamic Defense is the premise that the components of JSDF must modernize and improve their ability to conduct joint operations, a critical element in amphibious operations.²⁷

The Guidelines also addressed what it called “response to attacks on off-shore islands.” Although it did not specifically announce the development of a new amphibious force, it laid the requirement for an amphibious force in the following statement: “SDF will enhance its capability to respond to attacks on those islands and ensure the security of the surrounding sea and air space by securing bases, mobility, transport capacity and effective countermeasures necessary for conducting operations against such attacks.”²⁸ Later documents, such as the 2014 Guidelines, are more specific and state “the SDF will develop sufficient amphibious capability, in order to

land, recapture and secure without delay in case of any invasion to any remote islands.”²⁹

The JSDF is subdivided into the Japan Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF), Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF), and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF). Japan has tasked its Western Army Infantry Regiment (WAIR) of the JGSDF, based out of Nagasaki in Southern Japan, to serve as its amphibious landing force. The WAIR is a U.S. battalion sized element (roughly 1000 troops) and is currently in training with the U.S. Marine Corps to become the core element of a future 3000 man amphibiously capable unit. Basing out of Nagasaki will give the WAIR the ability to rapidly deploy to the Senkakus via JMSDF ships from the naval port of Sasebo or by the seventeen V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft recently purchased by the Japanese Government.³⁰

Japan’s most capable force is its JMSDF which currently possesses 139 surface ships and submarines, the second largest Asian fleet behind China, but is arguably even more powerful.³¹ Included in this fleet are several amphibious ships, the largest of which is the 27,000 ton *Izumo* class helicopter carrier. *Izumo* is the first of two amphibious carriers in its class; it has a large flight deck that can carry 14 helicopters or launch STOVL capable aircraft. The JMSDF also has two 19,000 ton *Hyuga* class helicopter carriers and several Oosumi class Landing Ship Tanks (LST). The LSTs have large flight decks and well decks capable of carrying hundreds of combat troops, two LCACs, and dozens of combat vehicles.³²

The JSDF is upgrading other capabilities for potential use in support of amphibious operations. For example, Japan purchased 42 F-35 stealth fighters with

delivery beginning in 2017, and it is increasing its anti-ship missile capability.³³ The Japanese also recently announced the purchase of 30 amphibious assault vehicles (AAV) from the U.S. (bringing the fleet up to 34 total vehicles) that can be used to transport troops from its amphibious shipping to hostile shores.³⁴ However, despite having much of the equipment required to execute amphibious operations, the JSDF is still deficient in several key areas, most importantly a lack of joint doctrine. This is a critical shortfall in the integration of joint forces, especially during operations as complex as an amphibious assault. In recent training exercises, the JSDF has experimented with U.S. joint doctrine, but it will eventually have to develop its own based on its military culture, unique capabilities, and operating environment.³⁵ Even though Japan's amphibious forces still have gaps that need to be addressed, the Japanese, like the Australians, are making progress towards developing a credible amphibious capability.

Impact on the U.S. Policy of Rebalance

A key tenet of the rebalance is to promote stability in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to achieve this objective, one of the most important messages the U.S. and its allies must communicate is that development of an amphibious capability is not intended as a tool for aggression. Despite its perception and historical examples casting it as an offensive capability, future employment of amphibious forces, like that proposed by the Australians, should primarily support regional stability. Peacekeeping, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance are all missions well suited for amphibious forces, particularly in the maritime environment of the Asia-Pacific region. There are numerous recent examples of this type of employment that support this argument, notably the JSDF's amphibious forces saved thousands of lives in the aftermath of

Japan's great earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.³⁶ That is not to say there is not the potential for employment of amphibious forces for assaults or other tactically and operationally offensive missions, but such use is claimed to be part of strategically defensive operations.

Militarily, allied amphibious development helps stabilize the region by serving as a deterrent against aggression. State or non-state actors with potentially hostile intentions are not only deterred by U.S. amphibious forces, but are now opposed by multiple states with credible amphibious capabilities. In the case of China, many states are concerned over its growing military power and aggressive behavior in attempting to establish military control over disputed territories in the East China and South China Seas. The growth of allied military capabilities, combined with the U.S. policy of rebalance, is helping to establish an effective deterrence against Chinese aggression. Since most of the territorial disputes involve small island chains, amphibious forces play a significant role in deterrence.

An example of deterrence against a non-state actor is the ongoing use of the Philippine Marine Corps against various terrorist organizations such as Abu Sayaf and Jemaah Islamiyah. With U.S. Special Operations in support, the Philippine Marine Corps has led a successful campaign to defeat these terrorist organizations and deter their return to the Philippine islands.³⁷

Allied amphibious development also supports diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of disputes based on the existing international order. For example, China has repeatedly tried to use a physical presence in the Senkakus to test Japan's resolve to defend the islands. Japanese leaders have responded through clear statements of their

intent to use force to defend Japanese territory; further, Japan is developing a new amphibious capability for this exact purpose. China now understands the lengths Japan is willing to go to defend its territory. As a result, China has backed off its aggressive approach to settling the dispute over the islands and the leaders of the two states recently agreed to resume security and diplomatic discussions.³⁸

Allied amphibious development also increases the potential for cooperation between the amphibious forces of various states. The U.S. has the opportunity to reinforce relations with its allies as it supports development of amphibious capability and conducts theater security cooperation training exercises in the region. Additionally, in many instances, the military-to-military relations of the states in the Asia Pacific region are better than those of their respective governments; Japanese and South Korean military relations are an example.³⁹ Therefore, states whose militaries participate in bilateral or multi-lateral training exercises can serve as a conduit for improved diplomatic relations. As another benefit to the U.S., the ADF has excellent military relations with other states throughout the region; the like-minded Australian participation in exercises with regional neighbors provides the U.S. indirect influence in spreading democratic ideals. This method minimizes U.S. “heavy-handedness” in the attainment of its interests, while increasing legitimacy for its objectives through a multi-national approach.

The development of allied amphibious forces has a positive budgetary impact on the U.S. policy of rebalance. Primarily, the increased capabilities and presence of its allies in the region have the long term benefit of lessening some of the burden on U.S. amphibious forces. In the event of contingency operations, such as response to natural

disasters, allied nations will have the capability to perform tasks that previously were limited to U.S. forces. Additionally, although the U.S. policy of rebalance is currently shifting increased combat power to the Asia Pacific region, the U.S. could eventually pursue the more cost effective model of reducing forces stationed in the region, and instead focus on developing its partnered and allied capabilities.⁴⁰ This option would also allow the U.S. to more efficiently employ its forces in other theaters, but surge them to the Asia-Pacific if needed.

As U.S. amphibious shipping and equipment is sought by its allies and partners, an economic benefit of allied amphibious development is the opportunity for the U.S. defense industry to increase its long term business ties to the region. Since amphibious operations are inherently joint and require support from all the war-fighting domains, this represents an opening for the U.S. defense industry to sell a wide range of military equipment to its allies. This factor has the additional advantage of increasing allied interoperability through the use of like equipment with U.S. forces.

Challenges for U.S. and Allied Amphibious Forces

There are also numerous challenges for U.S. and allied amphibious forces potentially that do not support or, worse, are even counter-productive to the U.S. policy of rebalance. These challenges include the vulnerability of amphibious forces operating against a modern A2AD threat, the need for development of new amphibious operating concepts and equipment, and unintended messaging from allied amphibious force development.

The number one challenge for employment of amphibious forces is against states that possess modern anti-access/area-denial (A2AD) and naval mine

capabilities.⁴¹ As a specific example, China recognizes a potential threat in the power projection capabilities of U.S. forces permanently stationed throughout the Asia Pacific region and the U.S. Navy freely patrolling its coastal waters. Without a navy or air force capable of countering the U.S., China has developed a sophisticated network of anti-access weapons to strike U.S. forward deployed bases and area-denial weapons to limit U.S. freedom of movement on the seas and in the skies. Collectively, China's A2AD capability creates a defensive buffer zone that potentially extends out to several hundred miles from its coastline. Other states in the region, including North Korea, also have A2AD and naval mine capabilities, but not as robust as China's.

Amphibious forces, in the execution of an amphibious assault, are particularly susceptible to the A2AD and naval mine threat, as they must penetrate all the way through the coastal defensive zone in order to reach their objectives. Without a joint campaign to neutralize the threat prior to an amphibious assault, amphibious ships, aircraft, and landing craft are vulnerable targets. In particular, the amphibious assault vehicle (AAVs) currently used by the U.S. and its allies represents technology from the 1960s; its slow speed through the water makes it impractical for launching from over the horizon and therefore inadequate for helping to provide the standoff distance required for the survivability of amphibious shipping against an A2AD threat. Currently, all allied amphibious forces, including those of the U.S., would encounter significant challenges in executing a successful amphibious assault against a coast fortified with a modern A2AD network.

In order to maintain a viable amphibious assault capability, the U.S. and its allies must develop new operating concepts and equipment. However, many in the U.S.

Department of Defense question the feasibility of amphibious assaults and, in a resource constrained environment, the value of continuing to fund the research and acquisitions required to field a viable amphibious capability. Instead, prioritization of funding goes to the other defense capabilities.⁴² Since many allies depend on the U.S. to develop new amphibious concepts and equipment, this issue has a negative impact on their amphibious capabilities. Currently, only the Japanese are actively planning and developing a multi-domain approach to operating in an A2AD environment. Although a significant part of their approach is based on the acquisition of U.S. systems, they are also conducting their own research and development of anti-A2AD systems to maintain a technological edge, which will likely be shared with the U.S.⁴³

As a result of the A2AD threat, amphibious forces must demonstrate utility across a broad range of missions, specifically those on the lower end of the spectrum of conflict, while carefully managing limited resources to develop new concepts and equipment for operations on the high end of the spectrum. Other than the Japanese, it remains to be seen if the other allies are willing to invest in the capability to succeed while operating in an A2AD environment.

Another challenge for the development of allied amphibious forces is the potential for negative consequences based on unintended messaging. While states developing amphibious capability have declared its use for peaceful or defensive purposes, it is very possible China will view the efforts as additional evidence the U.S. and its allies are working towards a policy of “containment.” This could lead to further mistrust in the region and more impetus for China to continue building its military forces.

Japan's amphibious development is also viewed with distrust by some in the region, particularly China and South Korea, whose governments both hold lingering resentment over Japanese aggression in World War II. The two states are concerned Japan's rearmament may pose a threat to the stability of the region in the years ahead. This is particularly troubling for the U.S. which sees great potential for cooperation with Japan, and South Korea in regional security matters.

Conclusion

The impact of allied amphibious force development holds major military, diplomatic, and economic benefits for the U.S. policy of rebalance. The development will create more capable allies that can help shoulder the burden for regional security and generate legitimacy for the mission through a multi-national approach. Additionally, the U.S. can use amphibious exercises to build military-to-military relationships as a means to undergird its diplomatic ties in the region. To realize these benefits, the U.S. must foster its allies' amphibious growth while developing creative solutions to the challenges facing amphibious forces in the Asia Pacific region, particularly against states possessing a modern A2AD capability.

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