

# INFLUENCE

## Victory Before Conflict



By LCpl John Gilchrist, USMC

*Editor's note: The following article is the first-place winner of the newly established Leatherneck Writing Contest. Major Rick Stewart, USMC (Ret) sponsored the contest through the Marine Corps Association and Foundation. Open to enlisted Marines, more than 70 entries were received. Upcoming issues of Leatherneck will feature the second- and third-place winners as well as other submissions.*



The South China Sea has become a region filled with tension due to the ambitions of the People's Republic of China. These tensions are a result of Chinese actions in the Paracel and Spratly

island chains and have caused substantial diplomatic conflict in the region. Thus far, hostilities have mainly been a war of words and military posturing by China and the other nations of the region. In preparing for a possible conflict in the South China Sea, the Marine Corps is strategically preparing the region for military action by doing our part in increasing America's influence over the region's nations. The influence created by USMC operations in the region will increase the U.S. military's capability for preparing and prosecuting any future armed conflict in the region. This attempt at increasing influence correlates with China's increasing aggression in recent years.

### The Situation

Since late 2013, the People's Liberation Army-Navy, or PLAN, has been conducting operations in the South China Sea at a tempo with expanding scope. These operations have been receiving substantial international media coverage. The most reported of these operations have been China's ongoing land reclamation efforts on Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands. China maintains a strong presence in seven locations in the Spratly Islands and one location in the Paracel Islands.

While many regional nations have a presence in these island chains, the Chinese have gone further in developing their military presence there. They have built large military facilities, military-grade airfields and radar stations and have stationed fighters, surface-to-air-missiles and large numbers of troops on some of these





LCPL MAKENZIE FALLON, USMC

**Left: Marines with 1st Battalion, Second Marine Regiment, currently assigned to Fourth Marine Regiment, Third Marine Division on the Unit Deployment Program, embark USS *Germantown* (LSD-42) during Exercise Blue Chromite 16 on White Beach, Okinawa, Japan, Oct. 27, 2015.**

**Below: LtGen Lawrence D. Nicholson, Commanding General, III MEF, shakes hands with Gen Nakatani, Japan's Minister of Defense, at the Butler Officers' Club, Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan, March 26, 2016.**



PFC NELSON DUENAS, USMC



LCPL AMALIA UMANUE, USMC

**Japanese Military Lt Kino, right, confers with Sgt Matthew Myers, USMC during training at the Jungle Warfare Training Center, Camp Gonsalves, Okinawa, Japan, May 19, 2016.**

islands. They have become more brazen in their claims of sovereignty over the islands with their coast guard and navy harassing civilian and military vessels of several other nations. In fact, China has gone as far as officially claiming sovereignty over nearly the entirety of the South China Sea with their nine-dash line.

China is not the only nation that has become more assertive with its claims on the islands in the South China Sea—just the most aggressive with their claims and extreme in their escalation. The nations of Brunei, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines also have made claims on some portion of the Paracel or Spratly islands. These claims are based on a combination of historical claims and international treaties, but the claims are overlapping and the treaties are mutually supportive.

These nations are not interested in the islands themselves but rather the undersea natural resources, including oil and natural gas, that are speculated to be there. Adding to this are the nationalistic trends that many of these nations are experiencing, and the result is no desire to cooperate or compromise with one another. Some have taken steps similar to China and have built military facilities and stationed troops on several of these islands. But while all nations have claims that overlap those of another nation, it is rare for an incident

to occur that does not involve China as an antagonist.

The importance of the region can be seen on multiple levels of perspective. Resolving these territory disputes could mean expanding available fishing territories which would boost local economies. For the nations of the region, the South China Sea represents the opportunity for their national economies to thrive by exploring, using and exporting the natural resources thought to be in the region's seabed. The global level of importance





**A helicopter crew from the Australian ship HMAS Success transfers pallets of goods to the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Waesche* (WMSL-751) during Rim of the Pacific Exercise 2014.**

own and making it into a reality by trying to establish an unmatched military presence there, China would be able to threaten commercial shipping to many of Asia's strongest economies. If China's power grows, it could one day solve its diplomatic disputes with the threat of cutting off or at least interfering with trade through the South China Sea. China would be able to damage the economies of nations that opposed it diplomatically or economically and, in doing so, would be able to practice some measure of control over its neighbors.

### American Strategy

This possible future threat is something that the United States has taken to heart. The U.S. military, in particular the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, has worked to begin countering the rising Chinese aggression. In 2007, "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" was released. A joint work by the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, the document, which has been periodically updated, makes it clear that the interests of the United States are best served by a stable global environment, open seas with guaranteed freedom of navigation, and international trade without infringement by nations or piracy. The document also clearly recognizes China as the threat it is to these preconditions.

Dominant strategic themes of "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" include forward presence, deterrence, power projection, sea control and, most importantly, cooperation, both inter-service and with other nations. The Marine Corps plays a key role in each of these strategic themes as demonstrated throughout history and through current practice. The position of III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) in the Pacific region, the touring of our Marine expeditionary units, and application of the Marine Rotational Force-Darwin are examples of this forward presence. Deterrence is practiced in part by the Marine Corps' amphibious presence and by increasing combat capability through technology and training.

Power projection combines forward presence and deterrence with offensive action. What this means is that power projection is achieved by 1) the implied threat that exists with the orientation of a Marine amphibious force toward a potential enemy or 2) offensive actions taken by that Marine amphibious force against the enemy; i.e., invasion. Power projection can be seen in many examples



**Maj Terry Heichelbech, left, greets New Zealand Army Pvt George Poa during the opening ceremony for Exercise Joint Assault Signal Company Black at Camp Linton, New Zealand, Aug. 11, 2015. Exercise JASCO Black provides opportunities for the U.S. and New Zealand military to strengthen their partnership, exchange training techniques and share knowledge.**

lies in the commercial sea lanes or trade routes that cross the South China Sea. These sea lanes connect the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean and bring trade from as far as Africa and Europe to South Korea and Japan. Across these sea lanes 60,000 ships and 13 billion barrels worth of oil travel. The ability to control, cut or interfere with these sea lanes would give any nation substantial power through influence on a global scale.

Such abilities are attractive to China. For centuries, the Chinese nation had been

a major regional power which dominated its neighbors. For most of the last 150 years, however, the Chinese nation has been dominated by and then held to second-power status by Western nations. Now in the 21st century with China having established itself as an economic power and having achieved the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," China, as a nation, sees as part of its destiny the toppling of the United States as the hegemonic force in the Far East.

By claiming the South China Sea as its





CPL JEROME REED, USMC

**Indonesian Marines participate in a weapons training event during Rim of the Pacific 2012, July 7, 2012. Twenty-two nations, more than 40 ships and submarines, and 25,000 military personnel participated in RIMPAC 2012.**

throughout Marine Corps history, including the Pacific campaigns, the landing at Inchon in 1950, and the threat of amphibious invasion during the Gulf War which tied down several Iraqi divisions committed to defending the Persian Gulf coast.

Sea control is, as it suggests, dominance over regional waterways including open ocean and littoral waters. Sea control utilizes power projection, and while this is an objective achieved primarily by the Navy, the Marine Corps plays its role through the classic mission of seizure or defense of advanced naval bases. In practice this may include the capture or destruction of forward supply depots, eliminating forward-deployed forces meant for intelligence gathering or area denial, and the negating of enemy positions through island hopping.

While each of these strategic themes are important, the strategic theme of cooperation aids the Marine Corps, and the U.S. military as a whole, by acting as a force multiplier. Cooperation between the branches of the U.S. military has been something tested and improved since the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Joint commands and exercises have allowed our forces to become more capable offensively and defensively. However, nearly as important, is the cooperation that we share with our allies and partners. Working with other nations during peacetime will

provide us with resources during war that will aid us in our warfighting efforts. These resources can be represented in a variety of ways from logistical assets to specialized military units that could enhance our capabilities.

While each of these strategic themes is interconnected, the fact is that all of them aid the United States in one overwhelming way: by providing and extending Ameri-

can influence over other nations and thus maintaining our national interests. Influence to mean the ability to affect the decision making of a nation through means of a political, social-economic, and/or military nature. The Marine Corps, being unable to make decisions of state or economic policy, is of course focused on military action to achieve our strategic goals.



CPL MATTHEW MANNING, USMC

**Republic of Korea and U.S. Marines take part in the Combined Marine Component Command exercise during the Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise 2014 at the 1st ROK Marine Corps Division Base in Pohang, Republic of Korea, March 18, 2014. The focus of the exercise was to enhance interoperability and expeditionary command control relationships between the MAGTF and the ROK Marine task force.**





CPL CHRISTOPHER DICKSON, AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

## Influence

The operations that the Marine Corps carries out in the South China Sea region and the wider Pacific area of operations build and maintain American influence. The concept of influence is not necessarily at the forefront of thought when planning or carrying out these operations, but the fact remains that every action taken by the Marine Corps, regardless of operational scope or objective, can impact this factor. Operations key to gaining influence are military training exercises and humanitarian operations.

The training exercises that the Marine Corps carries out are varied in objective, scope and location. During the 2016 fiscal year, III MEF will be conducting dozens of training exercises with our Japanese and South Korean allies. These training exercises build stronger cooperation and fighting cohesion with allied forces but also create influence. This is done by demonstrating to other nations that we and our allies can form a more powerful fighting force when working together. Furthermore, it demonstrates that instead of being a collection of forces, we can operate with our allies as a single efficient and effective force.

III MEF also will be conducting dozens of training exercises in Southeast Asia and Oceania. These exercises will be conducted with the nations of Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam among

others. Exercises like Pitch Black in Australia, which focuses on offensive/defensive air operations, are conducted mostly with American allies and deliver the same influential impact as our exercises with Japan and South Korea. Cooperation afloat readiness and training (CARAT)-type exercises meanwhile provide the Marine Corps with opportunities to work with nations not commonly associated as being allies.

CARAT-type exercises are bilateral and carried out by Marines embarked in amphibious warfare ships. The typical focus of the exercises is to train with the forces of the hosting nation in limited amphibious operations. The primary mis-

sion is to promote military cooperation and improve the relationship between the Marine Corps and these foreign forces. CARAT exercises are being held during the summer of 2016 with Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam among others. Exercises like CARAT offer the Marine Corps the greatest opportunity in increasing American influence. While these exercises are typically small in scope, they offer the Marine Corps the opportunity to press upon these other nations the capability of America's Armed Forces.

Humanitarian operations also are greatly advantageous in building influence over other nations. Whether aiding a close ally



CPL ISAAC BARRA, USMC

**New Zealand Army LBdr Arana Hunter shows U.S. Marines how to disassemble an IW Steyr assault rifle during Exercise JASCO, Aug. 11, 2015.**





CPL RYAN MAINS, USMC

**Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force soldiers post security as U.S. Marines advance on the beach during the Japanese Observer Exchange Program, April 28, 2015, at Kin Blue, Okinawa, Japan. JOEP is designed to increase regional security, improve unit readiness and enhance overall cooperation between the two nations.**

like the Philippines or an old enemy like Vietnam, humanitarian operations offer the Marine Corps an important opportunity to increase American influence. Not through a show of force or military capability *per se* but rather a show of devotion and humanity often unseen in military forces. This show of devotion and humanity can have a direct impact on the perceptions of the indigenous population which could sway public opinion in favor of the United States. This in return would likely influence a way national leaders make decisions when working with the United States.

### Profits of Influence

Gaining influence over the nations of the South China Sea could mean substantial tactical and strategic advantages if we are to engage in an armed conflict in the region. These advantages are mostly hypothetical but could become very real in the case of an evolving conflict. These advantages also could mean the difference between victory and defeat when engaging a regional power like China so far from our own shores.

In future combat operations, as much as in past engagements, scouting and reconnaissance are essential to naval combat. Allies inside the region could augment our scouting and reconnaissance abilities with their own assets as well as providing

an in-region location for our forces to be stationed. One example of this is providing land-based locations close to the area of operations for large UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) to operate from, in the possible eventuality that China could eliminate our reconnaissance satellites.

Another example of possible military advantage offered by regional nations is redundancy in command and control. With the worry that China could launch a successful cyber-attack offensive on our networks or shut down our communication satellites, land-based regional redundancy would become vital for operations. Without command and control our military forces as a whole would be severely hampered as advanced networked command and control is vital for modern military operations.

Possibly more important than the advantages that we could gain from influencing the region's nations are the advantages that the Chinese would not gain; meaning that we could influence other nations to not support China with any military or economic aid. Aid from other nations could consist of sanctuary for damaged ships or aircraft, local locations for the resupply of Chinese ships, or the more dreaded possible eventuality of a regional coalition led by China and all of the advantages that such a coalition could provide.

### Conclusion

Influence over other nations will provide the Marine Corps, and the U.S. military as a whole, with substantial tactical and strategic advantages during times of conflict. In the case of China and its increasing aggression in the South China Sea, this influence could be vital as China continues to build its military strength. In the near future the U.S. military could find China to be a near-equal match in an armed conflict, essentially fighting on China's home turf.

However, with Marine Corps operations and the operations of our sister branches, during peacetime the military could build enough influence with the nations in the region to equal or negate any Chinese advantage. In fact, it is quite possible that by raising American influence in the region, China could see itself losing if it initiated an armed conflict or attempted to infringe on international trade. Taking this a step further, it may be possible to outright convince the Chinese, before a conflict begins, that U.S. military capability is so enhanced by American influence within the region that their defeat is ensured. To quote Sun Tzu, "Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting." Simply put, influence could mean victory before conflict begins.

