

The Four-Block Littoral Force

The infantry's attack toward *Force Design 2030*

by MajGen Dale Alford

Our vision for the future must be *faithful* to our past. Allen Millett, a preeminent military historian and Marine, wrote that the history of the Corps “is essentially a story of institutional survival and adaptation in both peace and war.”¹ More insightfully, he observed that it would be

an error to make a history of the Marine Corps simply a history of the development of amphibious warfare ... the Corps has also shown its ability to change with American foreign and military policy.²

From a historical perspective, this is what *Force Design 2030* intends to do for our Corps and the Nation. The infantry must lead the way both *intellectually* and *physically* toward our *future ethos* as a true distributed operations force. Future victory hangs upon our present humility to remain *semper fidelis* to our legacy and the trust of the American people.

The truly unique contribution of the Marine Corps to the history of the American military has been its ability to simultaneously cultivate the traditions and doctrine of both conventional and small wars. To this end, the infantry has traditionally adapted to the larger service-wide goals of the Corps throughout several phases of our history. Since the Nation's founding, Marines with rifles have continually adapted. What began as shipboard detachments, grew to naval infantry, then constabularies for small

The Marine Corps has historically fought both conventional and small wars for the Nation. Its success has always depended upon preparation or rapid adaptability, usually both. Force Design 2030 charts a course for the Corps that remains faithful to this dual legacy while also aggressively anticipating the future. The infantry must adapt into a more mature, fit, intelligent, and well-armed force, with a maritime focus. This “Four-Block Littoral Force” will lead the MAGTF into the future and toward the enemy.

wars, and finally into major formations for the large-scale campaigns, first in France and then across the Pacific.³ This progression in warfighting up to the world wars is well known. However, it is far more significant to understand that, from the amphibious landing at Inchon to counterinsurgency in Helmand, the Corps retained the intellectual interest, physical capabilities, and the ethos to do both—and more.⁴ We must continue this tradition and adapt by honing our intellect and sharpening our skills to march toward the future.

A Legacy of Vision

The Three-Block War has faithfully served our Corps for over two decades as our most recent example of innovative Marine adaptability, but it is time to advance once more. It is time to add a fourth block and emphasize operations in the littorals, especially

maritime chokepoints. A “Four-Block Littoral Force” must be capable of the three enduring contingency mission-sets and be poised for mobilization to conduct full-scale combat operations. Taken as an analogy, this infantry force will continuously operate in the first three littoral blocks and only deliberately attack into the fourth with a full-scale national commitment. The first three blocks include littoral-focused security force assistance, crisis-response, and limited objective attacks in support of the Navy or joint force.⁵ The fourth is full-scale, nation-state war, with the expectation, if not guarantee, that such a war would require a multi-year effort.⁶ The Four-Block Littoral Force must be manned with mature, fit, intelligent, and superbly trained infantry Marines, equipped with precision weapons, connected to the MAGTF and the fleet, and, as necessary, carried to the mission

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The “Three-Block War” served the Corps well for decades. We now need infantry capable of operating as part of a “Four-Block Littoral Force.” (Photo by Cpl Aaron Patterson.)

on reliable transports in the air, sea, or possibly subsurface avenues of approach.

History reminds us that Marines will never be far removed from natural disasters, foreign crisis, or fleet operations. It also instructs us that large, conventional operations are not only an anomaly but also only came after significant mobilization.⁷ A “Four-Block Littoral Force” must have the discipline and vision to accept the difference between what it must do now for the fleet and national interests overseas as well as what it might be in a future war for the Nation’s survival. Just as we could not do both simultaneously because we lack the ships and force structure, we should not pretend that we have the time or funding to perpetually train for both. However, we can train for three and plan for the fourth. An adaptable and mature infantry that can operate successfully in the first three littoral blocks will be the ideal cadre to expand, if required, for an assault into the fourth. The Four-Block Littoral Force must thus be the adaptable infantry required for future victory and faithful to the lessons of our past.

The Legacy of the Commandants

Past visionary Commandants have protected this institutional adaptability, and *Force Design 2030* is the logical con-

tinuation of a century-long progression that began in the last inter-war period. Commandant Lejeune is most widely lionized for guiding the institution toward amphibious warfare, which transformed the Corps and best served the Nation in World War II, well after his tenure. Commandants Gray and Krulak deserve equal admiration for the introduction of maneuver warfare doctrine and the Three-Block War concept, respectively. All three possessed

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the ability to steward the Corps through transitions, wisely anticipate the future, and doggedly persist against internal opposition. Commandants Dunford and Neller also spearheaded aggressive internal initiatives to posture the Corps for operations after the Global War on Terror, which has carried into Commandant Berger’s *Force Design 2030*.⁸

Gen Gray led a philosophical transformation with his introduction of *FMFM 1, Warfighting*, enshrining into doctrine the concept of maneuver war-

fare. In a long view of history, his actions were drastic at the time but needed to propel the institution forward in preparation for what was to come. The history of the Marine Corps notes that he:

did not reject amphibious warfare, he certainly worried less about it than his predecessors. He wanted Marines to fight better by fighting smarter, by exploiting intelligence and targeting technology, not relying on massive firepower. The word “commando” came easily to him. He wanted the Corps to turn inward in a crusade of self-improvement.⁹

As Commandant, he applied this philosophy by “cutting manpower and procurement programs, allowing three infantry battalions to be stood down from the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) and slashing the FY 1989 procurement budget by 30 percent.” He additionally “put more [reconnaissance] Marines and engineers in the FMF and reduced the tank force.”¹⁰ If there was anything at the center of Gen Gray’s reforms, it was the infantry, but his efforts sought an intellectual revolution to accomplish an institutional reform: aligning the Service around supporting the infantryman.

Gen Gray sought to transform this structure to create “Thinking Warriors” through the creation of a maneuver warfighting philosophy that relied upon

commander’s intent and trust tactics. As part of this effort, he also insisted on force-on-force field exercises.¹¹ However, the training and education pipeline remained structured around recruiting high school-aged Americans. Their training was primarily in entry-level jobs and basic infantry tactics which was sufficient for the missions in the final years of the Cold War, but it did not remain so.

Gen Krulak then took Gen Gray’s philosophy and led the Corps on an

intellectual quest. In January of 1999, he envisioned a future “Three-Block War” and tried to transition the Corps to maximize its legacy of both *small wars* and *conventional warfare* while making room for the notion that Marines might be expected to do both simultaneously.¹² He wrote about the need for a “strategic corporal” who could operate in such an environment and founded the Warfighting Laboratory to “ride the dragon of change” and best prepare for the future. Our Corps found his predictions to be true throughout the Global War on Terrorism.¹³

Near the end of the Marine campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, two Commandants spearheaded something similar to best posture the Corps for the return of nation-state competition. Gen Dunford initiated, and Gen Neller directed, the Marine Corps Force 2025 initiative to re-design the Corps based upon anticipated future threats rather than a traditional force-cap or legacy force structure. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab led this multi-year effort, which included service-level wargames, an experimental battalion and then MEU, and Corps-wide input from innovation forums and planning teams. Gen Neller pushed through several immediate changes like increasing the size of the rifle-squad to fifteen, purchasing hundreds of quadcopters for those squads, increasing cyber and information operations capabilities, and investing in armed drones. Yet, the structure and organization of the Corps remained solidly anchored to the traditional, large-scale amphibious warfare force design of decades past.

Gen Berger’s *Force Design 2030*, which deliberately focuses on structure and organization, is the continuation of the Corps’ drive to prepare for the future. At present, that future is tied to the Indo-Pacific, the naval force, and the American people. The *2018 National Defense Strategy* makes it clear that our Corps is to orient to the Pacific for the foreseeable future. The 2020 U.S. Maritime Strategy links our future to supporting the Navy as it focuses on a rising China. Finally, our Commandant’s intent is that we will remain ready to serve the American people by

being ready for any mission, with an eye toward China, and not forsaking future development for the demands of current “readiness.”¹⁴ The Four-Block Littoral Force will meet all of these demands.

The Four-Block Littoral Force Mission Sets

Block 1: Persistent, Littoral-Focused Gray-Zone Force.

Primary Mission: Security Force Assistance, Theater Security Cooperation. Proposed Tasks: Screen, Reconnoiter, and Counter-adversary Coercive Efforts.

The world’s sea lines of communication and commerce are well known and Marines should be prepared to guard U.S. interests at their chokepoints. The Navy, in addition to thousands of U.S.

now increasingly problematically, since the United States turned over control of the canal in 2000, the Chinese have systematically moved in to influence and control this key maritime chokepoint.¹⁶

A future Marine “Gray-Zone Force” should provide a persistent infantry presence through security force assistance, theater security cooperation, and other “Phase 0” activities. This will give the United States and the fleet access and forward presence in these key geographic regions. This will simultaneously provide the Nation and the Navy with advanced reconnaissance and early indications and warnings of threats to U.S. national interests. These types of transformed Marine infantry Gray-Zone Forces would provide the

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commercial ships, routinely transit the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab-el Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, and the South China Sea, among other key maritime chokepoints. The geography draws us because it draws the interests of U.S. commerce and strategy. Given the increasing adversary threats and competition for influence in these regions, Marines should be persistently operating in these locations, prepared to support the fleet as our Corps was originally designed to do and as Marines have done throughout our Service’s history.

Among many other locations, Marines did exactly this for the Panama Canal during Operation JUST CAUSE in 1989. A forward deployed rifle company and light armored infantry company supported the Joint Task Force campaign to protect the canal by patrolling prior to hostilities, seizing enemy positions and key terrain during combat operations, and then remaining after hostilities to stabilize the area and train local security forces.¹⁵ Interestingly and

nation with an urgently needed non-kinetic maritime and littoral escalation tool against threats to U.S. shipping in the region.¹⁷ This is precisely what Congress indicated it desires as outlined in the *2020 House Armed Services Committee’s Future Defense Task Force Report*.¹⁸ Additionally, in the event of an overt-threat or attack, these forces could prove capable of blunting an adversary. Such a blunting effort(s) could involve the force employing cyber effects, unmanned kinetic effects, and enough reporting capabilities to call in another forward deployed, regionally aligned infantry battalion, MEU, or larger force. Such a force would also serve as a critical backstop for our allies and partners, who far too often find themselves bullied by forces tasked by Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran.

Block 2: Crisis-Response Force.

Primary Missions: Embassy Reinforcement, Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief, Tactical Recovery of Aircraft



The “Four-Block Littoral Force” requires more highly-trained, better equipped, and above all lethal infantry. (Photo by Cpl Aaron Patterson.)

and Personnel, Quick Reaction Force. Proposed Task: Guard.

The Nation expects Marines to remain its primary 911 force. From embassy reinforcements in Liberia in 1996 to Iraq in 2014 and again in 2019, Marines have repeatedly proven capable of protecting national interests on a moment’s notice.¹⁹ We are drawn to the geography of vastly different regions because the Nation has prioritized them according to political interests. This mission will endure globally and must be supported through continued naval, joint force, and inter-agency integration.

Given how much has changed in the character of warfare, however, lessons learned from these missions, and others like them, pose many questions for the infantry today. Do we train to seamlessly execute such complex and strategic missions, as directed by *Warfighting* to “train like we will fight”? How often do we execute such mission profiles in training, including live fire? Do we currently have the capabilities to seamlessly link these forces to maximize situational understanding against a determined enemy in an objective area, thereby enabling coordinated initiative among initially distributed units and joint close air support and/or theater-range surface-delivered fires assets? Any

Marine reading this article knows the answers to these questions.

The Commandant is aware as well. He recently authored a Washington Post Op-Ed co-authored with the Air Force Chief of Staff, in which they drove home the point that there is a significant difference between being prepared for tomorrow and investing in the programs and training that will enable us to fight in the years to come.²⁰ Our training standards and certification exercises are not Corps-wide and generally focus only on ensuring that the MAGTF can physically transport the infantry and its support the required distances in set timeframes. We must train and certify our forces to interact in the complex environments we have routinely encountered as the Nation’s 911 force. History indicates that it is unlikely the future will be less complicated.

Block 3: Blunting Force.

Primary Mission: Limited Objective Attack.

Proposed Task: Disrupt/Interdict.

The Blunting Force will allow for true distributed ops. In this scenario, the national interest will demand that we have solutions to deal with the geography upon which the contest of nations will unfold. This could mean we

fight distributed across the Pacific or somewhere else across the globe. If the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) chooses to deliberately encroach on territorial waters or coasts of U.S. partners or allies in the Indo-Pacific, the infantry must provide a relevant force to disrupt the PLA’s initial campaign. In this scenario, the Marine Corps cannot expect to use a large-scale, multi-MEB JFEO type force to deter, defend, or defeat a PLA provocation or deliberate assault in its own backyard. The changes in the character of warfare will not allow it.

The Corps should instead maximize to the fullest extent possible the advantageous position that we have as a direct result of Marine actions in this same theater in World War II and Korea, which now provides us a far too often overlooked 6,000-mile head start. When doing so, we should strive to ensure we have forward deployed infantry forces that are capable of conducting distributed, limited objective seizure missions in support of Joint Force Maritime Component Commander requirements.²¹ Such forces, at the platoon, company, and battalion levels, could come from one, two, or perhaps even all of the following: a permanent base, an expeditionary advanced base, an amphibious ship, or perhaps even from non-standard, improvised commercial vessels. Such an operation might resemble aspects of Task Force 58, an ad-hoc combination of two MEUs, which launched a 400-nautical mile heliborne seizure of a remote airfield in Afghanistan in 2001. This Marine operation supported a larger Combined Joint Task Force entry operation to support follow-on operations deeper within the country.²²

Block 4: Destroying Force.

Primary Mission: Amphibious Assault, Forcible Entry.

Proposed Task: Attack to Seize/Defeat.

A full combat force will serve as the initial ground element in a naval or joint operation. The primary assumption and present reality is that a Marine-led conventional assault force of anything larger than a regimental landing team will take time to build. This is simply because of the lack of available amphibious

ous and merchant shipping, along with the strategically insignificant size of the American infantry.²³ At present, the combined total of “close combat forces” in the Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command is not large enough to fill the seats in an average NFL stadium.²⁴ Thus a large-scale force needed for a major war could only form as the result of Congress allocating resources to a major war, which would have to include a massive increase in total force structure, possibly by a national draft.

In such a scenario, after a multiple-year build-up, Marines would likely initially operate from amphibious ready groups and forward deployed positions at expeditionary advanced bases. These forces would likely board naval shipping, small boats, and Marine tilt-rotor aircraft to conduct an infiltration or penetration of the enemy’s coast. Supported by long-range precision fires and armed drones, the Marines in these formations would be capable of fighting long enough to allow other elements of the joint force to arrive in theater by airdrop, troop transport aircraft, or perhaps even improvised commercial ships re-purposed to support amphibious missions. As such, our future, distributed infantry force must be capable of working in conjunction with special forces in the area and special operations forces once they arrive. The force must also possess the asymmetric killing power of highly trained dismounted infantry with conventional and precision fires to target enemy armor, drones, and heavy weapons—all while operating distributed such that the formations do not present an easy target for adversary swarming munitions that continue to proliferate across the world’s battlefields.²⁵

Attacking Forward, Heeding the Past

Planning for the future is foolish without a proper respect and appreciation for the past. Gen Mattis is fond of reminding Marines to develop a “five-thousand year old mind” through reading and studying the history of warfare.²⁶ Marines should daily commit equal time to conditioning the body and aging the mind.²⁷ This discipline

grounds Marines in the legacy of the profession of arms, warns of past lessons paid in blood, and simultaneously provides insight and a vision for the future.

If our history shows the vision and wisdom of previous Commandants, it equally shows near-sighted self-assurance of the institution they each led. Gen Lejeune’s detractors clung to the Banana Wars, Gen Gray’s naysayers clamored for more firepower, and Gen

our Corps came to fully appreciate the importance of the “strategic corporal” that Gen Krulak envisioned. Our current Commandant has built upon the work of five previous visionaries and has set conditions for the infantry to transform yet again to be best prepared for the future fight.

This infantry force must be built to win with both superbly trained Marines and precision weapons. The Marines in these infantry formations must

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Krulak’s opponents looked back to DESERT STORM. This trend continued even after 9/11. In 2003, a survey showed that the majority of Marine officers saw no real need to innovate or change the 1990’s force structure or capabilities for the future.²⁸ This was the same year that briefly re-validated our mechanized MAGTF in a rematch with an Iraqi army. In the years that followed,

have a higher physical standard than the rest of the Corps, as measured by our fitness tests, swim qualifications, the obstacle course, and an infantry endurance/tactics assessment course. The Marines must also possess a raw intelligence similar to those in reconnaissance, the Rangers, or special forces. Additionally, the Marines in these formations must be paired with a personal



Beyond expert marksmanship, the infantry of the Four-Block Littoral Force must be masters of all battalion-level weapons, capable of employing all supporting arms and equipped with both conventional weapons and emergent technologies. (Photo by Cpl Aaron Patterson.)

initiative to pursue academic education in the art and science of war through civilian and/or military schools. These infantry Marines must be expert shots, capable of employing all weapons in the battalion, and proficient with the equipment and procedures for directing all forms of tactical MAGTF and naval fire support. Furthermore, the Marines must be equipped with both conventional arms and man-packable precision weapons like weaponized drones and guided missiles.

When it comes to the talent level and maturity or seniority of the force, we must stop exploring and/or studying and/or delaying—and finally do what senior infantry leaders have advocating for decades.²⁹ Future infantry unit leaders, starting at the fire team level, must be in their twenties rather than teens. We must also ensure that selection into the infantry is no longer a guarantee but an earned trust into a “close combat force” based strictly, and only, upon objective, rigorous, historically informed, and future focused performance standards. Additionally, after succeeding through the initial infantry entry “gate,” the same approach must apply when selecting those Marines that will serve in critical team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon, and company commander billets. Additionally, we must accept that the institution will have to recognize and pay these Marines accordingly through promotions and bonuses tied to billets, and billet qualifications tied to bi-annual certifications in order to verify proficiency. This will create the required cadre of Marines who can fight and win in the complexities of the future as a Four-Block Littoral Force.

The Conclusion as the Beginning

Renowned strategist Colin Gray warned that there are two equally dangerous approaches to history: a *complete lack* of historical “knowledge” and an *over-appreciation* of a poorly understood “nugget.”³⁰ If we cannot parse the past, we are as ignorant as those who do not know it. Thus, our Corps’ history should serve as a guide to spur questions and insights, not to provide all the answers.³¹ This is the temptation we

must avoid with conventional amphibious warfare and a romanticized view of our legacy to the Nation, both culturally and militarily. However, we should not and cannot ignore geography, for beyond our Service being ordered to prioritize a specific region of the world, it provides the reference points for all strategy: “Every example of strategy, past, present, and future are geographically translatable. This is literally unavoidable. All military behavior must be ordered, executed, and exploited, in a geographical context.”³²

The infantry stands at this intersection of history and geography. We can clearly appreciate the accomplishments and wisdom of the past. Our *small wars* heritage, *amphibious doctrine*, and *maneuver warfare* all persist as monuments to our legacy of innovation and remained ingrained in our ethos today. This inheritance was best described by Commandant Krulak in his introduction to the 1997 update to *Warfighting*. He articulated that the *maneuver warfare philosophy* should serve as “our approach to duty.” This *approach to duty* requires trust tactics, humility, and the wisdom to see that our future will always be tied to the geography of the littorals. We are Marines of a maritime nation and our greatest national interest will always cause us to look to the Pacific.³³

The infantry now has a choice. Many outside the Marine Corps have recognized, favored, and agreed with Gen Berger’s efforts to chart a new course for the Marine Corps into the Pacific.³⁴ Others see a broader future in a partnership between the Marine Corps and special operations forces in the future.³⁵ Central to any hope of success must be our commitment to enhancing our infantry and build a *Four-Block Littoral Force* that can focus on the first three blocks and attack into the fourth when needed. Doing so will keep alive our dual traditions of small and conventional wars and continue to allow us to be truly adaptable. In doing so, we would do well to build the infantry Marines that Commandant Krulak originally envisioned in 1999. He believed they must be “firmly grounded in our ethos, thoroughly schooled and trained, outfit-

ted with the finest equipment obtainable, infinitely agile, and above all else, a leader in the tradition of the Marines of old.”³⁶ Now the question for the infantry is whether it will remain stuffed in the *hold* of past accomplishments, or if it will *disembark* and lead the way for the MAGTF to seek the Corps’ future, the nation’s interests, and the enemy. That is as *Semper Fidelis* to our true dual legacy as any Marine could hope.

Notes

1. Allen Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991).
2. Ibid.
3. Robert Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962*, (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company, 1991).
4. Keith Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps’ Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000). This book details the formative small wars experience of the Marine Corps in the interwar period and its lasting impact on the doctrine and leaders that led the amphibious campaigns in the Pacific. Bickel’s ideas are prescient today because he chronicles how the Marine Corps harbored an intellectual dualism for small wars and amphibious doctrine development in the 1930s. Much is made of the Marine Corps Schools’ suspending classes in 1933 in order to produce its tentative amphibious doctrine, but it is seldom remembered that the same tactic was used two years later within the school’s Small Wars Department to produce Small Wars Operations. More importantly, Andrew Krepinevich’s work shows that the Army has historically been unable to maintain this duality because it could not “tolerate developing the expertise to fight a style of warfare different from that it felt most important to the nation’s overall security.” Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam*, (Baltimore, MD: John’s Hopkins University Press, 1988).
5. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *JP 3-20, Security Cooperation*, (Arlington, VA, May 2017); and Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 3-10, MAGTF Ground Operations*, (Washington, DC: April 2018).
6. For a greater explanation on why such an effort would inevitably require multiple years, see Scott Cuomo, Olivia Garard, Jeff Cummings, and Noah Spataro, “Not Yet Openly

at War, But Still Mostly at Peace: Exploit the Opportunity to Become the 21st Century Force that our Nation Needs,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: February 2019).

7. Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012); and Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014). From the Spanish American War to Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, the average time from civilian policymakers ordering Marines into a shooting conflict and their actual intervention was five to twelve months. In all major/long wars, the Marine Corps has typically conducted an initial campaign within the first year, but it has always taken 17 to 23 months to launch a major offensive that incorporated new technology and increased personnel strength from a mobilized economy and society.

8. For more on these efforts, listen to Chris Brose and Ryan Evan, “Your Ideas Matter: The Making of Marine Strategic Planning and the Future of War,” *War on the Rocks*, (August 2019), available at <https://warontherocks.com>.

9. Allen Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991).

10. Ibid. Millett quipped in the text that “Aviation and heavy weapons officers suspected that the Commandant did not favor their programs,” which could easily be said about Gen Berger today. In 1989, Gen Gray canceled the FY91 procurement of 255 Abrams of an original request of 560, justifying it at the time as a decision to lighten the Corps and rely on the Army for heavy tank support. In 1990, Gen Gray phased out all M60 Patton tanks in order to avoid spending money to maintain both M60s and M1A1s.

11. Chris Woodbridge, “Making Thinking Warriors,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (August 2018), available at <https://mca-marines.org>.

12. Charles Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, (January 1999), available at <https://apps.dtic.mil>.

13. Frank Annis, “Krulak Revisited: The Three-Block War, Strategic Corporals, and the Future Battlefield,” *Modern War Institute*, (February 2020), available at <https://mwi.usma.edu>.

14. Michael Gordon, “Marines Plan to Retool to Meet China Threat,” *Wall Street Journal*, (March 2020), available at <https://www.wsj.com>; and Charles Q. Brown Jr. and David H.

Berger, “To Compete with China and Russia, the U.S. Military Must Redefine ‘Readiness,’” *Washington Post*, (February 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

15. Nicholas Reynolds, *Just Cause: Marine Operations in Panama 1988–1990*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996).

16. Mat Youkee, “Center of the U.S.-China Trade War: Panama’s Strategic and Symbolic Importance Place it at the Heart of Growing Trade Tensions,” *Foreign Policy*, (May 2019), available at <https://foreignpolicy.com>.

17. See Seth Moulton, Jim Banks, et. al, *Future Defense Task Force Report 2020*, (Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, 2020).

18. Ibid.

19. Staff, “U.S. Marines Kill Embassy Attackers,” *CNN*, (April 1996), available at <http://www.cnn.com>; Tim Arango, “U.S. Troops, Back in Iraq, Train a Force to Fight ISIS,” *New York Times*, (December 2014), available at <https://www.nytimes.com>; Andrew Dyer, “Southern California Marines First to Respond to Baghdad Embassy Attack,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, (January 2020), available at <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com>.

20. “To Compete with China and Russia, the U.S. Military Must Redefine ‘Readiness.’”

21. Scott Cuomo, Olivia Garard, Noah Spataro, and Jeff Cummings, “How The Marines Will Help The U.S. Navy and America’s Allies Win The Great Indo-Pacific War of 2025,” *War on the Rocks*, (September 2018), available at <https://warontherocks.com>.

22. Nathan Lowry, *From the Sea: U.S. Marines in Afghanistan*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2011).

23. Salvatore R. Mercogliano, “Suppose There Was a War and the Merchant Marine Didn’t Come?,” *Proceedings*, (January 2020), available at <https://www.usni.org>. At its largest, the Merchant Marine had over 1,200 ships in 1950; today, it has less than 180 ships. Of this, three Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron have less than a dozen ships each. More significantly, the current fleet is over 40 years old and has barely managed to support the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which did not involve naval campaigns, contested ports or beaches, nor the demand of a major invasion from a seabase.

24. Ibid; and Robert Scales, *Scales on War: The Future of America’s Military At Risk*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

25. David Hambling, “Drone Swarms Are Getting Too Fast For Humans To Fight,” *Forbes*, (January 2021), available at <https://www.forbes.com>.

26. Geoffrey Ingersoll, “General James Mattis’ Email About Being ‘Too Busy To Read’ Is A Must-Read,” *Business Insider*, (May 2013), available at <https://www.businessinsider.com>.

27. Damien O’Connell, “Controversy & Clarity Podcast, No. 2. Interview with MajGen J.D. Alford,” *Controversy & Clarity*, (January 2021), available at <https://podcasts.apple.com>. “For every hour spent P’ing, a Marine should spend reading, every day.”

28. Terry Terriff, “Of Romans and Dragons: Preparing the U.S. Marine Corps for Future Warfare,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2007).

29. *Scales on War*; Gidget Fuentes, “Neller: Future Marine Corps Could be an ‘Older, More Experienced’ Force,” *USNI News*, (February 2018), available at <https://news.usni.org>; and Shawn Snow, “Go Four Before Grunt: The Controversial Idea Posed By Mattis’ Task Force Adviser,” *Marine Corps Times*, (July 2018), available at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com>.

30. Colin Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace, and Strategy*, (Sterling, VA: Potomac Books, 2009).

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Michael J. Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017).

34. See, as just one example, David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “A Striking New Vision for The Marines, And A Wakeup Call For The Other Services,” *War on the Rocks*, (October 2019), available at <https://warontherocks.com>.

35. Gordon Richmond, “The Marines and America’s Special Operators: More Collaboration Required,” *War on the Rocks*, (December 2020), available at <https://warontherocks.com>.

36. “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War.”

