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POSITION PAPER

Subj: RESPONSE TO OSD: JOINT FORCIBLE ENTRY OPERATIONS IS NOT A VALID OPTION IN AN INCREASING ANTI-ACCESS / AREA DENIAL ENVIRONMENT

Ref: (a) Joint Forcible Entry Operations, Joint Publication 3-18 (2018)  
(b) “Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I,” RAND Report (2016)  
(c) “Future Warfare in the Western Pacific,” *International Security*, Vol.41, No.1 (2016)

1. Problem. The efficacy of Joint Forcible Entry Operations (JFEO) is in question due to the ever-increasing Anti-Access / Area Denial (A2/AD) environment.

2. Recommended Position. JFEO is not viable against a peer competitor’s A2/AD defense:

- JFEO is increasingly unlikely to succeed in an A2/AD environment
- JFEO is not a strategic imperative against a peer adversary
- Better options exist to achieve U.S. objectives regarding another great power such as employing Blue (U.S., allied, or coalition) A2/AD capabilities

3. Opposing Viewpoints. Opposing positions stress the imperative of maintaining a JFEO capability that can reach anywhere in the world. JFEO capability serves both as a deterrent and as a means to enforce U.S. policy across the globe. When diplomatic or other means fail, the U.S. Armed Forces may conduct JFEO per reference (a) to gain access in a hostile environment.

4. Rationale. In the face of a peer competitor such as China, A2/AD threats neutralize the U.S. military’s relative advantage, and JFEO is no longer a viable option for the following reasons:

- JFEO is increasingly unlikely to succeed against Chinese A2/AD defenses. As detailed by references (b) and (c), long-term economic, technological, and geographic trends favor China and the defense in an A2/AD environment. The principles for success in JFEO as outlined in reference (a), to include control of the air, control of the sea, and control of space, are likely untenable in an A2/AD fight. Even if Washington’s defense spending outpaces Beijing in the coming decades, the ability to project power will be rendered cost-prohibitive by China’s A2/AD systems and odds will likely favor the defender.
- JFEO is not a strategic imperative against a peer adversary such as Beijing. As per reference (b), Washington’s primary interest in contested regions such as the Indo-Pacific is to prevent international aggression. JFEO against a peer competitor thus involves hazarding a considerable amount of blood and treasure in a fight for non-vital U.S. interests, while the A2/AD defender, driven by core national interests, would likely bear any cost in a fight for survival and defense of their homeland. Besides the dreadful risk of casualties and equipment loss, JFEO is a highly escalatory act that could trigger retaliation against the U.S. homeland and even risk nuclear war. Moreover, JFEO is not the best means to deter international aggression.
- The U.S. has better options besides JFEO to achieve its interests relative to another great power. For example, as per reference (b), in conjunction with allies and partners, acquiring Blue A2/AD capabilities in strategic areas is a credible and more viable option

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to thwart Chinese aggression in the Western Pacific. Blue A2/AD provides effective deterrence against international aggression by turning the tables to confront the enemy with a high risk of catastrophic failure. Granted, such capability is less helpful for traditional power projection roles that JFEO might fulfill and JFEO may still be an option against lesser opponents with minimal A2/AD threats. Yet in a contested region against a peer adversary, JFEO is not viable, whereas Blue A2/AD, as part of an integrated strategy with allies and partners, better facilitates achievement of U.S. interests.

5. Recommendation. JFEO capability and doctrine may be retained for responding to contingencies absent significant A2/AD threats, however, JFEO should be removed from the lexicon of war plans and strategy vis-à-vis a peer competitor with advanced A2/AD systems. Furthermore, research and development and wargames versus peer competitors should explore options besides JFEO, such as Blue A2/AD. Planning for options to include Blue A2/AD should be undertaken as part of an integrated strategy employing all instruments of national power and fully leveraging the strength of allies and partners.

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