Concept For
NATO Joint Sea Basing (NJSB)

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The *joint* use of seaborne platforms to project, support and sustain multi-national forces.

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Introduction

1. **NATO Joint Sea Basing** (NJSB) provides the Alliance with another option for the deployment, employment, sustainment and re-deployment of a mission tailored joint force package utilizing a combination of seaborne platforms, strategic sealift and tactical airlift/sealift to rapidly project and sustain multi-national forces wherever needed. Simply stated, specified land, air and sea component forces are deployed utilizing existing seaborne platforms resident within NATO member nations' inventory in conjunction with available strategic sealift assets from the commercial market. Correspondingly, sea basing provides the NATO force commander with a capability to exercise command and control and/or the projection of military and logistics capabilities from seaborne platforms.

> *Where nations have a "tradition" of maritime and amphibious capabilities, their national planners almost unconsciously factor-in those capabilities when involved in planning situations. To this end, within those nations, a sea basing capability exists, even if not identified as a formal concept. Other nations, without such capabilities, may overlook them because they are not normally an option. Within NATO, as a whole, however, a formal concept is essential to ensure that there is a universal understanding of the potential of sea based platforms. The security, flexibility and reliability of sea based platforms must be considered as potential solutions to a wide range of geo-political, commercial and security challenges in an increasingly crisis-prone world.*

2. Sea basing can offer the NATO force commander a flexible range of options in the support of the full spectrum of NATO interests including but not limited to: humanitarian operations, disaster relief, search and rescue, non-combatant evacuation operations, enforcement of sanctions and embargoes as well as initial entry operations. A mission-tailored joint force under the sea basing concept could be the first to arrive at the scene of a crisis. It could serve as an enabling force by stabilizing a situation and preparing for follow-on operations. Sea basing can offer a visible deterrent presence in full view of potential aggressors or can operate from over the horizon to minimize political provocation or gain operational advantage.

3. Having recognized the advantages and capability enhancements that sea basing can provide, a number of NATO nations have already committed time and resources, in varying degrees, towards the creation of doctrine and assets within the area of a sea basing concept. This document, in conjunction with the use of existing doctrine, experimentation and exercising, will allow NATO to further and more effectively develop and exploit the use of this concept. Additionally sea

basing will enhance NATO's ability to fully integrate with coalition allies employing sea based forces in the conduct of future operations.

Scope of the concept

4. Sea basing, as a potential Alliance capability, is a transformational concept for projecting, employing and sustaining military capabilities and multi- national joint forces utilizing seaborne platforms. This provides the NATO force commander with an additional optimized capability for the conduct of operations without host nation support or a forward operating base (FOB). Fusing existing and emerging assets and their associated capabilities, sea basing seeks to enhance the Alliance's strategic decision making ability with the most effective solution in response to a crisis. Sea basing provides the opportunity to deploy specific mission-tailored forces to a joint operations area without waiting for full definition of any host nation support.

It is accepted that nations have procured sea based platforms to cover identified conventional maritime or amphibious use to meet perceived national needs in these operational areas. This concept relies upon knowledge of the existence of the platforms and their capabilities to assist in the projection and support of joint forces under circumstances which dictate their use in ways which were not perhaps their primary role.

5. Sea basing is envisioned to facilitate the commencement of sustainable operations, thus enabling the flow of follow-on forces into theatre, and finally expediting the reconstitution and redeployment of NATO forces. Command and Control (C2), maintenance, medical and logistics capabilities can remain afloat to be focused upon supporting operations ashore. Utilizing a joint perspective, sea basing endeavours to transcend traditional service boundaries providing NATO with an expeditionary advantage for the employment of forces in response to a diverse range of missions around the globe. It provides NATO with another deployment option in response to the specific demands of an operation.

6. Sea basing shares many characteristics with amphibious operations. Many elements of amphibious operations and doctrine can be used in executing sea based operations and development of the concept, but amphibious operations as such are not part of this concept and must be seen as a separate, enabling capability. Doctrine maintenance and development in the area of amphibious operations is carried out within the current amphibious community. The NJSB development must therefore be carried out in close harmony with the amphibious community, as well as other relevant communities within NATO.

Aim of the document

7. The aim of this paper is to provide strategic level guidance to the operational commands for the planning and conduct of joint multi-national

operations utilizing sea basing and to NATO and nations for capability development.

8. This document provides a definition, a sea basing overview, operating capabilities, mission applications, operational phases and operational planning factors for deploying mission-tailored multi-national joint forces to an area of operations for a range of missions.

Definition

9. The *joint* use of seaborne platforms to project, support and sustain multi-national forces.

Background

10. Due to the dynamic nature of international and environmental situations, the shortfall in strategic lift and the increasing requirements for expeditionary capability, the alliance is presented with three main areas of concern. The first is how to expeditiously move the right sized unit to the right location at the right time to be effectively employed. Speed of response to an emerging situation is often the decisive factor in the resolution of the crisis and therefore highlights the need for a high degree of strategic mobility and projection capability with logistical sustainability. Secondly, how to deal with the unpredictability of host nation support (HNS). The build-up of forces and supplies, the support of the forces, the sustainability of the forces and the protection of those forces will all be negatively affected without HNS. The expeditious assembly and deployment of forces, the force projection of those forces, the sustainability and the force protection of those forces without any reliance on HNS, including a physical land structure such as a port facility, poses a difficult challenge. Finally, how to limit the vulnerability of ground based logistics supply chains. Disruption of logistic support could be the main focus of a potential adversary with little or no capability to engage in direct action against the conventional force structure.

11. A solution for these concerns can be the use of the sea with its virtually unlimited space for manoeuvre. Utilization of the sea allows for the build-up of required logistic and operational support near the theatre of operation in order to enable the deployment and sustainment of the force. Sea basing increases strategic responsiveness and provides additional force projection and sustainment options to the NATO force commander.

Overview

12. Sea basing is more than a logistic concept. It is an expeditionary capability that provides the NATO force commander the ability to initiate operations throughout the spectrum of force from a location that he deems suitable and to conduct those operations from a secure and multi-faceted base. It reduces the

political dependence on third parties to set up, implement and continue joint operations. The concept also increases the possibility for the NATO force commander to gain immediate access to the crisis area while simultaneously reducing vulnerability to asymmetric threats. In principle the sea basing concept can be used for all types of operations and is scalable from support by a single ship up to and including an entire fleet.

13. Early afloat presence can provide capabilities such as Command and Control (C2) from established headquarters, Intelligence / Surveillance / Target Acquisition / Reconnaissance (ISTAR), Sea Point of Disembarkation (SPOD), Force Protection (FP), Air Defence (AD), Naval Fire Support (NFS), as well as medical facilities, supplies and Reception Staging Onward Movement & Integration (RSOI) enablers. The ability to support landed forces through sea basing can also be exploited during the withdrawal phase, enabling the drawdown of the support footprint ashore whilst continuing to provide services such as life support, HQ facilities, medical and fire support from the sea.

14. A significant element, or even the entire joint force, could be sea based for a particular phase or the entire operation. This footprint will be in line with the desired posture, phase or circumstances ashore. Sea basing allows the NATO force commander to retain much of his operational forces afloat from pier side to over the horizon as dictated by situational factors. These forces then remain in this posture until called forward incrementally or to surge at the optimum time and location independent of sophisticated port infrastructure if necessary. The delivery of forces and resources ashore can be done by incrementally offloading as required, conducting full offloads or retaining the full or partially loaded platforms pier side in port.

15. Sea basing does not provide the sole means of executing operations. It does not exclude amphibious operations nor does it preclude the establishment of installations on land. Joint forces will continue to secure ports and airfields when the situation dictates. Sea basing offers additional options for forward presence (may deploy to an area of potential operations and await decisions), force closure, anti-access or area denial challenges.

Exploitation of the maritime environment and employment of maritime assets in the conduct of joint operations has a long history. While this joint, and often combined, use of the maritime environment has proven successful, it has been largely on an ad hoc national basis rather than through the implementation of prepared policies founded on sea basing. Within the past decade, sea basing has been used in support of operations in the Balkans, Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq as well as in the provision of security during the 2004 Summer Olympics in Greece. In 1982 during the Falklands conflict, the UK had to deploy a task force nearly 7000 nautical miles by sea. Moreover, sea based operations on a national level have been utilized to conduct various Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) and in the provision of initial disaster relief and Humanitarian Assistance (HA) off the coasts of Mozambique, Honduras, Montserrat, Turkey, Indonesia, Thailand and New Orleans prior to the arrival of land-based assistance. In all of these operations, circumstances lent themselves to sea basing, and available platforms were adapted as required at the time, with individual procedures being established and developed for each operation as they progressed.

Operating Capability

16. During missions where a sea base is utilized, joint sea-based capabilities will deploy strategically to conduct and/or support operations. Joint force assets may be based completely on a sea base or a combination of a sea base and a designated SPOD/APOD in the operations area. Upon conclusion of the mission the sea base can assist in redeployment operations.

17. Sea based operations can be conducted with seaborne platforms located either over the horizon, in sight of the shore, in port or utilizing some combination of the three locations. Selection will be determined by the particular mission situation, requirements and available capabilities. Although possible, given the current NATO inventory, over the horizon operations are the most demanding.

Mission Applications

18. Sea basing is not a “one size fits all” solution to the variety of situations that NATO might encounter. A sea base could aid in the early assistance/resolution of a crisis situation associated principally with the following mission types:

a. Support of Humanitarian Operations (HO)
b. Support of Disaster Relief (DR)
c. Search and Rescue (SAR)
d. Support of Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)
e. Extraction Operations (EOP)
f. Humanitarian Relief (HR)
g. Enforcement of Sanctions and Embargoes (ESE)

h. Initial Entry Operations (IEO)

19. The operations in which sea basing can be exclusively employed may be limited by the number of available assets, composition and capabilities, as well as the scope and complexity of any given situation. Each developing situation will be unique and the suitability for the application of sea basing must be considered against the proposed tasks and location.

Operational Phases

20. Sea basing provides scalable force projection options to the NATO force commander through the sequential and concurrent integration of the primary operational phases outlined below. These are normally sequential but may occur concurrently during an operation. Executing sea based operations involve the same Operational Phases of Strategic Deployment, Assembly, Employment, Sustainment, Reconstitution and Redeployment. Sea basing would be a feasible method of deploying, sustaining and withdrawing a NATO Response Force (NRF) where the particular advantages of sea basing can be exploited to optimize the footprint ashore.

21. During the operational planning process some factors may emerge which suggest that a sea based option might be considered for some or all phases of an operation.

a. Strategic Deployment – There are a number of circumstances which may lead the operational commander to consider the use of sea based platforms to meet or assist in meeting the challenges of strategic deployment:

(i) If there is a need for covert or semi-covert deployment of some or part of a force, the particular tactical and communications capabilities of a military sea based platform may be required.

(ii) If operational security issues dictate that use of platforms from the commercial market would be unwise, the commander may be forced to deploy forces using only military resources.

(iii) If sea lines of communication to the objective area are threatened by conventional or asymmetric forces, it may be necessary to assure the security or confidence of the deployed force by using platforms with a self-defence capability.

(iv) If there are indications during the planning process that commercial and designated military sources will not fulfill the total lift requirement, the shortfall may need to be compensated for by using military sea based platforms to ensure timely responses to a crisis.

b. Reception Staging and Onward Movement & Integration – If reception facilities in the area of operations are unsuitable, unsecure, unreliable or unavailable, reception into and onward movement from a sea base may be the only option. Forces may be required to stage or poise before employment and if no suitable inter-theatre staging base is available for geo-political reasons then a sea based staging or loitering area may be needed. Additionally, if the area of operations presents problems for onward movement then sea based intra-theatre transportation assets can be used to overcome this challenge.

c. Employment – The use of sea basing enhances the initial reach of forces especially in initial entry operations. This use of sea basing can be extended beyond the more traditional use of naval gunfire support and the use of carrier-based air platforms for ISTAR (UAV), rotary-wing attack and initial theatre missile defence. Sea basing can make a significant contribution to logistic operations especially when security and infrastructure dictate that the logistic footprint of a force must be minimized. The option to the hold combat supplies offshore may be an attractive option in areas where the infrastructure is poor and on-shore security is questionable. When conducting medical planning, the option of providing role 2 and 3 medical facilities on a sea based platform must always be considered. In some circumstances, sea based capabilities provide significant advantages in terms of security and environment especially in the areas of extreme climate. The inherent flexibility of the sea based platforms makes it possible, in certain cases, to disguise the forces entry points and change a line of operation whilst maintaining C2 and operational integrity.

d. Sustainment – The persistent logistic support of forces and platforms both afloat and ashore. Sustainment of sea based operations may be provided from a wide variety of sources across a broad range of geographic locations utilizing both civil and military capabilities. The use of advanced bases early in the operation may be used to assist in the receipt, reconfiguration, storage, loading, transport and distribution of supplies and material to sea based assets and supporting sites. Dependent upon the availability of access, HNS, and the scale of the operation, operations can be partially or fully sustained through sea basing or increasingly

transferred to shore as required. In addition to immediate usage requirements, a reserve of several days might be retained ashore dependent upon the robustness of the lines of communication (LOC) or be consolidated onboard seaborne assets until required forward. This method of operation will reduce the quantities held ashore that would be vulnerable to environmental degradation or denial through enemy action including contamination. Retaining resources onboard seaborne assets will also increase the flexibility to select a range of optimum delivery points reducing land LOCs and thus the on-shore transport burden as much as possible.

e. Reconstitution and Recovery – Sea basing offers obvious advantages in planning for reconstitution and recovery. Where no viable points of re-embarkation exist or when an emergency extraction of forces is required, sea based platforms may not only be useful or desirable but also may be essential to successful completion of this phase of an operation. Even when the reconstitution and recovery phase of an operation is planned by "conventional" sea and air assets, the prudent operational planner should make contingency arrangements for the rapid extraction of the force. The use of sea based assets may well be required in such contingency plans. Obviously, if sea basing has been used to assist the deployment and maintenance of the force, it is probable that reconstitution and recovery will also use the same or similar platforms.

Operational Planning Factors

22. In preparation for sea based operations, the following planning factors should be considered.

a. Command and Control (C2) – Sea basing provides the NATO force commander with an established afloat means to command and control both sea and land based forces. It provides assured C2 at the commencement of operations and may reduce the command footprint ashore as well as the need to protect land based command and control facilities.

b. Infrastructure – Sea based forces do not necessarily rely on infrastructure (sea and air ports, roads etc) in the area of operations to project forces at the commencement of operations. Sea basing may additionally reduce the requirement for the improvement, construction and establishment of ashore infrastructure.

c. Assets – The use of existing military seaborne platforms may negate many challenges of acquiring assured commercial sealift

assets for force deployment. NATO sea based assets will be selected based on type missions and the availability of seaborne platforms. Sea basing operations are scalable and assets can be configured to fit the force. Availability of assets is a critical cornerstone as they support the functional requirements of joint force operations, e.g., the movement of selected forces and equipment (by air and sea), berthing, equipment storage, net-centric environment, C2 capabilities, logistics (supply, sustainment and maintenance), rehabilitation, medical care, etc.

d. Material - Consideration of support material selection for a sea based operation will depend in part on the length of time forces will remain afloat. For short duration operations, where forces operate primarily afloat, the requirement for material associated with land based support and sustainment may be significantly reduced.

e. Interoperability – The degree to which sea based operations are able to provide and accept joint assets and services between nations and to operate these exchanged assets and services together in an effective manner. Forces must be able to operate within a joint and multinational environment. Equipment, compatibility and/or interoperability (fuel coupling for aircraft as well for RAS example) is a critical component of sea basing.

f. Capacity – The maximum degree to which a sea base is able to receive, store, organize, integrate, project, support and sustain a joint force. It is a key attribute as it determines to some extent the size and the ability of the NATO force commander to conduct operations. Capacity describes the limits of joint force capabilities that can be supported from the sea base and is driven in large part by functional limitations.

g. Rate – The degree to which a sea base is able to receive, store, organize, integrate, project, support and sustain a designated quantity of the joint force over a period of time under a standard set of conditions. Since speed and responsiveness are essential elements of successful multinational joint expeditionary operations, the rate of capabilities for closure, assembly, employment, sustainment, and reconstitution must be addressed. The rate of the joint force that is projected by a sea base is driven in large part by the size and limitations of the sea base.

h. Survivability – A sea base may mitigate threats to forces both afloat and ashore. Survivability depends on several factors including the specific numbers and type of threat, acceptable level of risk determined by the NATO force commander, protective measures,

training, and inherent defensive capabilities of the sea base. It also includes the capability of the sea base to conduct force protection including the functions of detect, assess, warn, defend, and recover.

i. Accessibility – Characterizes the ability of the sea base to project joint force capabilities throughout a range of changing environmental conditions. The flexibility to bypass or operate within the physical constraints presented by terrain, hydrography, weather, depth of operations, and threat is an important attribute of sea based operations. Sea based forces both afloat and ashore must be capable of conducting operations across different types of terrain and coastal boundaries and must be able to operate under austere conditions.

j. Optimized Footprint – Sea basing will provide the NATO force commander with a tool to shape the environment through metering the flow of forces ashore and then flexing the logistical and operational stance in accordance with the political and military situation to achieve effects based results. No longer must Iron Mountains ashore precede operations.

k. Effects of the Sea – The influence of the sea on personnel and equipment must be considered in relation to the duration afloat and, expected sea states. The sea may significantly impact the character / type of the missions performed by a sea base

Conclusion

23. Flexible quick-response action will be required in areas far from fixed bases available or suitable for military use. A sea base can replace or augment the fixed in-theatre airports and seaports, on which past military operations have focused and depended, with a manoeuverable seaborne structure. It can provide a mobile base of operations, command centre, logistics node and transportation hub. Sea basing can optimize the agility with which NATO forces deploy into theatre and then exploit the maritime environment during the conduct of operations.

24. In small scale operations sea basing has already provided comprehensive support to some types of operations ashore, especially in the realm of humanitarian and disaster relief environments. For medium and large scale operations it will often be complementary to the scheme of manoeuvre ashore.

25. Optimum effect can often be achieved by combining the anticipatory deployment of sea basing assets and the large quantity of resources that ships deliver. Recognized by nations as a viable option for conducting operations,

NATO should ensure that sea basing can fully integrate with likely coalition allies during the conduct of sea based operations. Above all, successful exploitation of sea basing will come first and foremost from a frame of mind that understands the complementary opportunities that it has to offer across a broad spectrum of operations.

Recommendations

26. Like all joint force operations sea basing is not without its challenges. The "how" to conduct sea basing operations is not addressed in this concept. Significant coordination in the development of allied joint doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures to address afloat as well as ashore operations is recommended. This includes Ship to shore, onward movement and storage procedures.

27. For sea basing to be a transformational strategic concept for projecting, employing and sustaining military capabilities and multi-national joint forces utilizing seaborne platforms, NATO forces must be trained and capable of operating as part of it. This will involve harmonizing development in all areas (Doctrine, Organisation, Training, Material, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, Interoperability (DOTMLPFI)).

28. It is recommended that capability development starts with capitalizing on existing seaborne platforms and supporting equipment.