


Book Review

Timothy Heck, Brett Friedman, and Walker Mills (eds.) (2024) *On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare*. Volume 2. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 365 pp., ISBN 978-8-9862595-8-1

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This is the second volume of essays on historical and emerging examples of amphibious military operations, with the first volume being published in 2020 and available on this website. Featuring contributions from American, British, Israeli, New Zealand, and South African scholars, some possessing significant military experience, *On Contested Shores* is divided into five sections covering the following topics: doctrine and logistics, technology and innovation, organisation and training, policy and interoperability, and military material and personnel.

The Foreword uses the following US military definition of amphibious operations:

Amphibious operations use maneuver principles to employ ready-to-fight combat forces from the sea to achieve a position of advantage over the enemy. During combat operations, maneuver, in conjunction with organic and supporting fires, it is

essential to gaining access where the enemy least expects it. It provides a position of advantage to destroy or seriously disrupt the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions that create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope ([U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff \[JCS\], 2021](#), p. 3).

Notable chapters in the doctrine and logistics section cover the landing craft controversy involving the construction of Louisiana-based landing craft of Andrew Higgins which had been used for oil companies and timber production, but were transformed into landing craft used in the Normandy D-Day invasion along with Soviet/Russian amphibious warfare theory and practice from World War II operations to ongoing activity in Ukraine ([Strahan, 1998](#)).

The chapter in the "Technology and Innovation" section ("Amphibious Juggernaut: How the Landing Ship, Tank, and Landing Vehicle Tracked, Created the Most Powerful Amphibious Assault System of World War II") covers how the Marine Corps and Navy, along with inventors, such as Donald Roebling, created various landing, vehicle, track (LVT) vessels, and landing ship tanks (LST) amphibious assault vehicles to execute these operations in European and Pacific operational theatres. Key components of all book chapters are interservice rivalries, disputes between governments and private sector contractors, and governmental and legislative intervention into these disputes.

Subjects addressed in the "Organization and Training" section include British and South African plans to invade German South West Africa (now Namibia) in 1914; German amphibious landings on Baltic Islands close to Estonia, Finland, and Russia between 12 October and 17 October 1917; inland manoeuvre in historical polar amphibious operations which places particular emphasis on Antarctica and the Arctic as potentially emerging conflict arenas; and Soviet preparations for a naval landing in Israel in June 1967 and their partial implementation.

The policy and interoperability component includes New Zealand's "Green Island Operation in the Solomon Islands on 30–31 January 1944, which places acute emphasis on the limited hydrographic intelligence information for these islands; and historical, contemporary, and emerging Chinese operations against Taiwan's offshore islands and how Beijing's military doctrine for such operations has evolved over multiple decades.

The concluding military material and personnel section features chapters covering the US strategic deterrence and Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) during the Civil War; the 1943–1944 Soviet Kerch-Eltigen landing in Crimea; and development of China's People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps since 1979 and how it might impact Chinese power projection in the Pacific Ocean and other locales.

The Conclusion notes that the potential conflicts the United States, and by extension its allies, might become involved with will include forces deployed amphibiously from the sea, which will require new and innovative methods of amphibious warfare. Work quality is enhanced by multiple photographs, illustrations, and maps along with extensive use of archival and government information resources ([Heck *et al.*, 2024](#)).

Ways this work could have been strengthened include moving the Conclusion to the front of the work by providing a contextual information and noting that many works cited in these essays are available by open access and should include their Uniform Resource Locators (URLs). The authors in the Introduction should also ask the "Why Should I Care" question about the desirability of reading this book.

One answer to this question is noting that the 2015 *Naval War College Review* article emphasises that 80% of all countries border the sea, with 95% of the world's population living within 600 miles of the coast. In all, 60% of politically significant urban areas are located within 60 miles of the coast, and 80% of world capitals are in littorals, with littorals representing about 16% of global oceanic expanse, where all seaborne trade originates and ends (Vego, 2015).

Another answer to the question “Why Should I Care” is noting that United Nations statistics demonstrate that the percentage of people in Asian countries living within 100 kilometres (km) of the coast will increase by 8% or 134,580,000 between 2020 and 2035; Europe's population within these parameters will increase by 1.15% or 3,550,000 during this period; Middle East and North African populations will increase by 18% or 47,271,000 during this period; Sub-Saharan African populations will increase by 42% or 96,309,000 during this period; North American populations will increase by 10% or 15,574,000 during this period; Central American and Caribbean populations will increase 13% of 15,301,000 during this period; South American population by 22% or 42,686,000 during this period; and Oceanic populations will increase by 18% or 6,089,000 during this period (Maul and Duedlell, 2020).

Many of these coastal areas are already conflict- and tension-prone; so, an answer to “Why Should I Care” is that war with amphibious or littoral characteristics may be coming to your neighbourhood. This question can also be answered by persuading the broader public and governmental funders on the critical importance of this subject to potentially emerging military operations. It can also stress to incoming military personnel of the desirability of pursuing amphibious operations as a career path and of defence industries of the potential attractiveness of developing relevant offensive and defensive weapon systems and technologies. Possible future editions of this work should also examine whether national governments and militaries are doing a good job focusing on enhancing these capabilities and informing public opinion on the future likelihood that amphibious military operations are likely to be key attributes of 21st century war. Researching environmental and humanitarian impacts such military operations have on populaces in coastal/littoral regions would also be worth pursuing.

On Contested Shores is a thought-provoking work that should lead individuals and policy-makers to understand increasing global urbanisation and how that might impact conducting military operations in coastal and global regions internationally. Strongly recommended.

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