

The Defense Innovation Initiative

America's third offset and its impacts
to the USMC officer PME continuum

by LtCol John T. Gutierrez

The Defense Innovation Initiative (DII) was unveiled during the Reagan National Defense Forum Keynote speech by then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel. The DOD and the Marine Corps are at a crossroads that will shape the Nation's history as it attempts to implement the new DII that aims to advance the U.S. military's technical prowess that has been lost in recent decades.

It is not a new phenomenon the Nation, or the Marine Corps, finds itself in: a post-war period, facing declining budgets while the Nation faces increased threats to its national security. Many of this Nation's—and the Corps'—most innovative concepts and strategies occurred in similar times. For example, the Marine Corps codified the *Small Wars Manual* (Government Printing Office, Washington, DC: 1940) in the inter-war periods that captured many of the hard lessons of the Banana Wars. Moreover, after the First World War, the Marine Corps developed the amphibious doctrine that led to allied victories in both the European and Pacific Theaters. The DII can be classified as the third offset strategy, in a series of offset strategies beginning with the first offset strategy under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "New Look" in the



President Dwight D. Eisenhower. (Photo courtesy of the President Dwight D. Eisenhower Archives.)

1950s and continuing with Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown's "Offset" in the 1970s.

Beginning at the onset of the Cold War in 1945, the United States confronted the Soviet threat and developed a new strategy and policy to meet this emerging crisis. President Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy, otherwise known as the first offset strategy, was successful in deterring Soviet aggression because of its focus on nuclear weapons, such as the inter-continental ballistic mis-

"The Department of Defense is undergoing a defining time of transition. After 13 years of war ... we're facing a fiscal environment plagued by constant budget uncertainty, a continuing decline in resources, and by a historic realignment of interests and influences around the world.

"This requires making disciplined choices and meeting all our nation's challenges with long-term vision.

"We're taking the initiative, getting ahead of that change—that change we know is coming—and making the long-term investments we need for the future."¹

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siles, strategic bombers, and nuclear ballistic missile submarines. Almost 20 years after the “New Look” strategy, the U.S. found itself unable to keep pace with meeting the threats of the Soviet Union’s growing nuclear arsenal and large number of conventional forces. Consequently, America’s second offset strategy was ushered in, which revolutionized conventional warfare and assured American dominance in large-scale ground combat. This offset strategy evolved concurrently with doctrine—which came to favor rapid, decisive operations to quickly defeat adversaries. In addition, the second offset strategy led to improvements such as stealth, precision strike, navigation capabilities, battlefield information, and communications systems.

The Cold War era also forced the Marines to develop radical concepts that proved instrumental to its institutional survival. Faced with a changing environment that challenged the relevance of traditional amphibious warfare concepts in an increasing nuclear world, the Marine Corps explored operational concepts and doctrine that would redefine maneuver warfare from the sea. The cornerstone of this amphibious warfare renaissance was the establishment of Helicopter Marine Experimental 1 (HMX-1) and its work to integrate helicopters into amphibious operations. Their conceptual framework became the baseline for future helicopter operations during the Vietnam War for the Army and the Marine Corps.² The Marine Corps also experienced a significant period of innovation during the period of the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The most defining catalyst during this time was the publishing of *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1989). With its adoption, maneuver warfare became the Corps’ organizational philosophy and its doctrine for preparing and conducting operations.³

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has enjoyed a period of military primacy. However, the traditional American power projection model is in crisis and the monopoly that was gained during the second offset strat-

egy is slipping away. As seen throughout Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, our forces faced considerable challenges obtaining and maintaining forward basing facilities and over flight access to support military operations. This trend will continue, requiring the U.S. to rely more on maritime and expeditionary forces to project power abroad.⁴

To meet these emerging challenges, America’s third offset strategy, the DII, will focus on innovation, operational concepts, organizational change, long-term strategies, and people. The intent of the third offset strategy is to identify

assume positions of increased responsibility and complexity.⁵

Though the current version of the officer PME continuum has provided the Corps a strong foundation, it must adapt to meet the Nation’s changing national security challenges. The *U.S. Marine Corps Officer PME 2006 Study and Findings* (the Wilhelm Study) found that the officer PME system was generally sound. However, left unchanged, the system will be unable to meet the needs of officers, the Marine Corps, and the Nation.⁶ There have been many published studies recommending improvements to the current

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and invest in innovative ways to sustain and advance America’s national security into the 21st century. A significant part of the DII will focus DOD efforts on ways to better understand and prioritize new or unconventional applications of technology in order to provide the U.S. with military technological advantages into the future. Other efforts will focus on implementing business practices, wargaming, and operational concept development.

Perhaps one of the most controversial elements of the DII is its mandate for the Services to re-think how they develop leaders. As the former Commandant Gen Charles C. Krulak said, “The Corps has done two things for this great nation. We make Marines and we win our nation’s battles.” To this end, the Corps has a well-established robust training and development pipeline for Marines. This is evident in the officer professional military education (PME) continuum that guides military leadership and professional development from the officer candidate to the general officer. The goal of this PME system is to develop leaders as they progress and

officer PME system within all of the Services. One example is GEN David H. Petraeus’ well-known view on officer graduate education at civilian institutions. He has written, civilian experiences provide officers with opportunities to “get outside the military cloister” and challenge their traditional thinking and military perspective.⁷ In concert with the Wilhelm Study’s finding, the Corps should look to improve the current officer PME continuum to meet the goals of the DII.

One such way would be to increase the number of Marines participating in Fellowships. While the Marine Corps currently offers Fellowships under the Commandant of the Marine Corps Fellowship program (i.e., the Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellowship Program [SDCFP]), and others programs such as the DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Project Agency) Service Chiefs’ Fellows Program, the number of opportunities offered and post-Fellowship utilization tours should be increased. Instead of the traditional resident PME model of attendance at a resident school, a new model would require officers to

complete one Fellowship within their careers.

The other Services have well established Fellowship programs, such as training with industry (TWI) that could be used as a template for the Corps to meet its emerging needs. TWI places competitively selected captains/USN lieutenants and majors/USN lieutenant commanders within top performing civilian companies to learn the intricacies of their core business processes, thus exposing Service members to a different environment, learning best practices from industry. As the pace of technology and innovation within industry outpaces the military, intrinsic benefits exist for this program in many areas such as cyber warfare, logistics, combat arms, and aviation. Note that there is a distinction between TWI programs and the SDCFP. The SDCFP is a top-level school equivalent program that places senior officers with corporate executives, the focus being more on executive leadership and strategy development. Both TWI and the SDCFP provide alumni opportunities to develop different perspectives when problem solving, thinking critically, and acting decisively. Most important, they expose Fellows to different leadership styles, cultures, and experiences not offered through resident PME schools. Just as there is no substitution for operational experience, there is also no substitute for exposure to the nimble, flexible, and innovative culture of Corporate America. This understanding, coupled with the experiences of resident/non-resident PME, and time in the Operating Forces, is what the Nation demands of its 21st century military leaders.

In concert with the previously recommended changes, the Corps should improve the policy for post-Fellowship utilization tours. Currently, there are no designated post-Fellowship assignment billets for CMC Fellows, although the intent is to provide a cadre of highly qualified officers who have experience at the highest levels of defense research and national security studies who are available for high visibility assignments.⁸ This is common among all the Services and was identified by the Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter during his 23



Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter during speech at Stanford. (Official DOD photo.)

April 2015 speech on innovation and cybersecurity at Stanford University.

An existing program called Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellows sends about 15 DoD people a year out to commercial companies. Right now we don't effectively harness what they've learned when they come back, ... so we're going to try expanding that fellows program into a two-year gig—one year in a company and one year in a part of DoD with comparable business practices, ... that way, we have a better chance to bring the private sector's best practices back into the department.⁹

Echoing Secretary Carter's remarks, the Corps should strive to implement a pay-back tour for post-Fellowship alumni similar to the policy for participation in the Special Education Program or the School of Advanced Warfighting. The Corps would find itself with a robust cadre of post-Fellowship alumni with experiences across multiple domains including, operational, Supporting Establishment, recruiting, resident school, Fellowship experience, Joint, etc. An example of this need was recently highlighted during Secretary Carter's speech at Stanford University when he announced the DOD would take advantage of the elements that make Silicon Valley "a nexus for innovation"—by establishing an experimental Silicon Valley partnership called the Defense Innovation Unit-X. Secretary Carter said, "This is a first-of-a-kind partnership for us, staffed by some of our best active-duty and military personnel, plus key people from the reserves who live here, who are some of our best technical talent."¹⁰

As LtGen Victor "Brute" Krulak said, "The United States does not need a Marine Corps ... the United States wants a Marine Corps."¹¹ The Corps must continue its legacy, developing innovative concepts and strategies during post-war periods. Just as war is both timeless and ever changing, so too must the Corps implement changes to its current officer PME continuum and post-Fellowship assignment policy



AAV with amphibious assault ship. (Photo by OSD, DTIC.)

in order to meet the Nation's impending needs. These changes will produce Marine leaders to combat the imminent threats to the Nation today, in areas such as cyber warfare, and antiaccess/areadential, allowing the Corps' to meet the challenges outlined in the DII. This is what the Nation wants and demands of her Marine Corps for the way ahead.

Notes

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10. Ibid.
11. LtGen Victor H. Krulak, USMC(Ret), *First to Fight*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989).



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