

POSITION PAPER

Subj: THE FUTURE OF THE JOINT FORCIBLE ENTRY OPERATION (JFEO) OPTION

Ref: (a) JP 3-18
(b) Joint Operational Access Concept of 17 Jan 12
(c) National Security Strategy (2017)

1. Problem. Is JFEO a valid option for military commanders in an ever-increasing Anti-Access / Area Denial (A2/AD) environment?

2. Recommended Position. Joint forcible entry operations (JFEO) are not only a valid operational option, they will continue to be a primary offensive solution regardless of domain.

3. Rationale. Despite a storied heritage of beach landings and fighting small wars from the sea, U.S. servicemembers rarely storm beaches under enemy fire in present-day operations. And yet, it is this narrow view of JFEO that drives the question of its validity. However, JFEO remains a relevant and viable offensive option for three reasons: (1) JFEO, by definition, is much more comprehensive than doctrine conveys; (2) not every adversary is a near-peer competitor; and (3) retaining JFEO as an option forces adversaries to have to allocate resources to defeat it.

a. JFEO by Definition. Forcible entry is defined as, “[s]eizing and holding of a military lodgment in the face of armed opposition or forcing access into a denied area to allow movement and maneuver to accomplish the mission.” (Ref. (a)). While the term has long been associated with amphibious or air assaults into enemy territory, its definition has a much wider aperture. The definition is written in the disjunctive, meaning there are two ways to conduct forcible entry: (1) seize a “lodgment in the face of armed opposition,” *or* (2) “forcing access into a denied area” to facilitate maneuver. (Ref. (a)). As to the first, there are no limitations on the form of a lodgment, provided it exists in a “potentially hostile operational area.” (Ref. (a)).¹ Even assuming the use of conventional weapons to arm the opposition, there are various offensive actions that meet these definitional requirements. As to the second, the term “denied area”² is even broader than “operational area” and merely requires the facilitation of maneuver, not holding ground. (Ref. (a)). Given these definitions, any of the following operations *arguably* fit within the definition of JFEO:³

- A land force crossing a hostile border and seizing some terrain in order to permit the flow of follow-on forces (1/2);
- Air assets penetrating and gaining control of enemy airspace in order to permit offensive ground operations (1/2);
- Freedom of navigation operations that keep sea lines of communication open and available for offensive actions (2);

¹ Operational area is defined as: “An overarching term encompassing more descriptive terms (such as area of responsibility and joint operations area) for geographic areas in which military operations are conducted.” DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (2020).

² Denied area is defined as: “An area under enemy or unfriendly control in which friendly forces cannot expect to operate successfully within existing operational constraints and force capabilities.” DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (2020).

³ Each operation type is identified by a (1), (2), or (1/2) to identify which definition(s) it meets.

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- Offensive cyber actions that seize control of adversary networks in advance of a ground maneuver in order to facilitate actions on the objective (2);
- Jamming adversary radar to mask the arrival of special operations forces in zone (2); or
- Interrupting adversary satellite access to stifle C2 capabilities during an offensive maneuver operation (2).

In fact, there is an argument to be made that even diplomatic negotiations or other non-kinetic instruments of military power can secure access to otherwise denied areas, thereby facilitating movement or maneuver (e.g. no-fly zones). In light of the possibilities that extend well beyond the beachhead, JFEO is not only a viable option, it is widely used across the Department of Defense in current operations.

b. Less-Capable Adversaries. For those less willing to venture outside of the kinetic environment, JFEO from the air or sea can still serve its generally connoted purpose against many potential adversaries. The U.S. cannot limit its preparation to near-peer competitors. In fact, the U.S. is more likely to conduct future offensive operations against weaker or smaller states, many of which have rudimentary A2/AD capabilities or limited ability to protect these capabilities. (Ref. (b)). While A2/AD has turned into the buzzword of the day, anti-access and area denial are not new concepts. Rather, states have developed the ability to employ them at a greater distance with more accuracy and more lethal effects, but much like defensive measures employed in the past, these too can be overcome. (Ref. (b)). To the extent the DoD currently lacks the ability to mitigate such a threat, it is incumbent on the DoD to find new solutions, rather than merely discarding a “capability to project force.” (Ref. (b)).

c. Capabilities Require Resources. Finally, even if traditional JFEO becomes a rarely used option, it is a capability that should remain on the table. So long as it is an option for the US, it is a capability the adversary must defend against. By focusing efforts on A2/AD, the adversary necessarily loses the capacity to make advancements in other domains, platforms, and capabilities. It also forces adversaries to commit forces to entry points, thereby reducing force size in other areas and creating opportunities for exploitation. If nothing else, forcing the enemy to continue to develop traditional A2/AD capabilities, plan for JFEO, and commit forces to defend against JFEO, retaining this doctrinal capability has value.

4. Opposing Viewpoints. Opposing viewpoints tend to focus on two primary arguments: (1) JFEO is an archaic form of warfighting; and (2) A2/AD capabilities limit its viability as an option. As discussed above, while valid, these arguments are based on a connotation of JFEO, not the definition. By broadening the aperture of JFEO to fulfill the scope of its definition, the U.S. military conducts JFEO in every domain. Even for those unwilling to accept non-kinetic actions as JFEO, there are few scenarios where the U.S. will be invited to the front lines and will likely require forcible entry by land, air, or sea regardless. As to the second argument, while an increasing number of countries do have some level of A2/AD capabilities, capabilities can be overcome and costs can be mitigated. (Ref. (b)). The U.S. military cannot establish a precedent of discarding viable military options every time an adversary develops a capability.

5. Recommendation. The National Security Strategy directs the DoD to be able to “deter, deny, and defeat.” (Ref. (c)). In light of the breadth of its definition, JFEO is not only an option to defeat, it is a primary option. The DoD simply needs to reframe its vision of JFEO and identify new mechanisms to overcome A2/AD challenges. Accordingly, the DoD should: (1) amend its doctrine to reflect the versatility of forcible entry operations in all domains; (2) continue to develop counter-A2/AD capabilities to mitigate risk against non-near-peer adversaries; and (3) exercise those capabilities in a manner that stretches the resources of potential adversaries. In order to expand its warfighting capabilities, the U.S. must also expand traditional notions of warfighting.

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