Including Africa Threat Analysis in *Force Design 2030*

Glen Segell, PhD

Abstract: This article examines the threat analysis across Africa that should be included in *Force Design 2030* for the United States Marine Corps to be deployed landward to Africa or seaward of the continent. It is a strategic guidance document examined from a threat analysis of China, Russia, Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations. Africa is not mentioned, and this is a notable omission given that high level interventions in the past to Africa have not been overtly successful. Given geostrategic significances and hot spots it is inevitable that the Marines will be deployed there again. This article examines lessons learned from failures in Somalia, Libya, and Lebanon and successes in Syria and Iraq as well as the experiences of others—France in Mali and Burkina Faso and United States Africa Command. Great power competition, violent extremist organizations, and the gray zone phenomena across Africa are examined as are security, intelligence, counterintelligence, and hybrid warfare.

Keywords: *Force Design 2030*, United States Marine Corps, Africa, great power competition, gray zone, violent extremist organizations, security, counterinsurgency, intelligence, counterintelligence

Introduction

The roles and deployment of the United States Marine Corps are dynamic. *Force Design 2030* (FD2030) has been written as a strategic guidance documented for a modernization program that aims to ensure that the U.S. Marine Corps remains relevant to the current and future battlespace, has

Dr. Glen Segell is professor at the University of Cambridge and visiting professor and research fellow in the Department of Political Studies and Governance, University of the Free State, South Africa. He is also a research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran and Gulf States Research, University of Haifa, Israel. He holds the rank of brigadier general (reserves), where he also consults as an expert for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He worked in active intelligence and offense operations in Iraq, Kuwait, Sudan, and Libya.

adapted to do so, and so can outmaneuver any potential adversaries. FD2030's purpose is to transform the Marine Corps' existing force design to contend with the character of war that will include precision strike regimes, gray zone strategies, and an emphasis on maritime campaigns.[1]

The threat analysis of the version of FD2030 that is available on its website examines China, Russia, Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations. The problem statement that this article examines is that a notable omission in FD2030 is Africa. It is not included in the threat analysis nor mentioned anywhere in the strategic guidance document. The complete spectrum of the character of future war in different regions is unique and has therefore not been fully examined. The Marine Corps has deployed to Africa and will deploy again as examined in this article. By not including a threat analysis that includes Africa, the Marines will be vulnerable to failures.

In tackling the problem statement, this article examines issues and topics that should be included in FD2030 as strategic guidance to enable a better operationalization of the Marine Corps in Africa. To this end, this article recommends that FD2030 should include lessons learned from the past, both failures and successes, lessons from allies, and strategic guidance based on threat analysis on great power competition, violent extremist organizations, and the gray zone in Africa. It should also include means such as hybrid warfare, partnerships, security, intelligence, and counterintelligence.

The methodology of this article is to examine these issues and topics in different sections in a step-by-step process enouncing the concepts and conceptualizations, giving examples of these from both primary and secondary sources and directly quoting the advice of others. This will lead to the conclusions justifying why it is essential to include Africa as a threat analysis in FD2030.

The Africa Threat Environment

At the fore of the threat analysis for the United States in Africa is great power competition by more than those noted in the FD2030 threat analysis (China, Russia, Korea, and Iran). To this should be added India and Turkey. This great power competition is manifest between each other and with the U.S. and European countries, predominately Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium. The purpose of this great power competition is to gain as many African partners as possible to attain local and regional strategic influence. The tangible benefits of such influence are gains in economic, political, informational, and military interests where the African leaders are willing partners for national or personal interests.[2]

The U.S. concentration on Africa could be said to be ongoing since the Cold War struggle for influence in the postcolonial proliferation of sovereign states across the continent. However, the characteristics of the great power competition have changed. The nature of the great power competition in Africa differs from other regions in the world, so FD2030 should include an examination of this. It differs for the U.S. and European countries that deploy forces (boots

on the ground), sometimes within the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union, while the others such as China, Saudi Arabia, and Japan do not deploy forces even though they have bases, for example in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa on the Indian Ocean.[3]

Other countries, such as Russia, prefer to use mercenaries while Iran uses a combination of its own Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and proxy insurgents such as Hezbollah. In line with American strategic culture and strategy of engagement, the use of mercenaries and nonstate proxies are not an option. It would be unthinkable for American policy makers to use these. American strategic culture favors its own conventional armed forces, sometimes by Special Forces, as observed in past deployments in Somalia and Libya. Consequently, the United States and its allies do not engage other non-African states in direct great power competition military confrontation.[4]

If Africa involved solely great power competition in direct military confrontations, then the force design called for by FD2030 might have value, for most of the threat analysis therein emanates from great power competition threat analysis. However, the growth of violent extremist organizations, both local and ideological extensions of Middle East Islamic fundamentalism, has added to the threat environment and endangers U.S. interests in Africa. These destabilize and threaten locals and have escalated regionally to threaten U.S. geostrategic interests, for example al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and al-Qaeda. They recruit from the local population and merge with them, equating any Marine Corps deployment tasked with the impossible mission of "looking for a needle in a haystack."[5]

Despite the difficulties to be overcome on the tactical level, violent extremist organizations have been included in FD2030 as tackling them is a cornerstone of U.S. strategic policy. The catalyst for direct U.S. military action against violent extremist organizations leading to deployment to engage them in a preemptive and preventive manner and to assist African state partners to do so emerged with kinetic diplomacy. This was a definition used to describe the policy of President George W. Bush after 11 September 2001. This "war on terrorism" has been applied by the Pentagon, resulting in a shift in U.S. military strategy. That shift has been from containing threats such as applied by Cold War deterrence to deploying forces to engage the threats abroad preemptively, akin to taking the battle to the territory of the enemy.[6] An example of such a shift was that in the Cold War period American forces were required to defend a line such as the Rhine River against an invading Soviet force. Their presence in Germany was to serve as a deterrent to a Soviet offense and they never entered combat with Soviet forces. In the contemporary modern context, the tactics of forward deployment require more logistics capability, for example the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the deployment to Afghanistan in 2001, and the Iraq War in 2023. In these conflicts, American forces engaged in combat.

The political direction from the White House for such a shift from passive defense to active offense has been echoed and outlined in military doctrinal

documents from the Pentagon. This shift has been discussed within the parameters of the evolution in Marine Corps thinking that led to FD2030. For example, there is a paradigm shift detailed in the open-source web version of FD2030. It informs of a paradigm shift from the 1990s to 2015 quoting from official documents such as *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, Field Manual 3-24, that is also Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5.[7] During that period the United States was the sole superpower and enjoyed air, land, and sea supremacy. However, there was a growing need to deploy forces globally in counterinsurgent operations and this influenced the paradigm shift.[8]

Following this sound strategy logically of fighting the adversary away from U.S. soil and given the existence of great power competition and violent extremist organization adversaries, it would have been assumed that FD2030 would have included Africa as a threat analysis. However, it is a notable omission. Moreover, it should be included given the clear identification of great power competition and violent extremist organization threats where it is fair to state that Marine Corps deployment to Africa is an inevitability.[9]

Despite this inevitability, the immediacy of any such deployment is characterized by hesitations that could lead to escalations and even failures. In the past, U.S. policy makers have authorized Marine Corps deployments where and when there has been a clear distinction of when conflict or war exists compared to peace. This is not always the case anymore in Africa. The combination of great power competition and violent extremist organizations is exacerbated by a relatively new phenomena and terminology, mainly since 2016, to describe the changing nature of adversaries and warfare. The multitude and diversity of adversaries in the African threat environment has been summed up by a former commander of United States Special Operations Command Africa, retired Army brigadier general Donald C. Bolduc. He explains that Africa is the best example of a gray zone environment that U.S. forces encounter.[10]

A definition of the gray zone is provided by a National Security Information team:

> A conceptual space that describes a set of activities that occur between peace (or cooperation) and war (or armed conflict) occurring when actors purposefully use single or multiple elements of power to achieve political-security objectives with activities that are typically ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary competition, yet intentionally fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict.[11]

Such gray zones are to be found in many countries and regions and have become a military, political, and academic buzzword. The gray zone definition and identification is significant to Africa for the adversary is not solely due to great power competition and violent extremist organizations but could also be a blend of tribal insurgents, jihadists, and criminals operating in failed states. Sometimes these could be the same people as in violent extremist organizations

and great power competition. For example, Hezbollah, which is a violent extremist Islamic Shia organization first seen in Lebanon in the 1980s as a rival to the Shia Amal Movement. Hezbollah is now prevalent in many countries worldwide and is a direct proxy of Iran. It is supported financially and militarily aided by the IRGC that are part of the armed forces of Iran. Hezbollah and the IRGC have been seen operating in unison, for example as first seen in 2010 in Nigeria.[12] Another example of great power competition and the gray zone is seen in Russian mercenaries, exemplified by the Wagner Group, supporting the regime in Mali.[13]

While combating great power competition and violent extremist organizations have a clearer statement in FD2030, the gray zone in Africa does not. This is because the conflict manifests in struggles of resources versus political/religious/ideological domination and is both physical and in cyberspace.[14] The contest in the gray zone has ambiguous characteristics somewhere between peace (or cooperation) and war (or armed conflict). It does not cross the threshold to the point where the U.S. president can clearly declare a state of war. Any conventional Marine Corps force deployment to Africa has become a precarious domain for U.S. strategic culture and policy makers and military elites.[15]

Both the political and military elites might hesitate as deployment traditionally has been when conflict or war is clearly identifiable, and this is not the case even against jihadist movements in the gray zone when they are not posing an immediate threat. There might be cells of jihadists within the local population widely dispersed and in rural areas far from U.S. geostrategic interests. They might also be in cells of two or three in a village of 10,000 and not openly definable as combatants (e.g., not wearing identifiable uniforms). Even if a decision is taken to deploy the Marine Corps against them, the contest might be asymmetrical. A more suitable security force would be police to make arrests, if available.[16]

Adding to such hesitation has been previous Marine Corps deployments to Africa that have been met with varying degrees of success and failure in 1992.[17] Further hesitation might stem from lessons learned from hazards of other direct high-profile interventions, for example the Marine Corps deployment to Lebanon in the Middle East, when there was no clearly defined exit strategy.[18]

A dichotomy prevails for while there might be hesitancy for deployment arising from previous experiences that have not been overtly successful, for example Somalia, there are also clear geostrategic interests and military hot spots necessitating U.S. Marine Corps deployment. A clear threat analysis needs to be included in FD2030 to ameliorate this dichotomy. The geostrategic interests and military hot spots have been identified in a document released by the White House in August 2022, where President Joseph R. Biden spoke of the U.S. strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa. From this it can be construed the specific geostrategic locations where the Marine Corps might be deployed to support

such a strategy. These would include the location of minerals such as uranium in Niger, the maritime sea routes and choke points of the Cape Route, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Gibraltar, the southern flank of NATO that is North Africa, especially Libya and off the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean to protect shipping and trade.[19]

Among the specific military hot spots that can be identified for Marine Corps deployment are against violent extremist organizations like al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Hezbollah branches that operate in Somalia, the Sahel, the Maghreb, Lake Chad, and most recently in Congo and Mozambique. Intertwined is the gray zone that causes instability and conflict and is creating illegal migration to Europe that is a cause for deep concern. Also, a potential focus is the ongoing conflict in Yemen and the IRGC forces operating in the Red Sea off the African east coast—a region that has seen naval piracy.[20] This piracy has declined but other maritime crimes have increased. Illegal fishing along with smuggling and trafficking of people and illicit items such as narcotics are all on the rise. These and the protection of the ships delivering humanitarian aid, for example by the United Nations World Food Programme, is also seen as a priority in these hot spots.[21]

At the time of the writing of this article in January 2023, it is not known how many military missions that the United States has undertaken or is currently undertaking in Africa or how many troops are deployed. That fact remains top secret. However, the White House strategy also stresses joint and combined operations and support other than direct military intervention. This should also be included in FD2030 to determine how the Marine Corps could work with other branches, for instance United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the National Guard.

AFRICOM operates with African states and European allies and NATO in the mission to counter transnational threats and malign actors. This is accomplished by training and equipping local and regional security forces, in the provision of economic, education, and environmental assistance and expertise and overall advancing U.S. national interests through assistance, development, education, and training programs.[22] AFRICOM informs that it is engaged in West Africa and the Sahel, North Africa, Central Africa, and East Africa.[23] It is also reported that U.S. National Guard troops have or are still deployed to the Horn of Africa. This includes Djibouti, Kenya, and Somalia.[24]

Lessons from the Past

Lessons from the Marine Corps deployment to Somalia in Africa (1992–94) are not that dissimilar to lessons from its deployment to Lebanon in the Middle East (1982–83). A large force deployment with high-level intervention into violent urban areas where there is no local stable governance could better be achieved by shorter deployment and precision strikes. In both instances, the Marine Corps withdrew after facing unacceptable causalities.[25]

Such specific examples and lessons are not mentioned in FD2030 but an overall objective of FD2030 calls for the Marine Corps to be restructured for

just that type of deployment. That is, FD2030 calls for the Corps to be a lighter, faster, and more lethal service—one that can perhaps integrate Marines and sailors into versatile "stand-in forces" that can respond to an array of crises. However, just having an appropriate force structure would not guarantee that the Marine Corps would be more successful than before. Specific lessons from previous Marine Corps deployments should be included to enhance planning and preparation.

An example that should be included is the Marine Corps deployment to Somalia. On 9 December 1992, President George H. W. Bush ordered 1,800 Marines to Mogadishu, Somalia, to spearhead a multinational force aimed at restoring order. Their role was part of a larger United Nations humanitarian effort after the collapse of the Somali government. There were some successes by the U.S. troops; international aid workers were soon able to restore some food distribution and other humanitarian aid operations.[26]

However, without law and order, rival factions and militia groups emerged. The Marines found themselves in roles they had not undertaken before and were not prepared for it. They were in the crossfire of the militia groups, operating in violent urban environments for protracted periods with many patrols, and could not easily defend themselves. Also debatable were the effectiveness of rules of engagement. The Marines progressively found their main mission was their own protection. More failures than successes, especially the downing of a Black Hawk helicopter, led President William J. "Bill" Clinton to order all U.S. troops to withdraw from Somalia by 31 March 1994.[27]

Both on the tactical and strategic levels, the Marine Corps was not prepared and with a mismatch between force structure and objectives it did not achieve the objectives. On the tactical level, the intervention in Somalia was considered a failure due to the daily mayhem in the streets of the capital city of Mogadishu, which bedeviled the security operation. On the strategic level, when the Marine Corps arrived there was a lack of a national Somali leadership and when they departed there was still no functioning government. The Marines had no mission capability, nor were they tasked with the role to establish stable governance in Somalia that would have been a prerequisite for the objective of any sustainable humanitarian effort.

Examining the experience of U.S. allies is also a valuable tool. France has launched many expeditionary missions in Africa, especially in the Sahel and Chad. It has learned similar lessons to the United States in Somalia—a lack of sustainable, stable local governance coupled with the inability of African regional forces to support them. For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel have been catalysts to determine that small forces should only be deployed for short precision-type missions.[28] Large forces deployed for a long period spend more time defending themselves than anything else. Such lessons have also been learned from United Nations and NATO deployed to Sudan, for example.[29]

Most recently in 2022 and early 2023, France has announced that French

forces in Mali and Burkina Faso would withdraw after nearly 10 years of fighting insurgents and jihadists. This was due to Mali's military junta's cooperation with Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group and Burkina Faso's request for France to do so. France has even withdrawn its ambassador from the latter in January 2023.[30]

Others including Germany, the UK, and the European Union force contingent have followed suit to withdraw forces from both countries. They have noted that leadership in Mali and Burkina Faso that faced a coup have not been cooperative and so their own presence is seen as foreign intervention rather than foreign assistance.[31]

Such contestation are elements of great power competition that should be included in the threat analysis of FD2030. China and Russia have apparently gained the advantage as this withdrawal has opened the door for them to enter these countries, and they have done so as advisors and trainers, while reaping numerous economic and mineral deals.[32]

Learning from such deployments should be included in FD2030 to signal that there are instances where the Marine Corps does not need to be deployed landward as a large force. Adding to this is another example that highlights that the correct force needs to be chosen for the mission. However, unless suitably trained and equipped, the Marine Corps, even as a small precision strike force, is not the correct one. One example is the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, on 11 September 2012. The terror group Ansar al-Sharia undertook a premeditated attack that resulted in the deaths of both the U.S. ambassador and a U.S. foreign service information management officer as well as two Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) contractors. Due to transportation challenges, it was not even possible to deploy U.S. Marine Corps Fleet Antiterrorism Security Teams (FAST) or even unmanned, unarmed surveillance drones.[33]

In both Somalia and Libya, lessons have been learned and the Marine Corps has not been subsequently deployed landward. An example is the most recent Marine Corps deployment to Africa in December 2020 as part of Operation Octave Quartz. The Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group consisting of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit was available offshore Somalia and not landward. Their mission was the protection of the withdrawal of American forces from that country where their presence offshore was aimed to serve as a viable force multiplier and as a deterrent to escalation.[34]

While learning from past failures and from the experiences of allies, it is also important to learn from where the United States has had the greatest success in working with local partners and to include this in FD2030. Lessons applied from Libya are an impetus to liaisons and work with locals and have more viable rapid reaction forces. This was applied working with People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* or YPG) in 2014 in Syria and the use of the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) in Iraq to combat ISIS jihadists. The United States provided air support to the YPG during the siege of Kobanî and during later campaigns. It helped the YPG defend territory against attacks by ISIS.

The Syrian side in the civil war was supported by Russia, and so this conflict involved both great power competition and violent extremist organizations.[35] Another example is when the United States worked with the CTS in Iraq deploying special forces.[36] In both cases the specific context of the threat analysis determined the force design. [37] Such specific contextual assessment should be included in FD2030 with a specific threat analysis of Africa.

Decluttering the Gray Zone across Africa

Learning from the past—both failures and successes—and from others is a valid methodology for strategic guidance. Just as valid is identifying the adversary and its capability and preparing and planning a Marine Corps force design and structure with appropriate weaponry. The gray zone as described is a cluttered battlespace given that it is urban warfare, where in the crowded environment it is difficult and problematic to easily distinguish between civilians and combatants as, for example, the latter might not wear uniforms. Such a battlespace with potentially ambiguous targets makes it hard to acquire, understand, track, and to apply military effects and forces with precision. It is also a cluttered battlespace in that there are many different types of adversaries, sometimes with different goals and sometimes with overlapping intentions. These different types include the local state's security forces, great power competition using proxy forces, violent extremist organizations, local militias, and local and international organized criminal networks. Therefore, it is cluttered because there are multiple adversaries in multiple guises presenting multiple threats that require multiple scenarios and probability analysis to be included in FD2030. The methodology of preparing and planning for these has been learned from previous insurgent and terrorist events such as the Madrid bombings in 2004. This requires precise and valid evaluations and implementation of security, intelligence, and counterintelligence.[38] The value of these will be to de-clutter the gray zone, namely to identify and to provide the Marine Corps with a precise adversary, its location, and its threat capability thereby enabling the appropriate size and shape of any deployment with the necessary preparation and planning.

The common thread running through all such strategic guidance is that the gray zone inevitably must be decluttered for U.S. policy makers to be confident when deploying a Marine Corps force. This is easier said than done, for gray zone adversarial activities are not cataclysmic but tend to be gradual. There is not a clear condition of war. This is evident both by activities of states in great power competition, nonstate actors in violent extremist organizations, and others, for example, organized crime. When their gradual adversarial activities are classified by U.S. criteria as lower than the threshold of armed conflict, U.S. policy makers will not be assured that a Marine Corps deployment would not become the cause for an escalation to war and thus the United States would be blamed for such foreign intervention—so they will not deploy. That might result in a "too little too late" syndrome emerging.[39]

Decluttering the gray zone can be systematic by segregating the known

from the unknown. For example, the location of states is known with borders on a map. The governance of states are identifiable people and includes the bureaucratic organization (e.g., political and military elites). Data can be gathered about their intentions and their state's military capability in both manpower and equipment. The effectiveness and readiness of these can be observed during exercises and so they become a known quantity and quality should the need arise to engage them in combat. It is possible to determine to what degree they are aligned to U.S. interests.[40]

More challenging is the nonstate-based threat environment, as the activities occur between war (or armed conflict) and peace (or cooperation). Many activities fall into this turbid situation in the gray zone. For example, organized crime, including narcotics and weapon smuggling, insurgent movements, lone-wolf terrorists, religiously motivated social movements and fanatics, cyber threats, and illegal migration patterns.[41] There could also be multiple overlaps where local actors could be acting with great power competition support or as a proxy to them that would mean that each has their own objectives. Deterring or dissuading one element might be effective on one level but not another.[42]

An example is to be found in Iranian proxy Hezbollah operations in West Africa that have also been identified as being linked to money laundering activities. Arrests and breaking the latter activity have not ended the former's destabilizing presence or Hezbollah's recruitment of locals for Iran's global Shia Islamic revolutionary movement.[43] Another example is al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) that is both an Islamic fundamentalist group and is also engaged in drug smuggling in Mali and Niger.[44]

An example of the entanglement of great power competition and violent extremist organizations in the AQIM situation also highlights the cluttered gray zone in Mali. France intervened in Mali and worked with local and Chadian forces to upend the AQIM in north Mali. The French special forces operated as light infantry in armored personnel carriers, but it should be noted that 59 French soldiers were killed.[45] The success was short-lived and since late 2022 France has begun withdrawal of forces from Mali and Burkina Faso, where in addition to great power competition with increased Russia presence in Mali, there is also a growth of violent extremist organizations and gray zone activities. For example, AQIM has an increasingly active presence in Mali as an Islamic fundamentalist movement and is also engaging in smuggling.[46]

These examples are just the tip of the iceberg that justify why Africa should be included in the threat analysis of FD2030 looking at great power competition, violent extremist organizations, and gray zone conflict. Africa is a diverse and unstable environment with multiple numbers of adversaries engaged in overlapping activities and connections.[47] Caution should be taken that such a complex environment does not lead to organizational complexity of overly prescriptive force design in the strategic guidance in the form of multiple bureaucratic levels, which would inhibit fluid operational-organizational inertia on the tactical level.[48]

To forestall such an eventuality, strategic guidance could suggest that the most appropriate tactics would be a short period precision strike deployment of the Marine Corps to a hot spot. That would require security and intelligence analysis on an ongoing basis to determine the right moment to deploy and to withdraw for the greatest operational effect. This entails long-term planning and preparation that needs to include extreme options; for example, deploying the Marine Corps for less than 24 hours at less than 6 hours' notice. As already noted in FD2030, drones can play a greater role. At the same time caution needs to be applied as too much data from surveillance and reconnaissance without accurate analysis would not enable decision makers to be more effica-cious.[49]

Therefore, a diverse force design should be included in FD2030 to cover multiple options given the cluttered gray zone in Africa. Hybrid warfare is a way that could be applied to suit such a diverse force design. It has been defined as a fusion of different tools and instruments. Options that should be included are a blend of the conventional force of the Marine Corps, drones, irregular warfare by special forces, partnerships with other U.S. military branches such as AFRICOM and the National Guard—and including cyberwarfare.[50]

Security

Decluttering the gray zone would be dependent on having accurate information and analysis. This will require security, intelligence, and counterintelligence. While there is a strong link between them, they are sometimes at odds with each other. For instance, there can be organizational competition and reluc-tance to share data and analysis.[51]

Unless this is overcome, decluttering the gray zone in Africa will be com-pounded. Each require clear definition and role and task assignment that should be included in the strategic guidance of FD2030 supporting the specific force design. For example, security and protection of U.S. interests is an existential rationale for the Marine Corps. Security objectives could be to establish a short period foothold in a hot spot or to deter an escalation while other means are employed such as diplomacy. Protection could be supplied to vital installations such as ports or as a force multiplier when other forces withdraw as seen in the deployment offshore Somalia in 2020.[52]

To improve threat analysis and regulate tackling nonstate adversaries below the threshold of war, the suitable security factors should be aligned with intel-ligence. At the top of the list would be to ascertain when the gradual escalation by great power competition and violent extremist organizations has reached the point that would require the Marine Corps to move from a passive offshore presence to that of an active landward deployment.[53]

The nature of the intelligence product on the multiplicity of local actors, violent extremist organizations, overlapping gray zone activities, and links to great power competition would serve to classify the descriptor of security needs and whether the Marine Corps would partner with others. These partners could

include the Navy, AFRICOM, European allies, and any form of hybrid warfare such as cyber. An integral element of the intelligence product would also need to determine the required logistics. One of the challenges is the size of Africa, the second largest continent after Asia. Africa is three times the size of Europe with the terrain that is diverse and includes both deserts and jungles.[54] Every Marine Corps deployment would be unique and complicated as Africa has 54 sovereign states of which 38 are coastal and several island nation-states.[55]

From lessons learned from Somalia, for the security of the Marine Corps force, the intelligence product would also need to identify who and where the adversary is. Nonstate adversaries might not wear uniforms and as they were recruited from the local population could conceal themselves therein. They could receive housing and food support from it; additionally, in a failed state they have ungoverned territories that can provide safe haven for them to hide in.[56]

Intelligence

The intelligence product therefore requires data and analysis on all aspects of great power competition in Africa, violent extremist organizations, and gray zone actors.[57] The takeaway from this intelligence product to be included in FD2030 would be the warning signs in threat analysis that would trigger a Marine Corps deployment. As gray zone activities include denial and deception efforts and stealth, the strategic guidance needs to register unexpected outcomes rather than cataclysmic changes.[58]

Identifying such unexpected outcomes for the threat analysis can be classified into two categories: puzzles and mysteries. To be effective for both, intelligence gathering will need to penetrate certain specific communities within the overall society, namely human intelligence (HUMINT), especially those that have been identified as recruitment grounds for violent extremist organizations.[59]

Puzzles have a definite answer and intelligence needs to find it. Puzzle type intelligence can be applied to various partnerships between the Marine Corps, the Navy, AFRICOM, the National Guard, and African states. Examples are to build maritime safety and security, to counter illicit trafficking, to address humanitarian needs, to promote regional stability and security, to strengthen local, regional, United Nations, and African Union combined operations, and to encourage sustainable development. The role of the Marine Corps in these could range from active and passive protection and deterrence to escalations.[60]

Mysteries have no definite answer where any answer could be contingent on other factors. Mystery type intelligence tends toward analysis that offers a best forecast or probable scenario. The intelligence product tends toward sense-making for responses as a different combination of the same factors could lead to a different outcome. This was the case with Somalia and Libya.[61] Mysteries are the context where the Marine Corps is best not deployed. For example, a lone-wolf terrorist is better left to counterintelligence efforts to trick him rather

than sending boots on the ground to intercept them. The strategic guidance of FD2030 should also note this as a limitation for Marine Corps deployment.

Counterintelligence

Without an excellent intelligence product, no Marine Corps force could deploy successfully. Counterintelligence also has a part to play in U.S. tactics in Africa though this is a different role from intelligence. It can be used when the Marine Corps cannot be deployed or in lieu of it or to supplement and complement a deployment. It does not necessarily aim to offer security or to protect people, physical territory, or even information in cyberspace. Whereas intelligence to support Marine Corps operations may struggle on puzzles and mysteries in threat analysis, counterintelligence can operate and be successful with less uncertainty.[62]

Examples of intelligence and counterintelligence cannot be released due to secrecy, but the National Intelligence Council has described their significance in a memorandum updated on 4 August 2022.[63] From this memorandum it is possible to ascertain that counterintelligence has a role in hybrid warfare with the Marine Corps in the gray zone in Africa to trick adversaries into responding to classified information released about Marine Corps exercises or obsolete Marine Corps plans. In this way it is sometimes contrary to security-driven deployment and could lead to a dispute with intelligence over the release of such material. Another tactic is to restrict normally unclassified or "open source" information (OSINT), for example Marine Corps collaboration with the African Union, if it is known that adversaries were using it to further their own purposes for purposes such as extortion.[64] In both instances such tactics could serve to disorientate and trick a violent extremist organization/gray zone adversary to reveal its intentions and location.[65]

Nonetheless, both counterintelligence and intelligence using HUMINT and OSINT can be a double-edged sword and counterproductive to security and objectives. They might rely heavily on monitoring and gathering data from the technologies and services provided by mobile/cell telecommunications, the internet, and social media. However, any violent extremist organization or gray zone adversary can also do so, especially if they have the support of other countries' counterintelligence and intelligence services in great power competition.

Dictatorial totalitarian states that typify Africa can also use these same services and technologies to monitor, censor, and subjugate their population.[66] Various violent extremist organizations such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab have also used them for recruitment and psychological influence purposes.[67] A vivid example was live commentary with photos by al-Shabaab of its attack on the Westgate shopping Mall in Kenya in 2013 on Twitter.[68] But this can be used by U.S. cyber teams to ascertain the physical location of such violent extremist organizations when they broadcast and so determine where, when, and how large a Marine Corps precision strike force to deploy—and this should be included in the strategic guidance of FD2030.[69]

Conclusions

The 2018 U.S. *National Defense Strategy* was the impetus for FD2030 in that it called for changes in American forces after evaluating the threat environment and finding that there was a need to build a more lethal force and implement reforms for greater performance.[70] While FD2030 contains many positive elements as a strategic guidance to meet this call, there are also certain elements that been criticized while there are clear omissions.

For example, in being critical of FD2030, three senior retired Marine Corps officers (Colonel Gary Wilson, Lieutenant Colonel William A. Woods, and Colonel Michael D. Wyly) started their article by noting that the words "Send in the Marines! The situation is serious. We need to fix it—fast!" have a special meaning.[71] They truthfully inform that the Marine Corps has for centuries proven themselves in battle as a reliable force. However, these retired officers have also spoken out over their concerns that FD2030 abandons the principles of maneuver warfare and has an overreliance on technology. In their view, the threat analysis of FD2030 and therefore its strategic guidance for restructuring is oriented toward the Marine Corps fighting units operating in the Indo-Pacific region.[72]

The author of this article concurs that the threat analysis of FD2030 is too specific and should also include great power competition, violent extremist organizations, and gray zone in Africa as examined here. As it presently stands using the strategic guidance of FD2030 and its suggested force design, deploying Marine Corps "boots on the ground" will not necessarily bring success and victory in Africa. It is fair to state that despite such deficiencies the White House together with the Pentagon will continue to look to the Marine Corps to be deployed to Africa. There is no other U.S. military branch, together with the Navy, that could defend the geostrategic concerns and tackle the hot spots mentioned in this article.

As a matter of priority to ameliorate the deficiencies outlined above, FD2030 needs to include lessons learned from the failures in Somalia, Libya, and Lebanon. These clearly show that the U.S. Marine Corps at the time of its deployment was not fit for the intended purpose of policy makers. At present, it is also not fit for purpose in a deployment to Africa. Lessons learned from successes elsewhere, for instance in Syria and Iraq, should also be included in FD2030 as well as the experiences of others in Africa like the French in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Lessons from the past and from others are only one item. Other entries to be included are those examined in this article on great power competition, violent extremist organizations, and gray zone contests and competition in Africa that are challenging. The threat environment has multiple actors engaged in multiple overlapping activities. The overriding concerns noted in this article conclude that without decluttering the great power competition/violent extremist organizations and gray zone in Africa, the Marine Corps is not going to be able to engage and easily combat the adversary and cause of the threat,

especially nonstate actors and insurgent movements who are an extension of Middle East fundamentalism, nor others such as the Russian Wagner group and local Sub-Saharan African terrorist groups.

Options for strategic guidance and a force design that have been suggested in this article are, for a short period, precision strike deployment of the Marine Corps dependent on precise intelligence on the location, size, strength, and intentions of the adversary. Counterintelligence can play a role to trick an adversary into revealing these details. Victory could also be attained through hybrid warfare dissuading and deterring using information or psychological operations. Here also drones could be used as recommended by FD2030 and software (algorithms) could play a role in ensuring mission success.

With a restructured force design, the Marine Corps could still deploy in its traditional role offshore as a formidable deterrent force and as a force multiplier partner with the Navy, special operation forces, AFRICOM, the National Guard, African states, and European allies, both in precision strikes landward and beyond. The Marine Corps could collaborate in security cooperation including training and education, humanitarian assistance, medical readiness, development strategies, and interdiction of illicit activities. In doing so, the policy of containment and its strategies that prevailed prior to 9/11 would also be furthered. The domino effect of reducing or eliminating great power competition, violent extremism organizations, and gray zone conflicts in Africa would enable U.S. forces to be concentrated elsewhere.

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