

1988

## In My View

P. J. Baldwin  
*U.S. Marine Corps*

Bernard N. Cole  
*U.S. Navy*

Robert C. Whitten  
*U.S. Naval Reserve (Ret.)*

R. R. Mariner  
*U.S. Navy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Baldwin, P. J.; Cole, Bernard N.; Whitten, Robert C.; and Mariner, R. R. (1988) "In My View," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 2, Article 9.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss2/9>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

# IN MY VIEW . . .



Ian Oliver

## Marines and Small Wars

Sir,

Mr. Rylander's article, "The Future of the Marines in Small Wars" (Autumn 1987) shows how the pendulum has swung in the persistent debate over the role of the Marine Corps. Fortunately, the Navy/Marine Corps team has not succumbed to the extremes of this debate and has generally maintained balanced, ready forces.

In the 1970s, some argued that the Marine Corps was too light. Now, the Marine Corps is destined to play only a "modest role" in low-intensity conflict (LIC). It is one of the enduring traditions of the Marine Corps to be periodically advised that its past roles are no longer suitable for modern warfare and, therefore, it should "reorient" itself. History, however, has not cooperated. It continually presents greater challenges, some new, others familiar.

Fortunately, the Marine Corps has withstood the siren's call to reorient. Enhancements have been made—the MAU (SOC) being the most recent in a long list of innovative improvements. As a result, the Marine Corps has had the forces necessary and ready for the task at hand. If it continues to pay heed to its traditions (particularly, first to fight and to fight in every clime and place against air, ground, and naval forces) and to fully understand the roles and contributions of maritime forces in warfare, it will continue to provide these sorts of forces. This is important because instead of being an "unlikely" or "circumscribed" player in LIC, as Mr. Rylander contends, Navy/Marine Corps forces are more likely to be major players. Ours is a maritime nation among other primarily maritime nations where most of the populations and resources lie within reach of our naval forces.

In closing, on an unrelated note, Mr. Rylander lists the key elements of foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare as security assistance training, humanitarian assistance, and civil affairs. I am sure it was only an oversight that he forgot to list intelligence support.

P.J. Baldwin  
Major, U.S. Marine Corps

### A Flawed Offshore Strategy for East Asia

Sir,

Professor Nuechterlein's attempt to delineate a new U.S. strategy for East Asia is flawed and his conclusions are not logically drawn. His argument is based on a generally accurate reading of East Asian history, although his comment that during the 1945-1950 period the United States "provided no military aid to either colonial power" is off the mark—aid to France and The Netherlands, and especially to the former, was made with the recognition of that aid's eventual effect in their colonies. The author is less accurate in his analysis of recent events. The statement that "an enlarged Soviet naval presence does not in itself pose a greater security threat to countries of the region" is sophistic and reflects a misunderstanding of Russian history that is fully matched by his conclusion that "Moscow is not likely to use its navy to undermine governments in the Pacific or Southeast Asia." In fact, Russia throughout its history has expanded its territory through force of arms. And in the Pacific, the Soviet Union has little means other than its navy to carry out the expansionism proclaimed by Gorbachev in his July 1986 Vladivostok speech.

The author does not offer a consistent argument in favor of an "offshore strategy" for the United States. At one point, he states that the United States "should avoid responding primarily in a military fashion" to the Soviet challenge in East Asia. True enough, but in the next paragraph, Nuechterlein argues that "Washington should rely primarily on naval power to maintain its political influence in the Pacific area and should retain air bases in Japan and the Philippines." The author also does not seem to understand the important role played by the Marine Corps in naval power, recommending that the Marines be withdrawn from Okinawa.

Another example of Nuechterlein's apparent sophistry is his argument that the North Korean and Vietnamese threats can be dealt with by "regional powers," a term he fails to define. The author's argument, which forms the basis for his ill-defined "offshore strategy" for the United States does not take into account North Korean and Vietnamese aggressiveness, overestimates the number and residual benefit of South Korean soldiers with actual combat experience in Vietnam, and would condemn East Asian States to a permanent existence of semi-belligerency with Soviet-backed neighbors.

Nuechterlein does not adequately address the political situation in Northeast Asia; perhaps he does not understand the depth of the historical differences between Japan, Korea, and China. His statement that historical Japanese-Korean antipathy "should not . . . dissuade the Tokyo government from strengthening its political relationship with South Korea" is as fatuous as is his recommendation that the United States ask Japan and China "to take on a major responsibility for keeping the peace on the Korean Peninsula."

In the author's closing paragraphs, he neatly illustrates the lack of *realpolitik* in his proposal: his discussion of the Strait of Malacca area does not acknowledge the growing security relationships between the United States and the nations of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, the area's vital importance as a primary sea line of communication, and is simply wrong in concluding that it is not "vital to U.S. security interests." He also does not discuss the impact of his proposed "offshore strategy" on the Philippines.

I agree that his argument for reducing U.S. troop commitments in Korea may be valid, but his attempts to generalize from this point are not persuasive. Overall, I do not believe that Professor Nuechterlein is successful in his attempt to delineate a new U.S. strategy for East Asia.

Bernard N. Cole  
Captain, U.S. Navy

### Rejoinder to Captain Cole

Sir,

Captain Bernard Cole's letter suggests that either he did not read carefully the article I wrote for the *NWC Review* (Autumn 1987), or he deliberately set out to misrepresent both the thesis and my supporting arguments. The writer has a right to disagree with my views, but he should accurately describe them. For example, he says I recommend withdrawing U.S. Marines from Okinawa. Page 33 of the article clearly indicates that under an offshore defense strategy, U.S. ground forces in the western Pacific, including Marines in Okinawa, would be *reduced*, not withdrawn. Similarly, he claims that I do not define which regional powers should take more responsibility for containing the threats posed by North Korea and Vietnam on their neighbors. He simply ignores, or does not want to be reminded, that China's recent political orientation toward Japan and the United States substantially changes the security threat in both Northeast and Southeast Asia. Captain Cole asserts that Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia form a "vital" interest area for the United States but ignores the definition of "vital"—that the area is so important that the United States should be ready to risk war to defend it. The United States does not have any treaty or other commitment to defend Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, and these countries must, therefore, be considered major, but not vital, U.S. interests. Finally, it is simply inaccurate to say I did not discuss the Philippines in relation to the offshore strategy. Pages 34 and 35 are devoted to the problems posed to U.S. interests by political instability in that country and describe the vital nature of the U.S. stake in the Philippines.

Captain Cole seems to believe that the United States should not examine the changing political/security situation in East Asia resulting from political changes in China, the economic strength exhibited by Japan and South Korea, and growing cohesion among the ASEAN countries. I conclude that an offshore defense strategy for the 1990s is consistent with changing political relationships in East Asia over the past 10 years and with political and economic realities in the United States. Anyone who thinks that Congress and the American public will be willing to fight regional conflicts on the Asian mainland in the 1990s is simply not in touch with current realities.

Donald Nuechterlein  
Federal Executive Institute

## A High-reliability Organization

Sir,

The article "The Self-Designing High-Reliability Organization: Aircraft Carrier Flight Operations at Sea" by Rochlin, La Porte, and Roberts (Autumn 1987), while in many ways very perceptive, does not in this observer's opinion deal adequately with the self-designing or self-organizing features of carrier flight ops. The authors seem to marvel at the high success rate in flight operations. However, it is a universal feature of self-organizing systems that they will adapt to their objectives via internal "feedback" mechanisms. Perhaps the oldest recorded observation of such effects was the once-famous study at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in the early part of the century. The assembly workers in the plant were subjected to changes in their work environment that were meant to speed up or slow down production rate. Much to the surprise of management and the experimenters, production increased regardless of what changes were implemented. When the goals were implicitly altered, the workers developed cohesion and a coherent work pattern.

Similar effects occur in physical and chemical systems. Indeed, the 1977 Nobel prize in chemistry was awarded to Ilya Prigogine of the University of Brussels for his pioneering work on such systems. An interesting and important finding was that the imposition of external "forcing functions" degraded the order which was spontaneously established. It would be similarly interesting to investigate the influence of "forcing function" analogues on the "spontaneous" order of the flight deck. Typically, such effects would be the intrusion of an external authority. As the authors describe the actual flight operations on board a U.S. carrier, external interference seems to be nearly nonexistent.

Feedback and, to use mathematical jargon, "nonlinear coupling" are to work in the social system of the flight deck just as they are in physical/chemical systems, although in much more complex interactions than in the latter. It appears to the writer that it would have been more instructive to develop the "feedback" aspect explicitly. The presence of these mechanisms is implied, to be sure, but the reader who is unfamiliar with self-organization may miss this very important underlying concept.

The authors discuss at some length the "paradox of high turnover." I suggest that in terms of organization dynamics, the turnover rate must be measured against some characteristic time scale. In the case of flight operations, it is reasonable to take it as the time required to spot and launch an aircraft or to recover an aircraft. Compared to this very high tempo, the turnover rate may not be particularly large.

In any event, the authors should be commended for having uncovered a very interesting problem in social-system dynamics. Their ultimate findings should be a significant addition to our knowledge of self-organizing systems.

Robert C. Whitten  
Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve (Ret.)

## The Captain is Still the Key

Sir,

In reading "The Self-Designing High-Reliability Organization: Aircraft Carrier Flight Operations at Sea" (Autumn 1987) I was surprised that the author's otherwise perceptive observations barely mentioned the key figure on an aircraft carrier or any other ship: the Captain. In failing to address what the Captain represents they missed the fundamental reason why an aircraft carrier works, and even more basic, a philosophical cornerstone of the Navy.

An aircraft carrier conducting flight operations epitomizes the concept of command-at-sea. The Captain has absolute responsibility, authority, and accountability. He may delegate specific authority to the Air Boss, CAG, OOD Underway, or whomever, but can never escape his ultimate accountability. While the lines of delegation and organization may appear "*ad hoc* and circumstantial" to an outside observer, they are clearly defined and universal: all lead to the Commanding Officer through the department heads and executive officer. Cooperation, "horizontal integration," between departments is important, but when mistakes are made and blame is affixed, the lines of responsibility are rigidly vertical. At flight quarters, final responsibility still remains with the Captain, which is why carriers are commanded by aviators. Even in peacetime, flight operations are routinely hazardous and require life-or-death decisions that cannot be delegated.

Eventually the Captain will face a seemingly numen decision where he must sacrifice innocent men and women to save or fight his ship. This can be done with a clear conscience only because years of personal experience, in the air and at sea, have taught him the even worse consequences of choosing to do otherwise. It is when things go wrong, as in an emergency or in combat, that the wisdom of this ancient tradition of individual accountability is fully evident. The Captain alone decides.

The Navy is not arbitrary in the way it does business at sea. Things are done aboard ship the way they are because they work—especially under crisis conditions. The purpose of an aircraft carrier is to go in harm's way. The redundancy described and emphasis on flexibility are the results of lessons learned in three wars and with considerable bloodshed. The experience necessary to make all this work can only be acquired by doing. There are no textbook answers. The penalty for failure on the flight deck, more often than not, is death. To get ordinary kids to do extraordinary things on a routine basis requires inspirational leadership, not an MBA or Ph.D. While daily operations have evolved in a "self-designing" manner, the lines of organizational responsibility can be traced back to the days of John Paul Jones.

Such awesome responsibility demands a unique individual with extensive experience. The Commanding Officer of a carrier has spent years flying from these ships and has proven his leadership ability and aviation expertise in at least one operational command and as captain of a deep-draft ship. The Captain of a nuclear carrier adds intense academic and technical credentials. The "generalist" (unrestricted line) officer, whose career pattern the authors consider to be a "paradox of high turnover," is, in fact, training to be the Captain. The few that get that far will be "specialists" in command, proven over and over again operationally, as opposed to professional technicians, staffers, or courtiers.

## 86 Naval War College Review

Viewing any naval issue in the context of command-at-sea should help observers understand why “efficiency changes” that violate the traditional lines of authority and accountability (e.g., contract or combined maintenance where the CO has no direct control over those working on his airplanes, or the “Super CAG” concept where the senior Air Wing Commander is theoretically “equal” to the Captain) are controversial. One can further extrapolate why so many problems exist in the shore establishment with organizations such as PSD/PSA, NAVRESSO, and NAVHOS where the station commanding officer does not have authority (is not the reporting senior) over those officers who must support his or her command. And it explains why contradictions to seagoing officer career patterns or command relationships such as HP/CP, ADO, MP, and the GURL will continue to meet resistance. They violate the basic tenets of the institution.

Discussing what makes an aircraft carrier tick without addressing command-at-sea is like drawing conclusions on the practices of a major religion without mentioning its fundamental articles of faith. Young naval officers first get the idea when told that no matter what the circumstances, even if the OOD fails to wake him up, the Captain is always responsible should the ship run aground. The most recent illustration is the U.S.S. *Stark*. Although I hope Professors La Porte, Roberts, and Rochlin’s work will contribute to protecting our OPTAR accounts, I recommend they read the eloquent essay “Hobson’s Choice” before their next CV deployment.

R.B. Mariner  
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

