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THE U.S. MARINE CORPS CASE FOR A SECOND OPENING TO SAN DIEGO BAY

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The amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego returns to its homeport through the one narrow opening to San Diego Bay. Navy photo

San Diego is a major strategic stronghold critical to U.S. national security. This also makes it a preeminent military target for America's geopolitical adversaries in China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, as well as for non-state terrorist organizations.

We have previously authored [three columns detailing the merits of a second opening to San Diego Bay](#) in order to sharply diminish this

threat. These were written from the perspectives of the U.S. Navy and national security, the environment, and regional economic potential.

Today, we are presenting a fourth position from the perspective of the potential impact on the deployment and sustainability of the U.S. Marine Corps, access to naval repair facilities, and the all-important logistics of sustaining the Navy and Marines.

The Marine Corps' deployment vulnerability issue has largely gone unnoticed thus far, but it is of paramount importance.

For the first three decades of the 20th century, the Navy was content with Pearl Harbor as the forward operating base for a portion of the Pacific Fleet. That posture was sufficient until the rapid expansion of Imperial Japan in the 1930s. This expansion prompted the repositioning of the vast majority of the Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor, with its single point of entry and exit.

By making this move, the vulnerability to the Pacific Fleet, amassed at Pearl Harbor, increased exponentially. And yet, the Navy was reluctant to acknowledge this increase in vulnerability and continued to underestimate Japan's capability to strike Hawaii in any meaningful manner.

And we all know what happened soon thereafter on Dec. 7, 1941.

In 2022, the U.S. Navy and national security apparatus are again failing (or refusing) to recognize another massive vulnerability to the Pacific Fleet — this time in San Diego. The current situation is eerily reminiscent of Pearl Harbor during the last century, especially given the rise of several powerful and potentially belligerent actors as well as San Diego Bay having a single point of entry and exit.

This bottleneck makes San Diego a strategic target. The associated risk mandates mitigation and a viable solution is a second opening.

If an aggressor succeeded in blocking San Diego Bay's single entrance, the Navy would be significantly hamstrung, commercial shipping would be cut off, and America's ability to project power away from its shores would be drastically diminished.

A blocked bay exit would literally bottle up all naval assets at Naval Base San Diego, NAS North Island and the submarine base at Point Loma, as well as associated naval repair facilities.

Repair facilities are a true force multiplier to any navy, and a lack of access to such could be crippling to the U.S. Navy in war.

Think about the turnaround time for the USS Yorktown in World War II between the damage it received during the Battle of the Coral Sea and the commencement of the Battle of Midway. Repairs to the Yorktown that could have taken weeks or months to complete on the West Coast only took 72 hours at Pearl Harbor.

Yorktown's presence at the Battle of Midway turned the tide of this battle, and this battle turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. Further, if the USS Nevada had not been intentionally run aground to avoid being sunk in Pearl Harbor's single entrance on Dec. 7, things might be significantly different in the world today.

If our Navy and Marines can't get to the fight, they are rendered irrelevant. If they are in the fight and can't get repaired or resupplied and reinforced to sustain the fight, they will lose.

We must also remember that the largest of the three U.S. Marine Corps Expeditionary Forces is massed across the region at Camp Pendleton, MCAS Miramar, MCAS Yuma, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, and Marine Logistics Base Barstow. All those personnel and equipment must deploy from the San Diego area.

While much of the rolling stock supporting a Marine Expeditionary Force's deployment can be accessed from the prepositioned ships currently deployed around the globe, massive amounts of Marine ground, aviation, and logistics support must still come via road and rail to San Diego to be loaded aboard Navy amphibious and supply ships. Other coastal ports in California would be available if San Diego Bay is compromised, but each has its own unique set of limitations making them significantly less capable.

Let's consider the ramifications of a massive cruise ship or giant auto carrier being sabotaged (or hit by hypersonic missiles) and sunk at the entrance to San Diego Bay.

All Navy ships in port — over 50 are based here — will be unable to exit for lengthy periods of time until the channel is cleared. Likewise, all ships and submarines stuck in port will be rendered static targets for follow-on missile strikes.

Navy ships at sea heading to San Diego for restocking or repair will suddenly need to re-route. The shipyards along the bay will be rendered useless. And the deployment of the largest Marine Corps expeditionary force in the world will be significantly impacted.

The concerns associated with this San Diego Bay bottleneck have been identified as significant national security risks since the first quarter of the 20th century, yet they continue to be ignored.

Due to significantly longer-range weapons, there is a strategic urgency that was not previously present. Russia has invaded Ukraine in the largest European land war since World War II; China is expanding in the South China Sea and eyeing Taiwan; Iran is fighting proxy wars against Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East; North Korea is testing and launching ICBMs over the Sea of Japan; and currently unstoppable hypersonic missiles are becoming the mainstay in the arsenals of potential enemies.

The risk to San Diego and the deployment of the Pacific Fleet and Marine Corps as well as the sustainability of our naval expeditionary forces is undeniable.

The integrity and viability of the Navy bases in San Diego is not only of critical importance to America, but also to the entire free world. Think about the world without the U.S. Navy and Marines fully operational and capable of projecting U.S. military power in order to keep the peace. In short order, belligerents all around the world could soon be on the move.

To put it bluntly, the safety of San Diego and the Pacific Fleet are a global concern and must be protected at all costs.

We can not continue to stand idle while admiring the beauty of San Diego Bay. The single entrance and exit is a vulnerability that invites attack. By removing this significant temptation, we can keep the peace.

The time for a second opening to San Diego Bay is now.

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