



NPS IN THE NEWS

Weekly Media Report – April 26-May 2, 2022

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COLLABORATION:

[Naval Postgraduate School Collaborates With Microsoft To Bring Emerging Technologies To The Fleet](#)

(NPS.edu 2 May 22) ... Lt. Cmdr. Ed Early

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FACULTY:

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(Trend News Agency 28 Apr 22) ... Maryana Akhmedova

(International News 28 Apr 22)

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ALUMNI:

[Craig Martell Appointed DOD Chief Digital and AI Officer](#)

(GovConWire 26 Apr 22) ... Jane Edwards

(Breaking Defense 26 Apr 22) ... Jaspreet Gill

Craig Martell, formerly head of machine learning at Lyft (Nasdaq: LYFT), has been named chief digital and artificial intelligence officer at the Department of Defense... He also served as a professor of computer science at **Naval Postgraduate School** and specialized in natural language processing.

[Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen BS Raju to Assume Office Today](#)

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(ND TV 1 May 22)

(Economic Times 1 May 22)

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Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General BS Raju was presented with the Guard of Honour at South Block Lawns in the national capital on Sunday... Lt Gen Raju has attended all-important career courses in India and did his NDC at the Royal College of Defence Studies, United Kingdom. He also holds a distinguished Master's programme degree in Counter-Terrorism at the **Naval Postgraduate School**, Monterey, United States.

[CMSI China Maritime Report #20: "The PLA Army Amphibious Force: Missions, Organization, Capabilities, and Training"](#)

(Andrew S. Erickson 28 Apr 22) ... Dennis J. Blasko

Summary

The PLA Army's (PLAA) amphibious units would serve as the core of any joint force charged with invading Taiwan. As a result of the 2017 reforms, the PLAA now possesses six amphibious combined arms brigades distributed across three group armies (the 72nd, 73rd, and 74th). During a cross-strait invasion, these brigades would likely receive support from other elements of the group armies to which they belong. This could include fire support, air defense, air transport, aerial fire support, and electronic warfare/cyber-attack. Due to its large composition of two-year conscripts, the PLAA amphibious force has traditionally spent the first four months of every year developing basic individual and team skills, although a recent shift to a twice-a-year conscription cycle could allow for more complex training throughout the year. An analysis of the available reporting on 2021 training events indicates that amphibious training occurs frequently from March to October but mostly involves units at or below the battalion level. Despite efforts to bolster the PLAA's amphibious capabilities, the force currently lacks the capacity to execute a large-scale assault on Taiwan... Dennis J. Blasko is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with 23 years of service as a Military Intelligence Officer and Foreign Area Officer specializing in China. He was an Army Attaché in Beijing and Hong Kong from 1992–96. He served in infantry units in Germany, Italy, and Korea and in Washington at the Defense Intelligence Agency, Headquarters Department of the Army (Office of Special Operations), and the National Defense University War Gaming and Simulation Center. Blasko is a graduate of the United States Military Academy and the **Naval Postgraduate School**. He has written numerous articles and chapters on the Chinese military, along with the book *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, second edition (Routledge, 2012).



[Navy Seal Speaks at South Hill Rotary Club](#)

(Independent Messenger 1 May 22) ... Dennis J. Blasko

The South Hill Rotary Club welcomed Navy Seal Scott Chierepko as guest speaker recently. He updated the club on just what a Navy Seal does and their experiences in helping make sure that our Nation is safe from danger from those who threaten our country's freedom.

Scott Chierepko, a native of Newburyport Massachusetts is a retired Navy SEAL officer who served from 1988-2011, 10 years enlisted and retiring as a Lieutenant Commander. Scott has a master's degree from **Naval Postgraduate School**. He is the owner of BEI Tactical, a government contracting company providing training, products, and services. He gave a history of the command relations with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Joint Special operations. SEAL has a mission to "provide maritime special operation forces to conduct full spectrum operations, unilaterally or with partners to support national objectives.

UPCOMING NEWS & EVENTS:

May 11-12: [Acquisition Research Symposium](#)

May 13: [Discovery Day](#)

May 17: [Defense Energy Seminar](#)

May 23-27: [Joint Interagency Field Experimentation \(JIFX\)](#)

May 24: [Strategic Communication Workshop \(SCW\)](#)



COLLABORATION:

Naval Postgraduate School Collaborates With Microsoft To Bring Emerging Technologies To The Fleet

(NPS.edu 2 May 22) ... Lt. Cmdr. Ed Early

The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) is teaming up with Microsoft to explore how rapidly evolving commercial technologies can solve operational challenges faced by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps.

This collaboration will bring together two of the nation's major centers for innovation and development in a cooperative research effort that aims to tackle several highly complex issues associated with rapidly integrating and adopting new technologies in support of warfighting and national security. It also provides the potential to revolutionize how the services organize, train, equip, fight, and win by combining the best of industry, academia, and the government.

"Today, so much innovation and technological research and development is powered by America's robust corporate base. The Department of the Navy has been trying to find ways where our organizations can emulate and evolve with the nimble agility of these organizations, and with success," said Aaron Weis, the Department of the Navy's Chief Information Officer (DON CIO). "This agreement between NPS and Microsoft takes that initiative to the next level, creating a defined cooperative research collaboration between a global tech giant and the capabilities it brings to bear, with the Navy's leading science and technological university, where operationalizing innovation is core to their mission."

Microsoft became the latest industry member to team with NPS following the signing of a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) between the two organizations. CRADAs allow U.S. government research facilities to engage in collaborative efforts with non-government entities. These types of cooperative efforts benefit the Department of Defense (DOD) and industry leaders by providing opportunities to conduct joint research and learn from each other.

Under the CRADA, NPS will collaborate with Microsoft on select research efforts. The goal is to leverage the latest in commercial technologies and expertise to advance Navy and Marine Corps operations, while sharing any insights gained with the broader public.

NPS will utilize the Microsoft Cloud services, including Azure, Office 365 and Teams, to accelerate their digital transformation journey and deploy advanced cloud capabilities to tackle critical mission priorities. The first areas of shared research under the newly established Cooperative Research Initiative (CRI) will include operational uses for cloud-enhanced networks and edge computing, methods for extending delivery of NPS coursework from the school's classrooms and labs throughout the fleet and force, and ways in which the Navy and Marine Corps can leverage gaming, exercising, modeling, and simulation (GEMS) to help operational commanders make faster and better decisions.

"For over four decades, we've worked with the U.S. Department of Defense on a longstanding and reliable basis in support of its mission to ensure our national security," said Jason Zander, executive vice president of Microsoft. "This Cooperative Research Initiative with the Naval Postgraduate School will provide a remarkable opportunity for us to work shoulder to shoulder with our nation's brightest leaders and servicemembers and help them solve the complex challenges they face. And through this collaboration, we look forward to sharing our latest research and furthering our joint efforts to empower our military to make our nation safer."

The Cooperative Research Initiative will also involve collaboration at an innovation lab on the NPS campus in Monterey, where integrated teams of NPS and Microsoft personnel will work side-by-side exploring several critical topics.

One of the major research areas will explore recent technical breakthroughs in intelligent edge computing solutions and cloud-enhanced networks, as well as how the DOD can leverage these developments for operational purposes.



NPS will also team up with Microsoft to conduct research into how gaming, exercising, modeling and simulation can improve military capability development and the decision-making of Navy and Marine Corps commanders.

Finally, NPS will investigate how it can harness recent advances in digital teaching – including the school’s own distance-learning efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic – to create an NPS “smart campus” capable of delivering critical knowledge and skills to Sailors and Marines worldwide.

Together, these collaborative research and discovery efforts by NPS and Microsoft will bring together the incredible potential and expertise of both organizations, as well as unique NPS facilities such as the Sea Land Air Military Research (SLAMR) laboratory, to accelerate shared understanding of Navy and Marine Corps challenges and accelerate solutions for how emerging technologies can be employed to tackle the most important operational challenges currently faced by the fleet and force.

“The type of cutting-edge research which will be enabled by this partnership is something that can only happen at NPS,” said the president of NPS, retired Vice Adm. Ann E. Rondeau. “We are, and have always been, a center for excellence and innovation – a catalyst for transformative capabilities and the education of our future Navy and Marine Corps leaders. With this agreement, we look forward to working with our colleagues at Microsoft in an effort to find solutions to all of the challenges facing our fleet and force, now and in the future.”

Further details on the collaboration between NPS and Microsoft will be provided in the coming weeks and months.

The Naval Postgraduate School provides defense-focused graduate education, including classified studies and interdisciplinary research, to advance the operational effectiveness, technological leadership and warfighting advantage of the Naval service. For additional information, visit NPS online at <http://www.nps.edu>.

The Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) does not constitute endorsement of Microsoft or its products and services by the Naval Postgraduate School, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.

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EDUCATION:

NPS Applies System Engineering to Bolster Marine Corps Reserves Education System

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As Great Power Competition intensifies, the United States Marine Corps is increasingly being called upon as the nation’s premier expeditionary force. Critical to its success is the strength of its Reserve component, and the ability to augment active duty USMC forces with trained and ready Marines.

Marine Corps Forces Reserve (MARFORRES) is tasked with this mission. To facilitate this, it assigns active duty Marines to Reserve units as Inspector-Instructors (I-Is), whose job it is to maintain the daily operations of the unit until Reservists report for training. During training periods, the I-I cadre serves as advisors and subject matter experts for the unit.

Historically, however, I-Is were at a disadvantage when reporting to their units. Few of them had ever served in a Reserve unit and they faced a steep learning curve in acclimating to the unique needs and culture of the Reserves.

To help overcome this challenge, MARFORRES turned to the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS).

“They decided that they really needed to try and see if there’s a better system for presenting information and transferring knowledge that the I-Is require, so they reached out and asked ‘Can you help



us? What are the different ways we can make this happen?” recalled Dr. Andy Hernandez, associate professor in NPS’ Systems Engineering department.

In 2014, MARFORRES established a partnership with NPS to examine the existing I-I education system and to address identified shortcomings in the program. Hernandez, as principal investigator (PI), drew on the wealth of NPS subject matter experts and looked to applied systems engineering – the interdisciplinary study of the design, integration and management of complex systems over their life cycle – to take this on. The team included faculty and students from systems engineering, center for executive education, the former CED3 now GEAC, and defense management.

“We began by asking ‘What is the problem? Let’s dissect the problem,’” he said. “We developed a clear problem summary and the functions of what the education system ought to do. We basically used a systems engineering approach to break down the bigger problem into smaller solvable problems.”

Through this process of functional decomposition, the NPS team and MARFORRES were able to break down in detail the activities that must occur for the overall system to achieve its main purpose. Subsequently, the team developed a set of requirements for designing the education system.

“How do you go about educating the I-Is when they’re scattered over 150 separate locations in the contiguous United States, as well as Puerto Rico?” Hernandez said. “That was the original problem. But the other problem was how then do you continue providing information and educating them with fresh information?”

“You need to convey the most recent information,” he continued. “You need to be able to engage with them directly. You need to have continued information updates, and you have to figure out how to do this in a distributed fashion.”

To accomplish this, the NPS team devised a three-pronged approach: a formal orientation conference with educational lectures; distance learning (DL) with a reach-back portal; and, practical exercises for experiential or scenario-based learning.

Held on an annual basis, the I-I orientation conference introduces basic knowledge about the Reserves, and internal processes that active duty units do not have in particular. Additionally, it’s an opportunity to develop relationships among the I-I cadre as well as MARFORRES Headquarters staff.

“There’s a need for formal lectures, just like we do here at NPS,” Hernandez said. “Sometimes there’s just a need to have a face-to-face interaction. Specifically, the commanding general at the time said ‘One of the reasons we have an orientation conference is because we want I-Is and headquarters staff to meet one another. The I-I should meet some of the people they’re going to be working with at least once so when they call up headquarters, they know who they’re actually speaking with during their two- or three-year assignment.’”

The NPS team also developed an interactive, web-based learning portal and designed a series of educational modules to guide incoming I-Is through MARFORRES processes and policies. Created within the university’s Sakai learning management system, the DL program allowed participants to learn and retain information better than receiving a one-time deluge of PowerPoint slides.

“With the DL portion, now we could go ahead and talk to everybody ahead of time,” Hernandez said. “Once you identify who is coming to the command, you can provide this education right at the beginning of their duty time.”

The portal allows the incoming cadre to interact with the materiel at their own pace, he added. By the time they arrived at the orientation conference, they had a common knowledge base with the other new I-Is.

Finally, the development of scenario-based practical exercises provided hands-on application of material from the portal while creating a forum for current I-Is to share their experiences with challenging and sometime unique situations. This new dimension in the education design addressed a need to inject experiential learning that has been proven to be a highly-effective approach for the I-I population, Hernandez noted.

The NPS team created a one-week workshop with MARFORRES Headquarters staff held during the annual I-I orientation conference. During the workshop, the team builds scenarios for specific situations for incoming I-Is to resolve, situations they may have to deal with when they’re in their Reserve



component position. Gaming practical exercises in this manner is an excellent way to reinforce concepts and identify areas for improvement, Hernandez said.

“MARFORRES identifies four or five teams of facilitators, active-duty personnel who are in I-I billets,” he explained. “What I do then is I take those facilitators and I partner them up with a NPS faculty member as a mentor. Why do I do that? Because NPS faculty know how to engage, they know how to get out teaching points, they know how to construct the class such that they will get the learning objectives.”

Since its inception in 2014, Hernandez proudly reports the I-I program has continued to grow, adapt and evolve to meet MARFORRES’ needs. To date, the new I-I education system has helped educate approximately 1,200 I-Is. The response to this new approach has received a decidedly positive response according to exit surveys that the MARFORRES operations division collects in each orientation conference.

“I think it’s a great reflection on NPS that we have the latitude to do this,” Hernandez said. “An operational command identified a problem and we took it on. MARFORRES has different categories of problems, some technical, some social. Because we have a diverse set of scientists at NPS, it is possible to call on these experts to address them.”

“It speaks well of NPS that it has the diversity of talent to do that,” he added. “This has been a satisfying project for the entire team. We saw a real problem set in a real unit and we were able to provide a real answer. That’s the strength of NPS.”

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RESEARCH:

NPS Research in Extreme Weather Prediction Prepares for Future Computing Capabilities

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The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) has received a major grant to explore a groundbreaking new way to model hurricanes and other extreme weather events.

The three-year grant from the Office of Naval Research, awarded in February, will allow mathematicians at NPS and the Naval Research Lab in Washington, D.C., (NRL-DC) to apply new approaches, including machine learning, to high-fidelity computer models to more accurately and efficiently model hurricanes. This will enable the Navy to best predict - and mitigate - these storms’ impact on marine battlespace environments the world over.

“This is a game-changer,” said Dr. Frank Giraldo, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Applied Mathematics department and co-lead on the project along with Assistant Professor Anthony Austin, who leads the machine learning aspects of the project. “The novelty of our approach is, in my opinion, the only possible way to ever make weather models scalable on exascale computers.”

The Department of Energy is slated to bring the first exascale computers – next generation computers capable of a billion billion operations per second – online within the next few years. Given computing limitations, current weather models are incapable of fully drilling down to the necessary scale for accurate prediction.

Dramatic changes at the turbulent scale within the first 24 hours of a hurricane’s formation lead to its rapid intensification, with winds whipping up to at least 35 miles per hour and pressure plummeting 42 mbars. Current models are incapable of predicting rapid intensification at that scale, Giraldo said, which is really at the heart of why hurricane behavior and strength remain relatively unpredictable.



“That’s literally a killer because you don’t know where the storm is going to go,” he said. “If you don’t fix that problem, you won’t be able to predict or track hurricanes.”

Experts suggest hurricanes have increased in frequency and intensity in recent years, and point to climate change and warmer oceanic waters around the world as the culprit for stronger storms, presenting increased risk to coastal areas, Naval commands, and of course, vessels at sea.

It’s a problem the Navy is keenly aware of.

In his 2021 strategic guidance for the Navy and Marine Corps, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro specifically identified climate change as one of the most pressing challenges the services face today.

“It is a national security and warfighting imperative for the Department of the Navy to address the impact of climate change on our readiness, operations, and ability to fight and win,” Del Toro stated. “Climate change increases risk and exposes vulnerabilities to our people, installations, platforms and operations, and it impacts and expands the mission set our naval forces must support.”

In working closely with NRL-DC, the NPS team hopes to arm the Navy with an effective means to accurately predict hurricanes, from inception through evolution.

Doing so requires predicting cloud formation and behavior at the turbulent scale, which is impossible with current techniques. It’s not the actual computation of data, Giraldo says, but the communication of computation instructions that is too much for computers to handle. A “bottleneck” occurs when massive amounts of sub-processes attempt to communicate at that scale, he notes.

“Communication is what kills an application on a high-performance computer,” Giraldo explained. “We’re trying to fix that problem by saying, ‘OK, let’s do it in a way that minimizes communication. Let’s do the problem in a very different way.’”

Machine learning algorithms, a form of artificial intelligence, learn to perform tasks without being explicitly programmed to do them. For each of those sub-processes, the algorithm is able to independently make a prediction without being told to; i.e., without having to re-invent the wheel each time a prediction is made.

This essentially side-steps the communication bottleneck and opens the door for a whole new fidelity in making weather predictions at that scale. With a team of exceptional mathematicians and post-doctoral students, Giraldo says, NPS has the unique capability to team up on this project.

“Our group’s expertise is in high-performance computing,” he said. “We run on the biggest computers in the world and so we understand what it takes to run these models.

“We have built a really special program in computational mathematics in our NPS Applied Mathematics department,” Giraldo added. “Computational mathematics, scientific computing, really is at the heart of everything that’s done across the DOD.”

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FACULTY:

Southern Gas Corridor Plays Big Role in Europe's Energy Security - Brenda Shaffer

(Trend News Agency 28 Apr 22) ... Maryana Akhmedova

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The Southern Gas Corridor plays big role in Europe's energy security, faculty member of the US **Naval Postgraduate School**, international energy and foreign policy specialist Brenda Shaffer said at the "South Caucasus Development & Cooperation" international conference in Azerbaijan’s Shusha city on April 28, Trend reports.



"We are entering a very difficult economic period. Energy security projects play a particularly important role during the current economic crisis, and the Southern Gas Corridor is one of such projects," Shaffer noted.

The supply of Azerbaijani gas to Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor began on December 31, 2020. Azerbaijan exported its natural gas to the European market through pipelines for the first time in history.

Azerbaijan has diversified its export opportunities with direct access to the European market, which is the world's largest importer of natural gas.

The Trans Adriatic pipeline (TAP) which is the European part of the Southern Gas Corridor, will annually supply eight billion cubic meters of gas to Italy and one billion cubic meters of gas to Greece and Bulgaria.

[Southern Gas Corridor plays big role in Europe's energy security - Brenda Shaffer \(trend.az\)](#)

[Brenda Shaffer hails Southern Gas Corridor's role in ensuring Europe's energy security \(news.az\)](#)

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ALUMNI:

Craig Martell Appointed DOD Chief Digital and AI Officer

(GovConWire 26 Apr 22) ... Jane Edwards

(Breaking Defense 26 Apr 22) ... Jaspreet Gill

Craig Martell, formerly head of machine learning at Lyft (Nasdaq: LYFT), has been named chief digital and artificial intelligence officer at the Department of Defense.

He will oversee efforts to advance the adoption of data, AI, analytics and digital platforms to provide warfighters decision advantage on the battlefield, DOD said Monday.

"With Craig's appointment, we hope to see the department increase the speed at which we develop and field advances in AI, data analytics, and machine-learning technology. He brings cutting-edge industry experience to apply to our unique mission set," said Kathleen Hicks, deputy secretary of DOD and a 2022 Wash100 Award winner.

Martell previously served as head of machine learning at file hosting service provider Dropbox (Nasdaq: DBX). Prior to Dropbox, he spent five years at LinkedIn and led AI teams and programs.

He also served as a professor of computer science at **Naval Postgraduate School** and specialized in natural language processing.

In February, the Pentagon established the CDAO office to bring AI and digital strategy and policy development to senior DOD leadership and appointed John Sherman, chief information officer of DOD and a 2022 Wash100 Award recipient, as acting CDAO.

[Craig Martell Appointed DOD Chief Digital and AI Officer - GovCon Wire](#)

[Lyft exec Craig Martell tapped as Pentagon's AI chief: Exclusive Interview - Breaking Defense](#)

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Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen BS Raju to Assume Office Today

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(Economic Times 1 May 22)

(India Today 1 May 22)

(Hindustantimes 1 May 22)

(The Print 1 May 22)

Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General BS Raju was presented with the Guard of Honour at South Block Lawns in the national capital on Sunday.

Prior to this event, he also laid a wreath at the National War Memorial in Delhi today.

He will be succeeding Lieutenant General Manoj Pande, who is now the Chief of Army Staff.

Lieutenant General Baggavalli Somashekar Raju has been appointed as the new Vice Chief of Army Staff on Saturday and he will take over the charge today.

An alumnus of Sainik School Bijapur and National Defence Academy, he was commissioned in the JAT Regiment on December 15, 1984.

He commanded his Battalion during Operation Parakram in the Western Theatre and in Jammu and Kashmir. He also holds the distinction of commanding the Uri brigade along the Line of Control, a Counter Insurgency Force and the Chinar Corps in the Kashmir Valley. The General Officer also served as the Commandant of the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan.

During his career spanning 38 years, he has tenanted many important regimental, staff and instructional appointments in the Army Head Quarters and in field formations to include, Colonel Military Secretary Legal in Military Secretary branch, Brigadier General Staff of the operationally active White Knight Corps, Deputy Director General Military Operations and Director General Staff Duties.

Prior to the appointment as the Vice Chief of the Army Staff, the General Officer was tenanting the appointment of Director General Military Operations during the standoff on the LAC.

The General officer is a qualified helicopter pilot having carried out operational flying in Somalia, as part of UNOSOM II. He is also the Colonel of the JAT Regiment.

Lt Gen Raju has attended all-important career courses in India and did his NDC at the Royal College of Defence Studies, United Kingdom. He also holds a distinguished Master's programme degree in Counter-Terrorism at the **Naval Postgraduate School**, Monterey, United States.

For his contribution to the service, he has been awarded Uttam Yudh Seva Medal, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal and Yudh Seva Medal. (ANI)

[Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen BS Raju to assume office today – ThePrint](#)

[Indian Army Gets New Vice Chief | Bharat Shakti](#)

[Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen BS Raju to assume office today | Rising Kashmir](#)

[Lt Gen BS Raju to be new Vice Chief of Army – Mysuru Today \(citytoday.news\)](#)

[Meet Indian Army's new Vice Chief- Lt Gen Baggavalli Somashekar Raju - NewsOnAIR –](#)

[Vice Chief of Army Staff 2022: Who is Lt. Gen B.S. Raju who will take over as Army Vice Chief on May 1? \(jagranjosh.com\)](#)

[Lt General BS Raju to be new Vice Chief of Indian Army from May 1- The New Indian Express](#)

[Lt. Gen. BS Raju will take over as Vice Chief of Army Staff on May 1 - The Bharat Express News](#)

[Lt Gen BS Raju appointed as new Vice Chief of Army Staff; Know all about him \(asianetnews.com\)](#)



[Lt Gen BS Raju appointed new Vice Chief of Indian Army; to assume charge on May 1 \(timesnownews.com\)](#)
[BS Raju to take charge as next Vice Chief of Army on May 1 \(dailypioneer.com\)](#)
[Lt Gen B S Raju named new Vice Chief of Army - The Statesman](#)
[Lt Gen Baggavalli Somashekar Raju Set To Be New Vice Chief of Army \(ndtv.com\)](#)
[army: Lt Gen BS Raju to be new Vice Chief of Army - The Economic Times \(indiatimes.com\)](#)
[Lt Gen BS Raju named new Vice Chief of Army Staff - India News \(indiatoday.in\)](#)
[General BS Raju to take over as army vice chief on May 1 | Latest News India - Hindustan Times](#)

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CMSI China Maritime Report #20: “The PLA Army Amphibious Force: Missions, Organization, Capabilities, and Training”

(Andrew S. Erickson 28 Apr 22) ... Dennis J. Blasko

Summary

The PLA Army’s (PLAA) amphibious units would serve as the core of any joint force charged with invading Taiwan. As a result of the 2017 reforms, the PLAA now possesses six amphibious combined arms brigades distributed across three group armies (the 72nd, 73rd, and 74th). During a cross-strait invasion, these brigades would likely receive support from other elements of the group armies to which they belong. This could include fire support, air defense, air transport, aerial fire support, and electronic warfare/cyber-attack. Due to its large composition of two-year conscripts, the PLAA amphibious force has traditionally spent the first four months of every year developing basic individual and team skills, although a recent shift to a twice-a-year conscription cycle could allow for more complex training throughout the year. An analysis of the available reporting on 2021 training events indicates that amphibious training occurs frequently from March to October but mostly involves units at or below the battalion level. Despite efforts to bolster the PLAA’s amphibious capabilities, the force currently lacks the capacity to execute a large-scale assault on Taiwan.

Introduction

One of the most important missions assigned to the People’s Liberation Army Army (PLAA) is to provide forces equipped and trained to enhance China’s military posture to deter further steps toward Taiwan independence. All four services, the PLAA, PLA Navy (PLAN), PLA Air Force (PLAAF), and PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), plus the Strategic Support Force and Joint Logistic Support Force, have a role in this effort. If deterrence fails, one military option available to the senior Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership is to order the PLA to conduct an extremely difficult and complex operation known as a joint island landing campaign, which would be supported by a joint firepower campaign. Although a traditional over-the-beach amphibious landing likely will not be the first military course of action to be undertaken in a campaign directed against Taiwan, the PLA is clearly preparing for this possibility should other options fail.

The core of the PLAA’s contribution to the Taiwan deterrence and warfighting missions resides in six amphibious combined arms brigades (ACAB) assigned, two each, to the three group armies stationed closest to Taiwan in the Eastern and Southern Theater Commands (TC). Reforms undertaken since 2017, including increasing the capabilities and capacities of PLAA helicopter units and special operations forces (SOF), long-range multiple rocket launchers and air defense weapons, and non-kinetic electronic warfare and cyber-attack units, have greatly expanded the options available to PLAA commanders to conduct joint island landing and joint firepower campaigns.

If ordered to conduct operations against Taiwan or its offshore islands, the six amphibious combined arms brigades will work in concert with elements of their parent group armies and theater commands in an operation that likely will be reinforced by additional Army units from outside the region.



Any PLAA action against Taiwan will be coordinated with units from the other services and forces and will also involve militia forces and civilian assets in support. The dispersion of forces in peacetime, however, will require days, if not weeks, to move and assemble units within striking range of Taiwan and prepare them for launching an assault.

Once these forces are ashore, Taiwan's topography is not optimal for rapid, large-scale offensive, mechanized movements. Only a few beaches along its west coast are suitable for amphibious landing and behind them the terrain soon becomes mountainous and checkered with rice paddies and urban sprawl. Given the restrictions imposed by the terrain, the PLA leadership perhaps sought to modernize PLAA capabilities, as well as capabilities in the other services, to shift the decisive phase of a joint island landing campaign from a traditional over-the-beach amphibious assault followed by a mechanized ground movement inland to a series of airborne (parachute) or airmobile (helicopter) assault operations to seize ports of entry on the coast, airfields, and other key terrain/objectives closer to the center of gravity of Taiwan's defenses to allow for the rapid insertion of second-echelon follow-on forces by sea and air.¹ Nonetheless, a large-scale assault by multiple amphibious combined arms brigades remains a major component of China's deterrence posture and any joint landing operation.²

This report first addresses the current status of the PLAA's amphibious combined arms brigades and the support they are likely to receive from their brother Army units. It then discusses training and examines PLAA amphibious and sea-transport exercises and drills conducted in 2021 involving both amphibious and non-amphibious PLAA units. This analysis is consistent with, and supports, the U.S. Department of Defense's assessment in 2020 and 2021 that

"Both PLAA and PLANMC [Marine Corps] units equipped for amphibious operations conduct regular company- to battalion-level amphibious training exercises, and the PLA continues to integrate aerial insertion training into larger exercises... The PLA rarely conducts amphibious exercises involving echelons above a battalion, although both PLAA and PLANMC units have emphasized the development of combined-arms battalion formations since 2012.³"

About the Author

Dennis J. Blasko is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with 23 years of service as a Military Intelligence Officer and Foreign Area Officer specializing in China. He was an Army Attaché in Beijing and Hong Kong from 1992–96. He served in infantry units in Germany, Italy, and Korea and in Washington at the Defense Intelligence Agency, Headquarters Department of the Army (Office of Special Operations), and the National Defense University War Gaming and Simulation Center. Blasko is a graduate of the United States Military Academy and the **Naval Postgraduate School**. He has written numerous articles and chapters on the Chinese military, along with the book *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, second edition (Routledge, 2012).

[CMSI China Maritime Report #20: "The PLA Army Amphibious Force: Missions, Organization, Capabilities, and Training" | Andrew S. Erickson \(andrewerickson.com\)](#)

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Navy Seal Speaks at South Hill Rotary Club

(Independent Messenger 1 May 22) ... Dennis J. Blasko

The South Hill Rotary Club welcomed Navy Seal Scott Chierepko as guest speaker recently. He updated the club on just what a Navy Seal does and their experiences in helping make sure that our Nation is safe from danger from those who threaten our country's freedom.

Navy SEAL, SEAL in full Sea, Air, and Land, in the U.S. Navy, is a member of a special operations force trained to engage in direct raids or assaults on enemy targets, conduct reconnaissance missions to report on enemy activity (especially prior to beach landings), and take part in action against terrorist groups.



Scott Chierepko, a native of Newburyport Massachusetts is a retired Navy SEAL officer who served from 1988-2011, 10 years enlisted and retiring as a Lieutenant Commander. Scott has a master's degree from **Naval Postgraduate School**. He is the owner of BEI Tactical, a government contracting company providing training, products, and services. He gave a history of the command relations with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Joint Special operations. SEAL has a mission to “provide maritime special operation forces to conduct full spectrum operations, unilaterally or with partners to support national objectives.

"The NSW priorities are to compete and win, preserve and grow force readiness, advance partnerships and strengthen the force and families. “Leadership is the foundation of all we do” he stated.

The program was very informative with slides and information relating to the SEAL and other military programs.

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