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Module 4: Joint Capabilities

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Formative Assessment #14

Question

Discuss two capabilities from any non-Navy U.S. service/SOF that can aid US Navy operations. Focus on the specific capabilities named and what they bring to a joint operation with the US Navy. Provide operational examples (real or conceptual).

Response

Joint firepower and joint sensing are the two most decisive non-Navy contributions to a maritime fight because United States Army (USA) long-range precision fires (LRPF) disintegrate shore-based anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems that block naval maneuver, and US Air Force (USAF) and US Space Force (USSF) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) build and preserve the decision advantage the fleet needs to take and hold of local sea control. The operational objective (OPO) is clear: establish local sea control in a contested littoral in order to secure an expeditionary advance base and enable sustained power projection ashore. Align ends, ways, and means to the OPO and break the coastal kill chain by seeing first, deciding first, shooting first, and sustaining contact.

USA LRPF strip away coastal defenses because they bypass access constraints and hold fixed nodes at risk. USAF and USSF ISR underwrite the maritime scheme of maneuver because they give the joint force persistent target custody and the ability to prioritize, cue, and assess across domains. A commander who links these capabilities to the naval plan compresses timelines, widens options, and reduces loss rates.

USA LRPF are a direct tool for breaking the enemy littoral system at depth. Army doctrine states the core purpose with clarity: “Landpower focuses on destroying an enemy’s armed forces, occupying its territory, and breaking its will” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-1). In a maritime campaign, that logic drives a sequence against coastal sensors, shooters, and command and control (C2) from land positions that are hard to preempt. The concept of employment is straightforward. Forward-position an Army fires element on allied soil or an austere expeditionary site within range of coastal radar, C2 hubs, and fixed launchers. Prioritize power, command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I), and munitions storage. Sequence HIMARS, Mid-Range Capability (MRC), or follow-on LRPF against those fixed nodes. Each radar removed degrades adversary track quality. Each C2 node destroyed adds latency. Each launcher eliminated shrinks the threat ring. The result is time and space for the amphibious task force to close the objective area and for the surface action group to press counter-sea tasks in support of the landing force.

USAF and USSF sensing knits the fight. Air doctrine captures the theater logic: “Experience has shown that centralized control of ISR capabilities under the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) provides joint components with the most capability in the most efficient manner” (Department of the Air Force [DAF], 2016, p. 151). Space doctrine adds the foundation for modern power projection, stating that “the US does not project or employ power without

space” (U.S. Space Force [USSF], 2020, p. 29). For the fleet, orbital ISR and positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) combine with airborne ground moving target indicator (GMTI), electronic intelligence (ELINT), and theater C2 to produce target custody and deconfliction inside the tight geometry of a littoral fight. USSF collection provides wide-area custody and warning. Airborne ISR adds fidelity over coastal complexes, pushes aimpoints through joint C2 to Army launchers and naval shooters, and supports rapid assessment. The Navy finishes with maritime fires, electronic attack, and mine countermeasures, then exploits the gap to move logistics and the landing force.

Two operational examples show the mechanism. First, the First Island Chain. The operational objective is to secure ten days of local sea control around a strait in order to place an Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) site that enables maritime air defense and anti-ship fires. USA LRP from partner territory strike fixed over-the-horizon radar, coastal C2 nodes, and hardened magazines ashore. USAF ISR maintains custody on mobile transporter-erector-launchers (TELs) and coastal surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), cueing naval decoys and cyber to saturate remaining sensors and force emissions. With the shore kill chain fractured, a Navy Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) transits, the EABO site establishes an air defense and anti-ship umbrella, and sustainment flows under that shield. Second, a North Atlantic choke point. The operational objective is to keep the sea line open for 21 days. USSF space domain awareness guards convoy routes and detects attempts to target merchant traffic, while USAF C2 and ISR prioritize naval escort fires across a dispersed battlespace. Army fires ashore attrit fixed coastal missile sites and ISR relays that bracket the strait. The escort commander fights with better geometry and fewer salvos aimed back.

A common objection claims the fleet alone decides command of the sea. That view fails under modern conditions. Sea denial rests on shore-based missiles, sensors, and C2 that are best broken by land-based fires and theater ISR. Doctrine also records the empirical lesson of centralized ISR control and the foundational dependence of power projection on space services (DAF, 2016, p. 151; USSF, 2020, p. 29).

In summary, pick the operational objective, then plan regressively. If the goal is local sea control to open an objective area, USA LRPf take down the shore-based kill chain that blocks naval maneuver, and USAF-USSF ISR gives the fleet the persistent battlespace awareness and cueing that make joint fires lethal and safe. Together, they shorten the timeline, lower risk to ships, and convert contested littorals into usable sea space at the time and place the commander chooses.

References

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