Chapter 1

The Landscape: Chaos in the Littorals

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things."[1]

—Niccolo Machiavelli

". . . a second Cold War might be upon us—a protracted struggle between ourselves and the demons of crime, population pressure, environmental degradation, disease, and culture conflict."[2]

—Robert D. Kaplan

This chapter discusses the environment in which U.S. forces in general, and Marine Corps expeditionary forces in particular, have to operate. It describes a world characterized by disorder and crisis, especially in the littoral regions of the developing world.

AFTER THE COLD WAR: THE "NEW ANARCHY"

The end of the Cold War has ushered in a period of widespread uncertainty, rapid change, and turmoil. The Cold War provided a known enemy whom we thought we understood fairly well and against whom we could prepare. The Cold War provided structure and stability. The global ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union tended to subsume lesser, regional conflicts. As local belligerents positioned themselves on opposing sides of the Cold War, local conflicts were overshadowed by the global struggle and were often suppressed out of fear of starting a global war.

The certainty, structure, and stability that the Cold War provided have disappeared. The geopolitical situation has shifted from a bipolar global structure to multiple regional power centers with a single world superpower—the United States. Conflict has arisen as political groups vie for regional dominance. Long-simmering animosities have erupted into conflict. In short, the threat has shifted from the known enemies of the

Cold War to a broader, heterogeneous set of potential competitors and adversaries and a variety of types of conflict. Some of these opponents are traditional nation-states, but many will be nonstate actors—such as terrorist groups and international organized crime networks—that present new and unique challenges.

The political map of the world is changing quickly, and the trend seems likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Democracy and capitalism continue to spread across the globe, although the transition is hardly a smooth or peaceful one. Where democracy has newly taken hold, its survival is not assured. For that matter, democratic states are not necessarily peaceful states. At the same time, anti-Western sentiment, especially anti-American sentiment, thrives in many parts of the world. According to one noted political scientist, the ideological clash of the Cold War will be replaced by a "clash of civilizations."[3] The perception of the U.S.'s political, economic, and military dominance, reinforced by the military results of the Gulf War, will lead many potential enemies to adopt asymmetrical methods that avoid our material and technological superiority and exploit our perceived weaknesses. Along with other asymmetrical forms of political violence, terrorism will continue to pose a threat to U.S. citizens, property, and interests and will remain difficult to combat.

Dangerous combinations of demographic, economic, and social forces threaten to overwhelm resources, infrastructure, and governmental control in many parts of the world. As a result,

the need for humanitarian assistance will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. According to one estimate, humanitarian crises today are four times more frequent, last longer, and cause more damage than in the 1980s.[4] This is especially true in the developing world, although not exclusively. Several established states have demonstrated surprising instability and currently face the prospect of great change and uncertain futures.

While threats to national security may have decreased in order of magnitude, they have increased in number, frequency, and variety. These lesser threats have proven difficult to ignore. The main point of this discussion is to point out that the post-Cold War geopolitical situation has fundamentally altered the nature and scope of future military conflicts. This situation requires a diverse range of military methods and capabilities for effective response. Far from creating a new world order, the end of the Cold War has led to what former United Nations Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar has described as the "new anarchy."[5]

CRISES: DISASTER, DISRUPTION, DISPUTE

In short, the end of the Cold War has resulted in a world characterized by widespread disorder and potential crisis.[6] In the coming years, the ability to respond effectively and quickly to

crises will be essential to the protection of U.S. interests. Crises that will threaten U.S. interests in the near future fall into three broad categories: disasters, disruptions, and disputes.[7]

Disasters are accidents or calamities—complex human emergencies—that cause suffering on a massive scale. Disasters create societal and political instability as well as physical devastation. If a disaster reaches significant enough proportions without an effective government response, it may lead to violence and even rebellion. Disasters may be natural or manmade. Natural disasters are the best known and include hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, droughts, plagues, epidemics, and wildfires. Less frequent but sometimes even more destructive are manmade disasters such as nuclear or other industrial accidents, economic failures, or catastrophic governmental collapse.

The second class of crisis is disruption. Disruptions are intentionally disorderly activities that cause internal commotion on a scale sufficient to interfere with a government's ability to perform its functions. Unlike disasters, which are generally the result of the forces of nature or unintentional human actions, disruptions are the result of human intent. These may be the actions of an organized political group with a unified agenda such as an insurgency movement or terrorist organization, a criminal organization more interested in profits than politics such as a drug cartel, or an accumulation of individuals or small groups acting in their own self-interest. The effects of

disruptions are internal to the country in question, although the disruptive element itself may originate externally or receive external support. Disruptions may include genocide, terrorism, insurgency, drug trafficking, and epidemic crime. They may stem from sectarianism, nationalism, racial or religious hatred, or extreme poverty. Disasters can lead to disruption if there is widespread dissatisfaction with the government response to the disaster.

The third class of crisis is dispute, a clash between two political groups. A disruption may escalate to a dispute when the disruptive element becomes powerful enough to openly challenge the established government rather than to merely subvert its authority. Disputes may be internal, as in a rebellion or insurrection, or external between sovereign states or other independent political groups. A dispute may result from a single incident, or it may be a lasting ethnic, ideological, or other difference. It may take the form of political tension that does not generally result in military violence—such as the Cold War—or it may result in open warfare that may itself take any number of forms and intensities.

The intent here is not to try to categorize every type of political crisis. The point is simply that in a broad range of situations potentially threatening to U.S. interests, the actual or contemplated commitment of U.S. military forces will arise. The actual U.S. response will depend on the situation.

FRAGMENTATION AND INTEGRATION

Two of the primary forces that drive changes in global politics are the simultaneous processes of fragmentation and integration, which one noted political scientist has described as "fragmegration."[8] These processes contribute significantly to the complexity and unpredictability of current world events.

A main trend in global politics is fragmentation: the breakup of multination states into smaller, more natural national groups with narrower communities of interest. Since 1990, the trend toward fragmentation has been unmistakable. This trend reflects the failure of some states to satisfy the political needs of all their constituents. It also reflects the tendency of groups to define their interests more narrowly than before. This fragmentation is rarely a smooth process. The existing state usually resists the loss of authority. Moreover, the drawing of boundaries and the creation of other arrangements can rarely be done to the satisfaction of all concerned parties. The simple increase in the number of active political groups as a result of fragmentation increases the complexity of global political relations because the interests of some different groups invariably overlap and conflict.

A second major trend in global relations is integration. At the same time that the world is fragmenting politically, it is becoming increasingly connected economically through the rise in global markets. This economic integration results largely from

advances in communications technologies that provide both near-instantaneous worldwide transfer of capital and world-wide access to goods and services. As a simple example, one popular "American" basketball shoe is actually assembled from 52 different components that come from five different countries, and it is shipped by sea or air to markets all over the world.[9] The United States has significant commercial interests worldwide. Some of them, such as Persian Gulf oil, are clearly vital to national interests while others, such as the basketball shoe industry, are important but not vital. Another manifestation of increased interconnectedness may be the current decline of unilateral action and the rise of consensus-building among governments before applying military force.

The result of simultaneous fragmentation and integration is a tightly coupled, increasingly complex global social-political system that is potentially very sensitive to disruptions and in which seemingly local events in one part of the world can have potentially significant effects elsewhere.

MAJOR REGIONAL CONTINGENCY

At the high end of the range of potential crises is the threat posed by major regional contingencies. At present, the United States is the single nation on the globe that possesses a military capability to unilaterally protect and pursue its interests

worldwide. This condition is likely to be the case for the immediate future, but if history is any guide, it is unlikely to be permanent. At some time in the future, another power—whether an existing state, a new state, an alliance of states, or some other political entity—is likely to rise up to challenge the United States on roughly equal military and other terms.

Despite the current absence of a global peer competitor, the world remains an uncertain and dangerous place, and the United States faces a number of significant challenges to its security. Several regions, including the Korean peninsula and the Mideast, are areas of continuous political tension with a more or less permanent threat of hostilities. Numerous regional powers are capable of temporarily challenging U.S. supremacy regionally and compelling the United States to make a significant commitment of military forces to establish superiority. Several regional powers hostile to, or at least not friendly toward, the United States maintain large militaries with offensive capability in relatively high states of readiness. They may not be equipped with the very latest technology, but they may compensate with quantity for what they lack in quality. Furthermore, some of these powers have demonstrated a tolerance for casualties that to some extent offsets the technological superiority of U.S. forces. Several regional powers possess nuclear weapons, and more have chemical and biological weapons.

These powers may attack U.S. forces, activities, or interests directly in a region, but a more likely scenario is a clash between regional powers that threatens U.S. interests. Although a third party to such conflicts, the United States may find itself

bound by treaty obligations or may feel pressure from the world community to intervene as a major member of an international coalition.

A direct military conflict with a major power is an unlikely event—at least for the foreseeable future—but it would be the conflict most threatening to our national interests and security. It would be the one eventuality that poses a direct threat to national survival, and so we must be prepared to protect against it. Such a conflict could involve, among other things, intense conventional combat with advanced weaponry and large military formations. Such a conflict could be protracted and would likely involve a period of mobilization and deployment of forces. The initial clashes, however, could occur unexpectedly and would almost certainly involve the rapid commitment of forward units that must therefore maintain the capability to fight such wars.

SMALLER-SCALE CONTINGENCIES

While major regional contingencies pose the gravest threat to national security, the most likely and most frequent crises into which the United States will find itself drawn will be smaller-scale contingencies involving military operations other than war. Environmental disasters, insurrections, separatist movements, rebellions, coups, genocide, and general societal and

governmental collapse all generate violence and instability that may not lead to major regional contingencies but may nonetheless threaten U.S. interests. U.S. commitments in these situations may include presence, civil support, counterdrug operations, peace building and peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and noncombatant evacuation operations.

Smaller-scale contingencies may involve combat with regular, or conventional, military forces. Most militaries in the developing world are organized and equipped primarily to maintain internal order or for defense, and they lack a power-projection capability. Some of these conventional forces may have advanced weapons and equipment, but usually they use predominantly older equipment, often purchased as surplus from major powers that are upgrading their own arsenals. They tend to use inexpensive weapons systems that are easy to maintain, sustain, and operate rather than expensive, high-technology platforms, but they may invest in high technology in certain areas like air defense, command and control, etc. Included in this category are explosive mines, both land and sea, that can be as effective as they are inexpensive and widespread. The rampant and unrecorded use of mines can take a horrible toll on combatants and civilian populations and can pose a threat for generations.

Conversely, smaller-scale contingencies frequently also involve clashes with unconventional military or paramilitary organizations—criminal and drug rings, vandals and looters, militias, guerrillas, terrorist organizations, urban gangs—that

blur the distinction between war and widespread criminal violence.[10] These organizations are likely to employ unconventional weapons and techniques—even relatively simple and cheap weapons of mass destruction—that provide a challenging asymmetrical response to a superior conventional capability. The weapons our future foes most often choose to employ against us may bear little resemblance to today's conventional weapons.

Even noncombat missions such as humanitarian assistance that do not involve a clearly identified enemy are not necessarily undertaken in a permissive environment. U.S. forces performing such missions may find themselves operating in a lawless environment dominated by the threat of violence. The operating environment often fluctuates between permissive and hostile, and protection of the force is invariably a key consideration.

NONSTATE ACTORS

Although the state remains the predominant entity in global politics, its preeminence in the use of organized political violence has declined. One of the trends of modern conflict is the rise of powerful nonstate groups able and willing to apply force on a scale sufficient to have noticeable political effect. This rise of nonstate actors is one of the manifestations of the

political fragmentation discussed earlier. The result is a decline in conventional interstate warfare. According to 1996 United Nations statistics, of the 82 conflicts started since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, only three were conventional wars between states; 79 were civil wars or insurgencies involving at least one nonstate belligerent.[11]

Many of these nonstate groups employ unconventional military methods and weapons because they cannot compete with established states in conventional military terms. They are likely not to abide by the laws and conventions of warfare recognized by states. They are especially unlikely to be willing to meet an industrialized military power like the United States on its own terms but will probably adopt methods specifically intended to counter the conventional material and technological superiority of their foe. As a result, they are often difficult to target militarily. Furthermore, lack of political accountability makes them less vulnerable to political, diplomatic, and economic pressure than established states.

Nonstate groups are most likely to have significant influence in smaller-scale contingencies, especially internal con- flicts, but this influence is not restricted to participation in smaller-scale contingencies. Some nonstate powers may wield significant influence in larger conflicts as well.

THE DEVELOPING WORLD

The most volatile regions of the globe—the most likely scenes of crisis requiring U.S. involvement—are generally not in the industrialized world, but in the developing world. These are generally the regions undergoing the greatest change. They are often regions afflicted by drought, disease, and ages-old ethnic hatreds. Government institutions lack stability, and many suffer from internal corruption.

Some of the most rapidly growing regions in the world usually lack the economy, infrastructure, and government institutions needed to deal with that rapid growth. Some of the most densely populated regions on earth often suffer severe resource shortages. Competition for scarce resources— whether basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter or strategic resources that can bring prosperity—can lead to conflict.

Under these conditions, practically any crisis can result in mass refugee movement. The cause of this movement varies—it may be famine, genocide, internal warfare, conventional war, lack of work, or political oppression. “Worldwide, the UN estimates there are more than 17 million refugees— 10,000 people a day forced to leave their countries for fear of persecution and violence—and there are more than 30 mil-lion internally displaced persons within certain countries. Refugees and displaced persons bring their frustrations, disappointments, fears, and grievances with them. They impose a logistical and

financial burden upon their hosts."[12] Refugees introduce humanitarian and often political issues into any military intervention, complicating the conduct of military operations. In fact, refugee management may itself be the primary objective of an operation.

Lack of modern or developed infrastructure can pose significant problems for military action in the developing world. Many ports cannot handle the deepest-draft ships. Many airfields in the developing world cannot handle the largest military transport aircraft. Many roads and bridges cannot accommodate military traffic.

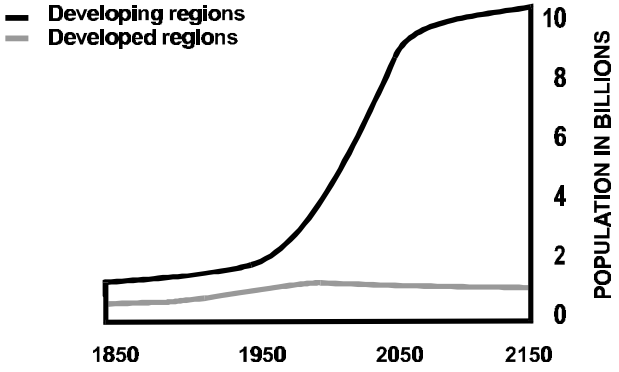
The developing world often lacks the capability to cope with major disasters and disruptions—or to deal with the refugee migrations that these cause. Developing countries often lack the military might to resist invasion from without or insurrection from within. Thus, it is in the developing world that American forces will most likely find themselves committed to protect national interests.

POPULATION FACTORS

Conflict is at base a clash of human interests. Conflict arises where there is discontent, where conditions are in flux, and where resources are in short supply. Uncontrolled population

growth in the developing world increases competition for the basic necessities of life. Nearly all of this growth will be in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, some of the poorest regions of the world.[13] While in the developed world populations will age without significant growth, populations in the developing world will continue to increase dramatically for the foreseeable future. (See figure.) This rate of increase alone will increase the competition for resources and the likelihood of conflict.

Rapid population growth will likely lead to two demographic phenomena with major security implications: urbaniza-



World population trends.

tion and a "youth bulge."[14] As the population continues to grow, more people move to the cities. Today, 45 percent of the world's population—2.5 billion people—lives in cities. At projected rates, the world's urban population will double—to 5

billion—by 2025, making 61 percent of the entire world's population urban dwellers.[15]

As recently as 1950, widespread urbanization was a distinction of the industrialized world. Today urban areas are increasingly a feature of the developing world. Of the cities of more than a million people, two-thirds are now in the developing world. As much as 90 percent of the world's population growth will occur in the cities of the developing world.[16]

A rapidly increasing population becomes proportionately younger than a stable population. This youth bulge stresses governments and societies in two mutually reinforcing ways. First, children are relatively unproductive members of society, consumers rather than producers of goods. They must be supported by the society. Second, youth in many cultures are impatient for change and thus more likely to favor radical, even violent, solutions to societal problems. Because of the youth bulge, an increasingly large part of the population in the developing world will be both unproductive and prone to disruptive behavior.

From the basic needs of food, water, and shelter to the industrial requirements for raw materials and energy, more people require more resources. However, population growth will most likely occur in just those areas least able to support burgeoning populations. The disadvantaged, deprived, and dissatisfied are likely to fight for what they think they must have or to try to move where they think they can get it. Groups may

resort to war over control of resources, and factions able to control resources will gain disproportionate influence over central governments.[17]

URBANIZED TERRAIN

Urbanization has significant environmental effects. As the earth's urban population increases, so does the proportion of the earth's surface given over to urbanization. As the earth's population becomes increasingly urban, so do tomorrow's likely battlefields. Currently, only about 1 percent of the earth's surface is urbanized terrain. However, urban areas are rapidly expanding. Nearly 1.2 million acres of arable land in developing regions are transformed to urban use annually.[18]

These burgeoning cities are not the organized, high-rise cities of the industrialized world. Large parts are spontaneous shanty or squatter settlements that tend to grow much more rapidly and haphazardly than the rest of a city. These unplanned sprawls can swell to huge dimensions, becoming "unintended" cities in themselves, technically within the boundaries of a metropolitan area but beyond the control of local government and without any organized infrastructure.[19]

Urbanized terrain has significant military implications. It favors the defender over the attacker and the local over an expeditionary force. It often poses significant security problems for

a foreign intervention. While training for military operations on urbanized terrain has focused on the difficulties posed by modern multistory urban areas (to include subterranean levels), some of the most challenging areas will be the shanty slums spreading quickly through and around modern cities. These closely packed and densely populated warrens of transient populations, temporary structures, and no organized design can pose greater military problems than modern urban areas.

Combat in urbanized areas is both costly and time consuming. Urbanized terrain tends to complicate the employment of armor, artillery, and close air support. The presence of a noncombatant population provides concealment for indigenous combatants or disruptive elements and can restrict the employment of heavy weapons. Whether the mission is one of humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, or combat, urban terrain favors the use of ground forces, especially infantry, because the use of mechanized forces is often restricted. Moreover, because of the compartmentalized nature of the terrain, an urban battlefield can absorb much greater numbers of troops than open terrain. Combat tends to take place at extremely short range between small units, leading to greater reliance on small-unit leadership and proficiency.

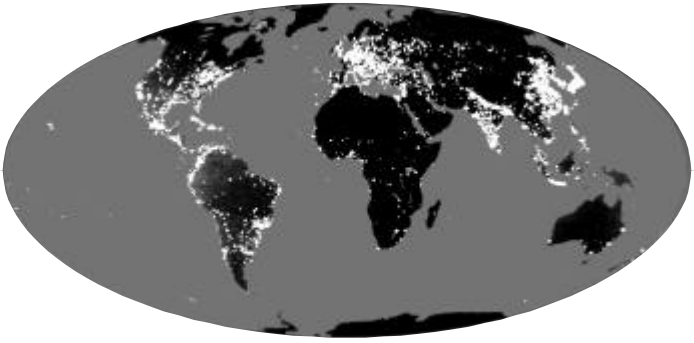
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SEA AND THE LITTORAL REGIONS

The sea dominates the surface of our globe. Despite the availability of transoceanic aircraft, most international trade is carried by sea. More than 99.5 percent of all overseas cargo by weight travels in ships, and total world seaborne trade continues to increase.[20] A standard 30-knot transport ship can outlift even the largest transport aircraft in weight of cargo by roughly 200:1.[21] The undeniable conclusion is that, for the foreseeable future, there is no viable alternative to shipping by sea for the overwhelming preponderance of world commerce.

The world's littoral regions, where land and sea meet, are equally important. The littorals are where seaborne trade originates and enters its markets. The littorals include straits, most of the world's population centers, and the areas of maximum growth. Straits represent strategic chokepoints from which the world's sea lanes of communications can be controlled. Population centers are focal points of both trade and conflict. Some 60 percent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometers of the ocean. Some 70 percent lives within 320 kilometers. By far the most cities with populations of more than one million are located in the littorals.[22] Coastal cities—that is, cities directly adjacent to the sea—are home to almost a billion

people worldwide and are experiencing unprecedented growth. Again, much of this growth is occurring in developing regions. Growth rates in many coastal cities of the developing world substantially exceed growth rates in surrounding rural regions. Of the world cities with a population of 500,000 or more, nearly 40 percent are located on the shore.[23] (See figure.)

The United States is a maritime state, relying on the guaranteed use of the seas for both its economic well-being and its



World cities at night.

ability to project military power in support of its national interests. For any global power, seapower is essential. Even with extensive strategic airlift capability, the sea remains the only viable means to move and sustain sizable military forces. As the number of U.S. bases overseas has decreased in the last years of the twentieth century, the importance of forward-

deployed U.S. naval power, with its amphibious capability for forcible entry, has increased dramatically.

The worldwide proliferation of weapons and munitions, including chemical and biological munitions will make the security of expeditionary forces against terrorist acts or other attacks a significant issue. Land-based expeditionary forces and their support will be continually at risk. Adding security forces for protection will paradoxically increase the potential targets for terrorist attack and may also increase the likelihood of undesired political friction and incident. In many parts of the developing world, contagious diseases may pose an additional threat to expeditionary forces ashore. Finally, situations may arise in which the host nation does not desire a large U.S. presence ashore. The sea is thus becoming increasingly important militarily not only as a vital means for moving military forces but as a secure base of operations, not merely for initially projecting power ashore but for the duration of the expeditionary operation. In the future, an important factor may be the ability to conduct and sustain expeditionary operations from sea bases.

As the range at which naval forces can project power inland increases, an increasingly larger portion of the globe falls under the potential influence of U.S. naval power. Just as it is undeniable that there is no alternative to the sea for world trade, it is equally undeniable that there is no alternative to naval power for the global projection of military influence.

WEAPONRY

Trends in weapons distribution pose two main areas of concern. The first is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Although obviously dangerous, nuclear weapons are possessed by relatively few of our potential enemies because of their expense and technical complexity. Nonetheless, while the number of admitted, confirmed, or suspected nuclear powers remains relatively small, several of them are hostile to the United States.[24] Moreover, the technical knowledge required to produce nuclear weapons is spreading. Especially with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the dispersal of its nuclear arsenal, it becomes more likely that the possession of these weapons will not be limited to established, responsible states.

Chemical weapons are more widespread than nuclear weapons, and their availability already extends beyond established governments to other political groups, as demonstrated by the attack by the cult Aum Shinri Kyo in Japan in 1995. Twelve people were killed and more than 5,000 injured by the release of the nerve agent sarin on the Tokyo subway during rush hour. The "poor man's nuclear weapon," chemical weapons offer significant destructive effect at a relatively low cost. Regardless of treaties, it is difficult to regulate the development and stockpiling of such weapons. As with chemical weapons,

the development of a biological weapons capability by a potentially hostile political group is difficult to detect and prevent.

The targets of weapons of mass destruction are not necessarily military ones. Terrorist organizations are just as likely to use these weapons against civilian populations. Furthermore, weapons of mass destruction do not necessarily require an advanced delivery system such as a missile or aircraft; an automobile, a suitcase, or even a small glass vial could suffice. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is perhaps the gravest single threat to national security in the short term.

The other trend of concern is the increasing availability of inexpensive but lethal conventional weapons ranging from mines to rocket grenades to car bombs to shoulder-launched antiaircraft missiles. These weapons are extremely effective, portable, highly destructive, easy to operate, difficult to detect and counteract, practically impossible to regulate, and in need of little technical or logistical support. These weapons can often be manufactured locally or are readily available on the international arms market. They are abundant and pose a significant threat to military and civilian targets alike. When in the hands of terrorists or other nonstate actors, this threat is particularly difficult to counter. Even in the poorest regions of the world, these weapons will likely be widespread.

CONCLUSION

While arguably threats to national security have decreased in magnitude, they have increased in number, frequency, and variety. Far from creating a period of global peace, the end of the Cold War has ushered in a period of crises and conflicts. We see established nation-states all across the globe splintering along ethnic, religious, or tribal lines. These trends not only produce crises between and within nations but create a much greater degree of instability—instability that can eventually degenerate into chaos. Where crises rise from relatively stable states led by state actors (premiers or presidents), chaos is the by-product of growing change and uncertainty, and is typically led by non-state actors (tribal chiefs and warlords). In this chaotic world, the United States will have to respond in defense of national interests. Many, perhaps even most, of these crises will occur in the heavily populated littoral regions of the developing world. As a result, the protection of national interests requires a strong, responsive naval expeditionary capability. That is the subject of chapter 2.