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Operation Chromite

A Strategic Analysis

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A Strategic Analysis

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a strategic analysis of Operation Chromite (15th-19th September 1950), part of the Korean War (1950-1953). This relevant military operation will be examined by highlighting its fundamental strategic principles in order to demonstrate its importance in terms of impact on the course of the war. Analytically, this will be done by adopting the approach of positive strategy, and in particular the views expressed by E. Luttwak in his book *Strategy – The Logic of War and Peace*.

The general context: the Korean War

First of all, to provide a historical base on which to develop the analysis of Operation Chromite, it is appropriate to outline the general development of the Korean War¹.

As the name suggests, the conflict took place in the Korean peninsula in a period ranging from June 1950 to July 1953. Since the war was fought exclusively on the Korean soil, the battleground is clearly defined in geographic terms; however, it should be noted from now that many external powers participated to the hostilities and influenced their outcome in more or less direct ways. The temporal delimitation of the conflict is equally clear, as the aforementioned dates coincide with the outbreak and the cessation of hostilities; but again, it is necessary to pay attention so to avoid the risks of an excessive rigidity. In other terms, it should be kept in mind that the war broke out after a “preparatory” period and that the conflict was never actually solved; as well as that it occurred in the context of the Cold War (which also explains the multitude of actors involved). For analytical clarity’s sake, the conflict can be divided into a prelude, four main phases, and an aftermath.

Prelude: At the end of WWII in 1945, Korea (as part of the defeated Japanese Empire) was occupied by Allied forces; in particular by American troops in the south and Soviet ones in the north. The division line between the two occupation zones was established along the 38° parallel north. Initially, this had to be a temporary solution, but it ultimately crystallized and became a political reality. In 1947 the US raised the issue at the United

¹ The following historical reconstruction is essentially based on Smith, 2009, 272 to 277.

Nations, which established a commission to conduct elections in the peninsula and reunify it under a single state. However, the solution was not effective and by 1948 two distinct governments were *de facto* in charge in each part of Korea: a pro-US one in the south and a communist one in the north. As a result, there were practically two states claiming their sovereignty over the whole Korean territory; namely the Republic of Korea (RoK, South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea). At that point, the US and USSR forces left the peninsula, even though each went on supporting the respective friendly state.

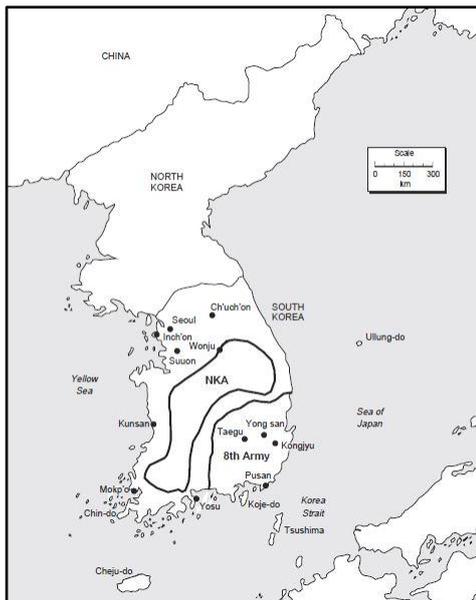


Figure 1: The Pusan Perimeter.
Source: Builder et al., 76.

Phase I: In a bid to unify Korea, the DPRK launched a massive surprise attack on June 25th 1950, marking the beginning of the war; only two days later its forces entered in Seoul, the South’s capital. The Americans invoked the UN Security Council, which (thanks to the absence of the Soviets²) adopted a resolution demanding all states to support the RoK. The US started employing its own armed forces, commanded by general Douglas MacArthur³, to defend the South. Another resolution by the UN Security Council ordered the creation of a multinational force to push back the North’s aggression and reestablish

peace. However, most of the war effort was sustained by the US, and MacArthur became the commander of the UN force. By September, the DPRK troops had occupied almost all of South Korea, closing the coalition forces in a relatively small area around Pusan (the “Pusan Perimeter”).

Phase II: On September 15th, Operation Chromite was launched. American troops landed at Inchon (380 km north of the frontline), to cut the invader’s supply lines, envelop their troops and liberate Seoul. The operation, strongly supported by MacArthur, turned the tide of the war: the coalition retook all the lost ground (including Seoul) and in October

² In 1949, at the end of the Chinese Civil War, the government of the defeated nationalist Republic of China fled to Taiwan, leaving the mainland to the rule of the communist People’s Republic of China; however, the permanent seat at the UN Security Council was maintained by the nationalist government. As a sign of protest, the USSR stopped participating to its deliberations. For this reason, it did not take part in the discussion about Korea and did not put its veto on the resolution in favor of the RoK. See Smith, 2009, 273.

³ He was then the Commander in Chief, Far East (CINCFE). See Ballard, 2001, 31.

entered in North Korea with UN authorization⁴. In a few weeks, it occupied most of the country, and was about to reach the Yalu river marking the border with China⁵.

Phase III: This sparked the PRC’s intervention, which pushed back the UN troops; the communist forces conquered Seoul again and penetrated deep inside the RoK. To save the situation, MacArthur called for the use of nuclear weapons against China, considering it as the only mean to stop its involvement in Korea and win the war; but the US President Harry Truman refused and removed him from command. In early 1951, the coalition launched a counteroffensive that retook Seoul and most of the South’s territory.

Phase IV: At that point, the situation stabilized, and in June the Americans accepted a Soviet proposal for a ceasefire; but the conflict dragged on until July 1953, when an armistice agreement was finally reached.

Aftermath: The deal essentially reestablished the border along the 38° parallel, and the situation froze. The issue of reunification was not solved and an actual peace treaty was never signed; in this sense, the Korean War is technically still going on.

The object of analysis: Operation Chromite

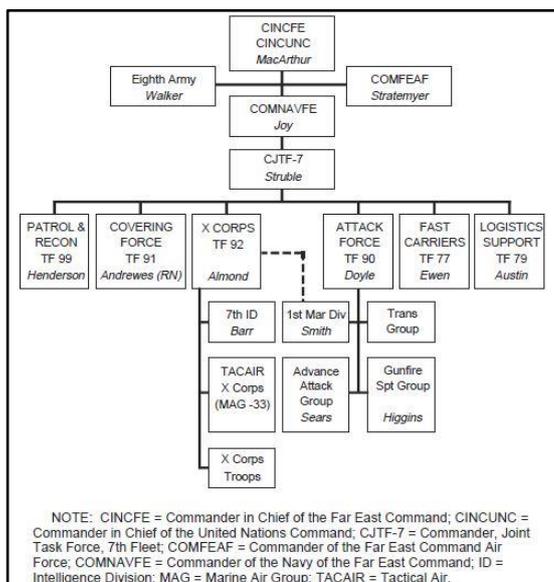


Figure 2: The command relationships of Operation Chromite. Source: Builder et al., 81.

Having presented the general context, it is possible to introduce the analysis of Operation Chromite by collocating in geographical and temporal terms and by briefly describing its development.

As noted, Chromite marked the start of the second phase of the Korean War. Until then, the UN forces were being pushed south by the advancing DPRK troops, that had launched a sudden attack on 25th June 1950 with the aim to occupy the RoK. This

⁴ In reality, since the Security Council was blocked due to the Soviet veto (the USSR had by then restarted attending its meetings), the resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly, which juridically has no binding powers in such matters. See Smith, 2009, 274.

⁵ Naturally, the term “China” indicates the PRC.

lightening war⁶ allowed the North to rapidly occupy most part of the South's territory, and by September the coalition forces were confined in the Pusan Perimeter, struggling to avoid a collapse of the frontline against the offensive launched by the DPRK to end the war before winter⁷. In this severe situation, MacArthur proposed a plan to change the course of the war and to rapidly end it: Operation Chromite⁸. In practice, it consisted in executing an audacious amphibious landing at Inchon, located on Korea's western coast and close to Seoul⁹. For this purpose, a specific Joint Task Force (JTF-7) was created, whose landing component was the X Corps.

Chromite took place in a relatively small zone defined as "Inchon-Seoul area". Since 4th

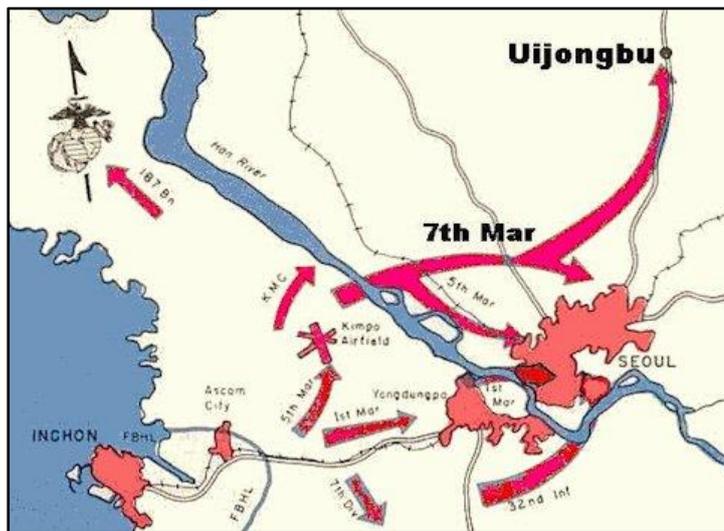


Figure 3: The Inchon-Seoul area and the movements of US Troops.
Source: <http://www.paulnoll.com/Korea/Maps/Korean-map-Inchon-Seoul.html>

September, airstrikes were conducted on the zone, and on 13th-14th of the month further preparatory aero-naval bombardments were executed. The X Corps arrived on 15th September and started the landing operations. At 1:30 a.m. of the following day, all the D-Day objectives had been secured, and on 19th

September the bridgehead was consolidated, thus ending the Operation¹⁰.

The triad of strategic analysis

At this point, it is possible to start the actual strategic analysis of Operation Chromite.

As this type of study examines the power relations and the dialectic of the opposed wills of the parties involved in the war, it is necessary to define the "triad of strategic analysis"

⁶ See Luttwak, 2001, 199 and 207.

⁷ See Builder *et al.*, 1999, 78.

⁸ In reality, the General had already conceived the operation in early July 1950, but he was forced to postpone it as all the available soldiers were needed to contain the communist advance. See Builder *et al.*, 1999, 73 to 75.

⁹ Inchon is just 18 miles west of the South Korean capital. See *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

¹⁰ The timeline is mainly based on the one included in *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

of the Operation; which implies individuating the actors, their respective objectives and the means at their disposal.

Actors

The Korean War as a whole involved a large number of actors that contributed in different ways; but essentially, one side was represented by the RoK and the UN coalition supporting it, the other included North Korea and its allies (the USSR and China¹¹).

However, in the specific case of Chromite the important actors are essentially the United States and North Korea, as the Operation was essentially a clash between their military forces.

Objectives

To properly identify the objectives pursued by the two actors, it is first of all necessary to examine the issue of the different levels of strategy to be used to conduct the analysis; as to each level correspond specific objectives. In this regard, Luttwak identifies five levels: technical, tactical, operative, theatre strategy and grand strategy.

The first two represent the “micro” dimension of strategy, namely the characteristics of the military equipment and the single battles respectively; for this reason, they will not be examined in this study, as they (alone) cannot explain the outcome of the Operation as a whole.

For what concerns grand strategy, it constitutes on the contrary the highest and broader level of strategy, and it roughly coincides with the international relations of the examined actor. In other terms, it does not include only military means and objectives, but also diplomatic, economic, ideological, and ultimately political ones. As a result, this level is conversely too ample to analyze a specific military operation such as Chromite, which represents only an episode (yet an important one) of a conflict that is in turn part of a wider scope of international issues and interactions, namely the Cold War. However, this

¹¹ It should be reminded that the USSR limited its participation to material and political support; whereas the PRC initially contributed by providing support to the DPRK, and intervened directly only later in the war.

level will not be completely ignored, as it is the source of the *political objectives* pursued by the actors; in other words, this level explains what they wanted to obtain from their engagement in the conflict.

As such, the main levels to be analyzed will be the theatre strategy and operational ones.

The former concerns “the relations between military power and the territory”¹². This statement highlights its two important aspects: first, this level (contrarily to grand strategy) focuses exclusively on the military dimension and “completely ignores the political, economic and moral character of the territory”¹³; which represents the second important component. As a matter of fact, theatre strategy concerns a specific region: at this level, “a *determined* stretch of territory is object of contentious”¹⁴ and constitutes the theatre of war, which “must constitute a reasonably autonomous unity”¹⁵.

The Korean War perfectly fits this parameter, as the peninsula was the specific object of the conflict while representing, in the broader context of the Cold War, the kind of “autonomous unity” mentioned above; meaning a scenario not directly influenced by events in other parts of the world¹⁶. As Chromite is an operation conducted in the specific Korean theatre, examining this level allows to find the *military objectives* of the Operation.

For what concerns the operational level, it is in an intermediate position between tactics and theatre strategy. It is the one where “the continuous control of all the employed forces has to take place and most of all this is the level of the battle as a whole”, and the action taking place on this plan “has to be something more of the sum of the tactical parts”¹⁷. This level deals with the “warfighting style”¹⁸, which is defined along a spectrum that goes from attrition warfare to relative manoeuver. The former aims at destroying the enemy forces by using superior material capabilities and firepower. The latter, “instead of seeking to destroy the enemy’s material consistency, is aimed at making it ineffective

¹² Luttwak, 2001, 226. Translated from Italian by me.

¹³ Luttwak, 2001, 226. Translated from Italian by me.

¹⁴ Luttwak, 2001, 226. Translated from Italian by me. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Luttwak, 2001, 226. Translated from Italian by me.

¹⁶ This definition of theatre of war recalls the one given by Clausewitz in *On War*, Book V, chapter 2; which Luttwak evokes in his book (see Luttwak, 2001, 226-227).

¹⁷ Luttwak, 2001, 189 and 191 respectively. Translated from Italian by me.

¹⁸ See Luttwak, 2001, 190. Translated from Italian by me.

by the destruction of *systems*” which means “to avoid the adversaries” and gaining victory through “the application of some kind of selective superiority against supposed weak spots of the enemy, material or psychological, technical or organizational”¹⁹. In practice, it is the “indirect approach” proposed by Liddell Hart, which seeks to defeat the adversary by exploiting the lines of least expectation and / or resistance.

The insistence on the nature of the relative manoeuvre comes from the fact that this method is the essence of Operation Chromite; moreover, this fact justifies the attention given to the operational level, as “[t]he more relative the maneuver is, the more important the operational level will be”²⁰. Naturally, to this level correspond the *operational objectives*.

On this basis, it is possible to outline the different type of objectives of the actors involved in Operation Chromite.

USA (UN Coalition)

- Political: to preserve the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of South Korea against the DPRK’s aggression.
- Military: as such objectives originate from the theatre strategy level, which revolves around the control of a specific territory, the broad military objective was to stop and then push back the North Korean forces in order to retake control of the South’s soil.
- Operational: Chromite was conceived as a relative manoeuvre whose objective was to secure a bridgehead far behind the frontline (the Pusan Perimeter) and to retake Seoul. This would have allowed to achieve multiple goals²¹ with significant theatre-level consequences:
 - o Cutting the overstretched supply lines of the DPRK forces, as they passed mainly through the occupied RoK capital²².

¹⁹ All the quotes are from Luttwak, 2001, 192. Translated from Italian by me. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ Luttwak, 2001, 193. Translated from Italian by me.

²¹ See Builder *et al.*, 1999; Ballard, 2001.

²² As Ballard notes, “Seoul was the hub of all movement in the South and became the most critical node in the supply line of the communist attack”. See Ballard, 2001, 32.

- Force the North Koreans to withdraw and take them between the anvil represented by the X Corps at Inchon-Seoul and the hammer of the pursuing 8th Army (which launched an offensive at the same time of Chromite).
- Obtaining a significant psychological and political victory.

These aspects and their strategic significance will be examined later in detail; by now, it is sufficient to note that these objectives were meant to ensure the destruction of the North's military capabilities and a rapid end of the war.

North Korea

Even though the DPRK was the “passive” side of Operation Chromite, it is still appropriate to consider its objectives in order to better understand the sense of the Coalition's attack. So, Pyongyang's objectives can be summarized as follows:

- Political: reunify Korea by force and extend the North's control over all of the peninsula.
- Military: to rapidly overwhelm the forces RoK and its allies so to rapidly seize control of the South Korean territory. By September, the need to rapidly end the war was made more urgent by the growing logistical problems and the upcoming winter²³; which was the reason why the North launched an offensive against Pusan in that month.
- Operational: as the DPRK was the actor that was attacked during Chromite, it has no proper operational objectives; but these can be defined in a “negative” way, namely as avoiding the Operation to succeed. So, the objective of the North's troops was basically to push back the landing forces and stop the Coalition from consolidating a bridgehead and recapturing Seoul, in order to avoid the disastrous effects resulting from the materialization of this scenario.

²³ Builder *et al.*, 1999, 75.

Means

The means represent the resources that the actors employ to achieve their objectives as well as the way they are used. As Chromite is a military operation, the most important means of the opposing parties are the combat units, their material capabilities and their warfighting abilities; and specifically those directly involved in the Operation. As such, the means of the two actors are the following²⁴:

- *USA (UN Coalition)*: as noted above, a specific force named JTF-7 was created to conduct Operation Chromite. It was “a true joint operational command, incorporating Navy, Army and Marine units in order to support the assault force”²⁵; which consisted in the X Corps. This was in turn centered on the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division, and counted 70,000 troops in total. The rest of JTF-7 was made of naval, air, recon and logistic units tasked with supporting the landing force. Significantly, this granted the US a complete aero-naval superiority.
- *North Korea*: The DPRK had less forces near the landing areas. The 3rd, 10th and 13th Divisions were within range of the zone, but these formations were stretched along the long Seoul-Taejon-Taegu highway that crossed the occupied South Korea, so only some of their sub-units could effectively take part in the fight²⁶. The only forces stationed at Inchon were about 2,000 men, including 400 soldiers from the 3rd Battalion of the 226th Independent Marine Regiment and some elements from the 918th Artillery Regiment that garrisoned Wolmi-do island²⁷. The North Koreans also had some coastal artillery positions consisting of 75mm guns inside concrete bunkers. In total, Pyongyang’s forces in the Inchon-Seoul area were estimated at about 6,500-8,000 troops²⁸. In terms of air and maritime power, the DPRK forces were almost inexistent.

²⁴ The following information is essentially taken from *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

²⁵ *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

²⁶ “They will be unable to influence the situation in Seoul for at least two weeks after our landing. Our severing their supply line will undoubtedly degrade this capability further.” Quoted from Builder *et al.*, 1999, 85.

²⁷ The island was vital for the defence of the beaches, and because of that it was the first tactical objective of the landing forces. See *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

²⁸ The first figure is indicated by Builder *et al.*, 1999, 85; the second by *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

Strategic principles

At this point, there are all the elements to analyze the strategic importance of Operation Chromite by showing its significance and its rationale.

As seen above, by September 1950 the DPRK forces had penetrated deep into the South's territory and had managed to confine the Coalition in a relatively small area around Pusan. However, Pyongyang's troops were unable to break through because of two reasons: the coalition forces were by then numerically superior²⁹ and, more importantly, the communist supply lines were overstretched. The rapid advance had allowed the North to take large swathes of land in a few months; but it had been too fast and too deep, and by the end of summer its troops on the front were suffering of serious supply deficiencies as the logistic system was not able to maintain them.

In short, "the North Korean had advanced by foot along unpaved roads for a distance superior to 500 kilometers, *surpassing the culminating point of their victory*"³⁰. This is the first key element to note: the DPRK attack represents a typical example of a (too rapid) advance that went beyond its culminating point. As a result, its troops became extremely vulnerable to a counterattack, especially one against the supply lines (as it was the case of Chromite); and this clearly illustrates the paradoxical nature of strategy upon which Luttwak insists.

Another important factor is that MacArthur managed to perfectly identify the enemy's *center of gravity*, and developed a plan to strike it.

²⁹ They counted 150,000 men and 500 tanks against the 98,000 North Korean troops. See Ballard, 2001, 33 and Builder *et al.*, 1999, 77 respectively.

³⁰ Luttwak, 2001, 57. Translated from Italian by me. Emphasis added.

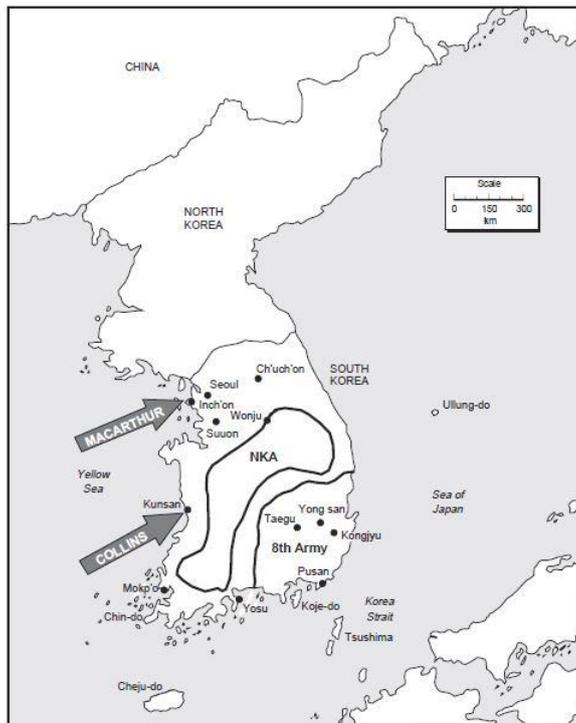


Figure 4: The alternatives for the landings.
Source: Builder et al., 79.

First, he refused to simply reinforce the Pusan Perimeter, insisting on mounting a counteroffensive combining an amphibious landing and attack by the 8th Army from Pusan. Still, there was a debate among the commanders on where to conduct the landing. Most of them were favorable to attacking Kunsan, always located on Korea's western coast, but much south of Inchon; they preferred it because it was much closer to Pusan and because it was easier to land there due to geographic reasons³¹. However, MacArthur dismissed this option, saying that "it would be a short envelopment

which would not envelop. It would not sever or destroy the enemy's supply lines or his distribution center and would therefore serve little purpose"³². In other terms, landing there would not hit the enemy's center of gravity; therefore, it would not grant victory. On the contrary, he insisted that a strike on Inchon would be lethal for the invading communist forces, affirming that "the enemy had neglected his rear and was dangling on a thin logistical rope that could be quickly cut in the Seoul area, that the enemy had committed practically all of his forces against the Eighth Army in the south and had no trained reserves and little power of recuperation"³³.

In short, "there can be no doubt that he applied his version of the center of gravity."³⁴ He was able to properly identify it as the Inchon-Seoul area, the point where the strike could lead to a collapse of the enemy's warfighting capabilities. The effectiveness of the Operation proved him right, showing again the paradox of strategy and proving that MacArthur had perfectly understood its logic, by deciding to launch an offensive in such

³¹ Essentially, its beaches were more suitable for landing ships and its tidal characteristics made landing operations less risky.

³² As quoted in Ballard, 2001, 34.

³³ Builder et al., 1999, 77.

³⁴ Ballard, 2001, 32.

a severe situation to exploit the enemy's weakness (namely its vulnerable supply lines) in a perfect example of relative manoeuvre on the operational level.

This last consideration introduces another central aspect, namely that MacArthur conceived Chromite as a *strike along the lines of least expectation and resistance*.

First, the Operation was meant to surprise the enemy by exploiting the fact that it would not consider the eventuality of an amphibious landing in a difficult location located so deep behind the frontline. However, responding to those that claimed a landing at Inchon would have been too complicated to execute, MacArthur stated that “[t]he very arguments you have made as to the impracticabilities involved will tend to ensure me the element of surprise”³⁵.

Moreover, “[a]lthough Inchon is a technically difficult landing site, the opposition should be light, and we have adequate fire support to cover our attempts if they should be complicated [...]”³⁶. So, in the same paradoxical logic, the North Korean resistance was expected to be light; and it actually was.

In brief, striking at Inchon did not only mean hitting the DPRK's greatest weak spot, but also one of the places where it did not expect an attack and therefore where it had less defenses; thus allowing to exploit the operational level by performing a relative maneuver. So, the very fact that it was considered a “bad” point for an offensive made of it the ideal point to assault. Moreover, at the theatre level, this sudden attack allowed the Coalition to take the *initiative*, which indicates the application of another important strategic principle.

The superior firepower of the US forces represented another central element in the success of the Operation, in the form of the application of the *concentration-mass* principles.

As it was seen above in regard to the means, the US had mobilized a significant landing force that vastly outnumbered the North Korean defenders; moreover, it benefitted of a complete (and essential) aero-naval superiority. The combination of these two elements

³⁵ Quoted in Ballard, 2001, 33. Emphasis added.

³⁶ Builder *et al.*, 1999, 86. From the template of MacArthur's command concept proposed at pages 85 to 86.

ensured the local firepower concentration to successfully land at Inchon and then to rapidly take Seoul. In this logic, MacArthur even transferred some forces out of Pusan to reinforce JTF-7³⁷, a risky but calculated move for the success of the landing.

At the theatre level, the concentration principle was granted and exploited by launching a ground offensive from Pusan at the same time of the landing at Inchon. The two actions were part of a single and coherent theatre strategy: the attack of the 8th Army “was occupying the attention of the NKPA in the south”³⁸, so to prevent it from reinforcing the Inchon-Seoul area; at the same time, the amphibious landing was intended to disrupt the fighting capabilities of the North Korean troops around Pusan. All of this aimed at ensuring the *annihilation* of the North’s military power: “MacArthur understood that timing for the assault at Inchon and the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter by Eight Army would be crucial [...] for the purpose of *enveloping and destroying* enemy forces [...]”³⁹.

The entity of JTF-7 is also linked to another important principle, namely *continuity*, as “the real essence of the Inchon landing was not merely to land and form a bridgehead but to drive across difficult terrain 18 miles and capture a large city [Seoul] and thereafter properly outpost and protect the city.”⁴⁰

As shown, retaking the South’s capital was an essential operational objective as it would have allowed to cut supply lines of the DPRK and cripple its warfighting capabilities. As this was a vital goal, it was absolutely necessary to have enough forces to land, take Seoul and hold it; as well as being able to supply these troops. In other words, it was crucial to sustain a continuous fighting effort; and this was granted by the dimension, firepower and logistic capabilities of JTF-7 and by the air-maritime supremacy it possessed⁴¹.

All of the above proves that Operation Chromite was indeed a perfect form of relative maneuver, as it presented all of its characteristics.

³⁷ The most notable one was a Marine regiment transferred to the 1st Marine Division (that was included in the X Corps, the landing force). See *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

³⁸ *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

³⁹ Ballard, 2001, 34. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Quote from Builder *et al.*, 1999, 80.

⁴¹ In the same logic, it appears clear why one of the tactical objectives of the landing was to take the nearby Kimpo airfield, which would have allowed to conduct air operations from land and to supply the landing force by air.

First of all, at the operational level, the plan “was not primarily oriented on the enemy⁴²”; on the contrary, “[i]nstead of simply pushing the North Koreans back or pushing from another site, CHROMITE was designed to completely unhinge the North Korean and throw them off balance by hitting them from the rear⁴³”. So, it was meant to be “a flank attack with the goal of attacking deep in the enemy’s rear, disrupting his LOCs, and cutting off the main force’s avenue of retreat”⁴⁴; which would have allowed to reach the ultimate theatre-level objective of liberating the South. In fact, the attack exploited the DPRK’s weak spot (overstretched supply lines) and the Coalition’s advantages (aero-naval superiority and amphibious capabilities) at the theatre level: MacArthur “orchestrated all the elements of the U.N. force into a single instrument in the right place at the right time for the maximum effect”. In short, Chromite was “*an indirect attack on a key vulnerability*”⁴⁵.

This means that the Operation represents a model in *efficiency* terms, as with a single and rapid action that caused few casualties⁴⁶ it allowed the Coalition to obtain a determinant strategic advantage; to the point of turning the tide of the conflict while avoiding a frontal attack which, in MacArthur’s words, “can only result in a protracted and expensive campaign⁴⁷”.

Such statements also imply a high level of *effectiveness*, as “MacArthur’s anvil and hammer technique ensured the virtual collapse of the North Korean army⁴⁸”. It allowed the Coalition to reverse the situation and retake the lost ground, thus achieving (for a certain period) the military and political objectives that have been outlined above, namely pushing back the DPRK’s forces and restore the integrity of the RoK.

However, Chromite presented also the “costs” of relative maneuvers, as it was a high-risk operation.

The risk came from three factors. First, Inchon’s shores did not make of it the best spot for landing (even though, as noted, in the paradoxical logic of strategy this made of it a “good” place). Second, its tidal characteristics posed a serious problem, as the Americans

⁴² Ballard, 2001, 33.

⁴³ *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

⁴⁴ *Landing at Inchon* (web source). LOC stands for Line of Communication.

⁴⁵ Ballard, 2001, 33 and 36 respectively. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ “The assault troops encountered only spotty resistance and friendly casualties were much lighter than expected”, see *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

⁴⁷ Quoted from Ballard, 2001, 32.

⁴⁸ *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

were practically obliged to land on 15th September, because it was the only day when the tide would be high enough to allow the landing ships to come sufficiently close⁴⁹; the next high tide would only occur one month later, but by then the weather conditions would have been too bad⁵⁰. Finally, as noted, it was essential to rapidly occupy the Inchon-Seoul area for obtaining the desired effect. If some problems had emerged (bad weather, stronger enemy resistance, lack of coordination...), then the Operation would have been a complete failure, it would not have changed the course of the war, and would have achieved none of the Coalition's objectives.

All of this means that Chromite was *highly vulnerable to friction*. In fact, two typhoons risked to delay the X Corps, which managed to arrive at Inchon just in time⁵¹. This (especially the absolute necessity to land on that day) represents the major flaw of the plan, namely its *lack of security*: had the plan been impossible to execute / complete on 15th September, it would have been impossible to delay it, thus losing all the potential (and huge) benefits it could bring. Naturally, MacArthur was a skilled commander, expert in amphibious warfare, and with competent subordinates; they were all aware of this problem and organized the Operation in the best way (after all, it ended in a complete success). Still, it was a challenging operation that demanded an absolutely perfect timing, which meant the plan's security was weak⁵².

In conclusion, the above considerations prove that Chromite was a typical case of relative manoeuvre at the operational level that allowed to unlock the stall on the theatre plan and to achieve the Coalition's political objectives. As Luttwak notes, it represented "a classic high-risk and high-success enveloping manoeuvre"⁵³. In short, it is possible to state that "MacArthur's plan, despite the technical difficulties inherent in its landing operations, was strategically and operationally sound"⁵⁴; as its success proves.

⁴⁹ Builder *et al.*, 1999, 82.

⁵⁰ Ballard, 2001, 34.

⁵¹ See Builder *et al.*, 1999, 82. It should be noted that some claim that these typhoons helped screening the movement of the X Corps; see *Landing at Inchon* (web source).

⁵² Despite this, "MacArthur seemed to consider it a low-risk exercise". See Builder *et al.*, 1999, 80.

⁵³ Luttwak, 2001, 198

⁵⁴ Builder *et al.*, 1999, 87.

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