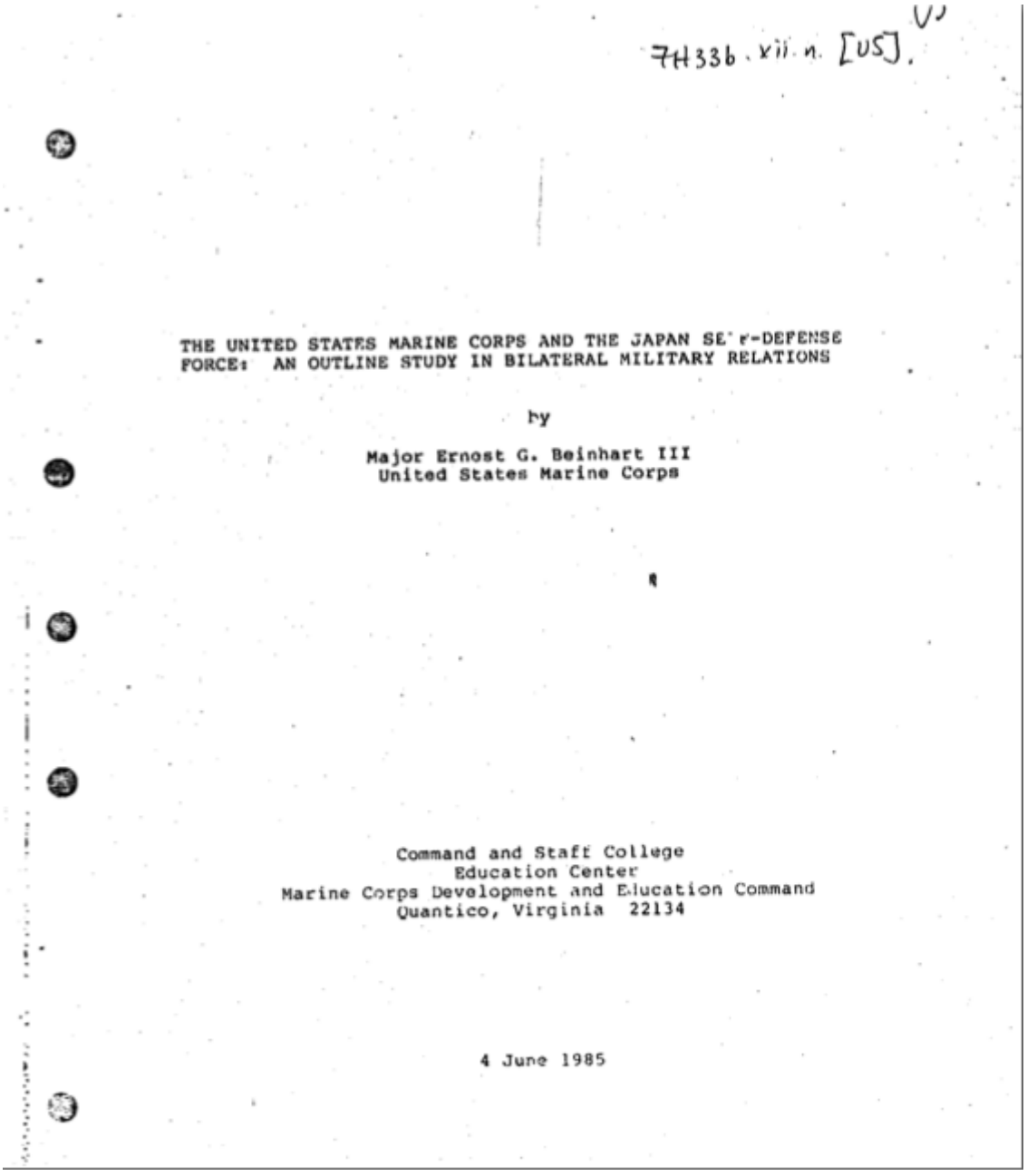
The United States Marine Corps and the Japan Self-Defense Force: An Outline Study in Bilateral Military Relations



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THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS AND THE JAPAN SELF-DEFENSE FORCE: AN OUTLINE STUDY IN BILATERAL MILITARY RELATIONS

by

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In recent years, units of the United states Marine Corps (USMC) and the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) have begun to train together, to sponsor mutual exchange visits, and to plan for concerted action in the event of aggression against Japan. Why is this happening? Why is it important? What larger changes are involved, and how can that process of change be influenced to best effect?

This paper addresses several of the broad issues involved in the emerging relationship between U.S. Marine Forces in Japan and the Japan Self-Defense Forces. Some of the dilemmas confronting U.S. and Japanese policymakers are described, and sufficient political background is provided that the general reader can gain a sense of the changes now in progress. Key points of the paper are that conditions in Japan are changing; that this change can be influenced in ways favorable to the United States; that the Marine Corps has a major role to play; and that for both selfish and unselfish reasons, the Marine Corps should allocate increased resources to the effort. Given Japan's ongoing and increasingly dangerous standoff with China over overlapping sovereignty claims to the Senkaku Islands, especially with China's establishment of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea in November 2013, questions of US-Japan military cooperation in the event of a miscalculation or possible aggression by either side become even more pertinent for discussion.

The author's intent in developing this document was to provide an overview of U.S.-Japan military relations; then, within that broad perspective, to consider a variety of narrower issues associated with the continuing presence of USMC forces in Japan.

Beinhart writes:

"To the extent that a territorial threat to Japan does exist, virtually all influential Japanese identify that threat with the Soviet Union. It is true that the presence of U.S. forces in Japan is a potent deterrent to Soviet invasion. It is equally true, however, that U.S. presence makes Japan an important target." [page 5]

"In fact, U.S. forces are not being kept in Japan at the expense of American national interests, but as a forceful expression of those interests. Their presence is as vital to the United States as it is to Japan." [page 6]

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