

Naval Expeditionary Forces and Power Projection: Into the 21st Century

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

The following remarks were delivered by the Commandant of the Marine Corps at a conference sponsored by the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy on 20 November 1991.

... It's a genuine pleasure for me to be here tonight at a conference on the usefulness of naval expeditionary forces sponsored by such a distinguished program as the International Security Studies Program of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Many of you may not be aware that each year the Marine Corps sponsors a CMC [Commandant of the Marine Corps] Fellow at the International Security Studies Program within the Fletcher School. These fellows are among our best and brightest officers, and I suspect that they bring a slightly different viewpoint and background to the program from that of the other students. We've been doing this since 1985.

Though it's too soon to tell, maybe some day there will be a future Commandant of the Marine Corps who will be a beneficiary of the kind of top-flight academic preparation that the Fletcher School provides its graduates.

Your program has long been known for the quality of its faculty and course of instruction, and the proof can be seen in the long line of former students who have gone on to positions of great responsibility and leadership both in and out of government. In fact, I understand from the newspapers that one of your former Navy Fellows, Adm Jonathan Howe—Fletcher Ph. D., class of 1969—is a leading candidate to replace Bob Gates as the deputy national security advisor.

So, we Marines are particularly proud that you have elected to hold a conference on such a timely subject and that you have asked the Marine Corps University to help cosponsor it.

I can't think of a time in our history when such a topic was more relevant to our Nation, or when the future was more conducive to the employment of naval expeditionary forces, than today.

This past year provides a number of great examples of how useful naval expeditionary forces and our Marine expeditionary forces, in general, have been, and are likely to continue to be, over the next few years. It is historic in that in a single year, we:

- Deployed 85 percent of our active expeditionary forces to a major regional contingency in Southwest Asia.
- Mobilized 65 percent of our Marine Corps Reserve, and sent much of it to the desert with its active duty counterpart.
- Embarked and deployed the largest amphibious task force since World War II.
- Employed all three of the Nation's maritime pre-positioning ships [MPS] squadrons without flaw.
- Maintained every commitment everywhere else in the world our Nation tasks us to—from counternarcotics support in the jungles of Colombia and Peru to arctic operations in northern Norway.
- Maintained a force for seven months at sea off strife-torn Liberia as security for our Embassy there and as an evacuation force for 2,400 diplomats and citizens.
- Evacuated, from 450 miles at sea, at night, with Marine helicopters, 250 diplomats and foreign nationals from Somalia just as rebel insurgents threatened the gate of our Embassy.
- Built, in the desert, in three weeks, the biggest expeditionary combat



service support area in our history.

- Fought a combined-arms, air-ground breach of Iraqi defenses.
- Employed a homeward-bound Marine expeditionary brigade, fresh from combat in the Gulf, to provide humanitarian assistance and government restoration to the flood-ravaged nation of Bangladesh.
- Maintained 1,200 Marines in the oft-tense Philippines, serving as the security and facilitating force for evacuation of U.S. personnel and dependents after the Mount Pinatubo eruption.
- Provided the expeditionary engineering support to dig Subic Bay and Cubi Point out from under the sands of Pinatubo.

- Employed a Marine expeditionary unit to provide security for humanitarian and settlement assistance to the Kurds in northern Iraq.

In sum, during the peak of operations this year, we had at sea or in the field, for periods of six months or longer, 107,000 of the total 116,000 Marines and Sailors of our operating forces during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. We back-loaded and returned to station, in operationally capable condition, our three MPS squadrons; redeployed every Marine, Sailor, and item of equipment from Saudi Arabia; returned home, got fresh socks, hot chow, and a resupply of ammo, and returned 26,000 of them to sea or on foreign shore, without their dependents, to continue to do what the Nation has Marines to do. It's been a hell of a year!

But today I came to talk to you in more of a naval context than exclusively to focus on the Corps. That's because I am, after all, a naval officer; but it's also because I believe this is, perhaps, the most important moment in the decades of my service in terms of the future of our naval service.

I had an opportunity to speak at the Naval Academy last week as part of the Forrestal Lecture Series. As I'm sure you all recall, Secretary Forrestal became the Secretary of Defense in September 1947 and served until March of 1949. This was a perilous period for the naval service and included intense debates over the implementation of defense unification legislation.

The debates centered on the continued existence of naval aviation and of the Marine Corps as elements of the national defense structure. Both survived, and it's a tribute to James Forrestal that in the almost half centu-

ry since, 80 percent of the over 200 crises involving American naval forces have seen a first call for carriers and/or Marines.

James Forrestal was a man of vision, and it was a privilege to talk to our brigade of young naval leaders of the future in his shadow.

History sometimes repeats itself, and we are again at a period of debate over the size of the armed forces we should retain for the future. Several things are already clear at this point in the debates: Whatever capabilities we retain are going to be smaller, will have to be relevant to the New World Order, need to be as useful as we can make them over a wide spectrum of capabilities, must be trained and ready, and must be affordable under a tight budget.

In some quarters, the criteria I've outlined for you just now are producing pessimism—a doubt that we can "get there from here" and a frustration that we're not going to be able to afford all the programs we believed were necessary a year ago.

My view is different. I believe we are entering a golden age for the utility of naval forces and that we have a golden opportunity to shape our naval structure to accent our usefulness to the Nation.

One of the most enduring and relevant qualities of naval forces is the fact that we have been the most constant of options available to our national leadership. While much of our fame has been won in wars like World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and even the recent Gulf War, our real and enduring value has been in the day-to-day maintenance of peacetime forward deployments, exercises, operations, and presence missions.

Today, at this very moment, while the majority of other forces have returned to home bases from the Persian Gulf, naval forces are away from our bases on world-wide expeditions, protecting our national interests and reinforcing our national policies. For example, one-quarter of all Marines in the operating forces—24,000—are deployed away from their families for 6-month periods in various parts of the world—6,500 aboard amphibious ships alone. In addition, 150 Navy ships are at sea or in foreign ports of call, ships that are exercising, sailing, and waiting in the front line of American power and influence. *This is the unique difference that sets us apart from the other armed forces.*

When a Marine or Sailor grabs his or her lunch pail, kisses a spouse, and goes to work, he or she doesn't come home for dinner for six months! That's how we're different. We're expeditionary. Expeditionary means service overseas—at sea or in the field. It also reflects a state of mind in which the operating forces of the naval service that are not deployed are either coming back from deployment or preparing to be the next out. It is, above all, however, also a capability that has been carefully designed and developed over many years of historic use to be the cornerstone of United States defense.

It should be patently clear to you, as informed citizens, that we are now celebrating a series of political-military victories and events that have all come together to create the strongest possible climate for the continued relevance of naval force capabilities. Our 75-year campaign against Communism and our 45-year Cold War with the Soviets have been won—big time! That doesn't mean there aren't still some bad guys out there; and as the New World Order takes clearer shape, more are going to emerge.

Put simply, I'm not sure anyone in this room today could tell me with any degree of certainty who the bad guys might be in a decade or two hence. Whomever they may be, however, of one thing we should be confident: no one is going to catch us technologically; no one is going to field the quality armed force we have today; and nobody is going to take us on in conventional conflict without preparing to get waxed.

So, we can afford to trim back the capabilities we've built to contend with earlier threats. In doing that, however, the trick will be to trim our arsenal the right way instead of the easy, "everything takes equal hurt" way.

In short, time and conditions have created an environment that once again places our Nation's naval forces—the Navy and the Marine Corps—in the keystone position of our national forward-deployed defense strategy and posture. We are the best capability our great Nation has to maintain a position of influence and leadership in an uncertain and rapidly changing world.

Philosophically, it's critical to distinguish between "capabilities"—the combination of people, systems, and training that enable us to do what's required in a given situation—and pro-

grams or "things." Historically, when the Services face tough fiscal times we tend to focus on "things"—on specific numbers of airplanes, divisions, submarines, or carriers. This approach has tended, in the past, to drive us toward hollow forces that reflected a lot of "things" but which, on balance, were not well-manned or maintained, and thereby, not capable. Also, we have tended to focus on "things," at the expense of people. To do this is to diminish or even lose a critical national resource: the ability to influence the day-to-day events that make up our world. I believe we must guard against the trap of trading "things" that *may* be needed in extreme circumstances for people and capabilities that are needed on a daily basis.

In the Marine Corps, we have chosen to focus on "capabilities"—those specific functions that we can offer for the national military arsenal.

Naturally, we'll need "things" to function with, but we need first to define clearly what it is we need to do and then focus on the things that will provide the capabilities we need to do it with.

With a well-thought-out, convincing position based on capabilities, we can best focus our decisionmakers primarily on what we need to do and then, secondarily, on what things we need to do it with. We Marines have found that the Congress will ensure the "things" will follow if the "capabilities" that are needed can be persuasively articulated and clearly understood.

Once again, I remind you that the principal utility of naval forces in the future, as it has been in the past, is likely to be peacetime engagement and forward-deployed presence missions.

We will remain the forces that contain crises—stop the "little fights," if you will—before they become contingencies, or "big fights." If they do become big fights, we will be the enabling force that holds the line to facilitate our joint contingency forces deploying to fight the major regional contingencies.

Most crises will not involve shooting, but they'll continue to require forces capable of shooting if they have to, and we're also contributors, of course, to the joint family of contingency capabilities.

The majority of our time, however, will be spent doing the kinds of things that Marines and Sailors are doing today—sailing the seas, operating in for-

ward-deployed units, and remaining ready to be employed wherever necessary. Readiness is the stock in trade for all of us in the naval service. It's what we do for a living.

Clearly, we no longer need huge standing armed forces to fight protracted land, sea, and air battles on a global scale. That threat is no longer credible. Likewise, the nuclear threat, under which most of us have served and have spent a lifetime preparing to defend against, is waning significantly.

Our evolving National Military Strategy is full of opportunity for naval forces. Three of its four major pillars are deterrence, forward presence, and crisis response. It's against that backdrop that we Marines have examined ourselves. We started with a pretty basic question: Does the Nation need a Marine Corps?

As you might expect, we determined that, if it didn't have the capabilities our Corps brings, the United States would need to create them. We would need to create them, because a Marine Corps—as part of the naval service—offers the country some truly unique and special capabilities.

Moreover, we need a Marine Corps because the Nation demands one. Americans have become accustomed to a force-in-readiness, comprised of professionals, who deliver consistently across a wide spectrum of conflicts, ranging from humanitarian assistance to full-scale war, anytime they're called.

One often associates the word "Marine" with the ultimate in forcible entry capabilities—the amphibious assault. Well, we certainly can do amphibious assaults, when required. However, as with other types of warfare, it's rare that we have to kick down the door somewhere and forcibly insert thousands of hard-charging United States Marines. Amphibious operations are much broader than just the amphibious assault.

The great majority of the time, as the amphibious element of forward-deployed naval forces, Marines provide the country with the capability to influence the action at the time of its choosing. We are a forward presence, crisis deterrence, containment force that can prevent a difficult situation from becoming a crisis. When that deterrent fails, we provide the "bridge" from light forces to heavy forces.

In other words, the capabilities we bring are those of a light to medium force that can be early—and on many occasions, first—on the scene with

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enough muscle to shape the battlefield and influence the action until a heavier force arrives. Usually, we Marines think of ourselves in that role; but it also applies to the Navy as well. Naval aviation, combining carrier- and land-based Marine expeditionary aviation, is a tremendous enabling force for the sequential buildup of Air Force land-based capabilities.

For years, we Marines have seen ourselves as the most "joint" of all the Armed Services. We operate on the sea with a naval task force, and we operate on the ground or in the air, either independently or with joint/combined forces. In addition, we provide the landward extension of naval campaigns and, as I described earlier, provide a fully integrated combined arms force that bridges all three mediums of our sister Services' capabilities—land, sea, and air—as an enabling force.

But the naval service can't do all these things alone. I've already tipped my hat to the magnificent capabilities that our sister Services offer, and I want to emphasize the genuine need to protect those capabilities and make sure that they remain extant in our national arsenal. The principal roles of the Army and Air Force are to prosecute land and air warfare. There are no finer forces in the world for these roles. The Army has superb "light" forces, rapidly deliverable by air, and they provide our country with the "Sunday punch" it needs in the form of "heavy" mechanized and armored divisions to fight and win sustained campaigns.

At the same time, the Air Force is the clear world leader in stealth technology, in airborne command and control and reconnaissance, and in the ability to conduct a sustained, integrated air campaign. It is also the only Air Force in the world with a truly worldwide aerial strategic mobility capability. Both Services are the major contributors to our joint special operations forces for those precise, sophisticated, special operations requiring a precision military instrument.

However, given the New World Order, most of these forces will be based here, in the United States. We need a strong array of the capabilities these divisions, wings, and special operations forces provide to respond quickly and decisively to appropriate crises and, when crises turn sour and become armed conflict, to provide the majority of the contingency forces we'll deploy to fight them.

But we need naval forces that are "out front" influencing, deterring, and resolving minor crises. If they heat up, those same forces can then support and enable our joint contingency forces to deploy, and can play a substantive part in the fight, as well.

A typical scenario requiring contingency force deployment might call for Army airborne forces, or an amphibious ready group with a Marine expeditionary unit (the "light forces") to be first on the scene, under the air umbrella provided by one or more carrier battle groups.

This might be followed by Marine forces in amphibious platforms, or introduced by maritime pre-positioning ships, that land to provide the "medium capability" until a heavy Army and sustaining Air Force arrive. This type deployment illustrates naval forces in their "enabling" role, providing the transition from light through medium to the heavy, sustained warfighting capabilities should they be needed. The experience in the Gulf War is illustrative of this very type of "layering" and "enabling" action. It is one of the things that naval forces do best.

The ultimate in "enabling" gets me back to my earlier statement that most people focus on Marines as amphibious assault troops—the Nation's "door-openers" available whenever a situation requires it. It is true that a naval task force offers the Nation its principal forcible entry capability that can transition immediately to intense combat from a standing start, and can "enable" heavier forces to arrive and continue the prosecution of combat operations.

If what I've just described suggests to you that perhaps I've just reinvented the wheel, then my point is made. In terms of the need, the New World Order calls for the same capabilities naval forces have historically provided, nothing more, nothing less, nothing changed.

So let me conclude by telling you that I see a bright and optimistic future for the utility of our naval expeditionary forces. We are the right force at the right time. Obviously, our viewpoint is shared by some of you since you have so graciously elected to participate in this superb conference on this very same subject.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to be with you today. Semper Fidelis.

