

REFLECTIONS ON THE CORPS

Enabling America's Global Reach

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

Forward deployment is the key to ensuring America's global reach.

Although Britain has, by force of geographical circumstances, been more amphibious in action than any other power, her performance has been much poorer than her experience. That deficiency is due to her failure to develop her Marines into a special "lock-opening" force of adequate scale. The United States has been wiser in this important respect. The value of such a force is endorsed by the sum of experience through the ages about the value of elite forces in general. Their key importance as lock-openers has been proved repeatedly in the history of warfare, and more than ever in recent times.

—Sir B. H. Liddell-Hart

The end of the Cold War has had a dramatic effect on U.S. national security requirements. The abatement of the Soviet threat has ended decades of American military preoccupation with an East-West, largely continental, struggle. Force structure, procurement strategies, and overseas basing were all focused on the defeat of the armed forces of the Soviet Union and its proxies. Today, the security environment is far less defined; the threats to American interests less clear. Many Old World tensions previously restrained by the Cold War are finding form and release in civil wars, ethnic and religious animosities, and irredentist ambitions. When these disputes, most of them in the world's littorals, threaten American interests, the United States will seek to deter conflict with a visible military presence, a sign of American resolve; and when deterrence fails, the United States will respond. Here, naval forces will be key.

The United States emerged from World War II with a global system of

bases that had served the logistic and deployment needs of the Allied effort in the drive to defeat the Axis. In the wake of the war, as the East-West confrontation grew in intensity, these bases became the framework for a worldwide logistic infrastructure supporting the strategy of containment and underpinning the deployment and forward-basing of troops, ships, and aircraft. While this framework provided the United States a formidable global reach, the end of the Cold War is witnessing the dismantling of much of this overseas infrastructure as American forces, previously stationed abroad, have come home. In 1991 alone, 638 overseas bases were closed, a reduction of 38 percent. Many more closures are planned. Today, and for the foreseeable future, America's overseas reach will come less from forward bases than from forward deployment. In this, naval expeditionary forces will be a major, if not the principal, manifestation and embodiment of American national power.

The most important, indeed, the crucial phase of any response to crisis has always been in the first hours or days. During this critical period, forward-deployed joint forces will seek to resolve or to stabilize the situation at the lowest level of conflict. But if the crisis grows, those same forces will have to assist or "to enable" the introduction of heavier, contingency forces.

If not already on the scene, these enabling forces must be able to fight on arrival to seize the port or airfield lodgments necessary for the throughput of follow-on forces and their supplies. Enabling forces have to be structured with the command and

control, combat, and logistics staying power to buy time for the arrival and assembly of the Nation's CONUS-based forces.

Enabling is not solely a function of strategic agility. For example, some Army units can arrive quickly, but lack the logistic staying power to sustain themselves. Some Air Force units could be on the scene in hours, but are dependent on bases near the crisis area. Navy ships may already be on-station, but lack the ability to project forces ashore. Because of the shrinking overseas infrastructure, enabling forces cannot depend for their success on mercurial host national support or overflight rights. They must be prepared to go where they are required, imposing themselves on an uncooperative or hostile force as necessary. Global reach is much more than just getting there. Global reach is staying there as well.

The Naval Service in general, and the Marine Corps in particular, played a unique and historic role as the Nation's premier enabling forces. During World War II, Marines reduced Japanese strongholds one after another and were followed closely by Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and even other Marines, who completed the work, whether that was final mop-up, base construction, or airfield operations. In Korea, the 1st Marine Division opened the door at

Inchon for the amphibious blow that cut North Korean communications and precipitated the collapse of the Pusan perimeter. In Vietnam, Marines landed as the lead element of the massive American buildup and held the northern flank of the American war effort.

In DESERT SHIELD, Marine maritime prepositioned forces (MPFs) arrived in Saudi Arabia 7 days after National Command Authorities decided to respond to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. The MPF concept, conceived in the early 1980s, was validated during Operation DESERT SHIELD. It provided the introduction of the first credible mechanized forces with their integral combat equipment. Together with Marine aviation, logistic units, and 30 days of sea-based sustainability, MPFs stabilized the situation and enabled the introduction and buildup of the Nation's heavy forces.

Another "classic" enabling operation came in Somalia, a country racked by anarchy and famine; an area possessed of only one suitable deep-draft pier and only one airfield capable of receiving C-141 and C-5 transport aircraft; a country with no electricity, no potable water, and, initially, no in-country aviation fuel. In the opening phases of the operation, Marines landed from amphibious ships

to take possession of the port facility and airfield. Once the area was secure, sea-based sustainment and equipment aboard MPF ships were off-loaded while Marines and other members of the unified task force flew from the United States to linkup with their equipment. Expeditionary Marine aviation command and control elements turned Somalia's single major airport into an all-weather, day-night field, thereby permitting 24-hour operations. In Somalia, Marines both opened the door and stepped through it.

The U.S. military is committed to joint warfare. It makes fiscal as well as warfighting sense. With fewer forces and constrained spending, America will rely on those forces that afford it the maximum in diplomatic and political leverage, and the capability to open the door and hold it open. The forces it retains for this function must be the ones it uses every day. This places naval expeditionary forces squarely at the center of those critical capabilities needed by global power. Sir Basil Liddell-Hart was right—great powers need to be able to project force and influence. If the United States is truly to have a credible global reach, it must be able to control the oceans and to project power from the sea. In this, U.S. naval expeditionary forces will predominate in enabling America's global reach.

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