

The Commandant's Perspective

The United States Marine Corps: Our Nation's Force-in-Readiness for the 21st Century

by Gen Charles C. Krulak



In 1952, the 82d Congress, armed with fresh memories of near disaster in the opening days of the Korean War, engaged in a spirited debate over the readiness posture of the U.S. military. Vowing that the Nation would never again be put in the position we were in during June of 1950, the Congress called upon the Marine Corps to fulfill the following special role.

... American history, recent as well as remote, has fully demonstrated the vital need for the existence of a strong force-in-readiness. Such a force, versatile, fast-moving, and hard-hitting, ... can prevent the growth of potentially large conflagrations by prompt and vigorous action during their incipient stages. The nation's shock troops must be the most ready when the nation is least ready ... to provide a balanced force-in-readiness for a naval campaign and, at the same time, a ground and air striking force ready to suppress or contain international disturbances short of large scale war. ...

For the past 46 years, the Marine Corps has provided that force-in-readiness in both peace and in war. Today, as we stand on the brink of the 21st century, the strategic landscape unfolding before us appears vastly different than it did during the Cold War. The vacuum created by the demise of the Soviet Union has created new challenges for the United States, forcing us once again to analyze and debate our national security requirements.

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U.S. Defense Strategy Reviews

Two comprehensive and far reaching studies concerning future U.S. military requirements were successfully completed in 1997. These efforts, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), and the National Defense Panel (NDP), were chartered to ensure that the United States remains capable of shaping the future security environment, instead of merely reacting after the fact. Significantly, both the QDR and NDP validated the traditional role of the Marines and pointed out that the Corps, as one would expect from the Nation's force-in-readiness, was already developing the capabilities needed to prevail in the next century.

The QDR and NDP both characterize the next century as one of crisis, conflict, and chaos in the littorals brought on by rapid economic growth, increased competition for limited resources, terrorism, technological diffusion, exponential growth in urban populations, nationalism, ethnic and religious strife, and increasing access to modern conventional weaponry and weapons of mass destruction. The Marine Corps is in complete agreement with those assessments and has been actively preparing for just such

an operating environment for some time. As our Nation's force-in readiness, we must be prepared for the dangers inherent in the age of uncertainty that is forecast by these projections.

The QDR faced the difficult challenge of constructing a strategy that could simultaneously *shape* the current security environment, *respond* rapidly to emerging threats, and *prepare* the Department of Defense (DoD) for the long term. The QDR calls for "flexible and multimission capable" forces to respond to the full range of crises, not just the high end of the conflict spectrum. Furthermore, it stresses the need for forces that can address multiple small-scale contingency operations and are able to transition rapidly from one end of the spectrum of conflict to the other. Naval forces are ideally suited for this purpose, based on their flexible, multimission characteristics. Additionally, naval forces require no permission to enter an area of impending crisis. There are no issues of sovereignty involved with the deployment of naval forces, and they can be sustained in the area for extended periods of time. Furthermore, mobile sea-based forces are far less vulnerable than land-based forces.

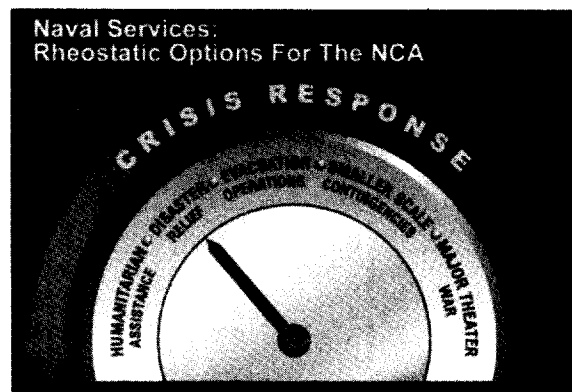
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As the element of naval power that operates along and across the interface between land and sea, Marine forces complete that multidimensional aspect of presence needed by the regional/unified commanders (CinCs) for effective crisis resolution. From various types of military-to-military contact to simply signaling resolve, and from disaster relief to high-intensity combat operations, Marine forces provide the range of capabilities that allows a sea power to compensate effectively for the absence of permanent overseas bases.

The United States has been, and will continue to be, the world's critical guarantor of stability through its forward deployments of credible combat power. At the same time, we cannot assume that we can continue to conduct business as we have in the past. The methods and strategies by which we established presence during the 20th century may no longer suffice in the future. While our allies rely on us to provide military forces to maintain stability and security, they are coming under increasing pressure to reduce the numbers of American land-based personnel and their supporting infrastructure. We have seen this in the Middle East, Panama, the Philippines, Japan, and throughout Europe.

Regional stability requires the United States to maintain a credible presence, but political dynamics may not allow us access to, or the use of, the traditional land bases and facilities to which we have become accustomed. If U.S. military presence is critical to stability, then we must ensure we have the flexibility and the means to project decisive military force across the range of operational situations, with a force whose basing posture is acceptable to our allies. The forces best suited to provide this flexibility and acceptability are sea-based forces.

Why? Traditionally, sea-based forces have been looked on as politically and culturally acceptable because they are viewed as transitory in nature and have a lighter political footprint. Furthermore, such forces are free to deploy rapidly to situations elsewhere in a region and are not formally tied to a single mission. Designed to operate from both land and sea bases, Marine forces, in concert with the Navy, provide a tailorable, on-scene team, that can deter a threat to stability, conduct assistance operations, or participate in a major theater war. In many ways, Navy and Marine air, land, and sea forces can be used like a rheostat for the National Command Authorities (NCA) and CinCs—a combined force potency that can easily be adjusted up or down to meet any mission.



An Operational Concept for the 21st Century

In recognition of this changing security environment, the Navy and Marine Corps revised our strategic direction with the publication of "... From the Sea" in 1992, and "Forward ... From the Sea" in 1994. These two documents frame the Navy-Marine

Corps vision. The Marine Corps will execute this vision using the operational concept, *Operational Maneuver From the Sea* (OMFTS), published in January 1996. The heart of OMFTS is the maneuver of naval expeditionary forces at the operational level of warfare to exploit enemy weakness and deliver a decisive blow. It combines high technology with maneuver warfare and is enabled by the advantages of sea-basing. These forward-looking responses to evolving world events are designed to ensure naval forces maintain superior capabilities in the projection from the sea of decisive power and influence ashore across the spectrum of peace, crisis, and war expected in the century ahead.

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Joint Vision (JV) 2010 was issued in 1996 to provide the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's (CJCS) strategic direction for the Armed Forces to achieve new levels of effectiveness through joint warfighting. The U.S. military's overall strength as a fighting force is ultimately a function of Service competencies, each reflecting distinctive capabilities, cultures, and traditions. Additionally, these core competencies offer a diverse set of options to the NCA and the CinCs. In this regard, the operational themes called for in *JV 2010* are entirely compatible with OMFTS. The operational pillars explicit to *JV 2010* (dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and force protection) are all imbedded within OMFTS. By using the sea as a maneuver space, both dominant maneuver and force protection are enhanced. The use of over-the-horizon sea bases to minimize the logistics buildup ashore during power projection operations also enhances force protection, while relying upon focused logistics to sustain the maneuver force from its secure sea base. Additionally, OMFTS will use weapons with significantly improved range, accuracy, and lethality for precision engagement.

The Corps' Core Competencies

- Expeditionary Readiness
- Combined Arms Operations
- Expeditionary Operations
- Sea-Based Operations
- Forcible Entry From the Sea
- Reserve Integration

Core Capabilities

Articulating what the Marine Corps does to support our National Security Strategy and how we operate is best accomplished by examining our core competencies. With over 222 years of expeditionary experience, including the last 46 as the Nation's legislated force-in-readiness, these six core competencies define the essence of our unique institutional culture and role within the National Military Establishment:

- *Expeditionary Readiness:* This quality stems from an institutional mindset and organization that holds itself ready to respond at once to any worldwide crisis, 365 days a year. This expeditionary mindset implies a Spartan attitude—an expectation and a willingness to endure, in fact a certain pride in enduring, hardship and austere conditions. As an example of this attitude, in most Marine Corps units, embarkation boxes substitute for bookcases, locker boxes, are packed, and our packs are filled and at the ready. In essence—as an organization—we are ready to go at a moment's notice. To Marines, this orientation is characterized by three things. First, it means being ever ready to transition from peace to war without Reserve augmentation and ready to win our Nation's first battles. Second, it means being committed to innovation, continuously anticipating evolving strategic challenges, and preparing to defeat the “opponent after next.” Third, it means being an adaptive force with leadership that is trained to improvise and capable of flourishing under conditions of extreme uncertainty.

- *Combined Arms Operations:* The Nation's premier crisis response force must be capable of acting on short notice and without immediate support from other warfighting forces. While we are fully capable of, and frequently practice, operating as part of a joint force, many times we arrive at the scene of a crisis before the rest of the joint force can arrive. It is for this reason that the Marine Corps requires an organic, balanced combined arms capability. Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs) have trained for more than a half century so that their ground combat, air combat, and combat service support capabilities are cohesively led by a single commander. Because MAGTFs operate as a joint force in microcosm as part of their everyday operations, it allows them to seamlessly integrate into the combined arms nature of joint force operations when required.

- *Expeditionary Operations:* The key to achieving success on foreign soil is the ability to sustain combat and noncombat operations without host nation assistance. This ability to rapidly project force requires a special mindset, one that is continuously prepared for immediate deployment into an austere environment. Marine forces arrive at the scene of a crisis with what they need to get the job done. Any resources available from the host nation are considered a luxury. This mindset drives the design, development, and acquisition of everything from individual equipment to expeditionary airfields and hospitals—of everything necessary to accomplish a wide variety of missions.

- *Sea-Based Operations:* Unlike any military force in the world, the naval character of the Navy-Marine Corps Team singularly gives our Nation an enduring means to shape and influence global events. Sea-based operations provide extraordinary strategic reach to shape events and provide units with a large measure of inherent force protection. A highly ready, combined arms MAGTF, operating from mobile sea bases provides the NCA with politically unencumbered access to global trouble spots.

- *Forcible Entry From the Sea:* Ultimately, a global superpower must possess the ability for unilateral action. A key requirement is the capability to project power ashore in the face of armed opposition. In the past, forcible entry from the sea was defined by amphibious assaults that focused on establishing lodgments on the beach and then building up combat power for subsequent operations. Forcible entry is now defined as the uninterrupted movement of forces from ships located far over the horizon directly to decisive objectives, whenever and wherever we desire.

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- *Reserve Integration:* Although a force-in-readiness cannot pause to call up its Reserves during an emerging crisis, Marine Reserves have continuously met the challenge of quickly integrating into the MAGTF team. As a part of the Total Marine Force, our Reserves have also recently assisted and augmented our forward presence around the globe. Marine Reserves routinely practice carefully crafted Reserve integration plans to augment or reinforce crisis response missions and add vital combat power, especially at the high end of the conflict spectrum. With common training, standard equipment, and identical combat readiness criteria, Marine Reserves represent a highly professional force multiplier for the NCA to call upon.

Navy and Marine forces provide self-contained and self-sustained air, land, and sea forces capable of operating from a protected sea base. We are structured to meet a range of contingencies including presence, humanitarian operations, evacuation of noncombatants, peacekeeping, and warfighting. We are compact enough to respond rapidly and yet heavy enough to get the job done. Most important in this increasingly uncertain world, the combined Navy-Marine team provides the NCA with enormous flexibility in their pursuit of national security interests.

First to Fight in the 21st Century

The words from the 82d Congress remain as sound and relevant today, as they did in 1952. The Marine Corps has always had a global outlook that transcended any particular scenario or threat. Instead, we have steadfastly focused on our statutory role—to serve as the Nation’s premier crisis response force. Our role is to be prepared to be the first on the scene, first to fight, first to quell disturbances, and first to help, both in the United States and abroad. Our experience has taught us that the only common denominator for the types of missions expected of a force-in-readiness is an immutable commitment to be ready for worldwide commitment 365 days a year. Anything less is inconsistent with our ethos, our core capabilities, and the expectations of the American people. The Marine Corps has not failed them in the past—and it will not fail them in the future. The United States Marine Corps is, and will remain, our Nation’s premier force-in-readiness.

