Resourceful Force Design

Building the best affordable force

by Gen James F. Amos

The rapidly evolving events of our recent past indicate a new constant. Competition for resources, natural disasters, social unrest, cyber-attacks, violent extremism, regional conflict, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are aspects of what has been labeled the "new normal." Intelligence estimates point out that more than half of the world's population lives in fragile states, vulnerable to ruinous economic, ideological, and environmental stresses. In many regions, ever-present local instability will erupt into crises, prompting calls for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations or, as necessary, more muscular responses. For the United States, the challenges of the recent past are harbingers of the foreseeable future.

The requirement for a ready Navy-Marine Corps Team, forward deployed and possessing the ability to respond to crises on a moment's notice, will not change for the foreseeable future, regardless of economic conditions or budget pressures such as we see today. Since the early 1990s, America has significantly reduced its permanent foreign basing and forward presence ashore. This trend is not likely to change anytime soon in the face of the Government's budget realities. In spite of force reductions, there remains an enduring requirement to maintain credible forward presence capabilities. In the past, America has chosen to depend heavily on the Marine Corps to provide a lean, flexible, and economical expeditionary force, operating forward, at sea where possible, and in close proximity to potential trouble spots. We must be prudent as we further draw down our forces so that those that remain will be flexible, responsive, and fiscally sound, and will possess the utility to address a wide range of crisis situations.

>Gen Amos is the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

This spring, with sequestration looming and additional force structure cuts a near-certain consequence, I wanted to ensure that the Marine Corps remained ready to address

Gen James F. Amos. *(Official HQMC photo.)*

emerging challenges while preserving our "middleweight force" capability. In essence, "preserving our 'middleweight force' capability" means maintaining the capability to operate in a "lane" that passes through air, land, sea, and cyber domains while operating adeptly and freely throughout the spectrum of threats, whether they are conventional, hybrid, irregular, or in the uncertain areas where they overlap. The Marine Corps must remain optimized for rapid deployment, versatile employment, and initial self-sustainment via MAGTFs. We require a force structure that is able to meet the harsh demands of the near and distant future—including possible combat—in spite of severe near-term resource constraints. With this in mind, we created a working group that focused solely on designing this force. The group, led by MajGen Frank McKenzie, would have a difficult task, but, in the end, its work would prove fruitful as it resulted in a fiscally grounded, credible, effective fighting force that ultimately supports the President's National Security Strategy.

Changing Methodology for an Emerging Environment

To fully understand the underpinnings of our future force structure design, it is important to first understand the various force structure reviews that began the process of establishing a post–Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) Marine Corps. Anticipating both reduced demand for forces and reduced funding, in the fall of 2010, we convened the Force Structure Review Group (FSRG). Conducting a first-principles review of the force, the FSRG sought to find ways to meet our postconflict military responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner. The goal of that effort was to provide the most ready, capable, and fiscally sound Marine Corps the Nation could afford. The result of that review was a derived force of 186,800 (186.8K) Active Component Marines based on the demands of the modern operating environment, steady-state cri-

sis-response requirements, joint contributions, a stabilizing forward presence, and responsiveness to major operations plans.

This force structure developed by the FSRG was strategically sound, and I am confident it is still the force best suited for the emerging security environment. However, following the signing of the Budget Control Act (BCA) in August 2011, it was clear that the Department of Defense would be required to accept additional risk in many areas and that a further reduction in total force structure would be directed. Future year defense budget projections resulted in a Marine Corps Active Component end strength reduction down to 182.1K and also imposed significant cuts to modernization, operations, and maintenance accounts.

The Corps will be rebalanced in order to optimize the force. *(Photo by 2dLt Danielle Dixon.)*

No longer planning to be sized for enduring stabilization missions after 2014, we designed and initiated a controlled reduction in end strength from 202K to 182.1K, to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2016. In 2012 I directed an additional effort to rebalance and optimize the force within the 182.1K end strength. This effort, called the Force Optimization Review Group, created proposed force structure realignments to meet the current and most likely demands of the emerging security environment. This force would be optimized to meet the goals of strategy, provide options in crisis, and fight effectively in major contingencies. Though analytically defendable and reasonable, by the spring of 2013 it became apparent that, as overall defense funding would become even further limited by sequestration, the ability to preserve a ready force at even the reduced end strength of 182.1K would be unlikely.

Active, Reserve, and civilian Marines have experienced firsthand how these new budget circumstances are having a significant impact on the way we organize, train, equip, and fight as an expeditionary force. Considering our desired global security posture and the emerging nature of the threats, the continued utility and relevance of maritime forces demanded a comprehensive review of our capabilities and capacities as a naval Service. We had to ensure force options that optimized the strategic and warfighting effectiveness of our Corps within a range of reduced resourcing levels. Given the knowledge provided by the previous two studies, I wanted to conduct a review that would ultimately pave the way for our participation in strategic and management reviews with a clear understanding of the capabilities, capacities, and risks associated with further reducing our end strength.

In the end, this study would propose a range of scalable, fiscally realistic, and strategically relevant force structures. . . .

Ultimately I sought to make sure that force structure cuts bound by a declining budget did not alter the fundamental character of our Corps. We had to remain a ready expeditionary force that continued to provide an essential component for our Nation's security. The study also had to protect the statutory roles, missions, and organizations of the Marine Corps. Per our tradition, we had to design a force that was ready and optimized for the most likely challenges our Nation would face in the post-OIF/OEF environment. Underpinning this effort was the idea of a force design that could maintain a forward presence, be ready to respond rapidly to crisis, and be scalable to larger force interventions as situations required. Our eyes were wide open, as we realized any reduction below the 182.1K level, combined with our mandate to preserve a ready expeditionary force, would likely require an acceptance of increased risk in some operations plans as well as "out-of-the-blue" contingencies.

We could not afford to take a linear view of this problem—one dimensional reductions of the planned force (182.1K) would not work. Instead, this force redesign had to be informed for the expected demands of the emerging security environment while meeting the goals articulated in strategic guidance. In the end, this study would propose a range of scalable, fiscally realistic, and strategically relevant force structures, to be subjected to both internal and external risk analysis. In doing so we had to take great care to ensure that both the strategic landscape and emerging demands were properly balanced

We must retain amphibious structure and competencies. *(Photo by LCpl Coleman.)*

against force design risks. At the end of the day we required our design group to create a force that was bound by the following guiding principles: It needed to be modernized, ready, and biased for action; integrated into the joint force structure; genuinely expeditionary; and right-sized while retaining our core combined arms and amphibious structure and competencies.

How did we do this? First, the group looked at the capabilities and capacities of the Marine Corps as a series of building blocks that cumulatively create the fully capable force at 182.1K. As the force expanded or contracted it would do so through a set of capability "shells"—depending on direction, support of core missions would incur less (or more) risk. Important during development of these shells would be their retention of the fundamental character of the force and primary missions within a specific capacity range. To maintain this characteristic, the force had to be looked at holistically as a system of MAGTFs that could be quickly sized and employed. This force design would optimize the execution of primary mission sets by end strength capacity. Simply applying a large percentage cut across the board to existing structure would only serve to render that force less effective in its organization, training, and employment.

Bounding this effort was the consideration of force design elements within a range of reduced end strengths. Coincidentally, the range the group reviewed fell within the 150K to 175K band as outlined by the Secretary of Defense's brief to the Congress on the recently completed Strategic Choices and Management Review. The "prime force," as the range was labeled within the group, retains the ability to conduct forward presence and crisis response with risk to

What would drive our end state?

major contingency operations (MCOs). In effect, capability shells were added to the baseline force in carefully considered and prioritized increments to reduce risk in the execution of the primary missions of this force. This method gave us the flexibility we needed to ensure reversibility, retaining the ability to "add back" capacity via capability shells in a period of increased demand and resources. This process affords us an ability to identify a prioritized sequence of force cuts below the 182.1K force, should these become necessary, adequately balancing risks with each reduction.

A New Force Design

What would drive our end state? We began with the task of realistically framing the environment. Looking at what Marines are doing today and what they would most likely face in the future was our starting point. Today, Marines are still operating with the international coalition in Afghanistan, providing crisis response in the Middle East, providing a stabilizing presence in Africa and the Pacific, and standing ready to respond to HA/DR efforts around the globe. Today's Marines also contribute to special operations and cyber warfare. We can foresee a strong demand for these capabilities in the future operating environment. The bottom line is this: We ask as much of our Marines today than at any point in our history, and this looks to be an enduring trend that will likely frame our future operating environment.

Crises originating from violent extremism, battles for influence, disruptive societal transitions, natural disasters, extremist ideologies, and manipulative politics will define our future environment. Criminal enterprises will likely wield combat power formerly only associated with states. Separatism, extremism, and intolerance will continue to lead to terrorism and large-scale violence. Further, we will likely see new science place modern weapons into the hands of developing states and nonstate actors while the proliferation of advanced conventional weapons challenges our ability to project power or gain access. In this uncertainty, it will be the forward influence, strategic mobility, power projection, and the timely response capabilities Marines are known for that form the base of attributes that must endure in our future force. We must maintain a force robust enough to balance an increasing focus on Asia-Pacific with a sustainable emphasis on the Middle East and a continued effort to counter violent extremists operating across multiple regions.

What force design optimizes this need, balances it with risk, and is responsive to fiscal concerns? It is impor-

tant to understand that the primary driver, as mentioned earlier, behind the development of this force strength initiative was not national strategy—that force size is an Active Marine Corps at 186.8K. The BCA and the impact of sequestration-like budgets have pushed us down to 182.1K and likely below. Having said that, outside analysis, combined with the significant research effort of our working group, concluded the force structure that most adequately answered the above question is a force of approximately 174K Active Component Marines.[1] Our analysis determined that this force provides America the best proportion of attributes required of steady-state operations, supporting structures, crisis response, and limited MCOs, while preserving the institutional health and readiness of our Corps. The 174K force allows the Marine Corps to remain forward deployed and ready for crisis, whereas further significant reductions, as our research clearly indicates, would incur heightened—and in some cases, prohibitive—risk.

What are the characteristics of this force? At the basic level, the 174K force is one that focuses on the deployment and initial employment of MEBs. We do not discount the primacy of the MEFs utilized by prior structures, but instead have reinvigorated the midsized MAGTF. MEFs, although remaining within the active force structure, would no longer be mirror-imaged. MEBs would now be operationalized. This construct facilitates rapid global employment while answering the demand signal of combatant commands and an emerging security environment. The 174K force was built with the MAGTF as its base, and it can scale from the special purpose MAGTF–crisis response (SPMAGTF-CR) level to MEF level while remaining an integral piece of the joint force. While early studies focused on maintaining a 1:3 deployment-to-dwell ratio for most units, this smaller force can maintain a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio, but provides little to no flexibility in this regard when looking at long-term MCOs or sustained crisis response. It can sustain the unit deployment program effort and exercises in the Pacific while continuing to capitalize on opportunities such as SPMAGTFs, the Black Sea Response Force, Rotational Force Darwin, and Guam. Finally, the 174K force will allow the Marine Corps to continue to meet its steady-state presence and deterrence requirements around the globe, realizing an elevated risk within the area of MCOs.

What Has Changed From Today's Force?

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Active Component end strength of the Marine Corps grew from 172.6K to 202K Marines to meet the demands of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This wartime surge in capacity has already begun its decline, and as fiscal pressures, the Quadrennial Defense Review analysis, and a variety of other things challenge our ultimate end strength, the Marine Corps must remain focused on a force structure that maintains a forward, ready, and engaged presence around the world. These traits allow our Nation to maintain its awareness, deter aggression, and address threats as they arise. This is our "bread and butter," and as America's 9–1–1 force, we had to make sacrifices in certain areas in order to remain forward deployed and ready to execute crisis response. This was critical to the design of the force structure and determining our laydown.

To date, we have managed the drawdown mostly through routine attrition and early-out incentives. Taking this approach has allowed the Marine Corps to reduce end strength gradually, by approximately 5K personnel a year. Our plan affords the Marine Corps an additional year to reach 174K as we target fiscal year 2017 to reach this goal. More importantly, it avoids draconian cuts and will allow us to hit the new personnel target without having to force Marines out before their enlistment contracts expire. Having said that, some communities will be affected differently, as preservation of critical capabilities is a must in this new force construct. As such, we took great care not to cut into the Supporting Establishment structure or the training commands, as these will be necessary to support the current readiness of the fleet with proper operational facilities and training, as well as surging the force should it be necessary in the future. These elements are in addition to our fenced forces (Marine Forces Cyber Command, Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Chemical Biological Incident Response Force, Marine Barracks Washington, DC (8th & I), HMX–1, Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group, Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group, Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One, Wounded Warrior Regiment, and so on). We made an

The Marine Corps will focus on structure that remains engaged around the world. *(Photo by PFC Jose A. Mendez, Jr.)*

Aviation will also be impacted. *(Photo by Cpl Manuel A. Estrada.)*

informed decision that the majority of the cuts would come from the largest communities: infantry battalions, aviation squadrons, and artillery batteries.

To this end and as we broadly looked across the MAGTF construct, cuts were made to each element in ways that optimized our end strength with our desired force character. The loss of a MEF headquarters and a 20 percent reduction to all headquarters above the MEF level were probably the most dramatic changes with regard to high-level vertical cuts, leaving the majority of the reshaping effort below the MEF level. Reductions in capacity weren't the only changes during this effort, as in some cases we would add capability to ensure characteristics of being forward deployed and ready were not compromised. As such, this redesign would create two new standing forward-based, colonel-commanded SPMAGTFs to provide a persistent forward presence and crisis response capability to be in place by 2017. In the end, the force structure we know today will be dramatically different than the Marine Corps at 174K, with the majority of the vertical cuts occurring as we downsize to 182.1K. Having said that, the ground combat element will be reduced by 1 regimental headquarters, 8 battalions (6 infantry and 2 artillery) and 23 companies/batteries (reconnaissance, light armored vehicle, and tank). The air combat element will lose 3 wing support groups and 13 squadrons (7 tactical air, 5 tilt-rotor/helicopter, and 1 support). The logistics combat element will be reduced by approximately 3.3K Marines, which includes an extensive reorganization and the elimination of 1 battalion.

What are changes that occur as the force goes from 182.1K to 174K? To begin with we eliminated one MEF headquarters. The II MEF headquarters at Camp Lejeune will be absorbed by Marine Corps Forces Command in Norfolk, VA, but II MEF's division and logistics group will remain at Camp Lejeune and the wing stays at Cherry Point. The 2d MEB will reorganize to become a more robust "stand-alone" headquarters element. The end product will be a self-sustaining MEB that can deploy quickly and without drawing headquarters staff from the MEF. It would be able to support a MEU if the need arose, function as a joint task force headquarters, or conduct large-scale HA/DR operations. Additionally, east coast forces would continue to be an integral part of any MCOs in support of either I MEF or III MEF. At the end of the day, 2d MarDiv retains its title 10 responsibilities but loses 1 infantry battalion, 2 AAV companies, 2 artillery batteries, and 2 tank companies. The 2d MAW will lose 1 light attack helicopter squadron (HMLA) and 1 Marine wing support squadron. Last, with regard to specific personnel reductions within II MEF, numbers would go down to approximately 38,157 in the 174K force as compared to 42,772 personnel at 182.1K.

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Unlike the major changes on the east coast, the focus of effort for continental United States Marine forces and thus less capacity shifts are those based on the west coast. In this force structure, I MEF will retain the global MCO command and control capability and approximately 96 percent of its planned 182.1K manning, dropping to approximately 45,278 personnel at 174K, compared to 47,086 personnel at 182.1K. Additionally, the 1st MEB command element will remain untouched and, unlike 2d MEB, will remain embedded within its MEF headquarters. The 1st MarDiv headquarters will remain intact with the division absorbing cuts that consist of 1 infantry battalion, 1 high-mobility artillery rocket system battery, and 2 cannon batteries. The remainder of I MEF remains at the planned 182.1K level.

Finally, the area least affected by the new force design is III MEF. As the strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region is in full swing, it only made sense to maintain III MEF as close as possible to its 182.1K form. Although the 174K force sees a reduction of approximately 8.1K Marines, the reduction in III MEF forces is relatively low (approximately 353) compared to the rest of the force—no units were cut, due to efficiencies gained through restructure. Additionally, III MEF will maintain an MCO capability but will be regionally focused, the MEU to MEF

relationship remains the same, and unit deployment program rotations will be restored to pre-OIF/OEF levels.

Although there are many postulated changes contained within our new force structure design, imperative will be the maintenance of consistent investment in our highest-priority programs. By doing so we are reducing some risk through significant capability improvements, such as the adoption of the F–35B Joint Strike Fighter, the MV–22 Osprey, and the Amphibious Combat Vehicle. These systems are crucial to our ability to project power and win access with a reduced future force structure. These platforms represent attributes our future force must retain, even as austerity dominates our outlook, as they ultimately provide Marines needed critical capabilities and a wide range of options in lieu of significantly reduced capacity.

Conclusion

The world remains a dangerous place. Today we see crises in Egypt, Libya, and Syria, but we cannot predict their ultimate outcomes. We do know, however, that terrorist organizations will continue to fester in areas of the world ripe for harboring illicit and destabilizing actors. Despite the BCA and sequestration, history teaches us that we must maintain a ready force capable of responding to crisis anywhere and on a moment's notice. We only need to look back to the end of the Cold War and the period leading up to 11 September 2001 to highlight this point.

We now face similar circumstances as we look to tomorrow. As was the case in the past, our manpower and investments have fluctuated with the onset and conclusion of our generation's wars. We understand that this is a time of change for our military. As sequestration threatens to further reduce budgets, it must be clear that this year's planned restructuring of our force was not done due to a strategic imperative, but rather as a measure to ensure we were ready to deal with the impending budget changes that loomed. Our working group determined an end strength of 174K was the best we could do in addressing the operational requirements of steady-state deployments, crisis response, and potential MCOs, while preserving the institutional health and readiness of our Corps. This proposed 174K force structure is far from ideal. This force allows us to achieve an acceptable level of home-station readiness while maintaining forward presence and crisis response forces as part of the Navy-Marine Corps Team. Further reductions below this end strength will incur greatly increased, and—in some cases, prohibitive—risk to the National Security Strategy. For the foreseeable future, there remains a heightened requirement for a very capable crisis response force that can deploy quickly, provide a variety of options, and create decision space for our leadership. The Marine Corps is, and will continue to be, the answer to this call. Our force structure must possess the capability and capacity to support our reply. Marines will continue to be America's force of first resort—an enduring mindset at the core of who we are and what we do!

Note

1. Supporting studies and analysis were conducted by Center for Naval Analysis, Systems Planning and Analysis, and Marine Forces Command (MarForCom). Center for Naval Analysis conducted a general risk assessment; assessed the Commandant's guiding principles; analyzed the MEB and the global response force; looked at lessons learned from previous attempts to MEB the Marine Corps; looked at the size of the Supporting Establishment; looked at historical uses of MEUs, MEBs and MEFs; and analyzed alternative lift constructs and Navy dependencies and force impacts of naval decisions. Systems Planning and Analysis evaluation consisted of a detailed look at Reserve employment risk; risk from future challenges; blue-in-support-of-green issues; risk to training for the prime force; risk to equipping the prime force; risk to recruiting and retention of the prime force; and reversibility. MarForCom looked only at MarForCom/II MEF consolidation.

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