STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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WHY THE UNITED STATES STILL NEEDS THE MARINE CORPS

BY

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Why The United States Still Needs The Marine Corps

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ABSTRACT

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In a time of dwindling resources, does the United States Marine Corps (USMC) still play a valid role in the strategic defense of the United States, or are there efficiencies to be gained by incorporating their roles and missions into the Army and other services without sacrificing the current level of combat support to the worldwide Commanders in Chief (CINCs)? A variety of recent articles and studies support the continued existence of the USMC, unfortunately, few provide much explanation of what the USMC does for the United States or discussion as to why we still need it.

The purpose of this paper is to explain, in layman's terms, what unique capabilities the Corps provides towards our strategic defense, and why the United States still needs the USMC. To fully understand the contribution of the USMC to the national security strategy, the paper begins with a brief historical background of the Corps to include the evolution of the roles and missions. From this starting point, a study of their organizational structure and doctrine explains what unique warfighting capabilities the USMC provides to the worldwide CINCs.

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Introduction

In a time of dwindling resources, does the United States Marine Corps (USMC) still play a valid role in the strategic defense of the United States, or are there efficiencies to be gained by incorporating their roles and missions into the Army and other services without sacrificing the current level of combat support to the worldwide Commanders in Chief (CINCs)? A variety of recent articles and studies support the continued existence of the USMC, unfortunately, few provide much explanation of what the USMC does for the United States or discussion as to why we still need it. The purpose of this paper is to explain, in layman's terms, what unique capabilities the Corps provides towards our strategic defense, and why the United States still needs the USMC.

To fully understand the contribution of the USMC to the national security strategy, it is important to have a basic historical background of the Corps to include the evolution of the roles and missions. From this starting point, a study of their organizational structure and doctrine leads to an understanding of what unique warfighting capabilities the USMC provides to the worldwide CINCs.

Historical Background

Why are Marines "a little paranoid?" Why is the Corps so sensitive about being "taken out" by the other services? Since their establishment on 10 November 1775, when the Continental Congress authorized two battalions of American Marines to be raised, there have been numerous attempts to dissolve the USMC. The Corps came dangerously close to extinction

at the hands of such notable leaders as General George Washington, President Andrew Jackson, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General George C. Marshall, President Harry S. Truman, and Major General Leonard Wood, to name just a few.[1] In almost every instance, the discussion involved duplication of missions with the other services, the desire to redistribute USMC assets, and the favorite arguments of saving money and reducing personnel. During periods when the nation has drawn down its military structure, the drastic reduction or total elimination of the USMC has been a topic of discussion.

Roles and Missions

In July of 1798, Congress defined the roles and missions of the Marines as " keep discipline aboard ship; lead boarding parties and amphibious landings; fight with muskets in short-range naval battles, and, if the captain wished, work some of the ship's long guns. They would also man coastal installations and forts, or any other duty ashore, as the President, at his discretion, shall direct."[2] Although world geopolitics and the strategic environment have adapted the 1798 roles over the years, three themes have remained constant: "Association with the fleet to meet the nation's worldwide needs for projection of force in peace or war; readiness for expeditionary service; and reliable performance."[3]

The National Security Act of 1947, the statutory basis for combatant functions assigned to the military services, as amended by Title 10 of the U.S. Code, lists the Marine Corps composition and functions as (summarized):

-The USMC, within the Department of the Navy, shall be so organized as to include not less than three combat divisions and three aircraft

wings, and such other land combat, aviation, and other services as may be organic therein.

-The USMC shall be trained, organized, and equipped to provide combined arms Fleet Marine Forces with supporting air components to seize or defend advanced naval bases and conduct land operations as essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.

-The Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on Navy vessels, security of naval bases, and other duties as the President may direct. These duties may not detract from operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized.

-The Marine Corps shall develop tactics, techniques, and equipment used by landing forces in amphibious operations in coordination with the Army and the Air Force.

Another very key provision of the law relates to the status of the Marine Corps as a separate service. The Corps falls under the direct oversight of the Secretary of the Navy, as does the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), but as a separate and equal service. As such, the Commandant of the Marine Corps advises the Secretary of the Navy on all Marine Corps matters and is a permanent and independent member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The working relationship between the CNO and Commandant, however, remains extremely close by nature of their missions. Marine forces assigned to the operating forces of the Navy are subject to the command of the CNO, and Navy forces similarly assigned are under the command of the Commandant.[4] This inherent "joint" relationship is key to the Marine structure and doctrine.

The most recent reaffirmation of the USMC role in the strategic defense of the United States comes from the 1995 Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (CORM). The report stated that "Army and Marine Corps capabilities are complementary, not redundant." The Commission further encouraged sceptics to forget the argument that the USMC is attempting to become a second land army and accept the, "Army for sustained land operations and the Marine Corps as the landward extension of naval force."[5] The Commission revalidated the mission of the United States Marine Corps for now, but how does the Corps fit into the joint battle?

As core competencies of Marines, CORM would include "amphibious operations, over-the-beach forced entry operations, and maritime prepositioning."[6] These competencies provide the focus which has tailored the USMC for maritime operations. Inherent also in these competencies is the need for specialized equipment, organizational structures, and doctrinal methods of organizing combat forces which are unique to the Corps.

Organization of the Marine Corps

The Marine Corps is divided into three main components under the Commandant: U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters, Operating Forces, and Supporting Establishment as shown in figure 1.[7] The essence of the Corps falls under the Operating Forces in the Fleet Marine Forces. In very simplistic terms, there are two Fleet Marine Forces (FMF), known as Marine Forces Atlantic and Marine Forces Pacific. An FMF consists of land, air, and service support elements which are under the operational control of the CINC. The FMF commander has a given number of Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) command elements. The divisions,

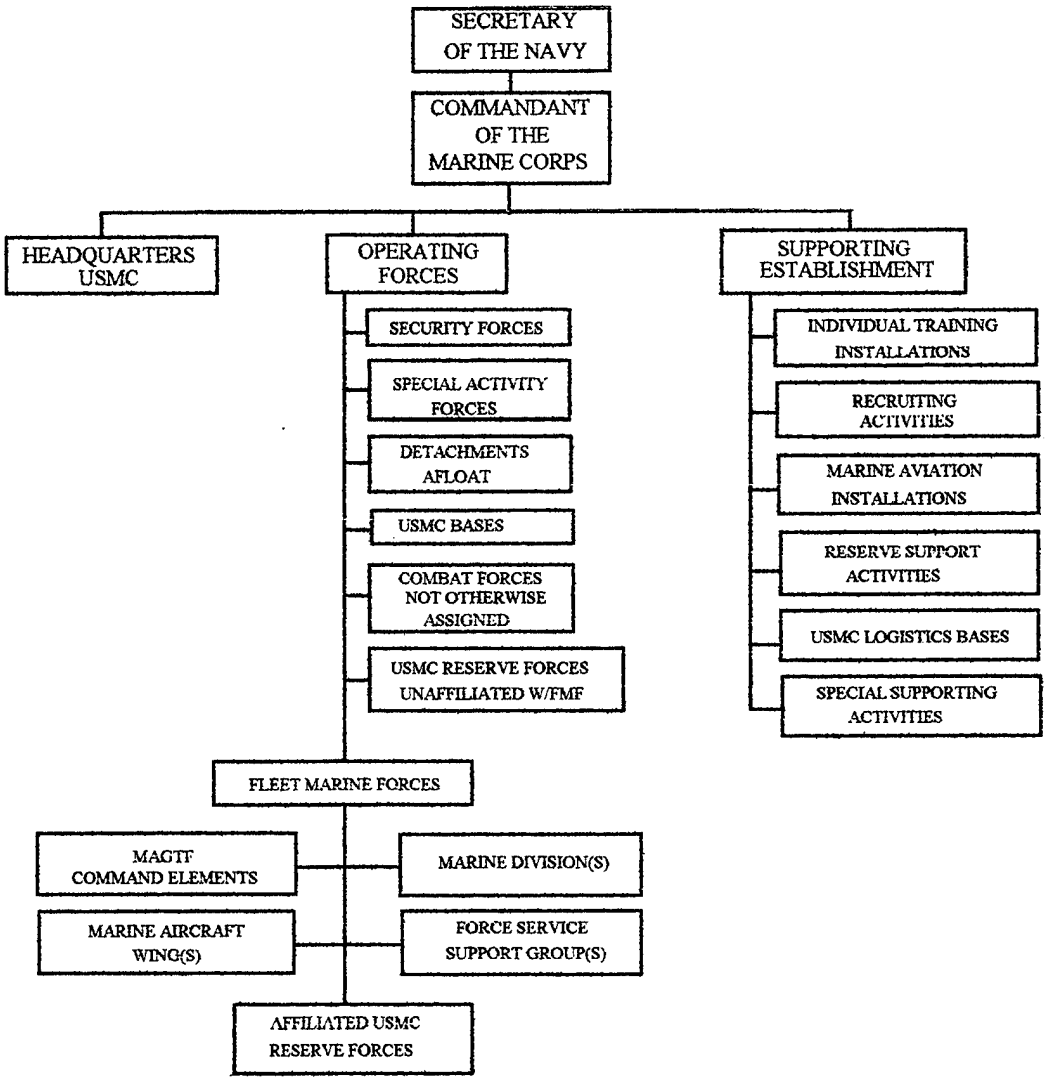

Figure 1. Organization of the Marine Corps

aircraft wings, and support groups are further organized by the FMF under MAGTF commanders into combined arms, combat organizations ranging in size from a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) whose normal ground combat element (GCE) would be a reinforced battalion, plus requisite aviation and combat service support (CSS), to a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) whose notional GCE would be a Marine division, and would include a Marine Aircraft Wing and CSS element in the form of a Force Service Support Group. The MAGTF, regardless of size, is

the essence of Marine combat organization and employment, and requires more detailed examination. To understand the MAGTF is to understand the unique characteristics of the Corps, and how the Corps accomplishes its roles and missions.

The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF)

The MAGTF Concept

The USMC organizes and trains for combat far differently than the other services. The combined arms methodology inherent in the Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) provides a command element (CE), a ground combat element (GCE), an aviation combat element (ACE) and a combat service support element (CSSE) which is tailored to the mission, has trained together and is self sustaining. The one factor of paramount importance in defining the size and mixture of forces in a MAGTF is the mission! Regardless of current organization, standard operating procedures, or geographic location, mission analysis is the key to determining the size and composition of the force. It is not assumed up front that a MAGTF will be built around the ground combat element. If mission analysis dictates an "air heavy" force, then the aviation combat element, of whatever size, becomes the dominant factor to be supported by the proper mix of ground and support elements.

Once the mission is defined and analyzed, an appropriate MAGTF is formed which will, by doctrine, be a combined arms force consisting of a command element, a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, and a combat service support element which is capable of supporting the entire MAGTF. "Regardless of size, all MAGTFs have the following

capabilities:

-Enter and exit a battle area at night.

-Operate under adverse weather conditions.

-Operate from over-the-horizon, without electronic emissions, by surface or air.

-Locate and fix the enemy.

-Engage, kill, or capture the enemy in rural or urban setting.

-Operate in hostile nuclear, biological, and chemical environments.

-Plan and commence execution within 6 hours of receipt of the warning order.

-Provide sea based sustainment."[8]

Another key principle in USMC organization and training is that all MAGTFs are considered and organized as "expeditionary forces." Units not only plan to deploy, but they do so on a regular basis with all equipment, personnel, and sustainability assets combat loaded. At any given time, approximately 25% of the operational forces are forward deployed. The value of these expeditionary forces is further enhanced by the MAGTF special operations training program. "The Marine Corps has instituted a special operations capable training program to optimize the inherent capability of our MAGTFs to conduct selected maritime special operations."[9] This includes special training, equipping and certification by higher headquarters prior to forward deployment.

The Basic MAGTF Elements

As already mentioned, every MAGTF, regardless of size, is composed of four basic elements: the command element (CE), the ground combat element (GCE), the aviation combat element (ACE), and the combat service support element (CSSE). The CE provides all command

and control for the planning and execution of assigned operations. It is also designed to facilitate the sequencing/reinforcement by additional MAGTFs or MAGTF elements as required. The CE consists of the commander, his staff, and elements of a surveillance, reconnaissance, and intelligence group (SRIG).

The GCE consists of an infantry unit from platoon size to one or more divisions, ranging numerically in size from roughly 40 to 20,000 Marines. The GCE has its own combat support units and organic combat service support units.

The ACE primarily conducts air operations and provides aviation support to the GCE and the CSSE. It is composed of aviation units, including its own combat support and combat service support elements, and, like the GCE, varies greatly in size from a composite squadron up to multiple Marine Air Wings. The integration of air-ground combat operations is a primary mission and is coordinated between the CE, GCE, ACE, and the CSSE through the Marine air command and control system (MACCS).

Finally, the combat service support element (CSSE) provides combat service support functions to the MAGTF. The CSSE complements the internal support capabilities of the other elements and can be composed of "supply, landing support, maintenance, transportation, general engineering, health services, and services (disbursing, postal, exchange services, information systems, legal, security support, civil affairs support, and graves registration)."[10]

In reference to the Title 10 legal requirement for the USMC to provide Fleet Marine Forces of combined arms, it is the MAGTF that provides the proper mix, size of force and command element for all operations.

The MAGTF Size

MAGTFs are formed in a variety of sizes. The Corps regularly practices the cross attachment of Marine aviation, armor, infantry, artillery, engineer, and service support for exercises and deployments. A total MAGTF can number from fewer than 100 Marines to over 100,000. The three basic sizes of MAGTF are the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), the Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD) or MEF (FWD), and the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). As to the exact size selected, again, that is determined by mission analysis. FMFM 1-2 lists eleven considerations for deriving a MAGTF troop list. Considerations include mission, size of the operational area, mission duration, resupply/reinforcement, and political considerations.[11] In looking at the sizes, capabilities, and employment considerations, it is important to remember that a MAGTF of any size is not a permanent organization. MAGTFs are combined arms teams which are task organized for specific missions.

The largest MAGTF, the MEF, is normally commanded by a lieutenant general and ranges in size from 25,000 to 80,000 Marines. The MEF is built from one or more Marine Divisions (MarDivs) and Marine Air Wings (MAWs) and a Force Service Support Group (FSSG). The MEF is the most capable of the MAGTFs and is normally deployed with supplies for 60 days. A typical MEF will consist of a complete CE, a GCE with three infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, a tank battalion, a light armor infantry battalion, and a battalion each of assault amphibian, combat engineer and reconnaissance capability, an ACE with all necessary command and control elements, support elements and aerial refueling assets, and a CSSE with maintenance, engineer, supply, transportation, landing support, medical and dental battalions; capable of providing all combat service support for 60 days. With some augmentation, the MEF

headquarters is readily capable of becoming a complete JTF headquarters.

The MEF (FWD) MAGTF is commanded by a major general or brigadier general and typically runs between 12,000 and 17,000 Marines in size. Using the MAGTF "building block" philosophy, the MEF (FWD) is approximately one third the size and capability of a MEF. Deploying with supplies for 30 days, the GCE, ACE, and CSSE each come closer to resembling an Army brigade size element. For example, the GCE will normally have a regimental size ground force and the ACE will be a Marine Air Group. Nonetheless, in terms of personnel it totals up to a division plus of self contained expeditionary force with sizable combined arms power which has been tailored to meet a specific mission.[12]

The final, and smallest MAGTF, is the MEU. Commanded by a colonel, the MEU is typically a forward deployed force of 1,800 to less than 2,500 Marines. Although a MEU may be smaller or larger depending on the mission, it will normally appear to be one third the size of the MEF (FWD). Instead of Army brigade equivalent units, the GCE, ACE and CSSE will consist of reinforced battalion sized elements. Capable of carrying 15 days of supply, the MEU "fulfills routine forward afloat deployment requirements, provides an immediate reaction capability for crisis situations, and is capable of relatively limited combat operations."[13] There are currently seven standing MEU CEs: three in the Pacific, three in the Atlantic, and one in the Far East.

The Maritime Prepositioning Force

The concept of maritime prepositioning was adopted by the Corps in 1979 to meet the need for rapid deployment with minimum strategic air or sea lift. "By 1986 the concept

manifested itself in the Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF), consisting of 13 ships organized into three maritime prepositioned squadrons (MPS): MPS-1, based in the Atlantic (now based in the Mediterranean); MPS-2 at Diego Garcia, and MPS-3, in the Guam-Saipan area. Each MPS is loaded with 30 days of supplies and most of the equipment for a brigade sized Marine Air Ground Task Force as well as smaller, tailored forces."[14] In short, the MPF provides up to three MEF (FWD) sized units worth of equipment, minus any required aircraft.

These 13 roll-on/roll-off ships operated by the Military Sealift Command are capable of discharging their cargo in ports or over the shore. While the ships do have helicopter landing platforms, they are not designed to carry helicopters or permit helicopter off loading of the equipment. These ships are loaded to accommodate reorganization into separate ship operations or in groups of two or three to support smaller MAGTFs. In actual deployments, the ships will normally be supplemented with an aviation logistical support ship, a hospital ship, and aviation assets which are flown to the location. The five conditions necessary for MPF deployment listed in FMFM 1-2 are:

-Adequate strategic airlift and tanker support available;

-The objective area port/beach, airfield, and linking road network must be secure;

-Airfield must be C-141, C-5 and 747 capable with adequate throughput capacity;

- Port/beach must have throughput capacity for timely MPS off load and accommodate MPS ship draft; and

-The port/beach must be sufficiently close to the airfield to permit timely arrival and assembly of the airlifted units and their prepositioned equipment and supplies.[15]

The key to MPF is that it allows the rapid deployment of a mech heavy MEF (FWD)

using a combination of strategic airlift and MPF ships. Using MPS, the unit can deploy with approximately 250 air sorties, as opposed to approximately 3,000 air sorties without MPS support. Positioned by the National Command Authority (NCA) within seven days sailing of likely deployment areas, these ships can, on short notice, be relocated to within one or two days sailing of "brewing" trouble spots and be included in a CINC's list of flexible deterrent options. The MPSs provide rapid deployment of Marines to the CINCs while saving critical strategic lift capabilities for follow on forces.[16]

Force Capabilities Unique to the USMC

The Corps has two unique structure and mission capabilities which separate it from other forces available to the CINCs: the ability to conduct amphibious operations and the ability to conduct unilateral, large scale air combat operations. Other than the obvious Title 10 requirements to organize, train and maintain such forces, an understanding of the intrinsic need for these capabilities is important to totally understand the Corps' contribution to the national security strategy.

Amphibious Operations

An amphibious operation, a form of forcible entry, "provides the means for seizing the strategic initiative. However, it generally requires rapid follow-up and exploitation for success in major efforts."[17] Expanded further by Joseph Alexander and Merrill Bartlett in Sea Soldiers in the Cold War, "Amphibious warfare is defined as that dimension of naval warfare in which an attack is launched from the sea by naval and landing forces, embarked in specialized ships and

craft, against a hostile shore. It is essentially naval in character, integrates all elements of military force (air, land, naval, logistics, command and control), and is useful in application across the spectrum of political conflict. Amphibious warfare is also risky and complex, and therefore requires an extraordinary degree of coordination."[18] The important qualifier in amphibious operations, although complex and often very large in scale, is that they are normally a method to accomplish an operation as opposed to being a complete operation in themselves. The goal is not to capture a beach, but to capture or control the beach and proceed well inland to accomplish the political or military objective. Ideally, the landing force will push through the beach head and conduct its primary resupply from the sea, and not on the beach.

In understanding the difficulty of an amphibious operation there are three requirements that shape its priorities: "(1) the necessity for rapid build up of combat power ashore from an initial zero capability to full striking strength to enable seizure of amphibious task force objectives; (2) the prerequisite to maintain unity of command between naval and landing force commanders throughout the transition of the assault from sea to land; (3) the precondition to minimize the inherent vulnerability of the landing force to natural obstacles and hostile fire during the ship to shore movement."[19] Amphibious landings may be quick, normally consisting of forward employed forces already embarked for landing operations, or deliberate. Deliberate landings require intensive prior planning of a mission where the organization, landing plans, and loading plans are all directed and published prior to the landing force embarking. The deliberate landing is best used in major operations or in operations requiring joint and/or combined forces.[20] As with any specialized operation, an amphibious assault is best planned in an area where it will readily succeed. Although it is a method of forcible entry, it is not best used as a

method of frontal assault against a strongly held position.

Strategically, amphibious forces are, " a mobile threat capable of attacking at a multitude of different points. Even uncommitted, these forces will require diversion of enemy resources to cover areas of prospective amphibious employment."[21] Operationally and tactically, amphibious forces require well trained joint or combined arms teams which only the Navy and USMC can readily provide on a large scale.

Air Combat Operations

All of the services contain assets capable of performing air combat operations to one degree or another; in conjunction with their assigned roles and missions. There has been much discussion over the years as to whether or not the USMC has exceeded its needs or missions. As previously mentioned, Title 10 calls for the Marine Corps organization to include not less than three aircraft wings, and such other aviation as may be required, and the CORM recognized USMC aviation capabilities as being, "complementary, not redundant." Given all that, why does the Corps require three active and one reserve air wings consisting of approximately 400 fighter and attack aircraft and 600 assault and utility helicopters?[22]

The official rationale for Marine Corps aviation is, " to provide supporting air components to the Fleet Marine Forces in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and in the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign. At the same time, it is a component element of naval aviation within the Department of the Navy. Accordingly, Marine aviation is organized, as a collateral function, to participate as an integral component of naval aviation in the execution of such other Navy functions as may be directed by competent authority. In this capacity, Marine aviation units, when directed, may be

placed aboard aircraft carriers as part of the ship's combat complement."[23]

A more simplistic reason for the existence of substantial Marine aviation goes back to the essence of the USMC mission. The Corps is designed as a small, highly mobile expeditionary force capable of self sustained combat operations in often austere environments. Combat operations require responsive, dedicated, and often massive fire support. In designing a flexible and mobile force, the Marines have traditionally traded off field artillery assets in lieu of aviation assets. As an expeditionary force, this saves the weight and mass required to move towed or self propelled artillery, artillery ammunition, and artillery service support units to be used for assault forces. Additionally, in an austere environment, the mobility, reach and flexibility of dedicated aviation versus traditional fire support equipment is unquestionable.

As with most other doctrinal and organizational decisions within the Corps, the use of aviation goes back to the basic concept of the MAGTF. The ACE is viewed as a combat arm and a maneuver element of the MAGTF; not just an element to support the ground element. The Corps lists, "six separate functions of Marine aviation: control of aircraft and missiles, antiair warfare, air reconnaissance, electronic warfare, assault support, and offensive air support."[24] In terms of capabilities aviation offers the MAGTF:

-Variety of attack against both airborne and surface targets.

-Observation of hidden enemy activities and observation of large areas of terrain.

-Responsiveness in ability to launch from flight decks and/or forward operating bases allowing the MAGTF to concentrate firepower against an enemy.

-Flexibility in types of attack aircraft, tactics, weapons; the ability to rapidly shift targets.

-Range of forward based aircraft allows deeper enemy engagement.

-Firepower and Mobility provided by aviation allows the commander to rapidly converge assets to mass fires wherever needed.

-Accuracy is increased by combining both the sophisticated on board systems of the aircraft and the Marine air command and control system (MACCS).[25]

Linked back to amphibious operations, the Corps has historically been the leader in developing serious doctrine for the close air support mission. This was prompted by the need for dedicated air support during amphibious operations. Today, Marine aviation plays a critical role in continuity of operations and concentration of combat power as a GCE is phased ashore.

While Marine aviation has a clearly unique mission, its size and availability, especially early in a conflict, make it an asset coveted by other commanders and staffs who are concerned with a variety of other missions. The USMC recognized this and, when they are not committed, dedicates its aviation assets to supplement normal Navy rotations on board carriers. When committed, the MAGTF commander, as prescribed in Joint Pub 0-2, makes sorties available to the joint force commander for the three missions of air defense, long range interdiction and long range reconnaissance as required. These sorties, commonly referred to as "the up front sorties," are dedicated to the joint force commander before aircraft are allocated to MAGTF missions. Additionally, the MAGTF commander makes excess sorties of aircraft available to the joint force commander for tasking after the needs of the MAGTF have been met. These excess sorties are over and beyond the required "up front sorties."

A growing concern in recent years is that joint commanders and staffs will indiscriminately task MAGTF aviation assets, since in many cases they are the only assets initially in theater, thus leaving a MAGTF commander without the necessary fire power to

effectively accomplish his mission. Joint Pub 0-2 has addressed this concern and states, "The MAGTF commander will retain operational control of organic air assets." It further mentions the "up front sorties" and making excess sorties available to the Joint commander but adds, that nothing in Joint Pub 0-2 shall infringe on the authority of the Joint commander to reallocate sorties or assign missions when he determines they are required for higher priority missions.[26] The spirit of the publication, and the recognized need by the Chairman of the JCS to surface the issue makes it clear that MAGTF aviation assets serve a unique purpose, and should not be diverted except in rare circumstances.

What the USMC Offers a CINC

Operational Advantages

In the operational arena, the Corps provides special capabilities which contribute to the planning and execution of the CINCs war fighting mission. The four key capabilities briefly discussed here are, first, the Marines arrive at the battlefield with a trained and functional combined arms team. Second, and critical in many situations, the force is self-sustaining. Third, the Marines, by nature of their primary existence, can conduct ship to shore assault operations. Fourth the MAGTF structure of the USMC force lends itself to rapid integration into joint or combined operations. In looking at just these four attributes, it becomes clear why the Marine MAGTFs can be considered a joint force "building block."

The inherent combined arms capability of a MAGTF is the central focus of how the Corps fights. The key is in the flexibility with which the MAGTF can be reduced, enlarged, or

merged with other forces on station or other forces arriving after the MAGTFs initial entry. While MAGTFs are normally tailored for the area of operation to which they are forward deployed, they can easily adapt to a change in mission by "plugging in" additional slices of the needed combat or combat support power. This makes the MAGTF a credible combat force immediately on arrival, with the potential to expand quickly.

The self-sustainability of the MAGTF, especially in an austere environment, is a capability which speaks for itself. Unlike airborne or air assault forces, the Marines arrive with their logistics support, and do not have their combat potential immediately limited by supply lines. When deploying to the proverbial "911 mission," a MAGTF does not suffer the range or time on station limitations normally endured by other light forces.

The amphibious landing option of the USMC offers the CINC a robust forcible entry capability even in remote areas of operation. The ship to shore assault capability is a traditional role for which only the USMC is professionally equipped. All USMC equipment is specially designed and "marinized" for sea duty against salt, emersion, and operation in shallow water. Amphibious landing vehicles and tailored assault packages for beach landings clearly make the Corps the service of choice for the mission. Their ability to assault, establish a beach head, if required, and then receive follow on forces from any service is unique.

Finally, the ability of a MAGTF to rapidly integrate with additional Marine forces, forces from other services, or forces from other nations makes the USMC a key joint or combined building block for continued operations. Depending on the situation, the CINC can assign the MAGTF a force or terrain oriented mission, not be immediately concerned with supporting the force, and not be restricted by what types of forces can relieve or reinforce it

later. The same cannot be said of pure light forces.

Strategic Advantages

From a strategic perspective, the Corps' expeditionary nature becomes increasingly important in the aftermath of the Cold War era. As summarized by Alexander and Bartlett in Sea Soldiers In the Cold War, "From the Sea: A New Direction for the Naval Services" was as revolutionary a document as has ever been produced by the sea services. The new doctrine identified a major change in operational focus, from open ocean war fighting toward joint operations conducted from the sea. The emphasis shifted to regional, expeditionary, littoral warfare." It changed operational art from blue water independence to green water "battle space dominance of the seaward littoral."[27]

When employing forces "from the sea" against a variety of traditional and even nontraditional opponents, a CINC, and the national political leadership, has the flexibility to circumvent international complications. A force arriving from international waters can avoid the often time consuming requirements for approval of basing rights, landing rights and even clearance for the overflight of foreign soil by aircraft. Additionally, a maritime force already posing the threat of forward presence in a region leaves an enemy in doubt as to when, where, how, and in what size it will be employed.

All of these factors offer strategic options and flexibility in resolving a preplanned or crisis contingency. A final, and perhaps critical, strategic employment option for a maritime force relates to the current national military strategy of being able to, "help defeat aggression in two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts," [28] with our existing military structure. Depending on the size, location, and timing of the two major regional conflicts (MRCs), it is

quite conceivable that one MRC will become a holding action until such time as sufficient forces can be mustered to bring it to a decisive political or military end. Whether this is accomplished via a temporary coalition or through existing military treaties, a maritime contingent could easily be either the initial force of choice, or the only force initially available. The forward deployed, forcible entry, and self sustaining attributes of the MAGTF makes it an attractive option for the CINC.

In Conclusion

Would it be possible to eliminate the Corps, and have the other services assume its strategic mission? Of course..... given the time, money, and national will which would be required to institute the massive organizational, doctrinal, and training changes in our Department of Defense. However, in times of increasing budget and manpower cuts, the nation cannot afford such a drastic reorganization.

By nature, the United States has always been, and still remains, a maritime nation. Former President George Bush summed it up in 1990 during an address to the Aspen Institute by saying, "No amount of political change will alter the geographic fact that we are separated from many of our most important allies and interests by thousands of miles of water." This includes political allies, trading partners, and the oceanic access to suppliers of critical resources.[29]

The ability of the United States to project the necessary political and military power to uphold treaties, conduct international trade, and execute its responsibilities as a "super power" is largely contingent on its ability to ensure freedom of the seas. General Alfred M. Gray, Jr., former Commandant of the USMC, once said, "What matters is not how quickly you can deploy

but how quickly you can employ. If you want to come and stay long enough to get a political and military decision in your favor, you've got to include coming from the sea."[30] It is in this responsibility that the USMC plays the vital role.

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