

10th Mountain Division,
Fort Drum.



U.S. Army (Barry Benner)



26th Marine Expedi-
tionary Unit, Croatia.

U.S. Marines (Rick T. O'Conner)

Rethinking Army-Marine Corps Roles

By BRIAN J. DUNN

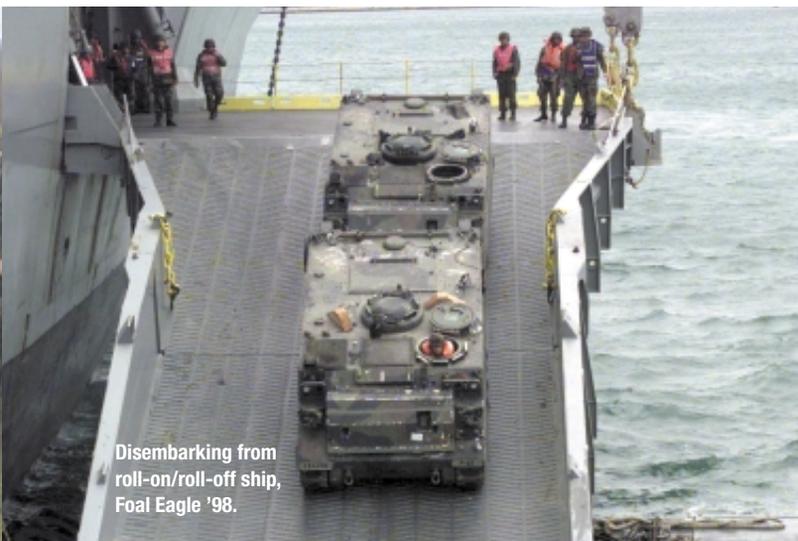
The capabilities needed for land forces have grown. Only ten Army and three Marine Corps divisions span the globe to deal with various small contingencies while they prepare to fight major theater wars (MTWs). But how should these over-stretched forces be organized to meet competing requirements in the future? The Army, with a mandate to win conventional wars, must innovate within a narrow sphere to accomplish its core mission despite the demands of more varied threats and need for incredible speed to reach distant theaters. If it tries to dominate the conflict spectrum by converting heavy mechanized units into light air-transportable mechanized forces, it risks limiting its dominance at the high end of the conflict spectrum. The Marine Corps is already light and has more flexibility to adapt to new strategic realities. It must abandon amphibious warfare as a core capability and embrace an expeditionary role based on urban warfare and air

mobility to complement the role of the Army to fight heavy forces. Acting jointly, an Air Force-enabled Army-Marine team will dominate the conflict spectrum and win both the first battle and the war.

Tradition and the New Environment

A digitized and faster but still war-focused Army and a radically reoriented Marine Corps support the notion that “the Marine Corps wins battles, the Army wins wars,” as characterized by the Commandant of the Marine Corps. This idea is rooted in historic differences between an Army raised from the people in wartime and a standing Marine Corps available for small landings by the Navy in peacetime. The relative size of the services before, during, and after wars demonstrates this distinction. The wartime Army expanded greatly while the Marines remained essentially unchanged except for World War II. Even the surge in the Marine forces in that conflict was dwarfed by expansion of the Army. The Cold War changed the strategic environment and required that the Army be prepared for high intensity conflict on short notice and have light units as deployable as the Marine Corps. Grenada, Panama,

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Disembarking from roll-on/roll-off ship, Foa Eagle '98.

U.S. Army (SPC Christina Ann Horne)



Unloading vehicle at Pohang Harbor, Korea.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Steve Faulisi)

in Power Projection

and other operations found the Army deployed for the first battle. Despite the fact that the Army has been identified with major wars, the Marine Corps also has always fought in American wars. Even with a capable standing Army, the Marines

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organized in division or greater strength participated. The Army-war link reemerged after the Cold War. As Army divisions were deactivated, Marine forces were not. Still the Army retained its capabilities despite cuts.

Army and Marine Corps responsibilities should be divided based on capabilities, traditions, and the new strategic environment. Airdrops can get many Army paratroopers and Rangers on the ground quickly, but the wherewithal to sustain them in heavy combat cannot be delivered as easily. Marine Expeditionary Units

(MEUs) have greater firepower, but only two are routinely forward deployed. The ability to place initial brigades on the ground on short notice is an impressive feat, but it does not guarantee that the troops can win once they arrive. A few light infantry brigades and a handful of armored vehicles can't win much of a battle and would be crushed in a war.

Prepositioning equipment is one way to speed powerful forces to a theater. The Army has brigade sets afloat in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and on land in the Persian Gulf, Europe, and Korean peninsula. The Marines have prepositioning ships anchored at Guam, Saipan, and Diego Garcia. Another squadron patrols the Mediterranean. Each package can support ground and air components for 30 days. Marine squadrons can support battles in the littorals for lower intensity conflicts and should be able to hold a bridgehead in the face of tougher opposition for a short time, assuming that Army heavy troops follow swiftly.

Rapid reinforcement is critical. The Army ambitiously plans to field a brigade anywhere in four days, a division in ten, and five divisions in thirty. This assumes uninterrupted use of ports

Extraction exercise
in Balkans.



U.S. Army (Joanna G. Sanford)

AH-1 during
Slunj '00, Croatia.



U.S. Marines (Brook R. Kelsey)

and airfields, which is questionable given anti-access technologies such as mines and anti-air and anti-ship missiles. If being denied access in areas where MTWs are likely to occur is problematic, not having forcible entry capabilities for unanticipated wars could be catastrophic. Both seizing and securing lodgment for follow-on forces is an essential capability.

To take a lodgment area and make it safe for reinforcements while meeting the aggressive Army timetable, the enabling forces must be even faster. CONUS-based Army paratroopers can be dropped anywhere but can't keep a door open long against a well equipped enemy. A Marine expeditionary unit, with its own tanks and light armored vehicles (LAVs), offers additional combat power, but not much; and there would be sustainment issues. On the other hand, a combination of Army paratroopers and marines relying on

Air Force airlift and fires to complement prepositioned equipment could meet this compressed timeline with sufficient troops.

Creating a New Paradigm

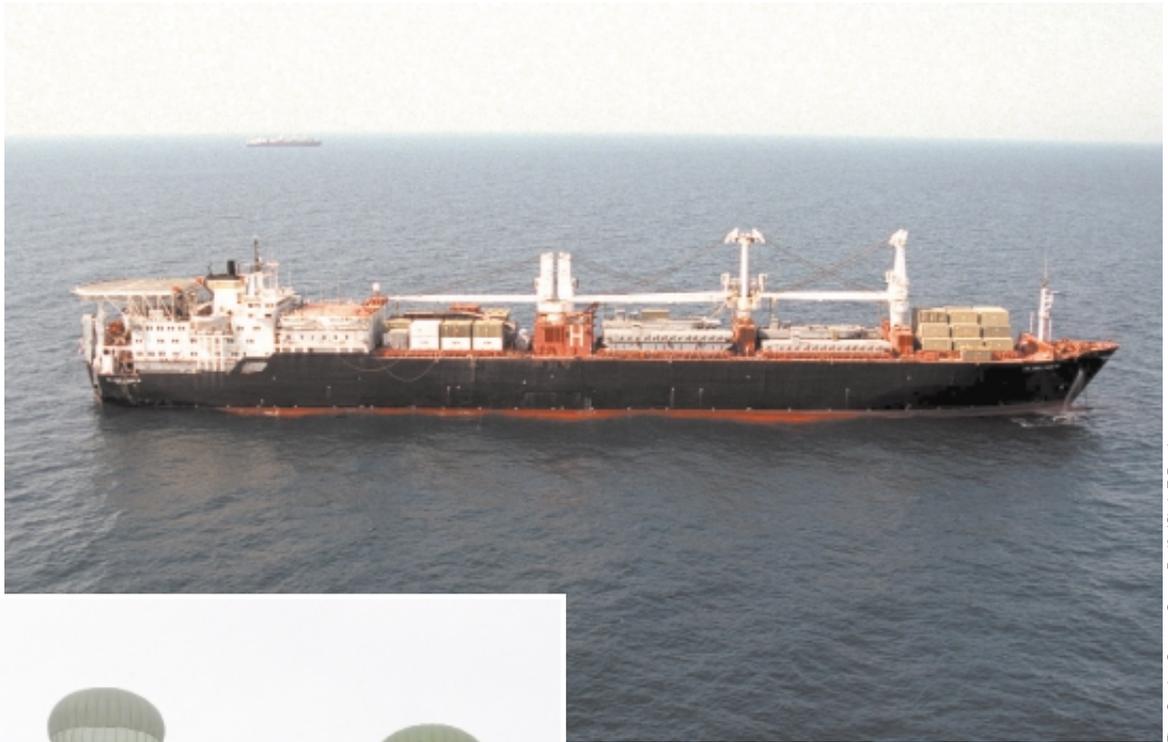
Although the Marines have a tradition of amphibious combat, expeditionary warfare is their true mission. The current preeminence in amphibious warfare is based on circumstances that arose in the Pacific during World War II. Few military operations conducted today call for large-scale opposed landings. The Marine Corps must adapt and become flexible as an expeditionary force by concentrating on small-scale violent and nonviolent contingencies with MEUs and winning the first battle to enable the Army to enter a theater to take the lead in winning the war.

An example of finding the right capability for expeditionary warfare was the Urban Warrior exercise series. Expertise in urban areas will be useful in many contingencies, including winning the first battle of a conflict, and supporting Army warfighting while maximizing the Marine role. Yet it is only one of the needed competencies. Although many assume urban warfare is the future, if everyone is focused on street fighting the capability to seize ground with heavy forces will erode. The Army must still be able to beat organized conventional enemies.

The Persian Gulf War was an undervalued demonstration of Army and Marine Corps roles for the future. Although the Marines fought in large formations, it is untrue that they could not be distinguished from the Army. The war-battle distinction was foreshadowed despite the hasty Iraqi capitulation that prevented a clear display of appropriate ground fighting responsibilities. The Army smashed the Republican Guard to win the war as the Marines struck defenses in a supporting role and were positioned to capture Kuwait City.

The war demonstrated the tremendous power of Army heavy forces. If we expect to repeat this 100-hour victory, the Army should not lighten too much while hurrying to reach a battlefield. Heavy armor has limits, however, and lighter forces remain critical. In addition to Kuwait City, opportunities for light forces in urban areas could have developed from Basra to Baghdad if the coalition had pursued grander objectives. Marines trained in urban warfare would have made ideal spearheads for such assaults. Another useful lesson was that even though the Marine amphibious ability was not used because of anticipated losses, the threat of invasion tied down substantial Iraqi forces. While amphibious warfare should lose its central role for the Marine Corps, it should be retained as one item in the expeditionary tool kit.

Maritime prepositioning ship in Persian Gulf.



Fleet Combat Camera Group, Pacific (Gloria T. Barry)



Airborne training near Aviano air base.

31st Communications Squadron (James D. Green)

Winning the first battle requires a faster response than sealift can deliver. LAV-equipped units may be the ideal reinforcement, balancing under-armor capabilities with deployability. Airlift assets can move such units and must be a major part of the Marine shift to expeditionary battle.

Positioning and reliance on the Air Force can increase strategic mobility for the Marines just as they have for the Army, but prepositioning must be modified for the new mission. Placing more prepositioned stocks on land is not advisable. Army land-based prepositioning has serious drawbacks. These sites represent high priority fixed targets for any enemy contemplating war. In addition, although they can be configured to cope with the specific local threat, the United States can't

afford to place sets everywhere. Equipment sets afloat also require good ports near airfields to link troops and weapons, limitations that could prove to be problems against a robust anti-access strategy. On balance, afloat prepositioning is preferred for the Marines; but the Army thinks its afloat stocks are superior because they can sail anywhere. But even afloat sets suffer from maintenance problems and a lack of adequate anchorages.

One answer is steaming prepositioning ships. Taking the concept one step further, sailing with an amphibious ready group (ARG) will protect prepositioning squadrons. As ARGs rotate to homeports, prepositioning ships could unload weapons and vehicles for maintenance before sailing again. Such squadrons travelling with ARGs will allow the Marines to reinforce landings rapidly. Two battalions plus brigade assets either in the United States or on Okinawa could be combined with LAV variants and heavy equipment to support an embarked expeditionary unit. One battalion and brigade assets could be on immediate deployment notice while a reserve battalion would have longer to prepare for movement.

Expeditionary Battle Force

In a straightforward application of the battle force concept, an MEU battalion landing team would debark at a port and occupy a nearby airfield. The squadron would rapidly unload while the Air Force airlifted personnel. If the team must

Target detection at
Camp Bonesteel,
Kosovo.



55th Signal Company (Daniel Ernest)

conduct an opposed landing, MEU combat aviation assets and accompanying ships, including naval aircraft, would support Marine units. Meanwhile, the squadron would go to a friendly port to unload near an airfield where the Marines would arrive.

The amphibious group would then load the troops as a second assault wave to reinforce the battalion landing team. If the crisis developed slowly, the squadron would land equipment before the MEU initiated action, shortening the time to get a second wave on ARG ships. Or tactical air-

lift could move equipment and troops from an intermediate staging base to the area of operations even if only a primitive field is available. V-22s would be particularly valuable. Cooperation between the Ma-

rine Corps and Air Force to practice linking airlifted personnel with prepositioned equipment is essential. In addition, the Air Force needs more strategic airlift as well as improved intra-theater assets to augment Marine V-22s.

If airfields are too far inland for Marine sea-based assault, Army airborne troops can secure objectives. Thus under this concept there is a limited role for the Army. The airborne battalion can deploy anywhere on short notice and Rangers are equally ready. Accepting the supporting role of the Army actually expands the utility of the Marine Corps beyond the littorals. With Army

airborne troops landing in brigade strength to seize airheads, airlifted marines could dominate cities with dismounted riflemen and fan out with LAV-equipped units into the countryside.

In short, Army airborne and Marine forces can supply the light rapid reaction units for first battles supported by carrier air wings and cruise missiles plus long-range Air Force assets. Marine Corps prepositioning can also put light armor into first battles. Army heavy forces and Air Force squadrons exploiting prepositioning can get to selected areas in small numbers, but for the quantity needed to win a decisive victory slower sealift must suffice. Medium divisions should be formed at the expense of Army light infantry units to provide mechanized capabilities that blend power and strategic mobility. Such forces will be slower to deploy than airborne units and weaker than heavy divisions but may bridge the gap between the first battle and offensive war. A strategic expeditionary corps that controls all service assets may have a role in fielding a joint expeditionary capability.

The final element in the range of capabilities is the Reserves. Enhanced readiness brigades of the Army National Guard have a role in winning MTWs. Although the active components can fight some first battles, mobilization is needed to win major wars. Thus the National Guard should be refocused on its traditional mission, preparing to fight and win large-scale conventional conflicts requiring full-scale mobilization.

The Army must remain focused on winning wars, and conventional campaigns are the core of this mission. The revolution in military affairs might make hyper-campaigns of blinding speed possible, but they will be significant operations aimed at defeating organized large-scale resistance. The Nation needs a strategically deployable battle capability to buy time for the Army. The Marine Corps can provide that competency as a fully capable expeditionary force. **JFQ**

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