

Marine Corps Readiness in Nation Building

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Marine Corps Readiness in Nation Building
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"Marines don't traditionally do nation-building or security operations. We have no doctrine for it."¹

-LtGen James T. Conway

"I think we need to get serious about nation building. Nation building and nation rebuilding is a fact of life."²

-Gen(ret) Anthony Zinni

Introduction

The current National Security Strategy published by the President of the United States reads that:

We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world. The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.³

Secretary of State Colin Powell added in an interview that: "The root cause of poverty is social injustice and the bad government that abets it."⁴ To this end the Marine Corps finds itself involved in large scale nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan—developing these countries by removing despotic regimes and establishing democratic governments. As well, the assumption follows that continuing to ensure the safety of America by bringing prosperity to the impoverished will remain an important part of our nation's strategy for ensuring the safety of its citizens. Furthermore, the inference is that our country will continue to lean toward displacing and changing corrupt

governments as a means towards encouraging the growth of freedom and free markets.

Current operations demonstrate that the Marine Corps **is** involved in nation building—and its repeated involvement in this type of operation throughout history demands some amount of organizational acceptance of the Marine Corps' role. As it stands, the Marine Corps is woefully unprepared to conduct nation building in support of the nation's foreign policy. To better prepare, the Marine Corps needs to take a serious look at how it figures into the national dialogue on security issues, its current TTPs, and the education needed in preparation to conduct this type of operation.

National Strategy

Several organizations currently exist that have a critical role in nation building operations; yet none of these organizations have standing relationships with the US Military. As such, our ability to conduct nation building as part of the "single-battle concept" is nonexistent.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is tasked with the distribution of relief funds to the developing world. USAID has numerous missions throughout the world and exercises liaison capability in conjunction with the Department of State to foreign governments.

Numerous Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) also provide foreign aid. These organizations are independent operations and do not frequently work in conjunction with the efforts of USAID and the DOS. While NGOs have a critical role in nation building, their presence abroad is not in concert with the operations of the federal government.

The primary difficulty in nation building is the lack of unity in the United States' diplomatic, civilian, and military efforts. The first step in developing a solid strategy for national security should be to define the relationships and roles of the elements of national power that can be brought to bear. A national plan would elucidate the role of the Marine Corps and our military and give a starting point to develop military plans prior to any deployment overseas.

Current TTP

The painfully obvious fact is that the Marine Corps is conducting nation building with no references. A cursory look into current Marine Corps Publications reveals numerous inadequacies.

The Small Wars Manual (NAVMC 2890), published in 1940, has some relevant content. It addresses the supervision of elections, the conduct of civil-military relations, the establishment a constabulary, and the implementation of courts

and law. Unfortunately, the information is dated and not in the context of modern times.

MCRP 3-33, Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), or one of its subordinate publications, should address the issue of nation building operations. Unfortunately, this publication has been in the process of revision. Previous drafts make no mention of nation building operations—so the Marine Corps is forced back to the Small Wars Manual for any reference. This creates a quandary for any unit attempting to adequately educate and train its personnel.

MCWP 3-33.1, MAGTF Civil-Military Operations, does a good turn towards establishing principles—but it provides next to no “how-to” knowledge for the planning and conduct of nation building. Even with the vagueness of this publication, a vast amount of resident knowledge exists in the Army and Marine Corps Civil Affairs (CA) community. Unfortunately, there is no peacetime link between the CA community and operating forces and staffs, and the passage of expertise from CA Marines occurs only upon deployment overseas.

The implication herein is not that having a book on a shelf somewhere would serve as a simple solution to a complex problem. The real issue is that commanders and staffs **deserve** a reference point for establishing a local, provincial, or national government prior to crossing the line of departure in ousting a

dictatorship or deployment to provide stability in a war torn area. Restoring utilities, training and equipping a police force, and establishing an education system in a foreign country are not covered **anywhere** in modern references. In many cases, a junior high civics textbook would probably work better than any manual currently in print.

Education

Removed from the TTP issue, assume that enough resident knowledge exists within the Marine Corps, Army, State Department (DOS), and NGO Community to compile a body of knowledge adequate in preparing for and conducting nation building. The dicey issue becomes how to fit education into an already full training schedule, as we are currently well beyond the realm of the possible in attempting to add any more training requirements upon FMF units.

Solution: Escape the UTM paradigm and visualize this as a minor amount of officer education resident within a unit. Nation building is not a specified unit task. It is an organizational capability that combines several inherent competencies of the MAGTF (i.e. Security Operations, Vertical/Horizontal Construction, CA Operations, etc.). Through the education of the officer and SNCO components of the Marine Corps, capable units would result.

The Marine Corps need only look toward a few key individuals. In much the same manner as engineering, air operations, or assault climbers, a staff or unit only needs a few key personnel educated in TTPs essential to nation building.

To do this, the Marine Corps will have to leverage the existing CA personnel and schools and combine their knowledge with various DOS, FMF, and civilian SMEs to produce a working educational solution. Once complete, a resident school can augment the efforts of the Marine Corps' Resident SNCO and Officer PME Program in making some minor curriculum changes.

Counter Argument

The chief, and only valid, argument against developing TTP and enhancing our PME is that nation building is the task of civilian organizations—that the Marine Corps' only role in nation building is the security of civilian agencies.

In an interview, our current Commandant, Gen Hagee, commented on our role in nation building in Iraq:

There's--I'm not sure there's a real bright, shiny line there between what the soldiers and the Marines are doing on the ground there, providing that sense of stability and security, and some of the lower-end, if you want to call it, nation building as the civilian force, as the CPA flows in there. What our mission normally is to set that environment so that the civilian organizations, your NGOs, can, in fact, do that important work.⁵

Unfortunately, this myopic standpoint fails to capitalize on several of the Marine Corps' unique features. First, its rapid deployability exceeds that of any military or civilian agency in the world. The ability to respond rapidly to conditions of chaos is key to avoiding lengthy occupation and dissension amongst the occupied.

Secondly, the MAGTF is uniquely designed to do far more than provide security. The organic capabilities to provide potable water, reinforce and construct critical infrastructure, enforce martial law, and conduct civil-military operations need only to be focused and planned properly to successfully build nations.

Most importantly, the Marine Corps' unique ability to impose our will on others is unparalleled—and a chief component of nation building. Sowing the seeds of democracy and prosperity in a nation newly rid of a poor ruling class or government inherently involves a clash of ideals. Were this conflict not present, the need for military presence would not exist (e.g. internal revolution). In limiting the scope of its presence in a nation building operation to "providing security," the Marine Corps misses the opportunity to capitalize on the youthful aggressiveness of its young Marines.

Conclusion

Though today's Marine Corps is unprepared to realize its full potential in conducting nation building operations, with just a few changes the Corps could find itself at the forefront in achieving our Nation's goals for stability and security throughout the world. Refining the Marine Corps' role in the National Security Strategy, updating TTPs and educating leaders would set the Marine Corps up for success in future nation building operations.

¹ Sergeant Colin Wyers, USMC, "I MEF transfers authority for southern Iraq to Polish-led division," USMC, 3 September 2003, <<http://www.usmc.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/lookupstoryref/200395144422>> (7 December 2004).

² General John J. Sheehan, USMC (Ret.), "Coalition Opportunities and Challenges in the Middle East and Europe," The 33rd IFPA-Fletcher Conference on National Security Strategy and Policy, 16-17 October 2002, <<http://www.ifpafletcherconference.com/oldtranscripts/2002/sheehan.htm>> (7 December 2004).

³ George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," Official White House Document, September 2002, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>> (4 January 2005).

⁴ Colin L. Powell, "No Country Left Behind," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2005, 28-35.

⁵ General Michael Hagee, USMC, "The Marine Corps Times Interview of General Michael Hagee," *Marine Corps Times*, 29 September 2003, <<http://www.usmc.mil/cmc/33cmc.nsf/0/65F0DB52D0AF957C85256DCF0064DA42?opendocument>> (7 December 2004).

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