

IDEAS and ISSUES

Candid professionally oriented comments on matters of interest to Marines. Particularly invited are new ideas that enhance the mission and esprit of the Marine Corps. Length: 500-1,500 words.



SPECIAL REPORT

The Marine Corps and Special Operations

by Gen Paul X. Kelley,
Commandant of the Marine Corps

On 3 October 1983, the Deputy Secretary of Defense published a memorandum on special operations forces. In this memorandum, the secretary noted that:

U.S. national security requires the maintenance of Special Operations Forces (SOFs) capable of conducting the full range of special operations on a worldwide basis, and the revitalization of those forces must be pursued as a matter of national urgency. Therefore, I am directing that the following steps be taken:

1. Necessary force structure expansion and enhancements in command and control, personnel policy, training, and equipment will be implemented as rapidly as possible and will be fully implemented not later than the end of Fiscal Year 1990. . . .

Since then, my position on this important subject, both as the Commandant of the Marine Corps and as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has been clear and unequivocal:

► First, we should examine in detail the full range of missions that are appropriate within the definition of special operations. Only then will we understand their scope and magnitude.

► Second, we should look within all four Services to see what special operations missions can be accomplished by existing conventional units.

► And, third, for those special operations missions that are beyond the capabilities of existing conventional units, we should organize, train, and equip appropriate special purpose units.

It was with the foregoing in mind that the Marine Corps embarked upon

an extensive examination to determine what special operations missions can be conducted by Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs) operating within a fleet. As many of us suspected from the outset, MAGTFs are, indeed, uniquely suited for a broad spectrum of special operations missions in a maritime environment. With that said, now is the time to put the Marine Corps and special operations in a proper perspective.

Hopefully, the answers to a few questions will provide a framework for this perspective. First, what are special operations? And, second, what special operations missions can be conducted by our MAGTFs?

A few years ago, the Department of Defense (DOD) definition of special operations was:

Secondary or supporting operations which may be adjuncts to various other operations and for which no Service is assigned primary responsibility.

Within the context of this definition, the Marine Corps has, throughout its history, maintained a capability to conduct certain "special" operations, especially those that were directly related to, or supportive of, our primary *maritime* missions. Just prior to and during World War II, the Corps experimented with units dedicated to performing specific kinds of operations. We established raider, parachute, glider, and other special units in an effort to determine the best way to accomplish the unique tasks associated with such supporting operations. However, we eventually concluded that these special units had no permanent value within

our force structure, and they were amalgamated with our regular units.

In recent times, the definition of special operations has been expanded. The DOD dictionary now defines special operations as:

Operations conducted by specially trained, equipped, and organized DOD forces against strategic or tactical targets in pursuit of national military, political, economic, or psychological objectives. These operations may be conducted during periods of peace or hostilities. They may support conventional operations, or they may be prosecuted independently when the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible.

This change in definition resulted from an earlier decision to revitalize and fully develop our Nation's special operations capabilities. What followed this decision was the creation of new or a significant increase in already existing SOFs.

As might be expected, the growth and prioritization of this effort has caused considerable discussion within the DOD. The primary focus of this discussion involves the nature of special operations and whether conventional forces can or should be employed to conduct such operations. The interrelationship of our various Service SOFs, their command and control, and relationships to conventional forces are but a few of the other issues that have emerged. This discussion notwithstanding, the Service special operations programs have produced significant results in the creation of new, needed capabilities, and the development of unique

equipment and techniques to complement these capabilities.

Throughout this revitalization effort, the Marine Corps has not felt it necessary to create new special units. We have continued to maintain that within our MAGTFs we have the capability to conduct a broad spectrum of special operations, particularly when a requirement exists for the introduction of helicopterborne or surfaceborne forces from the sea. These operations tie-in directly with the Corps' traditional maritime-oriented missions for which we have statutory responsibility. To be specific, MAGTFs, in concert with other naval forces, can perform the following special operations missions:

Last year, I asked the commanding general, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, to conduct an examination of the Marine Corps participation in special operations. The purpose of the examination was to take a detailed, objective look at our capabilities, as well as the dynamic development of special operations, and to make recommendations on the appropriate role of our MAGTFs in this area. The examination revealed that:

► MAGTFs, operating as elements of our numbered fleets, are uniquely qualified to conduct a broad spectrum of special operations in a maritime environment, particularly when a requirement exists for the introduction of helicopterborne or surfaceborne forces from the sea.

► The Marine Corps should not establish new organizations that would unnecessarily duplicate special purpose organizations of the other Services. Rather, the Marine Corps should recognize the unique character and importance of such special purpose organizations and should work toward ensuring that MAGTF special operations capabilities are complementary.

To form special units in the Marine Corps now, as we did in World War II, would be redundant with other Services' special operations organizations at a time when all Services are manpower constrained. Also, it would impact severely on our Unit Deployment Program (UDP), while UDP is proving to be one of our most important initiatives. Most importantly, creating "special" units could cause a shift in focus from our primary amphibious missions

and have far reaching impacts on force structure, equipment, and weapons necessary for the conduct of amphibious operations.

As noted earlier, we learned in the past that the creation of "special" units is not always the most efficient and effective way to accomplish unique missions. More often than not, our existing organizations can accomplish such tasks with adjustments or enhancements to training, equipment, and organization for combat, thus providing greater flexibility in employment of our forces. Amphibious forces and their component MAGTFs, particularly our forward-deployed MAUs, are



manding general, FMFLant is conducting this program, and has been tasked to develop specific recommendations relative to:

► The optimum organizational structure of the MAU to conduct appropriate special operations missions.

► A training syllabus that ensures that our forward-deployed MAUs are fully capable of accomplishing appropriate special operations missions.

► An augmentation troop list to satisfy unique special operations functions beyond what the MAU may normally accomplish.

► Special equipment not currently in the Marine Corps inventory or not normally carried by a MAU deployed with the fleet.

► A concept of employment for appropriate special operations missions that is in accordance with our established doctrine and principles and accommodates the inclusions of other Service SOFs, when appropriate.

It is not our intention to duplicate the capabilities of any existing SOF organizations, but, rather, to provide a complementary capability based on the introduction of forces from the sea—our specialty. We also fully recognize the requirement of developing this capability in conjunction with the U.S. Navy. There are significant advantages to having our MAGTFs trained in the conduct of maritime special operations, positioned aboard amphibious ships in proximity to a target but unencumbered by base and overflight rights, and operating under an established fleet command and control system. I believe we can offer a unique contribution to the special operations revitalization, add a new dimension to the broad spectrum of capabilities resident in our Nation's Navy-Marine Corps team, and yet maintain the traditional role of the Marine Corps.

USMC

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Air	Ground
(1) Visual Reconnaissance	(1) Beach Reconnaissance
(2) Multisensory Imagery	(1) Hydrographic Surveys
(3) Electronic Reconnaissance	(2) Ground Reconnaissance
	(4) Engineer Survey Operations
	(5) Sensor Implants
	(6) HUMINT, SIGINT, IMINT Operations
	(7) Topographic Operations
Units:	Units:
VMAQ, VMFP, VMO, RPV	Force Recon, Eng Bn, Div Recon, SCAMP, Radio Bn, ITT, CIT, TOPO, HIR

DIRECT ACTION

Air	Ground
(1) Deep Strike	(1) Amphibious Raids
(2) Interdiction Support	(2) Limited Objective Attacks
(3) Close Air Support	(3) SLO
(4) Assault Support	(4) Show-of-Force Operations
(5) Airborne Operations	(5) Reinforcement Operations
(6) Sensor Implants	(6) Security Operations
(7) Electronic Warfare	(7) Mobile Training Teams
(8) Psychological Operations	(8) Civic Action
	(9) Deception Operations
	(10) Fire Support Control
	(11) C4 Operations
	(12) Initial Terminal Guidance
	(13) Electronic Warfare
	(14) Hostage Rescue
Units:	Units:
VMA, VMGR, HMH, HMA, HMM, VMFA, VMO, VMAGAW	MAGTL, Force Assets

proven combined arms teams that possess inherent advantages, such as established command and control procedures and strategic positioning, that are vital to the successful conduct of maritime-oriented special operations.

As a result of the conclusions and recommendations of the FMFLant examination, I have directed that a follow-on pilot program be initiated, in cooperation with our Navy counterparts, to enhance the Marine Corps' special operations capabilities within the existing framework of our MAGTF concept. Our initial program will be conducted with the forward-deployed MAU as the primary focus. The com-