
Chapter 3

Expeditionary Organizations

“Under all circumstances, a decisive naval superiority is to be considered a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which all hope of success must ultimately depend.”¹

—George Washington, 1780

“There’s no reason for having a Navy and Marine Corps. General Bradley tells me that amphibious operations are a thing of the past. We’ll never have any more amphibious operations. That does away with the Marine Corps. And the Air Force can do anything the Navy can do nowadays, so that does away with the Navy.”²

—Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson, December 1949

Marine Corps forces are organized and equipped specifically to meet the requirements of expeditionary operations. These organizations possess the characteristics of versatility, flexibility, expandability, rapid deployability, sustainability, and reconstitutive ability necessary for expeditionary operations. This chapter describes the way the Marine Corps organizes for such operations.

NAVAL EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

The Navy and Marine Corps provide naval expeditionary forces as part of a joint force. These forces are organized to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country.³ They are designed to project military power ashore from the sea, to include the establishment of a landing force on foreign soil if needed, and thus to operate in the littoral regions.

Naval expeditionary forces combine the complementary but distinct capabilities of the Navy and Marine Corps. Through attack aircraft, surface fire support, sea-launched cruise missiles, and special-warfare forces, Navy forces provide the capability to attack targets in the littorals, and they provide the capability to deploy, land, and sustain expeditionary forces ashore. Navy forces contribute the seaward element of naval expeditionary power projection. Marine forces contribute landing forces, the landward extension of naval expeditionary

power. Landing forces include not only ground combat forces but also Marine aviation and logistics elements that can operate from expeditionary land as well as sea bases.⁴ In addition to projecting landing forces ashore, deployed Marine aviation forces can also strike targets ashore operating from aircraft carriers and amphibious ships.

Naval forces operating in international waters can minimize military and political liabilities. Naval expeditionary forces are self-contained, able to conduct most military operations without external support. Operating from the sea, naval expeditionary forces can maintain a presence in an area almost indefinitely, eliminating the need for ground-based staging and reducing the influence that host nations or other local powers can exert on U.S. policy initiatives. Naval expeditionary forces are unencumbered by the treaties and access agreements that land-based forces require to operate overseas.⁵

Through forward presence and deployability, naval expeditionary forces provide a rapid response to many crises or potential crises. Naval forces are typically the first to arrive at the scene of a crisis. As part of a joint force, they can serve as enabling forces by stabilizing a situation and preparing for follow on operations.

Naval expeditionary forces offer the combatant commander a flexible range of options in the support of national interests, covering peacetime missions, crisis, and conflict. They can offer a visible deterrent presence in full view of potential

aggressors or can operate from over the horizon to minimize political provocation or gain operational surprise and security. They can perform missions ranging from humanitarian assistance to forcible entry. They have the flexibility to project power inland to a significant depth at the time and place of their own choosing.

MARINE CORPS FORCES COMMANDS

There are three Marine Corps Forces commands: Marine Corps Forces Atlantic (MARFORLANT), Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC), and Marine Corps Forces Reserve (MARFORRES). Marine Corps Forces commanders are part of the Service or administrative chain of command and are responsible to the Commandant of the Marine Corps for equipping, training, administering, and sustaining their forces. These forces include—

- I Marine Expeditionary Force, based in southern California and Arizona, under Marine Corps Forces Pacific.
- II Marine Expeditionary Force, based in North and South Carolina, under Marine Corps Forces Atlantic.
- III Marine Expeditionary Force, based in Okinawa, mainland Japan, and Hawaii, under Marine Corps Forces Pacific.

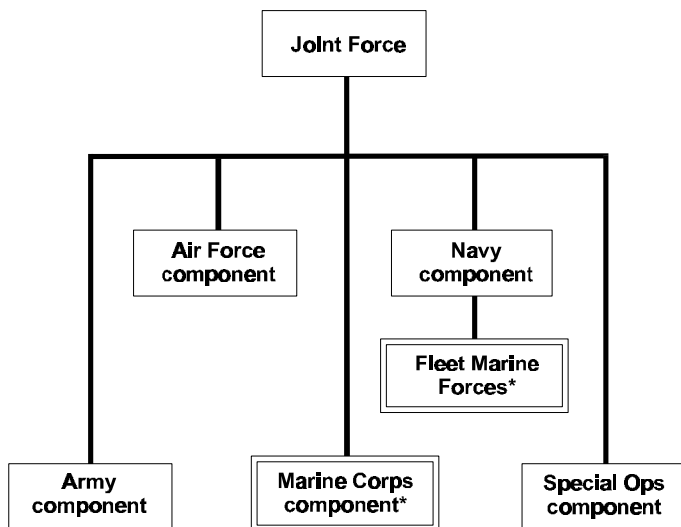
- 4th Marine Division, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, and 4th Force Service Support Group, stationed throughout the United States, under Marine Corps Forces Reserve.

The commanders of Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific provide operating forces to combatant commanders or other operational commanders. In this capacity, the commanders of Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific provide three types of expeditionary elements: amphibious forces, maritime prepositioning forces, and air contingency forces. They also provide special-purpose units tailored for a specific mission, such as mobile training teams or Special Purpose MAGTF Units, the annual military cooperation deployment to South America.

The commanders of Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific are also Marine Corps Service component commanders. For example, Commander, Marine Corps Forces Pacific is assigned as the Marine Corps component commander for U.S. Pacific Command and designated as the Marine Corps component commander for U.S. Central Command and U.S. Forces Korea. Commander, Marine Corps Forces Atlantic is assigned as the Marine Corps component commander for U.S. Atlantic Command and designated as the Marine Corps component commander for U.S. European Command and U.S. Southern Command. Componentency is further discussed later in this chapter.

The commanders of Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific retain the titles and responsibilities of commanding generals of Fleet Marine Forces (FMFs) Atlantic and Pacific. Fleet Marine Force commanding generals have the status of type commanders and provide forces to the Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet and Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet.⁶ For example, the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Pacific, is also the commanding general of Fleet Marine Forces Pacific, responsible to the Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, for providing combat-ready expeditionary forces for service with the operating fleet. (See figure, page 68.) This includes, for example, Marine expeditionary units deployed with amphibious ready groups.

The Marine Corps Reserve is closely integrated with the active duty Marine Corps Forces. Within the Service chain of command, the commander of Marine Corps Forces Reserve provides Selected Marine Corps Reserve units and individual augmentees to the active duty Marine Forces when directed by the National Command Authorities through the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command has training and readiness oversight authority over assigned Selected Marine Corps Reserve units on a continuous basis. He executes his training and readiness oversight authority through Commander, Marine Corps Forces Atlantic. When Selected Marine Corps Reserve units are mobilized or ordered to active duty (other than for training), Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command exercises combatant command (command authority) and is the force provider to the supported combatant commanders.



* A Marine Corps Forces commander (COMMARFORLANT or COMMARFORPAC) is designated simultaneously as a Marine Corps component commander (in relation to the joint force commander) and as the commanding general of Fleet Marine Forces (in relation to the Navy component).

**The Marine Corps component and the
Fleet Marine Forces of a joint force.**

MARINE AIR-GROUND TASK FORCES

The MAGTF is the Marine Corps' principal organization for all missions across the range of military operations. The MAGTF provides a combatant commander in chief or other operational commander with a versatile expeditionary force for responding to a broad range of crisis and conflict situations. MAGTFs are balanced, combined arms forces with organic command, ground, aviation, and sustainment elements.

MAGTFs are organized, trained, and equipped to perform forward-presence, crisis-response, and full-scale combat missions, including forcible entry by amphibious assault. With the exception of special purpose MAGTFs (discussed later), MAGTFs are general-purpose air-ground-logistics forces that can be tailored to the requirements of a specific situation.

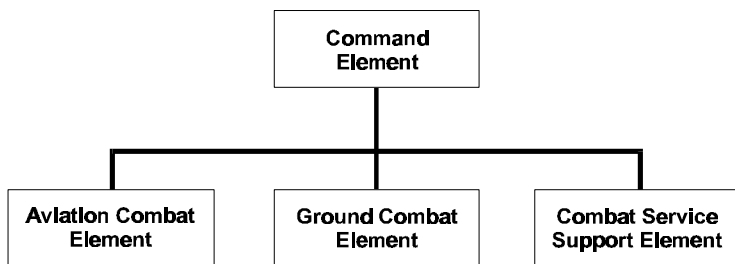
Marines routinely organize, train, deploy, and operate as MAGTFs. The MAGTF is a modular organization tailorable to each mission. Most military organizations are specifically designed for particular missions, and reorganization tends to reduce their effectiveness. However, the Marine Corps' building-block approach to MAGTF organization makes reorganization a matter of routine. Tailoring MAGTFs for specific missions through task organization is standard procedure. As a result, the MAGTF is a cohesive military organization with well-understood command relationships and operating procedures.

MAGTFs can perform missions ranging from humanitarian assistance to peacekeeping to intense combat and can operate in permissive, uncertain, and hostile environments. MAGTFs can operate from sea or expeditionary bases, or both. Depending on the requirements of the situation, they can present minimal presence ashore or a highly visible presence. They can project combat power ashore in measured degrees as needed and can provide secure staging areas ashore for follow-on forces. In this way, sea-based MAGTFs provide the National Command Authorities and combatant commanders a “rheostat” of options and capabilities to vary the composition, scope, and size of the forces phased ashore.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MAGTF

While MAGTFs are task-organized, each MAGTF, regardless of size or mission, has the same basic structure. Each MAGTF has four core elements: a command element, ground combat element, aviation combat element, and combat service support element. The MAGTF’s combat forces reside within these four elements. (See figure page 71.)

The command element provides the command and control necessary for the effective planning and execution of all military operations. It is normally a permanent headquarters. It



Structure of the MAGTF.

also includes units that provide intelligence, communications, and administrative support in general support of the MAGTF.

The ground combat element is task-organized to conduct ground operations in support of the MAGTF mission. During amphibious operations, it projects ground combat power ashore using transport helicopters from the aviation combat element and organic and Navy landing craft. It may have any composition required by the mission, although normally it is built around an infantry unit reinforced with artillery, reconnaissance, armor, engineer, and other forces as needed. The ground combat element may range from a light, air-transportable unit to one that is relatively heavy and mechanized.

The aviation combat element is task-organized to support the MAGTF mission by performing some or all of the six functions of Marine aviation: antiair warfare, assault support, offensive air support, air reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and control of aircraft and missiles. The aviation combat element is normally built around an aircraft organization augmented with appropriate air command and control, combat, combat support, and combat service support units. The aviation combat element can operate effectively from ships, expeditionary airfields, or austere forward operating sites and can readily and routinely transit between sea bases and expeditionary airfields without loss of capability. The aviation combat element can range in size and composition from an aviation detachment with specific capabilities to one or more Marine aircraft wings.

The combat service support element is task-organized to provide a full range of support functions from sea bases aboard naval shipping or from expeditionary bases ashore. The combat service support element provides sustainment for the MAGTF. It can also provide logistical support external to the MAGTF, as in disaster relief operations, for example. MAGTFs can augment this organic sustainability by external support from Navy, other-Service, and host nation support organizations.

One of the key features of Marine expeditionary organization is expandability. Because of the frequent need for rapid response, the initial force at the scene of a developing crisis may not be the decisive force. Crisis response requires the ability to

expand the expeditionary force after its introduction in theater without sacrificing the continuity of operational capability. The MAGTF's modular structure lends itself to rapidly and easily expanding into a larger force as a situation demands by simply adding forces as needed to the core units of each existing element. This expandability includes expanding into a joint or combined force, because the generic MAGTF structure parallels the structure of a multidimensional joint force.

THE MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

The Marine expeditionary force (MEF) is the principal Marine Corps warfighting organization, particularly for larger crises or contingencies. It is capable of missions across the range of military operations, including amphibious assault and sustained operations ashore in any environment.

The three standing Marine expeditionary forces—I, II, and III MEFs—are each located near airports, railheads, and ports for rapid deployment. Each Marine expeditionary force consists of a permanent command element and one Marine division, Marine aircraft wing, and force service support group. Each forward-deploys Marine expeditionary units on a continual basis.

The size and composition of a deployed Marine expeditionary force can vary greatly depending on the requirements of the mission. A Marine expeditionary force can deploy with not only its own units but also units from the other standing Marine expeditionary forces, the Marine Corps Reserve, or other Services. For example, I Marine Expeditionary Force in Operation Desert Storm included 1st and 2d Marine Divisions, 1st and 2d Force Service Support Groups, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing reinforced with groups and squadrons from the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings, elements from Marine Forces Reserve, and the U.S. Army's "Tiger" Brigade. A Marine expeditionary force typically deploys with 60 days of sustainment.

A Marine expeditionary force normally deploys by echelon. The lead echelon of the Marine expeditionary force, tailored to meet a specific mission, is designated the Marine expeditionary force (Forward) and may be commanded by the Marine expeditionary force commander personally or by a designated commander. The Marine expeditionary force (forward) prepares for the subsequent arrival of the rest of the Marine expeditionary force or other joint or combined forces. However, the deployment of the Marine expeditionary force (forward) does not necessarily mean that all the forces of the standing Marine expeditionary force will follow. This would occur only if the entire Marine expeditionary force were required.

THE MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAPABLE)

The Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable (MEU(SOC))) is the standard forward-deployed Marine expeditionary organization. Though each Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) is task-organized, a typical Marine expeditionary unit includes—

- A standing command element.
- An infantry battalion reinforced with artillery, reconnaissance, engineer, armor, and assault amphibian units.
- A reinforced helicopter squadron with transport, utility, and attack helicopters, a detachment of vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) fixed-wing attack aircraft, and other detachments as required.
- A task-organized combat service support element.
- Sustainment for 15 days.

Marine expeditionary units (special operations capable) undergo intensive predeployment training and are augmented with selected personnel and equipment to provide enhanced capabilities such as specialized demolition operations, clandestine reconnaissance and surveillance, raids, and in-extremis hostage recovery.

Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific maintain forward-deployed Marine expeditionary units (special operations capable) in the Mediterranean Sea, the western Pacific, and the Indian Ocean or Persian Gulf region. The Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) can be thought of both as a self-contained operating force capable of missions of limited scope and duration and as a forward-deployed extension of the Marine expeditionary force. Deployed with an amphibious ready group, the Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) provides either a combatant commander in chief or other operational commander a quick, sea-based reaction force for a wide variety of situations. In many cases, the Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) embarked on amphibious shipping will be the first U.S. force at the scene of a crisis and can conduct enabling actions for larger follow-on forces, whether a Marine expeditionary force, joint task force, or some other force. It can provide a visible and credible presence in many potential trouble spots and can demonstrate the United States' willingness to protect its interests overseas. The Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) has a limited forcible entry capability.

THE SPECIAL PURPOSE MAGTF

A special purpose MAGTF (SPMAGTF) may be formed to conduct a specific mission that is limited in scope and focus and often in duration. A special purpose MAGTF may be any

size, but normally it is a relatively small force—the size of a Marine expeditionary unit or smaller—with narrowly focused capabilities chosen to accomplish a limited mission. Common missions of a special purpose MAGTF include raids, peacekeeping, noncombatant evacuation, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. For example, a special purpose MAGTF was deployed to Haiti to restore democracy, conduct peacekeeping operations, and provide humanitarian assistance. Special purpose MAGTFs are normally designated by the mission location or operation name, such as “SPMAGTF Somalia” or “SPMAGTF Support Democracy.”

A special purpose MAGTF may be task-organized deliberately from the assets of a standing Marine expeditionary force and deployed from its home base for a particular mission, or it may be formed on a contingency basis from an already-deployed MAGTF to perform an independent, rapid-response mission of usually limited scope and duration. An example of the former is SPMAGTF Liberia, which was formed from elements of the II Marine Expeditionary Force and deployed from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to relieve the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable) deployed off the coast of Liberia in April 1996. An example of the latter is the special purpose MAGTF that conducted Operation Eastern Exit, the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991.⁷ It was formed from elements of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, deployed in the Gulf of Oman for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990–1991.

MARITIME PREPOSITIONING FORCES

Maritime prepositioning forces are a key element of the Marine Corps' expeditionary capability. The deployment of expeditionary forces rapidly to practically any part of the globe is made possible through the linkup of personnel from the operating forces with prepositioned equipment and supplies. A maritime prepositioning force consists of two basic building blocks:

- Prepositioned shipping carrying equipment and supplies.
- Marines and Sailors, with selected items of equipment, flown into the objective area by strategic airlift to link up with the equipment. Depending on the mission, the fly-in echelon can include some 120 self-deploying aircraft.

There are three maritime prepositioning ships squadrons. Each squadron consists of four or five multipurpose vessels. These squadrons are maintained at strategic locations around the globe that allow at least one of them to steam to any part of the world within a matter of days. The equipment on a single maritime prepositioning ships squadron is the equivalent of more than 3,000 airlift sorties.

Each maritime prepositioning ships squadron contains equipment and 30 days of sustainment for nearly 18,000 Marines from one of the standing Marine expeditionary forces task-organized around a Marine infantry regiment, a Marine

aircraft group, and a combat service support element. These forces, along with a Navy support element, fly into the theater using 250 strategic airlift sorties and link up with the equipment unloaded from the prepositioning ships. Within a few days, any combatant commander can have the lead echelon of a Marine expeditionary force ready for employment.

Maritime prepositioning forces can deploy in conjunction with a forward-deployed amphibious force that secures the linkup site, or it can deploy independently where a secure arrival and assembly area already exists. With the capability to offload pierside or at sea, the maritime prepositioning force MAGTF can go ashore with minimal or nonexistent port facilities.

Maritime prepositioning forces can provide a variety of employment options to a combatant commander. Through designated offload from prepositioning ships in concert with a tailored fly-in echelon, a commander can task-organize to—

- Deploy a MAGTF weighted to provide a specific capability, such as support to a military operation other than war.
- Augment the capabilities of an on-the-scene Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) by providing additional equipment.
- Selectively reinforce a Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) or air contingency MAGTF by

providing mixes of Marines and equipment that can be absorbed into the unit's command, ground combat, aviation combat, and combat service support elements.

By combining all three maritime prepositioning ships squadrons, the entire combat power of a heavy, mechanized Marine expeditionary force can be deployed to a region.

The ultimate usefulness of maritime prepositioning forces is their enormous flexibility. Through a building-block approach, they provide combatant commanders a cost-effective, rapid, sustainable global crisis response capability that can be employed across a wide range of expeditionary operations.

AIR CONTINGENCY FORCES

Air contingency forces may be dispatched to respond to fast-developing crises. An air contingency MAGTF is an on-call, combat-ready task organization that can begin deployment by strategic airlift within 18 hours of notification. The fixed wing aircraft of the air contingency MAGTF will normally self-deploy. Both Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Marine Corps Forces Pacific maintain air contingency MAGTFs in a continuous state of readiness. These forces require a secure airfield at

the point of entry. The air contingency MAGTF that deploys will be task-organized based on the mission, threat, and available airlift. Its size can range from a reinforced rifle company with a small combat service support element to a MAGTF with a regimental-size ground combat element and appropriate aviation and combat service support elements.

An air contingency MAGTF can deploy independently or in conjunction with a Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable), maritime prepositioning force, or other expeditionary force. Unlike maritime prepositioning force troops who deploy without most of their organic equipment in anticipation of marrying up in theater with that from the maritime prepositioning squadrons, air contingency forces must deploy to the theater with all of the organic equipment they require. Also unlike maritime prepositioning forces, air contingency forces do not have an organic sustainment capability.

MARINE CORPS COMPONENT COMMANDS

All joint forces include Service components. A component is one of the subordinate organizations that constitute a joint force. A Service component command consists of the Service component commander and all those individuals, units, detachments, organizations, and installations under that command

that are assigned to a joint force—that is, to a combatant command, subordinate unified command, or joint task force.⁸

The Service component commander is responsible in the operational chain of command to the joint force commander and in the administrative chain of command to the respective Service chief. The Marine Corps component commander deals directly with the joint force commander in matters affecting assigned Marine forces. The Marine Corps component commander commands, trains, equips, and sustains all Marine component forces. In general, the Marine Corps component commander is responsible for—

- Advising the joint force commander on the use of Marine Corps forces.
- Accomplishing missions or tasks assigned by the joint force commander.
- Informing the joint force commander as to the situation and progress of assigned Marine Corps forces.
- Providing Service-specific support—administrative, logistical, training, and intelligence—to assigned Marine Corps forces.

There are two levels of Marine Corps components: a Marine Corps component commander under command of a combatant commander or a subunified commander, and a Marine Corps component commander under command of a joint task force

commander. A Marine Corps component commander under a combatant commander may have one or more MAGTFs assigned, as well as other required theater-level organizations. For example, a Marine Logistic Command might be established to provide theater logistical support for all Marine forces, freeing the combat service support element of each MAGTF to focus internally on MAGTF combat service support requirements.

When so designated by the joint force commander, a Marine Corps component commander may also serve as a functional component commander. A functional component command is a command that is normally composed of forces of two or more Military Departments. It may be established to perform particular operational missions.⁹ Joint force commanders may establish functional component commanders (i.e., joint force air component commander, joint force land component commander, joint force maritime component commander, and joint force special operations component commander) to conduct operations or employ them primarily to coordinate selected functions. Normally, the component commander with the preponderance of forces or the requisite command and control capability to perform the required mission is designated the functional component commander. A Marine Corps component commander designated as a functional component commander retains Service component command responsibilities. Due to

the unique nature of Marine Corps forces assigned to a joint force, the Marine Corps component commander may be designated as the joint force maritime, land, or air component commander.

MAGTFs operate effectively under the operational control of either the Marine Corps component commander or a functional component commander. However, exercise of operational control through the Marine Corps component commander normally takes greater advantage of established chains of command, maintains the operational integrity of Marine Corps forces, exploits common Service doctrine and operating methods, and facilitates the coordination of operating and support requirements.

CONCLUSION

The Marine Corps provides a variety of versatile, deployable, and expandable organizations specifically designed to conduct or support expeditionary operations. The MAGTF, a modular task organization of air, ground, and logistics elements, is the Marine Corps' basic operating organization. MAGTFs can deploy rapidly as part of amphibious ready forces, maritime prepositioning forces, or air contingency forces. Coming in a

variety of sizes and capabilities, they provide a combatant commander or other operational commander with a responsive and adaptive expeditionary capability suitable for satisfying a broad range of operational needs.