Chapter 2

Marine Air-Ground Task Forces

2001. General

The MAGTF is the Marine Corps’ principle organization for the conduct of all missions across the range of military operations. MAGTFs are balanced, combined-arms forces with organic ground, aviation, and sustainment elements. They are flexible, task-organized forces that can respond rapidly to a contingency anywhere in the world and are able to conduct a variety of missions. Although organized and equipped to participate as part of naval expeditionary forces, MAGTFs also have the capability to conduct sustained operations ashore. The MAGTF provides a combatant commander or other operational commander with a versatile expeditionary force that is capable of responding to a broad range of crisis and conflict situations. MAGTFs are organized, trained, and equipped to perform missions ranging from humanitarian assistance to peacekeeping to intense combat and can operate in permissive, uncertain, and hostile environments. They may be shore- or sea-based in support of joint and multinational major operations and/or campaigns. MAGTFs deploy as amphibious, air-contingency, or maritime prepositioning forces (MPFs), either as part of a naval expeditionary force or via strategic lift. They can present a minimal or a highly visible presence and are able to project combat power ashore in measured degrees or can provide secure staging areas ashore for follow-on forces. MAGTFs are prepared for immediate deployment overseas into austere operating environments, bringing all means necessary to accomplish the mission. When deployed aboard amphibious shipping, MAGTFs maintain a continuous presence at strategic locations around the globe and can be rapidly moved to and indefinitely stationed at the scene of potential trouble. The MAGTF provides the JFC with the capability of reconstitution, which is the ability of an expeditionary force to regenerate, reorganize, replenish, and reorient itself for a new mission without having to return to its home base.

MAGTF operations are built on a foundation of six special core competencies: expeditionary readiness, combined-arms operations, expeditionary operations, seabased operations, forcible entry from the sea, and Reserve integration.

To carry out their mission, MARFOR must be—

w Organized, trained, and equipped for combat essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign to seize objectives against the best and most modern equipped enemy.

w A balanced force of combined arms and services.

w Primarily trained, organized, and equipped for offensive employment.

w Adaptable to the active defense of advanced naval bases.

w Trained, equipped, and ready for prompt and effective employment in any climate or terrain.

w Trained and equipped for airborne operations as required, in accordance with policies and doctrines of the JCS.

w Provided with sufficient organic CSS capability to establish and sustain combat power in the execution of normal missions and capable of supporting—
  { Supply.
  { Maintenance.
  { Transportation.
  { Deliberate engineering.
  { Services.
  { Health services.

w Provided with organic aviation units primarily organized, trained, and equipped to operate in conjunction with ground units in amphibious operations and capable of performing—
  { Offensive air support (OAS).
Antiair warfare (AW).
- Assault support.
- Air reconnaissance.
- Electronic warfare (EW).
- Control of aircraft and missiles.

Although MAGTFs are task organized, each MAGTF, regardless of its size or mission, has the same basic structure. Each MAGTF has four core elements: a CE, a ground combat element (GCE), an aviation combat element (ACE), and a CSS element (CSSE). (See figure 2-1.)

The CE is the MAGTF headquarters. It is task organized to provide command and control capabilities (including intelligence and communications) necessary for effective planning, direction, and execution of all operations.

The GCE is task organized to conduct ground operations in support of the MAGTF mission. It is normally formed around an infantry organization reinforced with requisite artillery, reconnaissance, armor, and engineer forces and can vary in size and composition from a rifle platoon to one or more Marine divisions.

The ACE is task-organized to support the MAGTF mission by performing some or all of the six functions of Marine aviation. The ACE is normally built around an aviation organization that is augmented with appropriate air command and control, combat, combat support, and CSS units. The ACE can operate effectively from ships, expeditionary airfields, or austere forward operating sites and can readily and routinely transition between sea bases and expeditionary airfields without loss of capability. The ACE can vary in size and composition from an aviation detachment with specific capabilities to one or more MAWs.

The CSSE is task organized to provide the full range of CSS functions and capabilities needed to support the continued readiness and sustainability of the MAGTF as a whole. It is formed around a CSS headquarters and may vary in size and composition from a support detachment to one or more Marine FSSG.

2002. Marine Expeditionary Force

The MEF is the principal Marine Corps warfighting organization. It is capable of missions across the range of military operations, through amphibious assault and sustained operations ashore in any environment. With appropriate augmentation, the MEF CE is capable of performing as a JTF headquarters.

a. Organization

![Figure 2-1. MAGTF Organization.](image-url)
There are three standing MEFs: I Marine expeditionary force (I MEF), based in southern California and Arizona; II Marine expeditionary force (II MEF), based in North and South Carolina; and III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF), based in Japan and Hawaii. Each standing MEF consists of a permanent CE and one Marine division, MAW, and FSSG. (See figure 2-2.) These major commands constitute the primary reservoir of combat capabilities from which MAGTFs are sourced.

b. Concept of Employment

The size and composition of a deployed MEF can vary greatly depending on the requirements of the mission. It can deploy with not only its own units but also units from the other standing MEFs, the Marine Corps Reserve, or the other Services and the Special Operations Command. A MEF typically deploys by echelon with 60 days of sustainment. The lead echelon of the MEF, tailored to meet the specific mission, is designated the MEF (forward) (MEF(FWD)) and may be commanded by the MEF commander personally or by a designated commander. The MEF(FWD) prepares for the subsequent arrival of the rest of the MEF or other joint or combined forces. However, the deployment of the MEF(FWD) does not necessarily mean that all the forces of the standing MEF will follow. This would occur only if the entire MEF were required. MEFs may conduct sustained operations ashore upon completion of an amphibious operation or by deploying from the sea, land, or air and linking up with maritime prepositioning ships carrying equipment and supplies. For additional information concerning MPF operations refer to Marine Corps warfighting publication (MCWP) 3-32, Maritime Prepositioning Force Operations (draft).

2003. Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

The Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable (MEU (SOC)) is the standard forward-deployed Marine expeditionary organization. (See figure 2-3.) Marine Corps Forces Atlantic and Pacific maintain forward-deployed MEUs (SOC) in the Mediterranean Sea, the western Pacific, and the Indian Ocean or Arabian Gulf region. The MEU (SOC) can be thought of both as a self-contained

Figure 2-2. Example of a MEF.
operating force capable of missions of limited scope and duration and as a forward-deployed extension of the Marine expeditionary force.

MEUs routinely receive special training before deploying that results in their being designated as “special operations capable.” To receive the certification, the MEU undergoes an intensive 26-week, standardized predeployment training program that includes an exercise and a final evaluation. The MEU must demonstrate competence across the entire spectrum of required capabilities, be able to plan and execute any assigned mission within six hours of notification, and conduct multiple missions simultaneously. These MEUs are augmented with selected personnel and equipment to provide enhanced conventional and selected maritime special operations capabilities.

a. Organization

There are seven standing MEU (SOC) CEs. Residing within I MEF are the 11th, 13th, and 15th MEUs (SOC); residing within II MEF are the 22nd, 24th, and 26th MEUs (SOC); residing within III MEF is the 31st MEU (SOC).

Although each MEU (SOC) is task organized, a typical MEU (SOC) includes—

w A standing CE.

w An infantry battalion reinforced with artillery, reconnaissance, engineer, armor, assault amphibian units, and other detachments as required.

w 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.

w A task-organized CSSE.

w Sustainment for 15 days.

b. Concept of Employment

Embarked aboard a Navy amphibious ready group (ARG), a deployed MEU (SOC) provides a combatant commander or other operational commander with a quick, sea-based reaction force for a wide variety of situations. In many cases, the MEU (SOC) embarked on amphibious shipping may be the first U.S. force at the scene of a crisis and can conduct enabling actions for larger follow-on forces. 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 MEU(SOC) mission is to provide the NCA and the combatant commanders with a forward deployed, sea-based, rapid crisis response capability to execute a full range of military operations. It is organized, trained, and equipped as a self-sustaining, general-purpose expeditionary MAGTF that possesses the capability to conduct operations across the spectrum of conflict, from military operations other than war, to amphibious and other conventional operations in support of various contingency requirements, including selected maritime special operations such as—

w Reconnaissance and surveillance.

w Specialized demolitions.

w Tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP).

w Seizure/recovery of offshore energy facilities.

w Seizure/recovery of selected personnel or materiel.

w Visit, board, search, and seizure of vessels.

w In extremis hostage recovery.

A special-purpose MAGTF (SPMAGTF) is a nonstanding MAGTF temporarily formed to conduct a specific mission. It is normally formed when a standing MAGTF is either inappropriate or unavailable. SPMAGTFs are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct a wide variety of missions ranging from crisis response, to regionally focused training exercises, to peacetime missions. Their SPMAGTF designation derives from the mission they are assigned, the location in which they will operate, or the name of the exercise in which they will participate (e.g., “SPMAGTF (X),” “SPMAGTF Somalia,” “SPMAGTF UNITAS,” “SPMAGTF Andrew,” etc.).

a. Organization

An SPMAGTF may be any size, but normally it is the size of a MEU (or smaller) with narrowly focused capabilities chosen to accomplish a particular mission. It may be task organized deliberately from the assets of a standing MEF, or may be formed on a contingency basis from an already-deployed MAGTF to perform an independent, rapid-response mission of limited scope and duration. By definition, SPMAGTFs include all four of the basic elements of a MAGTF.

b. Concept of Employment

SPMAGTFs are generally employed in the same manner as a MEU. However, under certain circumstances they may be deployed via commercial shipping or aircraft, strategic airlift, or organic Marine aviation.