

ANOTHER LONG MARCH: LESSONS FROM  
THE POST-VIETNAM REBUILD OF THE  
MARINE CORPS, 1969 TO 1989

A Monograph

by

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## ABSTRACT

ANOTHER LONG MARCH: LESSONS FROM THE POST-VIETNAM REBUILD OF THE MARINE CORPS, 1969 TO 1989, by Maj John J. Franklin, 59 pages.

1969 marked the start of America's drawdown from the Vietnam War. Bloodied and scarred by its experiences in the conflict, the Marine Corps embarked upon a twenty year program to rebuild their force and reclaim their organizational ethos in light of developing threats to national security and changing social and cultural perceptions about military service. Despite some challenges and setbacks, the Marine Corps, by 1989, emerged from this process capable of accomplishing any assigned mission. This monograph argues that the actions taken by Marine Corps leadership during this period illustrate how the Marine Corps successfully navigated an ambiguous and evolving national security environment and emerged as an effective and agile military force.

To support this assertion, this monograph employs a topical methodology of analyzing the ends, ways, and means applicable to the Marine Corps for the twenty year period in question. This monograph first studies three particular ends: the national security strategies outlined in the presidential doctrines of Presidents Nixon, Carter, and Reagan. Flowing from those ends, this monograph describes three historical events that reflect prevailing defense and military strategies during the period: the introduction of an all-volunteer military force, the botched attempt to end the Iran hostage crisis, and the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Next, the topic of means looks at the manpower and equipment resources cultivated by the Marine Corps during the twenty year period. Complementing this analysis, a study of ways, or how the Marine Corps employed these resources operationally, rounds out a discussion of Marine Corps efforts to return to relevance after the Vietnam War.

Collectively, an examination of actions and events applicable to the Marine Corps between 1969 and 1989, viewed through the topical lens of ends, ways, and means, tells the story of a deliberate rebuilding process of a the Marine Corps as a military force. That story provides a model to assist in answering the thesis question of this monograph: how might the Marine Corps most effectively structure and optimize their current force to accomplish any assigned mission across the entire range of military operations? Stated another way, what lessons learned between 1969 and 1989 will assist the Marine Corps today in navigating through the rocks and shoals of an emerging national security environment?

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## ACRONYMS

AVF	All-Volunteer Force
DoD	Department of Defense
MAGTF	Marine Air Ground Task Force
MAB	Marine Amphibious Brigade
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MAU	Marine Amphibious Unit
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit

## INTRODUCTION

Anticipating significant fiscal constraints in a post-Global War on Terror environment, in the fall of 2010 the Marine Corps conducted a review of how it structures and organizes its forces. This review directed the reduction of the end strength of the active duty of the Marine Corps from 202,000 to 186,800 upon completion of operations in Afghanistan. Beginning in the spring of 2011, the Marine Corps began taking steps to achieve this reduced end strength by eliminating from the active duty operating forces three infantry battalions, two artillery battalions, and nine aviation squadrons. Additionally, the Marine Corps started to build five standing Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) headquarters; each aligned to a geographic combatant command, and also initiated efforts to consolidate one of its service component commands with a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) headquarters. In the review's final report, the Marine Corps argued that these efforts would provide the geographic combatant commanders an Expeditionary Force in Readiness, optimized for forward presence, facilitating ongoing engagement activities and crisis response.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, the report also acknowledged the acceptance of a degree of risk for the Marine Corps in reducing its capability of its active component to conduct multiple major combat operations ashore, with plans to mitigate that risk through employment of the reserve component.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This sentence and the one prior warrant a brief description of the terms "combatant command" and "service component command." Joint Publication 1-02, *The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms* defines a combatant command as, "a unified or specified command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander established and so designated by the President, through the Secretary of Defense and with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff." The same publication defines a service component command as, "a command consisting of the Service component commander and all those Service forces, such as individuals, units, detachments, organizations, and installations under that command, including the support forces that have been assigned to a combatant command or further assigned to a subordinate unified command or joint task force." The Marine Corps organizes, trains, and equips forces to support the service component and combatant commanders.

<sup>2</sup>US Marine Corps, *Reshaping America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness: Report of the 2010 Marine Corps Force Structure Review Group* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2011), 1-3.



In August of 2011, the United States Congress enacted the Budget Control Act, which mandated an estimated \$492 billion reduction in defense spending over the next 10 years, forcing the Marine Corps to abandon plans to maintain an active duty force of 186,800 and instead adopt plans for an active component force of 182,000.<sup>3</sup> This projected end strength forced the Marine Corps to accept an even higher degree of risk in its ability to comply with the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, specifically, in its ability to conduct major contingency operations. In March of 2013, across the board cuts to federal government spending, popularly known as sequestration, rendered an active duty force of 182,000 unaffordable for the Marine Corps.<sup>4</sup> Responding to the additional cuts the Marine Corps immediately stood up a working group focused on designing an active duty force able to meet the President's national security objectives while also affordable under the limits of a sequestration-level budget. Through the efforts of the working group, General James F. Amos, the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, aspired to have the Marine Corps, "do as much as we could, as efficiently as possible, and do it well."<sup>5</sup>

The working group's efforts, backed by independent analysis, concluded that, under sequestration, the Marine Corps can afford an active component force of 174,000. A force of this size reduces even further the number of ground combat and aviation units, effectively eliminating a Marine division's worth of combat power. Where a force of 186,800 allowed for six-month

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<sup>3</sup>US Congress, "Budget Control Act of 2011," US Government Printing Office, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s365enr/pdf/BILLS-112s365enr.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2014), sec. 251-A-4; and Richard Kogan, "How the Across-the-Board Cuts in the Budget Control Act Will Work," revised 27 April 2012, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3635> (accessed 29 March 2014), table 3.

<sup>4</sup>Although Sequestration technically remains in effect, Congress has made efforts to allow departments and agencies within the federal government certain degrees of latitude in determining how to implement budget cuts to their organization. In the Fiscal Year 2015 Department of Defense Budget Preview, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated that the Marine Corps will draw down to a force of 182,000 but will shrink to 175,000 if Congress and the White House make additional budget cuts in fiscal year 2016.

<sup>5</sup>General James F. Amos, US Marine Corps, "An Amphibious Force for Emerging Demands," *Proceedings* 139, no. 11 (November 2013): 18-23.

deployment rotations followed by 18 months for units to recuperate, reset, and train, known as a 1:3 deployment-to-dwell ratio, a force of 174,000 demands virtually all units deploy for six months out of every year, a 1:2 ratio, in an attempt to maintain a forward presence and crisis response capability as called for in the Defense Strategic Guidance. Again, an inability to conduct effective major contingency operations represents the greatest hazard for an active duty Marine Corps component of 174,000. When the next major theater war occurs, the Marine Corps would likely have to deploy its entire active duty force and not return until the conclusion of hostilities since it would lack the force structure to provide any sort of rotational relief. Casualty replacements would go straight from recruit training and Officer Candidates School to the battlefield, denied of any pre-combat training.<sup>6</sup>

Despite nuances of the post-Iraq and Afghanistan uncertain security environment, the difficult process of restructuring a force to effectively operate across the entire spectrum of military conflict does not represent a new challenge to the Marine Corps. Throughout its 238 year history, the Marine Corps has continually adapted its mission, role, and organization to remain relevant and responsive to the dynamic demands of national security. Examples include the development of expeditionary Marine battalions for service during the Spanish American War and the Philippine Insurrection during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the inclusion of a Marine regiment as part of the first American infantry division on Europe's Western Front in 1917; the development of a Fleet Marine Force and the Corps' focus on amphibious warfare between the World Wars; and the formal implementation of the Marine Air

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<sup>6</sup>General James F. Amos, US Marine Corps, Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the impact of sequestration on the Marine Corps*, 7 November, The Official Website of the US Marine Corps, <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/cmc/Home.aspx> (accessed 2 April 2014).

Ground Task Force (MAGTF) concept in 1962.<sup>7</sup> The willingness and ability to quickly restructure its forces likely serves as a key reason why the Marine Corps has retained its relevance as an organization, despite performing missions also within the purview of the Army, Navy, or Air Force. Even the principal fighting unit of the Marine Corps—the MAGTF—serves as a modular, scalable entity, designed to allow a commander to shape and configure a force appropriate for the specific requirements of an operation.<sup>8</sup>

While the above examples point to how the Marine Corps possesses the ability to restructure in order to meet unforeseen challenges in an emerging global security environment, the period from 1969 to 1989, beginning with the transition away from America’s involvement in the Vietnam War and ending just prior to Operation Desert Storm, represents perhaps the richest model for analysis on what steps the Marine Corps took on how to maintain effectiveness during a time of significant financial drawdown. During the first seven years of this time frame the total Department of Defense (DoD) budget decreased by 33 percent, from a peak of approximately \$560 billion in 1968 to a valley of approximately \$380 billion in 1975 (both amounts adjusted to represent inflation through 2013). Additionally, the DoD budgeting process during the Vietnam War benefitted from the widespread employment of supplemental budgeting mechanisms, now called Overseas Contingency Operations appropriations. Supplemental budget accounts act as a method to quickly build up funding for emergency requirements (like wars) without processing funding requests through the normal budgetary process. The years leading up to 1968 saw a sharp increase in supplemental budget amounts for operations in Southeast Asia, followed by a

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<sup>7</sup>Colonel James W. Hammond, Jr., US Marine Corps (Retired), “We Are Products of 1898,” *Proceedings* 124, no. 8 (August 1998): 60-65.

<sup>8</sup>Headquarters, US Marine Corps (HQMC), Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), 2-6.

significant decrease beginning in 1969 and continuing until the last Vietnam supplemental in 1973.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from considering the financial expenditures associated with America's involvement in Southeast Asia, a changing and complex national security atmosphere vividly illustrates the context in which the Marine Corps undertook the arduous process of again redefining its applicability to the cause of national defense. The 2013 testimony of General Amos before the Senate Armed Services Committee cited above bears a significant resemblance to the 1974 testimony of General Robert E. Cushman, Jr. 1974 before the House Armed Services Committee on the future posture of the Marine Corps. Both testimonies underscore to Congress the importance of maintaining a capability to conduct amphibious and expeditionary operations. The Commandants also warn that further financial reductions to their force will result in a degradation of such capability.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, a comparison of General Cushman's article in the May 1974 issue of the United States Naval Institute's periodical *Proceedings* with the *Proceedings* article authored in November of 2013 by General Amos also cited above exhibit a high degree of similarity in tone and message.

In his article, General Cushman wrote, "In light of this, we must continue to work our way through the constraining influences of technology, people, and money—adding significant improvements within the limits of our ability to pay for them. The question 'What costs can we afford to pay?' has a darker side: 'What costs must we be able to pay?'"<sup>11</sup> Facing similar financial

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<sup>9</sup>Clark A. Murdock, Ryan A. Crotty, and Kelley Sayler, *Planning for a Deep Defense Drawdown—Part I: A Proposed Methodological Approach* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), 32-33.

<sup>10</sup>General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., US Marine Corps, Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on the posture of the Marine Corps Fiscal Years 1975-1977*, Washington, DC, 1974, 7-8; Amos, *Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the impact of sequestration on the Marine Corps*, 2-3.1

<sup>11</sup>General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., US Marine Corps, "To the Limit of Our Vision—and Back," *Proceedings* 100, no. 5 (May 1974): 106-21.

restriction but also forced to prepare for the next threat, still unknown, General Amos wrote, “Further, with sequestration as law, it became clear that we could not afford the 182K force structure and would require additional cuts. These facts drove us to more aggressively prepare for change—a change that was coming whether we liked it or not.”<sup>12</sup> The verbal and written comments of both Commandants reflect the numerous similarities in describing the challenges of optimally structuring the Marine Corps to meet evolving threats to national defense in both the years after the Vietnam War and in the post-Global War on Terrorism environment of today.

In his seminal and exhaustive treatise titled *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, Allan R. Millett describes how the Marine Corps, bloodied by its trials in Vietnam and confronted with an uncertain national security posture emerged as a stronger and more capable military service. He writes, “In a sense, the Marine Corps made a fifteen-year ‘long march’ that tested its political persuasiveness and survival skills. Instead of dwelling on past accomplishments, the Marines recalled a longer history of adversity, perseverance, and adaptation.”<sup>13</sup> Millet continues by recounting how, during an era of severe hardship beginning with the drawdown of American forces in Vietnam and ending with Operation Desert Shield in 1990, the Marine Corps rebuilt and restructured their force from the ground up in order to stand ready to effectively meet the security challenges of the future.

Today, in an era characterized in its beginning by the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan and a strategic rebalancing of military strength to the western Pacific Ocean, the Marine Corps again steps off on another long march. The current era bears striking resemblances to the 20-year period between 1969 and 1989. In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon and his administration struggled to find a way out of the quagmire known as the Vietnam War while not

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<sup>12</sup>Amos, “An Amphibious Force for Emerging Demands,” 20.

<sup>13</sup>Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 607.

appearing weak in the face of Communism. Today, President Barak Obama and his cabinet continue to look for a solution on how to end United States combat operations in Afghanistan while retaining a mechanism to counter terrorism in the region. Between 1978 and 1982 the United States military shifted from a strategic policy of containing Soviet influence in Asia and the Middle East to one of attempting to roll back any Communist ideology worldwide. Today, the United States military again attempts to shift its strategic focus, this time from often unconventional Global War On Terrorism operations to maintaining a significant presence in the Pacific to protect allies and help Southeast Asian nations sustain economic relevancy in the face of an increasingly nationalist and regionally aggressive Chinese government. In 1973, a shrinking defense budget, the end of conscription, the induction of an all-volunteer force (AVF), and a nation weary from almost a decade of war brought about significant manpower challenges for the armed services. Today, two of those same three factors influence decisions to reduce the end strength of all branches of the armed services.

However, despite all of these challenges, between 1969 and 1989 the Marine Corps rebuilt itself as a capable and efficient fighting force, able to accomplish missions across what doctrine today terms the range of military operations.<sup>14</sup> As a direct result of this rebuild, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the Marine Corps not only performed well in conventional conflicts such as Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait, but also conducted peacekeeping operations such as Operation Restore Hope in Somalia and Operation Silver Wake in Albania, where Marine forces evacuated American citizens from the United States Embassy in Tirana.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* groups the wide variety of military operations into three groups that span the conflict continuum from peace to war. Those three groups are: military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence; crisis response and limited contingency operations; and major operations and campaigns. US Department of Defense (DoD), Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011).

<sup>15</sup>For an assessment of Marine Corps performance during Operation Desert Storm, see Michael J. Mazarr, Don M. Snider, and James A. Blackwell, Jr., *Desert Storm: The Gulf War and What We Learned* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 125-28. For an account of Marine Corps actions during Operation

This monograph argues that the actions taken by Marine Corps leadership between 1969 and 1989 illustrate how the Marine Corps successfully navigated an uncertain and evolving national security environment and postured itself as the nation's most effective and agile military force. In order to support this hypothesis, this monograph provides an analysis of the national security climate between 1969 and 1989 and describes how the Marine Corps, during the years following the Vietnam War, adapted its organization and force structure to meet the demands of a changing security paradigm spanning the continuum of both conventional and irregular threats. The United States faces a similar security paradigm today. By looking back at the successful restructuring of the Marine Corps during the period following the Vietnam War, this monograph offers a model for reference the Marine Corps might use today to meet the current Commandant's demand of "maintaining relevance in a major-contingency-operations environment."<sup>16</sup>

To provide the structure for this assertion, this monograph considers the ends, ways, and means relevant to the Marine Corps as an operating force from 1969 to 1989. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, defines ends, ways, and means as a matter of doctrine. Ends refer to an objective or desired conclusion. Ways denotes a sequence of actions designed to accomplish those objectives and conclusions. Means represent the resources required to accomplish such a sequence of action.<sup>17</sup> Stated in another fashion, ends serve as the strategic outcome, ways serve as the method for achieving such an outcome, and means serve as the resources required to implement the method.

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Restore Hope, see Dennis P. Mzoczkowski, *Restoring Hope: In Somalia with the Unified task Force, 1992-1993* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2005), 158. For a first account of how the Marine Corps conducted Operation Silver Wake, see John T. Germain, "Operation Silver Wake," *Marine Corps Gazette* 81, no. 9 (September 1997), 64-66.

<sup>16</sup>Amos, "An Amphibious Force for Emerging Demands," 23.

<sup>17</sup>DoD, JP 3-0, II-4.

In focusing the aperture of a discussion of ends, ways, and means to the Marine Corps as an operational military force, ends represent why the Marine Corps must accomplish its objectives, ways represent how the Marine Corps employs its forces to accomplish its objectives, and means represent what a Marine Corps force consists of, in terms of personnel and equipment, to carry out its objectives. For the Marine Corps, ends comprise the national strategic direction and guidance given by the President and Secretary of Defense. Ways comprise how the Marine Corps organizes its forces to operate in support of assigned missions and tasks. For the Marine Corps, this means normally, but not always, organizing its forces into some sort of MAGTF, comprised of ground, aviation, and logistics combat elements all under a single commander.<sup>18</sup> Means comprise the collection of Marine manpower and material allocated to the service under federal law. Collectively, an investigation of these three components yields an assessment of effectiveness of the service as a fighting force.

In terms of methodology, this monograph offers a presentation and analysis of events significant to the Marine Corps between 1969 and 1989 through a topical organization of ends, ways, and means. Inside each topic, the author provides a discussion and study of these significant events in a chronological manner. Both sections I and II center on the topic of ends. Section I examines the development of an emerging national security strategy by describing the three presidential doctrines prevalent during the period. Section II then illustrates how this evolving national security strategy influenced defense strategy and military policy through an analysis of three events: the end of the military draft, an attempt to end the Iran hostage crisis, and the bombing of the Marine Barracks in Lebanon. The doctrines and events explored in sections I and II set the external context for how and why the Marine Corps adapted as an organization throughout the period under observation.

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<sup>18</sup>HQMC, MCDP 1-0, 2-6 to 2-15.



Sections III and IV take a look at the internal workings of the Marine Corps between 1969 and 1989 through the topical lens of means first, then ways. Specifically, Section III centers on the topic of means by analyzing the financial, personnel, and material resources employed by the Marine Corps during the period under question. Section IV then demonstrates how such means enabled the Marine Corps to maintain their way of fighting in support of the national security and policy objectives outlined earlier in the monograph.

Taken together, the topical sections of this monograph tell the story of how, through an era very similar to the one today, the Marine Corps emerged as a relevant, capable, and adaptable force-in-readiness. This story answers the thesis question of this monograph: how might the Marine Corps most effectively structure and optimize their current force to accomplish any assigned mission across the entire range of military operations? Stated another way; what lessons learned between 1969 and 1989 will assist the Marine Corps today in navigating through the rocks and shoals of an emerging national security environment?

The research for this monograph relied on many different types of publications in order to gain as much insight as possible into both the past and contemporary efforts of the Marine Corps in defining themselves as a relevant and effective operational force. Official government documents such as national security, defense, and military strategies published by the executive branch, the DoD, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff contributed greatly in establishing a baseline of information, especially regarding strategic end states, and receive a large amount of attention and scrutiny in this monograph. Primary source material, such as congressional testimony, written military orders, and presidential decision directives provided the majority of the data for analysis. Letters, memorandums for the record, position papers, and records of interviews with commanders, service chiefs, and staff members also contributed greatly in developing a holistic picture of the considerations taken into account by key decision makers. Secondary source material, mostly in the form of articles from the United States Naval Institute's journal

*Proceedings* and the Marine Corps Association and Foundation's periodical *The Marine Corps Gazette* also yielded a large degree of insight into the debates surrounding the merits of the different ways for the Marine Corps to ensure the means always achieved the ends. Lastly, Millett's work, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, served as the baseline historical reference and provided a platform for a deeper dive into the specific subtopic of force structure changes.

A thorough analysis of how and why the Marine Corps responded to significantly evolving national security, defense, and military strategies between 1969 and 1989 first warrants a historical review of the national security, defense, and military framework of the period in question. National security strategy influences defense strategy which in turn influences military strategy. These strategies, both in theory and in practice, then determine the composition, capability, disposition, and thereby the strength of all of the armed services, including the Marine Corps. The following two sections look at each type of strategy sequentially in an effort to determine how these policies significantly shaped the end strength of the Marine Corps throughout the time horizon under review and how the Marine Corps employed that end strength to contribute to the attainment of the outlined policy objectives.

## SECTION I: THE EMERGENCE OF A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

In 1987 President Ronald Reagan's administration issued the first official National Security Strategy in the form of a single overarching document, written to outline a plan for the nation "firmly rooted in broad national interests and objectives, supported by an adequate commitment of resources, and integrate all relevant facets of national power to achieve our national objectives."<sup>19</sup> Prior to the recurring issuance of the National Security Strategy, an

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<sup>19</sup>US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1987), 1.

exploration of the so-called presidential doctrines associated with three of the four presidents in office during the period under analysis provides the best insight into the overarching American policy end states of the time.<sup>20</sup> These three doctrines, associated with Presidents Richard M. Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan underscored the central security concerns of each administration and demonstrate how each president sought to counter those challenges and protect America's vital national interests. While purposely broad and far-reaching in scope, these doctrines offered a concise yet predominant view of America's strategic end states during the time frame in question, providing a context for further discussion of how the Marine Corps, limited by their means, established ways to operate in support of the outlined strategic objectives.

### The Nixon Doctrine

The first doctrine, attributed to President Nixon, revolved around two significant speeches made by the President. The first address, given in the form of informal, but attributable, remarks to the press corps on the island of Guam on 25 July 1969, provided the first public mention by the President or his administration of shifting away from a strategy of direct involvement in political affairs involving Asian nations. Responding to questions asking about the military commitments of the United States to the nations that comprised the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Nixon stated:

I believe that the time has come when the United States, in our relations with all of our Asian friends, be quite emphatic on two points: One, that we will keep our treaty commitments, our treaty commitments, for example, with Thailand under SEATO; but, two, that as far as the problems of internal security are concerned, as far as the problems of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, that the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem

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<sup>20</sup>H. W. Brands, "Presidential Doctrines: An Introduction," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2006): 1.

will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Nixon's comments signaled a noteworthy change from a previous strategy of the United States attempting to undertake every effort possible to contain the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia. Instead of advancing the previous strategy of collective defense of free nations by the United States, Nixon instead advocated a strategy of partnership with American allies. In short, Nixon's comments placed each nation primarily in charge of its own security while still acknowledging that the obligation of the United States to provide protection in the event of a nuclear threat.

Nixon's second address of strategic significance took place just over three months later when, on 3 November 1969, Nixon addressed the American public in a televised speech discussing the war in Vietnam. On the surface, Nixon's address aimed to answer three questions for the American public. In answering these questions, Nixon further and more clearly explained the national strategy with regards to Southeast Asia that he first alluded to in Guam by stating:

First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments. Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security. Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.<sup>22</sup>

Although Nixon initially made the remarks above to describe and advocate for his administration's forthcoming policy of Vietnamization, Nixon and his administration applied this doctrine not only to foreign policy decisions in Southeast Asia, but also to strategic initiatives in both the Middle and Far East. Additionally, the Nixon policy of limiting unconditional defense

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<sup>21</sup>President Richard M. Nixon, "Remarks to Press Corps During Visit to Guam," 25 July 1969, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140> (accessed 2 April 2014).

<sup>22</sup>President Richard M. Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam., 3 November 1969, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303> (accessed 2 April 2014).

guarantees to America's allies enabled the worldwide expansion of weaponry sales from the United States to nations no longer expecting to fall under American protection, effectively setting the stage for the doctrine prescribed by President Carter to follow 10 years later.<sup>23</sup>

### The Carter Doctrine

Two events directly influenced what became known as the Carter Doctrine. First, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, unexpected by United States officials, began officially on 16 January with the exile of Iran's United States-backed ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and ended on 11 February when Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to power.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Iran on 7 April 1980 and enacted harsh economic sanctions towards their former major military and economic partner in the Middle East. These sanctions, combined with a significant decline in Iranian oil production beginning in late 1978, resulted in the United States experiencing an average shortfall of 600,000 to 700,000 barrels of crude oil a day, leading to a shortage of gasoline in the spring and early summer of 1979.<sup>25</sup> The associated public discord prompted Carter to deliver a nationally-televised speech on 15 July 1979 in which he proclaimed the American people suffered from a "crisis of confidence" hoping to spur Americans into depending less on foreign oil.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>No presidential doctrine is attributed to President Gerald R. Ford due to his short time in office.

<sup>24</sup>US Congress, House, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Iran, Staff Report 38-745, *Evaluation of U.S. Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 1979).

<sup>25</sup>Joseph A. Yager, "The Energy Battles of 1979," in *Energy Policy in Perspective* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1981), 616-18.

<sup>26</sup>President Jimmy Carter, "Text of President Carter's Address to the Nation on July 15, 1979," The Miller Center at the University of Virginia, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3402> (accessed 29 March 2014).

Second, on 24 December 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> The Carter Administration, still reeling from an array of strategic missteps in addition to the recent energy crisis, viewed the invasion by the Soviets as an indirect, yet strategic, attempt to gain influence in the Persian Gulf region and a threat to American economic interests from the area. President Carter's State of the Union Address on 23 January 1980 succinctly outlined the United States position regarding Soviet intervention in the Middle East. During the speech, Carter stated flatly, "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."<sup>28</sup>

Complementing Carter's address, two key documents issued to Carter's National Security Council, both just less than a year after the speech itself outlined the administration's security strategy in the Middle East. First, Presidential Directive 62 called for increased emphasis and priority in protecting vital United States interests in the Persian Gulf by shifting the focus of United States general purpose military forces from Europe to the Middle East. The directive additionally stressed a sharp increase in diplomatic, military, and economic coordination with North Atlantic treaty Organization and other Allied nations worldwide to counter any perceived Soviet threat.<sup>29</sup> Second, Presidential Directive 63 provided direction to the DoD, Department of States, and Department of Energy, as well as to the Central Intelligence Agency regarding their

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<sup>27</sup>Joseph J. Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986), 77.

<sup>28</sup>President Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," 23 January 1980, Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> (accessed 2 April 2014).

<sup>29</sup>US President, Presidential Directive/NSC-62, "Modifications in U.S. National Strategy," 15 January 1981, Homeland Security Digital Library, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=458998> (accessed 2 April 2014).

responsibilities in implementing a security framework in the Persian Gulf. The document additionally tasked each department or agency with creating or modifying programs to carry out its designated tasks and directed the Office of Management and Budget to ensure those programs received prioritized funding.<sup>30</sup> Although Carter ordered these changes take place, the inauguration of Ronald Reagan a mere five days after Carter signed the presidential directives precluded Carter from overseeing the fulfillment of his orders.

### The Reagan Doctrine

With Carter's presidential term marked by both international and domestic turmoil for the United States, the tenure of Ronald Reagan provided a sharp contrast. Domestically, Reagan stimulated the American economy through vigorous tax cuts which decreased inflation and unemployment. Internationally, Reagan took aggressive, unprecedented steps to protect American security interests. In addition to publically denouncing the ideology of the Soviet Union and its communist economic system, Reagan implemented numerous policies to lessen the influence of the Soviet Union during the last years of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> Reagan advocated the provision of covert monetary aid and arms to anti-communist guerrilla forces in nine nations: Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Libya, Nicaragua, and Vietnam, in an attempt to roll back communist influence in those countries.<sup>32</sup> The rollback policy, the central tenet of the Reagan Doctrine, signaled a major foreign policy shift from the policy of containment adopted by

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<sup>30</sup>US President, Presidential Directive/NSC- 63, "Persian Gulf Security Framework," 15 January 1981, Homeland Security Digital Library, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=459079> (accessed 2 April 2014).

<sup>31</sup>President Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida," 8 March 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm> (accessed 2 April 2014).

<sup>32</sup>President Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Central America," 16 February 1985, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38231> (accessed 3 April 2014).

the administration of President Harry Truman in 1946, just prior to the onset of the Cold War, and still in effect at the time.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the quantifiable effects of the rollback policy, evidenced by actions such as the American military invasion to enact a regime change in Grenada, the policy's ambitions took Truman's doctrine of containment a step further. The Reagan Doctrine strove to weaken the Soviet sphere of influence beyond its immediate borders.<sup>34</sup> Although Carter's doctrine enacted the initial shift of United States strategy against defeating the Soviet government and economic system, Reagan's doctrine delivered the decisive blow.

In summary, each presidential doctrine built upon the central premise of the previous doctrine in a continual effort to refine and adapt the national security strategy of the United States. Nixon's policy of forcing America's Asian allies to take the lead in defending themselves while also agreeing to honor security agreements and provide assistance accomplished two objectives. First, the policy provided the United States with a disengagement strategy from Vietnam. Second, it set the conditions for the Carter Administration to eventually shift American military focus to the Middle East to enforce economic action favorable to the United States. Reagan's administration then built upon the strategic framework laid by the Carter doctrine and significantly built American military capability while simultaneously increasing financial support to covertly overthrow communist-inspired governments worldwide. These two facets of policy led to the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, leaving the United States as the world's only super-power going into the last decade of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>George Kennan, "Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947) <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23331/x/the-sources-of-soviet-conduct> (accessed 13 December 2013).

<sup>34</sup>James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 20-21.

<sup>35</sup>Fraser Cameron, *US Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Global Hegemon or Reluctant Sheriff?* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 11.



## SECTION II: THE DEFENSE AND MILITARY STRATEGIES THAT FOLLOWED

This evolution of a cohesive approach to national security over the 20 year span of four presidents drove significant changes in defense and military strategy. Similar to how each presidential doctrine built upon the last, defense and military strategy evolved from the morass and micromanagement of Vietnam, through a process of assessment and development in the last half of the 1970s, to, at the start of Operation Desert Storm, a wide reaching, technologically advanced, and responsive approach that aptly supported the nations interests abroad.<sup>36</sup> However, defining national defense and military strategies in the years between the Vietnam Conflict and the Persian Gulf War prove more difficult than simply consulting the latest National Defense Strategy or National Military Strategy document, the first of which did not enter production until 1992. Additionally, one must resist the natural inclination to confuse military strategy with military preparedness or even military capability. Strategy outlines objectives, while means and ways, as discussed earlier, drive military proficiency and competency. Instead of making an assessment of the military's ability to respond to strategic direction, the following paragraphs describe the framework of how national defense and military strategies developed from the emerging national security strategy described above.

Three distinct events best summarize this emergence and resulted in very significant and specific implications for all services and especially the Marine Corps. First, declining public support for American armed force commitments in Southeast Asia during the early part of Nixon's first presidential term championed the end of military conscription and the subsequent creation of an AVF.<sup>37</sup> Second, Operation Eagle Claw, the botched attempt ordered by Carter on 24 April 1980 to rescue the 52 American diplomats held captive in the United States Embassy in

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<sup>36</sup>Mazarr et al., 113-16.

<sup>37</sup>Karl W. Eikenberry, "Reassessing the All-Volunteer Force," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no.1 (Winter 2013): 8-9.

Tehran identified the substantial challenges associated with undertaking joint military operations.<sup>38</sup> Third, the American military intervention in Beirut between 1982 and 1984 illustrated realistic and significant consequences of Reagan's decision to increase military involvement in the Middle East.<sup>39</sup> These three actions significantly influenced the structure of the American military force, the Marine Corps included, as an entity. A brief discussion of each event follows.

### The AVF

During the 1968 Presidential election, Richard Nixon campaigned under a promise to bring the war in Vietnam to a close. As part of that promise, Nixon courted the vote of college students by underscoring that, if elected, he would abolish the wartime draft. After his victory in the November 1968 presidential election, Nixon took the first step toward fulfilling his promise by creating the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force on 27 March 1969. By the end of the year, the commission unanimously agreed:

. . . that the nation's best interests will be better served by an all-volunteer force, supported by an effective stand-by draft, than by a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts; that steps should be taken promptly to move in this direction; and that the first indispensable step is to remove the present inequity in the pay of men serving their first term in the armed forces.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Colonel Charlie A. Beckwith, US Army (Retired) and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), 294-95.

<sup>39</sup>President Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Events in Lebanon and Grenada," 27 October 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/102783b.htm> (accessed 2 April 2014).

<sup>40</sup>Thomas S. Gates, *The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force: Final Report* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1970), 5.

Nixon ultimately concurred with the finding and recommendations of the commission, but not before requesting, and receiving from Congress, a two-year extension of the draft law set to expire in 1971.<sup>41</sup> Nixon asked for no further extensions, effectively ending the draft in early 1973.

In the long run, the transformation of the United States armed services to an all-volunteer military dramatically improved the quality of the force itself. A 2006 study of the evolution of the AVF by the RAND Corporation cites three reasons for this improvement. First, members of the AVF score higher on standardized Intelligence Quotient tests. Second, the percentage of new recruits who have graduated high school increased since the end of the draft. Third, a transition to an AVF drastically increased the number of personnel who make a career out of service in the military. The RAND study cites that as a result of these factors, the AVF serves with a much greater degree of proficiency and professionalism.<sup>42</sup>

#### Operation Eagle Claw

While the introduction of an AVF ultimately increased the degree of professionalism and proficiency in the military, Operation Eagle Claw—the aborted mission to rescue 52 American diplomats held hostage in Tehran as the result of the Iranian Revolution—vividly demonstrated the challenges presented to that professional military force resulting from Carter’s foreign policy shift emphasizing the protection of American interests in the Middle East.<sup>43</sup> On 24 April 1980, three United States Air Force MC-130 aircraft carrying 118 United States Army Delta Force operators and three United States Air Force EC-130s fully loaded with fuel flew from the island of Masirah off the coast of Oman to a refueling location, codenamed Desert One, in Iran 200

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<sup>41</sup>*Draft Extension Act of 1971*, Public Law 92-129, 101(a)(35), US Statutes at Large 348, (1971): 85.

<sup>42</sup>Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! Evolution of an All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 745.

<sup>43</sup>Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 467-68.

miles southeast of Tehran. Concurrently, eight United States Navy RH-53D helicopters launched from the aircraft carrier *Nimitz* and met the six C-130s at Desert One. After ground refueling from the EC-130s, the eight MH-53Ds would transport the Delta Force assault team to Tehran to rescue the hostages.<sup>44</sup>

However, only five of the eight helicopters arrived at Desert One in operational condition. Aircrew abandoned one RH-53D enroute due to impending rotor blade failure. Another helicopter returned to the *Nimitz* after flying through a dust cloud which caused the degradation of several critical navigation and flight instruments. The third RH-53D experienced a partial hydraulic failure but continued to Desert One although it could no longer continue as part of the mission.<sup>45</sup>

Prior to execution, planners determined the requirement of six operational helicopters at the refueling site for the mission to continue. Since only five remained available, the on-scene commander requested permission to abort the mission and return to base. Ultimately, Carter himself authorized the mission abort and the C-130s, RH-53Ds, and Delta Force teams began the withdrawal process.<sup>46</sup>

During refueling operations just prior to retrograde, an RH-53D collided with an MC-130, causing a large explosion that immediately engulfed both aircraft in flames, killing eight personnel and wounding five. Subsequent explosions from ammunition onboard both aircraft sent damaging shrapnel into the rest of the helicopters positioned nearby. The on-scene commander

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<sup>44</sup>Beckwith and Knox, 253.

<sup>45</sup>The Special Operations Review Group Report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Operation Eagle Claw was commonly known as the *Holloway Commission Report* because of the Group's senior-ranking member, Admiral James L. Holloway III, United States Navy, Retired. Special Operations Review Group, *Report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Operation Eagle Claw*, Washington, DC, 23 August 1980, 9-10.

<sup>46</sup>Beckwith and Knox, 253.

decided to transfer all personnel, including the helicopter aircrew, to the remaining C-130s and depart the area, leaving behind RH-53Ds and one MC-130, all damaged to varying degrees.<sup>47</sup>

The Iran hostage crisis and the ensuing botched rescue attempt left the American public wholly disillusioned with their government's leadership during a period of significant foreign policy crises.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the military leadership began to realize "that, even with the best and most dedicated 'can-do' attitude, a force could not always succeed with 'make-do' capabilities."<sup>49</sup> The military establishment, now with an unprecedented degree of quality manpower, brought about by the AVF, yearned next for organizational mechanisms and updated equipment required to regain and maintain advantage in new threats to national security. The American public demanded the same.

### Beirut

Like the catastrophe of Operation Eagle Claw, the events surrounding the bombing of the United States Marine barracks in Beirut illustrate the challenges and complexities of operating in support of evolving United States interests in the Middle East. On 25 August 1982, the Reagan Administration sent a Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) to Beirut, Lebanon as part of a multi-national British, French, Italian, and American force tasked with maintaining peace as Palestinian Liberation Organization guerillas evacuated Beirut. On 10 September, the MAU withdrew from Beirut after the evacuation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization forces. Four days later, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party orchestrated the assassination of Bachir Gemayel, Lebanon's president elect, backed by both the United States and Israel. This act, combined with increased

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<sup>47</sup>Special Operations Review Group, *Report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Operation Eagle Claw*, 10.

<sup>48</sup>David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 176.

<sup>49</sup>Rod Lenahan, *Crippled Eagle: A Historical perspective of U.S. Special Operations 1976-1996* (Charleston, SC: Narwhal Press, 1998), 157.

Syrian and Iranian pressure on the Lebanese Armed Forces, and ostensibly supported by the Soviet Union, drove the redeployment of the MAU back to Beirut on 29 September, joining French and Italian forces still in place and setting up their landing force headquarters at the international airport. Over the next 15 months, attacks against the multi-national force increased in frequency and intensity, culminating in the Iranian-backed truck bombing of the United States Marine barracks at the Beirut International Airport which claimed 241 American lives.<sup>50</sup>

In his address to the American people in the wake of the bombings, Reagan succinctly outlined the American stance toward the brewing conflict in the Middle East, outlining the strategic importance of American military involvement in the region. Reagan stated:

If terrorism and intimidation succeed, it'll be a devastating blow to the peace process and to Israel's search for genuine security. It won't just be Lebanon sentenced to a future of chaos. Can the United States, or the free world, for that matter, stand by and see the Middle East incorporated into the Soviet bloc? What of Western Europe and Japan's dependence on Middle East oil for the energy to fuel their industries? The Middle East is, as I've said, vital to our national security and economic well-being.<sup>51</sup>

The mission of the MAU in Lebanon to maintain order throughout their sector as well as the attacks against them illustrate how rolling back Soviet influence in the Middle East became a pillar of United States defense and military strategy through the 1980s and into the 1990s.

Although the United States withdrew the MAU from Lebanon in February of 1984, the country and the surrounding region continued to serve as a proxy Cold War battleground.<sup>52</sup> However, the underlying contest between Soviet and American ideals did not limit itself to the Middle East.

America took strategic military action in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Europe, and even the Far East to stop the influence of Communism. Although the Cold War ended with the

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<sup>50</sup>Eric Hammel, *The Root: The Marines in Beirut August 1982-February 1984* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2005), 435-438.

<sup>51</sup>Reagan, "Address on Lebanon and Grenada."

<sup>52</sup>Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 9.

collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, United States defense policy today still centers on the actions of groups born out of these conflicts of the first half of the 1980s.<sup>53</sup>

### SECTION III: THE RESOURCES REQUIRED

The above explanation of the national security and military strategies prevalent during the period of 1969 through 1989 provides the foundation for an analysis of the ways and means developed by the Marine Corps to defend such strategies. Since what a force has to fight with often limits how a force will fight, this monograph first discusses means developed by the Marine Corps during the time period and then explains the ways in which the Marine Corps employed such means. An analysis of such means must first begin with a study of the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. Although individual Marines deployed to Vietnam as advisors as early as 1961, the Marine Corps' large-scale involvement in the Vietnam War began on 8 March 1965, when the 9th MEB landed on the beaches of Da Nang. The 9th MEB eventually became the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF), growing drastically in personnel and equipment over the next three years, to peak personnel strength of 85,755 in 1968.<sup>54</sup> The Marine Corps maintained a continual presence in Vietnam until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on 27 January 1973 mandated the withdrawal of all United States combat forces from Vietnam.<sup>55</sup>

Marine forces returned to Southeast Asia on 15 May 1975 in an attempt to rescue the crew of the American container ship *Mayaguez* captured by the Khmer Rouge. The Marine Corps

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<sup>53</sup>US Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-2.

<sup>54</sup>Edwin H. Simmons, "Amphibious Becomes Expeditionary," *Fortitudine* 18, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1988): 7.

<sup>55</sup>Marine Corps Command Center force allocation and assignment documents, January of 1971 and December of 1973, courtesy of the Marine Corps History Division secure, unclassified website, not available to the general public, accessed on March 25, 2014. The Paris Peace Accords are formally known as the *Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, Democratic Republic of Vietnam-United States*, 27 January 1973, Digital National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cat/displayItemId.do?queryType=cat&ItemID=CVW01224> (accessed 18 March 2014).

ultimately accomplished the mission, but did so at a cost of 14 dead or missing, 41 wounded, and three helicopters lost in harsh fighting against Cambodian communist forces.<sup>56</sup> The end of this mission finally brought Marine Corps action in Southeast Asia to a close after a period of over 14 years. During that time in the area of combat operations, the Marine Corps saw 13,095 Marines killed in action or died of wounds. Additionally, 88,594 Marines were wounded in action.<sup>57</sup>

Fourteen years in Southeast Asia left the Marine Corps more bloodied than ever before, having sustained 14,029 more casualties than they did in World War II.<sup>58</sup> While the tangible losses sustained during Vietnam left significant scars, the Marine Corps also began to dramatically feel the intangible effects on the institution as a whole. A January 1975 *Marine Corps Gazette* article by Marine Lieutenant General Samuel Jaskilka, titled “Quality and Leadership” begins by stating that, “some recent articles and letters to the editor written by our Marines have been critical of our Corps. This is not surprising since we are our own worst critics, as we should be!” Jaskilka continued by writing, “what does surprise me, however, is the misconception on the part of some that the top leadership of the Corps is either unaware of our problems or is not doing anything to solve them. Nothing could be further from the truth.”<sup>59</sup> The tone and tenor of Jaskilka’s comments, echoed throughout numerous other *Gazette* and *Proceedings* articles written in the first half of the 1970s, reveals not only a crisis of conscience within the Marine Corps but also a collective yearning to find out how to again set the Marine

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<sup>56</sup>Millett, 605-606.

<sup>57</sup>Naval History and Heritage Command, “Casualties: U. S. Navy and Marine Corps Personnel Killed and Wounded in Wars, Conflicts, Terrorist Acts, and Other Hostile Incidents,” US Navy, <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq56-1.htm> (accessed 18 March 2014).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Samuel Jaskilka, “Quality and Leadership,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 59, no. 1 (January 1975): 43.



Corps on a future path congruent with its reputation gained in France, the Central Pacific, Korea, and Vietnam as a smart, effective, disciplined force.

History revealed the Marine Corps overcame their post-Vietnam doubts: in September of 1990 over 45,000 Marines of the First MEF stood ready in Saudi Arabia awaiting the President's orders to drive Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army out of Kuwait.<sup>60</sup> By contrasting the Marine Corps of 1975 with the Marine Corps in 1990, three questions emerge. First, what conditions caused the Marine Corps to suffer such problems within their ranks? Second, what concrete steps did the Marine Corps take in terms of manpower recruitment and retention, and with equipment acquisition, over the 20 years between 1969 and 1989 to improve their fighting effectiveness? Third, what lessons remain applicable to the Corps today as it emerges from a prolonged period of conflict similar in many ways to that of Vietnam?

#### The Most Significant Challenge

The transition to an AVF is the primary reason why the Marine Corps struggled in the aftermath of Vietnam to meet its high personnel expectations. Contrary to the popular belief that all Marines begin as pure volunteers, draftees contributed significantly to the overall population of Marines since World War II. The Marines took 16,000 draftees during World War II, 83,858 during the Korean War, and 42,633 during Vietnam.<sup>61</sup> With the end of conscription in 1973 the Marine Corps lost a valuable mechanism that drove tens of thousands of qualified men into service. Additionally, social and cultural attitudes toward military service, significantly altered by the disdain over how the government handled the Vietnam War, changed in such a way that dissuaded many qualified young men from considering service in any branch of the military.

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<sup>60</sup>Millett, 50.

<sup>61</sup>Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida Coalition, "Fact vs Fiction...The Vietnam Veteran," Vietnam Webring, <http://www.vvof.org/factsvvnv.htm> (accessed 18 March 2014).

Initial efforts by the Marine Corps to retool their modest pre-AVF advertising and recruiting system, now inadequate in attracting enough qualified volunteers, proved challenging. Instead, the Marine Corps initially met its recruiting requirements by bringing in lower quality recruits. The percentage of male recruits with a high school diploma shrank to under 50 percent in 1973.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, DoD and Department of the Navy regulations forced the Marine Corps to accept at least 20 percent of recruits from those who scored lowest on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, a standardized measure of intelligence.<sup>63</sup> The Marine Corps viewed both a high school diploma and a good score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test as good indications of potential to adapt mentally and socially to life in the Marine Corps. This posed significant challenges for Marine Corps recruiters to get the numbers of diplomas and high scores needed.<sup>64</sup>

The 1973 to 1975 recruiting difficulties experienced by the Marine Corps produced near tragic results that almost shattered the overall cohesion and effectiveness of the Marine Corps as a whole. In 1975, the Marine Corps boasted the highest per capita unauthorized absence rate of all the armed services. They possessed the same dubious distinction regarding the rate of Marines imprisoned or courts-martialed. Reported drug use and alcohol abuse rates in the Marine Corps stood only second highest to those in the Navy.<sup>65</sup> The Marine Corps emerged from the first half of

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<sup>62</sup>Jack Shulimson, Leonard A. Blasiol, Charles R. Smith and David A. Dawson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1968: The Defining Year, Marine Corps Vietnam Operational History Series* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1997), 560.

<sup>63</sup>Jaskilka, 14.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>65</sup>Millett, 612.

the 1970s simply unable to recruit many quality individuals for active service, despite an all-time high national unemployment rate of 8.5 percent.<sup>66</sup>

### Better Leadership, Recruitment, and Retention

How then, did the Marine Corps ultimately return to meeting the requirement of recruiting and maintaining a qualified force? The early retirement of General Cushman, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1972 to 1975 helped in some respects. Changes in leadership often bring with them a fresh perspective on how to handle difficult situations, and the circumstances the Marine Corps found themselves mired in in 1975 served as no exception. Although General Cushman favored the appointment of his protégé, General Earl E. Anderson, as Commandant, many others lobbied for the appointment of Lieutenant General Louis H. Wilson, then the Commanding General of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Their efforts proved successful, and on 1 July 1975 General Wilson pinned on his fourth star and assumed the duties and responsibilities of the Commandant of the Marine Corps.<sup>67</sup> Immediately upon his Senate confirmation, General Wilson set out to make lasting reforms to the personnel quagmire suffocating the Marine Corps.

Specifically, General Wilson implemented three requirements that brought the quality of Marine recruits back up to standard. First, the Marine Corps mandated that, beginning in fiscal year 1977, at least 75 percent of all new recruits must possess at least a high school diploma.<sup>68</sup> Second, during that same year, the Marine Corps stopped accepting recruits from the lowest

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<sup>66</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Unemployment Rate,” US Department of Labor, [http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years\\_option=all\\_years&periods\\_option=specific\\_periods&periods=Annual+Data](http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years_option=all_years&periods_option=specific_periods&periods=Annual+Data) (accessed 18 March 2014).

<sup>67</sup>David H. White, Jr., “Louis H. Wilson: 1975-1979,” in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, eds. Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 429.

<sup>68</sup>Louis H. Wilson, “The Troops are Looking Good,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 60, no. 3 (March 1976): 16.

category of mental aptitude. General Wilson held fast to this prohibition even under risk of the Marine Corps not meeting their funded end strength in personnel. Third, General Wilson gave commanders down to the battalion level the authority to administratively separate problem Marines. Standards improved steadily over the next five years as General Robert H. Barrow replaced General Wilson as Commandant and kept General Wilson's implementations in effect. By the end of General Barrow's term as Commandant in June of 1983, the Marine Corps regularly attracted a high standard of both officers and enlisted Marines.

The quest for well-educated and intelligent Marines represents only one of the manpower challenges faced by Marine Corps leadership in the years between 1969 and 1989. While the induction of the AVF in 1973 forced the Marine Corps to work harder to fill its ranks with acceptable recruits, the increase in illegal drug use and alcohol abuse across American society as a whole in the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s impacted the Marine Corps as well. A *Marine Corps Gazette* article from the January 1974 issue succinctly denotes this problem by stating that a five-year study determined that alcohol contributed to 62 percent of Marine traffic deaths and that between 60 and 75 percent of disciplinary cases, depending on the alleged offense, stem from drug use or alcohol abuse.<sup>69</sup> In a similar determined fashion to the way the Marine Corps attacked their impending recruiting issues, General Barrow took aggressive action to eliminate drug users and alcohol abusers quickly from the ranks by focusing more on separation and less on rehabilitation and return to service. In facing both the recruiting and substance abuse challenges, Marine Corps leadership in the late 1970s and early 1980s sought to remove those who did not meet standards or broke the rules from staying in the Marine Corps, even if that action meant potentially not meeting required personnel end strength. The risk paid dividends as the Marine

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<sup>69</sup>C. F. Harris, "The Marine Alcohol and Drug Abuse Control Officer," *Marine Corps Gazette* 58, no. 1 (January 1974): 26.

Corps renewed standards within their force while never failing to meet their authorized manpower allotments.

### A Seat at the Table

In addition to benefitting from significant manpower improvements during the tenure of General Wilson and General Barrow, the Marine Corps also benefitted from a 1977 amendment to the National Security Act of 1947 which made the Commandant of the Marine Corps a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Previous to this amendment, the Commandant only consulted the Joint Chiefs of Staff on items relevant to the Marine Corps or served as an occasional member when asked. This original arrangement tied Marine Corps interests to those of the Navy as the Chief of Naval Operations served as the primary Marine Corps voice to the Joint Chiefs. Implementation of the new amendment placed the Marine Corps on equal footing with the other services and provided the Commandant a formal platform to advise the President on all matters of national security, not just those of direct concern to the Marine Corps.<sup>70</sup>

A seat at the table of the Joint Chiefs also allowed the Commandant to advocate for much needed advances in equipment refurbishment and modernization. Initially, federal budget difficulties during the Carter Administration prevented the Marine Corps from making any significant gains in the acquisition field.<sup>71</sup> However, during those years the Marine Corps began to chart a course outlining what material the Corps should purchase to outfit their force. The Marine Corps faced one significant question: should the Marine Corps equip its Fleet Marine Force for participation in potential North Atlantic Treaty Organization actions against Communist

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<sup>70</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, White Letter No. 12-78, "Commandant of the Marine Corps Status as a Member of the Joint chiefs of Staff," Headquarters, US Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 24 October 1978.

<sup>71</sup>Frank L. Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised: President Carter, Defense Budgets, and the Politics of Military Readiness* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 16.

Bloc forces, developing a rapid worldwide deployment capability only partially dependent on Navy amphibious shipping? In 1979, Secretary of Defense Harold R. Brown provided the Commandant long-range guidance stating that the Marine Corps must equip itself to accomplish both missions. The Secretary's guidance initiated three efforts within the Marine Corps. First, between 1982 and 1990, the Marine Corps developed a program to stockpile a supply depot in Norway capable of supporting an entire Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) for at least 30 days. Marine Corps and Norwegian forces also trained together on an annual basis as part of the bilateral agreement. Second, the Marine Corps supported Navy efforts to modernize its amphibious fleet. Development of five new *Wasp* class landing helicopter dock ships and five new *Whidbey Island*-class dock landing ships gave the Navy the capability to simultaneously embark one MAF of approximately 37,800 personnel and one MAB of approximately 12,220 personnel.<sup>72</sup> Third, and most significant to the current operational environment, the DoD developed a program that eventually transformed into the Navy and Marine Corps driven Maritime Prepositioning Ships program. Initially designed in 1980 to support the Rapid Development Joint Task Force, by 1986 the Maritime Prepositioning Ships program grew to a fleet of three permanently deployed squadrons; one in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, one in the Western Pacific Ocean, and one in the Indian Ocean. Each squadron possessed enough equipment and supplies to support the ground and logistics elements of a MAB.<sup>73</sup> This capability provided the Marine Corps an alternative deployment and sustainment capability outside of the traditional amphibious method.

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<sup>72</sup>David Eshel, *The U.S. Rapid Deployment Forces* (New York: ARCO Publishing, Inc.), 188.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 187-88.

### Reorganization and Acquisition

In addition to embarking on strategic and operational initiatives to improve their material readiness, the Marine Corps also invested in numerous tactical advancements, as unprecedented levels of peacetime military funding grew during the Reagan administration.<sup>74</sup> Numerous developments in individual and crew-served weapons ensured each of those companies entered a firefight well equipped. The 1980s saw the induction of the M9 Beretta to all officers and staff non-commissioned officers, an improved M16A2 service rifle to each sergeant and below, the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon light machine gun to each four-man fire team, the arrival of new versions of M60 medium machine guns and M2 heavy machine guns, Mk19 grenade launchers, and new 60 and 81 millimeter mortars to each weapons company. Additionally, the new infantry battalions increased their mobility with the acquisition of new High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, their protection with new helmets and flak jackets, and their energy with new, prepackaged Meals Ready to Eat. On a larger scale, the Marine Corps replaced the 105 millimeter Howitzer with a 155 millimeter version which greatly increased its range and could fire both guided and unguided munitions and also inherited a small fleet of M1A1 tanks from the Army. Most importantly, the Marine Corps brought the new Light Armored Vehicle into service in 1983. A purchase of approximately 700 eight-wheeled Light Armored Vehicles allowed the Marine Corps to add a light armored reconnaissance battalion to each of its three active duty infantry divisions, providing division commanders with a means to extend mobile scouting missions out to a long distance over rough terrain. The Light Armored Vehicle's 25 millimeter cannon also provided the division with an additional dose of firepower if required.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Lawrence J. Korb, "The Reagan Defense Budget and Program: The Buildup That Collapsed," in *Assessing the Reagan Years*, ed. David Boaz (Washington D.C.: Cato Institute, 1988), 83.

<sup>75</sup>Headquarters, US Marine Corps (HQMC), *Marine Corps Concepts and Issues* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Library, 1985), 2-15.

The ground combat element did not serve as the sole beneficiary of the acquisition and procurement efforts of the Marine Corps throughout the 1980s. The logistics combat element and aviation combat element each received substantial amounts of new equipment. Logistic units took possession of large numbers of the improved version of the M939 five-ton truck developed by the Army. Units could configure the M939 in a variety of ways to maximize supply and personnel transport. Additionally, the Marine Corps purchased the new Logistic Vehicle System fully equipped with a selection of trailers able to carry a large amount of cargo both on and off road.<sup>76</sup>

As stated above, Marine aviation also benefitted from the Marine Corps offensive acquisition posture throughout the 1980s. However, while equipment purchases for the ground combat element and logistics combat element often receive little scrutiny outside the Marine Corps itself, aviation capability development and procurement involves a whole host of interested parties. Marine Corps aviation represents a significant part of naval aviation as a whole. The Navy must endorse any procurement proposal for a new Marine Corps aircraft. The joint nature of aviation operations as a whole also raises a large amount of interest from the Army and Air Force as well. The large overall expense of developing and producing new aircraft also draws the interest from members of Congress; some who represent districts with aircraft manufacturing facilities and some who oversee the allocation of the tens of millions of dollars required to produce each aircraft. Despite the high degree of scrutiny from each of these sources the Marine Corps managed to develop and procure two new models of aircraft in the 22-year period between 1969 and 1990: the AV-8 Harrier and the FA-18 Hornet.<sup>77</sup>

Each of these aircraft possesses their own story of how they joined the Marine Corps inventory. The efforts taken to incorporate each platform into service with the operating forces lie

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<sup>76</sup>HQMC, *Marine Corps Concepts and Issues Marine Corps Concepts and Issues*, 47.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-27.



beyond the scope of this monograph. However, three findings from an analysis of those efforts as well as rotary-wing platform modernization efforts prove relevant to the discussion at hand. First, through a constant effort since the Vietnam War to acquire a dedicated attack platform tailored to provide close air support to Marines on the ground, the Marine Corps finally achieved their goal of replacing all of their antiquated A-4 Skyhawk aircraft with eight squadrons of 12 AV-8B aircraft each. This new version of the Harrier boasted an improved short takeoff and vertical landing capability, extended on-station time, and the ability to carry more munitions. Second, the acquisition of the Hornet in 1984 provided the Marine Corps with a multi-role aircraft capable of attaining and maintaining air superiority while also capable of functioning in an attack role. Third, continual refinement and improvement initiatives for the UH-1 Huey, AH-1 Cobra, and CH-53 Super Stallion helicopters ensured the Marine Corps met their rotary wing close air support and assault support requirements. During this period the Marine Corps also began to develop the MV-22 Osprey to replace the aging CH-46 Sea Knight.<sup>78</sup>

#### SECTION IV: A NEW WAY OF FIGHTING?

What did all this mean for the Marine rifleman operationally deployed between 1969 and 1990? In what *ways* did the Marine Corps employ their newly acquired *means* to accomplish their assigned military *ends*? How did the Marine Corps operate as a force? Ultimately, the Marine Corps continued to advance their doctrine of expeditionary combined arms in the form of a ground-air-logistics team, just as the Marine Corps pioneered in the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the first three decades of the 1900s.<sup>79</sup> The Marine Corps continued the development of an integrated air-ground fighting force to much success in World War II and in the early stages of

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<sup>78</sup>HQMC, *Marine Corps Concepts and Issues Marine Corps Concepts and Issues*, 21-27.

<sup>79</sup>Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 32-34.

the Korean War. In 1951, the Marine Corps took the first formal step to codifying this inextricable link in their organizational structure when the Commandant, General Clifton B. Gates, convened a board to study and make recommendations on air-ground and aviation matters, informally known as the Harris Board. The Harris Board published their report in December of 1951, recommending among other items the creation of composite headquarters elements to oversee integration between Marine infantry and aircraft units during training and combat. The Commandant's approval of this recommendation paved the way for the formation of the 1st and 2nd Provisional MAGTFs in 1953. Marine Corps Order 3120.3, issued on 27 December 1962 removed the provisional moniker, further clarified the definition of a MAGTF as a "task organization which is designed to exploit the combat power inherent in carefully integrated air and ground operations," and outlined the four different types of MAGTFs.<sup>80</sup> The Marine Corps took this task organization into the Vietnam War and employed its principles to a high degree of tactical success.

#### The Advanced Amphibious Study Group

The conclusion of Marine Corps involvement in Vietnam allowed the Marine Corps to take a formalized, introspective look into how to best operate. In 1974, General Cushman established the Advanced Amphibious Study Group under the cognizance of the Headquarters Marine Corps Chief of Staff. The Commandant charged the group with the broad task to "study questions of critical importance to the Marine Corps, principally in the midrange period; to develop original concepts and solutions; and where appropriate, to recommend the means and

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<sup>80</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 3120.3, "The Organization of Marine Air-Ground Task Forces," Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 27 December 1962.

methods of implementing the solutions proposed.”<sup>81</sup> The Group published numerous recommendations between 1974 and 1986, including arguments advocating for the development of a permanent MAGTF headquarters structure across the Marine Corps.

### A Refined Task Organization

Prior to this reorganization, the Marine Corps created headquarters elements to oversee integration of ground and air units during operations and exercises. The Marine Corps then deactivated those headquarter elements at the completion of their assigned mission.<sup>82</sup> Determining that “the advent of maritime and land prepositioning; an increased emphasis on rapid deployment, including the requirement for airlifted MAGTFs; and an increased demand for refined execution planning in the joint commands all indicated that we needed to improve our approach to forming and staffing MAGTF headquarters,” the Advanced Amphibious Study Group presented Marine Corps leadership with a model for placing the Fleet Marine Force under a permanent MAGTF structure. In 1983, the Group won approval of this concept from the Commandant, General Barrow.<sup>83</sup>

At the organizational level, the creation and implementation of standing MAGTF headquarters elements changed how the Marine Corps organized and operationally employed its forces. In both garrison and combat, the infantry division, aircraft wing, combat service support group all fell under the operational control of a MAF three-star commanding general. The Marine Corps’ three MAFs—one on the west coast of the United States, one on the east coast of the

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<sup>81</sup>Director Advanced Amphibious Study Group, *The Permanent MAGTF Headquarters Concept and How It Applies in the Formation of a Composite MAGTF*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 15 July 1985).

<sup>82</sup>US Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Force Manual 0-1, *Marine Air-Ground Task Force Doctrine* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1979), 2-3.

<sup>83</sup>Director Advanced Amphibious Study Group, *The Permanent MAGTF Headquarters Concept and How It Applies in the Formation of a Composite MAGTF*, introductory statement by James J. Stewart, Director.

United States, and one permanently forward deployed to Japan—ensured the MAF could maintain a presence world-wide. The MAF could now undertake and accomplish large-scale operations and also quickly respond to pressing crises and contingencies by rapidly forming smaller MAGTFs from the larger MAF structure.

Two specific developments, both significant to how the Marine Corps employs its forces today, emerged from the 1983 implementation of standing MAFs in both garrison and during operations. The establishment of standing headquarters elements at all levels of the MAGTF allowed the Marine Corps to refine the role of each echelon of the MAGTF itself. The MAF now possessed the strength in numbers and equipment to deploy for a long period of time in support of high intensity combat operations, showcasing the ability of the Marine Corps to respond quickly to all types of conflicts, both large and small, conventional and unconventional.<sup>84</sup> The MAB maintained the capability to deploy quickly and serve as the forward element of what would become the MAF once all assigned forces mobilized. The MAU possessed the small size and organizational structure to remain afloat to immediately respond to any crisis as directed by national command authority.

First, through refining the definition and composition of the three types of MAGTFs, the MAU emerged as a natural fit to demonstrate the ability of the Marine Corps to possess a special operations capability. In 1983, the same year the Marine Corps transitioned to permanent MAGTF headquarters elements, the DoD directed all services to review their special operations capability. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Paul X. Kelley tasked the Commanding General of Fleet Marine Forces, Atlantic, Lieutenant General Alfred M. Gray, Jr., with analyzing the current special operations capability of the Marine Corps. General Gray determined that although the Marine Corps possessed an inherent ability to conduct a broad

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<sup>84</sup>Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 14.

spectrum of special operations in a maritime environment, the Marine Corps still needed to improve its overall special operations capability. General Gray's findings resulted in the implementation of a pilot program to train and designate the MAUs as Special Operations Capable. By 1988, all six MAUs in the Marine Corps received a high degree of additional training and designation as Special Operations Capable. Of note, a Special Operations Capable designation did not create some sort of elite unit but instead denoted a capability to conduct certain types of specialized operations in a maritime environment.<sup>85</sup> This designation fulfilled the DoD mandate to the Marine Corps to examine its special operations capability and also enabled the Marine Corps to broaden the skill set of its MAUs.

In addition to refining the capability of the MAU, the reorganization of the Marine Corps into standing MAGTFs also allowed for the development of the MAB. The 1983 Amphibious Group study on the standing MAGTF concept called for the creation and permanent organization of four MAB command element headquarters. The study describes the MAB command element as a stand-alone element able to "exercise and otherwise prepare for rapid deployments, either independently or as part of a MAF."<sup>86</sup> This construct facilitated a "building block" relationship between the MAB and MAF headquarters, allowing the MAB to command and control operations, but also allowing the MAF to fall in on the "nucleus" of the MAB headquarters as operations grow in scope and intensity.<sup>87</sup> While conceptually this arrangement sits well within the overall MAGTF concept, the Marine Corps encountered difficulty in orchestrating its implementation.

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<sup>85</sup>Richard A. Hobbs, Jr., "The Role of the Marine Amphibious Unit, Special Operations Capable in Low Intensity Conflict," 3 June 1988, Defense Technical Information Center, [www.dtic.mil/cgibin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA198180](http://www.dtic.mil/cgibin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA198180). (accessed 18 March 2014)

<sup>86</sup>Director Advanced Amphibious Study Group, *The Permanent MAGTF Headquarters Concept and How It Applies in the Formation of a Composite MAGTF*, 3.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

### Expeditionary Once Again (Like Always)

In 1988, the Marine Corps readopted the term expeditionary in naming their fighting elements. The MAF changed back to the MEF, the MAB reverted to the MEB, and the MAU again became the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).<sup>88</sup> The MEF and MEU continued to play important roles in the structure and capability of the Marine Corps as an organization through 1989, the last year of the period under study. However, the Marine Corps faced a tougher challenge regarding the role of the MEB. Therefore, even though technically outside the 1969 to 1989 window, a brief postscript of the fate of the MEB remains relevant to this monograph.

By 1990, the Marine Corps could no longer afford to staff the MEBs. Consequently, the Marine Corps designated certain personnel and equipment within each MEF to deploy as a MEF forward, assuming the role of the traditional MEB command element. Although conceptually viable as a power projection capability, this designation contributed to confusion within the DoD regarding the employment of the Marine Corps as a warfighting organization. To remedy this misperception, in 2000, the Marine Corps abolished the MEF forward concept and established a standing MEB headquarters structure within each MEF. This structure, staffed with personnel already inherent to the MEF, would, as required by mission tasking from the Secretary of Defense, receive forces and form the ground, aviation, and combat service support elements organic to the MEF. The fully outfitted MEB would then possess the ability to provide the theater combatant commander with a readily deployable force capable of conducting “missions that require a MAGTF larger in size than a MEU and smaller than the MEF.”<sup>89</sup> The Marine Corps now possessed the ability to provide the theater combatant commanders MEUs, MEBs, and

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<sup>88</sup>Simmons, “Amphibious Becomes Expeditionary,” 3.

<sup>89</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, “Campaign Plan for Reintroduction of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade,” Plans, Policies, and Organization Message Distribution System, Headquarters US Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 15 February 2000.

MEFs; three different types of force packages not only capable of conducting all types of military operations from large to small, but also capable of building upon its own organizational structure as the duration and intensity of combat operations increased. The Marine Corps employs the same organizational structure today.

## CONCLUSION

The above study of the Marine Corps mission, organization, and operation during the 20-year period between 1969 and 1989 yields significant insight into the central question posed in the introduction of this monograph: how might the Marine Corps most effectively structure and optimize their current force to accomplish any assigned mission across the entire range of military operations? The Marine Corps, as an organization, inevitably learned a myriad of lessons through the sheer experience of operating as a military service during the events described above that took place throughout the dynamic, rapidly evolving time period of 1969 to 1989. Of all those experiences, three lessons stand out that significantly shaped the Marine Corps. The experiences of the Vietnam War and the struggle for the Marine Corps to redefine its identity during the war's aftermath illuminate these three specific focus points that each serve as a critical bridge in describing why the Marine Corps entered the last decade of the twentieth century well positioned to respond not only to the challenges of somewhat conventional conflicts such as war against Iraq in Kuwait but also to accomplish unconventional missions such as creating secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Somalia, evacuation of the American Embassy in Albania, or conducting counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

First, in the immediate wake of the decision to implement an AVF, the Marine Corps quickly realized it must keep enlistment and retention standards high in order to train and maintain a professional and capable fighting force. After initial difficulties in recruiting high quality individuals and witnessing the effects of allowing morally and educationally underqualified candidates into its ranks, the Marine Corps rapidly raised its entrance standards,

prior to the DoD doing the same. The Marine Corps took the calculated risk of potentially not being able to meet their authorized end strength in order to ensure cohesion and morale as a fighting force. The risk paid large dividends, as the Marine Corps, assisted in no small part by a successful advertising campaign which highlighted the appeal of discipline, toughness, and historic Marine Corps victories. Once again, the American public viewed the Marine Corps as the nation's most elite military service. Quality young men and women once again wanted to become Marines and many wanted to remain Marines.

Second, the Marine Corps retained, but refined, the MAGTF concept initially formulated during World War II, formally codified in 1962, and tested in combat during the Vietnam War. The establishment of the MAGTF headquarters organization as a permanent entity helped ensure effective and efficient command and control of fighting formations. These headquarters allowed the MAGTF to operate as a joint headquarters by providing an organizational framework for the associated staff structure. Specifically, the permanent establishment of three MEF headquarters allowed the peacetime garrison organizational structure of each MEF to mirror its likely wartime employment structure, reducing confusion when deploying and also placing the ground combat element, aviation combat element, and logistics combat element always under the same command for increased training, exercise, and education opportunities. The permanent MAGTF headquarters also synchronized the effort by the elements of the MAUs and later the MEUs in gaining and maintaining a Special Operations Capable qualification; an important indicator of readiness until the inclusion of a Marine Corps command into the current Special Operations functional combatant command.

Third, the Marine Corps took a long-term view in heavily weighing the value of longevity in their procurement of major weapons systems and equipment. The Marine Corps either developed or significantly refined 11 major end items between 1969 and 1989: the 155 millimeter Howitzer, the M1A1 tank, the Light Amphibious Vehicle, the M939 five-ton truck, the



Logistics Vehicle System, the AV-8B Harrier, the FA-18 Hornet, the UH-1 Huey, the AH-1 Cobra, the CH-53 Super Stallion, and the MV-22 Osprey. Of those 11, all except the M939 five-ton truck remain in the active duty Marine Corps inventory today.

Ultimately the leadership of the Marine Corps between the years of 1969 and 1989 did a lot right, and largely stands responsible for resetting the Marine Corps on solid footing after the challenges of fighting a protracted and often unconventional conflict as in the Vietnam War. Despite initial setbacks caused by changing social and cultural perceptions within the nation and by refining recruitment and retention standards after the end of a steady flow of wartime manpower, the Marine Corps prepared itself well to confront new and then-unknown challenges to national security. Deploying elements of a MAGTF to oversee the withdrawal of Palestinian Liberation Organization from Lebanon in 1982 strikes a chord similar to deploying elements of a MAGTF to Djibouti and Uganda today to keep peace between the government in South Sudan and rebel forces.<sup>90</sup> Preparing for anti-access and area denial missions in the hopefully unlikely event of military conflict with a near-peer competitor in the Pacific rings close to conducting exercises in Norway during the height of the Cold War.

Although the Marine Corps certainly faced challenges and issues during their long march out of Vietnam, the organization as a whole largely moved in a positive direction, returning today to the Marine Corps' six core competencies: the nation's force in readiness, integrating combined arms, a partner with the Navy, an amphibious force, capable of operating in complex environments, and able to lead joint and multinational operations.<sup>91</sup> Regardless of the uncertainties again brought about by an emerging national security environment and the

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<sup>90</sup>Gina Harkins, "Crisis team evacuates more embassy personnel in South Sudan," *Marine Corps Times*, 3 January 2014, <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20140103/NEWS08/301030012/Crisis-team-evacuates-more-embassy-personnel-South-Sudan> (accessed 1 April 2014).

<sup>91</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2010), 11-17.

accompanying budgetary, personnel, equipment, and organizational changes, one lesson from the Marine Corps' rebuild between 1969 and 1989 remains constant: the recruitment and retention of quality individuals, coupled with a disciplined adherence to standards, sets the best condition for success. Marine Corps leadership, under the direction of Commandants Wilson, Barrow, Kelley, and Gray, implicitly understood this lesson. Through their insistence to adhere to and maintain individual standards despite the risk of not attaining authorized end strength, the Marine Corps began to thrive again as an organization, once more capable of effectively responding to a new set of international challenges.

The Marine Corps emerged from the 20 years following the peak of Vietnam stronger and more capable as a force than ever before. The foresight, adherence to standards, preparation, and sound recruitment and retention practices honed between 1969 and 1989 ultimately readied the Marine Corps well for operations over the last 25 years, including those in Afghanistan and Iraq. Again today, the Marine Corps prepares for another long march of organizational refinement during the new normal found at the completion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan currently coming to a close.<sup>92</sup> While Marine Corps leadership has initially found success in describing to Congress and the American public the suitability of the Marine Corps to tackle the nebulous future challenges to the national security environment, only time will tell to what degree the Marine Corps actually succeeds in accomplishing its yet-to-be-determined missions. If the efforts of the Marine Corps between 1969 and 1989 serve as any indication, the Marine Corps will fare quite well indeed.

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<sup>92</sup>In President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address on 28 January 2014 he stated, "Today, all our troops are out of Iraq. More than 60,000 of our troops have already come home from Afghanistan . . . together with our allies, we will complete our mission there by the end of this year, and America's longest war will finally be over." President Barrack Obama, "President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address," 28 January 2014. The White House. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/28/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address> (accessed 3 April 2014).

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