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The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has served as "the standard forward-deployed Marine expeditionary organization" since 1962 and is employed today as a "highly-mobile, versatile, self-contained crisis response force" by Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) world-wide. However, insufficient amphibious shipping, a critical requirement for the MEU, and the contemporary security environment known as the "the new normal," both stand as major challenges to the ability of the Nation and the Marine Corps to respond to emerging threats and crises. The Marine Corps is not organized and arrayed to meet these challenges in a sustainable manner, but adaptation of current formations and command structures could alleviate this issue. By formalizing the SPMAGTF-CR into a permanent Crisis Response Force and tying it to a partner MEU under a common headquarters, the Marine Corps could provide the most responsive and capable crisis response force to date and better support GCCs worldwide.

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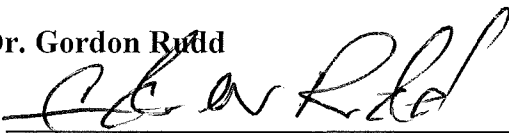
Crisis Response Force: Shaping the MAGTF of the “New Normal”

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES**

Major Jason Goodale

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Mentor: Dr. Gordon Rudd

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Introduction

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has served as “the standard forward-deployed Marine expeditionary organization” since 1962 and is employed today as a “highly-mobile, versatile, self-contained crisis response force” by Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) world-wide.¹ However, insufficient amphibious shipping, a critical requirement for the MEU, and the contemporary security environment known as the “the new normal,” both stand as major challenges to the ability of the Nation and the Marine Corps to respond to emerging threats and crises. The Marine Corps is not organized and arrayed to meet these challenges in a sustainable manner, but adaptation of current formations and command structures could alleviate this issue.

In response to the attacks on American interests in Benghazi, Libya, the Marine Corps established Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response Africa (SPMAGTF-CR-AF) in 2013.² This unit and its successors have collectively responded to many emergency situations, interacted with numerous host-nation militaries in Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) operations, and participated in combat operations during Operation INHERENT RESOLVE in Iraq and Syria. While the SPMAGTF-CR is not a permanent model for the Marine Corps to fulfill its Title 10 obligations to the country, it has illuminated a future model for the Marine Corps to provide the “the right force in the right place at the right time.”³

By formalizing the SPMAGTF-CR into a permanent Crisis Response Force and tying it to a partner MEU under a common headquarters, the Marine Corps could provide the most responsive and capable crisis response force to date and better support GCCs worldwide. The reality of a degrading global security picture and constrained military resources suggests the Marine Corps pursue adaptive solutions in order to fully realize its role as a “middle-weight” force.⁴

The Problem

The tragic events in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, cast light on the overextension of the American military in its role of protecting national interests. The inability of the Navy/Marine Corps team to intervene in a timely manner during this crisis is particularly salient to the current discussion. Since 1983, Navy and Marine Corps planners have advertised a MEU presence of 3.0, sustaining three complete MEUs afloat and ready to respond to contingencies at any one time. But by 2012, and continuing today, that presence capability has noticeably diminished.

Optimistically, there are two MEUs afloat at any one time today – a 2.0 presence.⁵ This is largely attributed to a lack of sufficient amphibious ships and degraded maintenance and readiness on those that exist. In response to these shortages, the Navy and Marine Corps have instituted the Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP). The result is that far fewer than 30 amphibious ships are available and ready for operations afloat; Marine Corps Combat Development Command estimates that on any given day in 2015, only seven amphibious ships were available.⁶

The most important consequence of this shortage is that the OFRP does not provide the coverage required by Combatant Commanders as is, let alone with maintenance problems. Since 2008, requests have ranged from the mid-40's to as high as 70 ships per year, but never as low as 30.⁷ Combatant Commander requests are unconstrained, and even a 50-ship inventory would fall short in certain years, but the point is that in the case of amphibious presence, demand greatly exceeds supply.

The demand signal is explained by what the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense began referring to in 2013 as the “new normal,” which can be described as enduring

global unrest characterized by rapidly-developing situations that threaten U.S. interests.⁸ The Marine Corps leadership envisions its role as providing MAGTFs to GCCs in order to set “initial conditions for a joint, interagency and multinational response to crises and contingencies.” The MAGTFs would provide “small-footprint, steady-state theater presence” and would be forward-deployed in order to provide “immediate response.”⁹

The Marine Corps capstone concept, *Expeditionary Force 21 (EF 21)*, and the 36th Commandant’s Planning Guidance both reflect the “new normal.” Both documents also describe the importance of meeting commitments while acknowledging a lack of amphibious shipping and the need to institutionally evolve in order to meet new challenges.¹⁰ Brigadier General Dale Alford of Marine Corps Futures Directorate stated this imperative more bluntly. “Marines are there to be the first to react...period.”¹¹

In March 2013, the Marine Corps established SPMAGTF-CR-AF to provide crisis response capability to the AFRICOM theater.¹² Within a year of the establishment of SPMAGTF-CR-AF, the Marine Corps developed a second formation, dubbed SPMAGTF-CR-CC (CENTCOM) based out of Al-Jaber, Kuwait. Though similar in construct, SPMAGTF-CR-CC is a more-robust force of 2,300 personnel, with an expanded ACE and several combat-multipliers in the Command Element (CE).¹³ Similar to the MEU, SPMAGTF-CR has consistently reinforced the flexibility and responsiveness of the MAGTF. The following sections will demonstrate a conceptual complementary relationship between the MEU and SPMAGTF-CR that would solidify the Marine Corps’ self-identified role as a crisis-response force.¹⁴

The addition of permanent forward-deployed, land-based MAGTFs will not be easy. If the Navy cannot provide enough amphibious ships to support the continuation of a 3.0 MEU presence, the Marine Corps cannot provide the three MEUs it advertises. The “new normal”

presents a situation in which even a 3.0 presence may not sufficiently support contingency requirements. Rectifying the capability and the capacity of Marine Corps crisis response will require the pairing of land and sea-based MAGTFs working in concert under a responsive and capable command structure.

Defining the Crisis Response MAGTF

As discussed earlier, SPMAGTF-CR has differing models, deployed in the EUCOM/AFRICOM and CENTCOM theaters.¹⁵ This is the first limitation of maintaining crisis response capability under the SPMAGTF concept – it is neither permanent, nor standard, which are necessary qualities for any long-term plan to shape Marine Corps operational formations.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Marine Corps should eliminate the SPAGMTF designator and establish a permanent rotational formation designated Crisis Response Force – (Assigned Theater), based on the SPMAGTF-CC model [see Figure 1 in Appendix for organizational chart]. This hurdle will be difficult for the Marine Corps to clear, but the “new normal” cannot be adequately addressed without the institutional evolution called for in conceptual planning.

The Crisis Response Force (CRF) Ground Combat Element (GCE) should be built around a complete infantry battalion, as in the case of 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines for SPMAGTF-CR-CC. To deploy anything less than a battalion leaves the MAGTF less cohesive; as with a MEU, the commander can always employ less, but needs the ability to mass to battalion-strength in extreme cases. The specific organization of the battalion should be left to the CRF based on its area and mission, but should generally resemble the SPMAGTF-CR structure including a crisis response element (reinforced company), a TSC element, and a security (force protection) element [see Figure 2 in Appendix].

A major deficiency noted by previous SPMAGTF-CR commanders is the lack of organic fire support. The MEU can support the lift of howitzers [see Figure 3 in Appendix], but given that CRF is restricted to aviation transportation alone, it is limited in what assets can be transported. One possible solution is to reinforce the CRF with an Expeditionary Fire Support System (EFSS) detachment, but this would still consume a sizeable portion of available air sorties. In a crisis situation where the United States has air superiority, aviation-delivered fires may be the most versatile and responsive solution. Nevertheless, the addition of EFSS allows the commander another option should the situation warrant increased ground fires.

The critical element of the CRF is its organic Aviation Combat Element (ACE). SPMAGTF-CR-AF, though self-lifting through its organic VMM squadron, lacked aerial fires and suffered from maintenance degradation, as noted by Colonel Thomas Savage, Commanding Officer for SPMAGTF-CR-AF 15.1.¹⁷ Thus, the CRF ACE should resemble a composite group similar to SPMAGTF-CR-CC with a VMM squadron (12 X MV-22), a VMA squadron (12 X AV-8B or 10 X F-35B), and a VMGR detachment (4 X KC-130J).¹⁸ No SPMAGTF-CR has deployed with organic UAV support, but a CRF would greatly benefit from the inclusion of a VMU detachment.¹⁹

Finally, as was the case with SPMAGTF-CR-CC, the ACE should include all support and logistics detachments to enable round-the-clock aviation support. This includes a stand-alone CE, to ensure unity-of-command, and unity-of-effort in support of the CRF.²⁰ Due to the high reliance of the CRF on aviation assets, the ACE commander could be dual-hatted as the deputy commander of the CRF. This differs greatly from a MEU where the subordinate squadron commander is responsible for the ACE as a whole.

The CRF Logistics Combat Element (LCE) is more loosely defined, consisting of numerous detachments, much as a Combat Logistics Battalion embarked aboard a MEU. This flexible design allows for scalability according to the mission and assigned theater, but will generally include engineer, transportation, health services, maintenance, supply, explosive ordnance disposal, and services detachments. Particular consideration should be given to the medical detachment. The MEU brings a robust medical capability due to the inherent capabilities of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). SPMAGTF medical detachments vary, but SPMAGTF-CR-CC was augmented with an en route care detachment capable of performing trauma procedures in an austere and dispersed environment.²¹ On the whole, these are standard functions of combat logistics and would require little to no adjustment on the part of the Marine Logistics Group to source these critical enablers to deploying CRFs.

The final element of the CRF is the CE. This function is often overlooked in a MEU, as the CE is organic to the MEF and minimal in size and capacity. The MEU staff is tailored to best support the Rapid Response Planning Process (R2P2) for a single crisis and is integrated with the ARG staff given its operational subordination to the naval component while afloat. SPMAGTF-CRs, in contrast, have thus far operated simultaneously in multiple countries and had to split their command structure into multiple components to support planning and execution. As an example, in 2014/15 SPMAGTF-CR-CC operated an Alpha and Bravo command at the CE level, in addition to an Alpha and Bravo command at the GCE level, with liaison and planning cells positioned throughout the AO, including their parent command at MARFORCENT HQ (FWD) in Bahrain.

This robust CE enabled effective command and control (C2) of concurrent contingency missions including TSC, embassy reinforcement, Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel

(TRAP) and combat missions. The CE, with 231 personnel including intelligence and communication augments, was much larger than most expeditionary headquarters, but was critical in supporting the widely varied crisis response missions performed by that unit. Col Jason Bohm, Commanding Officer of SPMAGTF-CR-CC, went further in lauding the planning and coordination support his CE provided to multiple higher and adjacent headquarters including MARFORCENT, CFLCC-I, and the five separate MEUs that transited the theater during his deployment.²² It is worth noting that both SPMAGTF-CR-AF and CC were built around Marine Regimental Headquarters and that trend should continue for CRFs in the future. This decision is not without consequence, which will be addressed later.

The One-Two Punch

The MEU remains a cornerstone of Marine Corps crisis response and, regardless of shipbuilding woes, the foreseeable future includes two ARG/MEUs pre-positioned in hot-spot areas. Additionally, while L-class ships will experience upgrades and redesigns, the MEU should not fundamentally change in design or employment in the foreseeable future. However, the MEU will face increasing time and space challenges and will have to be prepared to cover larger geographic areas through disaggregation, reducing the interoperability and efficacy of the MAGTF to support itself. For this it will need a land-based partner – the CRF.

Criticisms of the SPMAGTF-CR model assert that it diverts attention and missions from the MEU (ignoring the data on GCC requirements versus fulfillment). Furthermore, it casts a poor light on the Marine Corps' amphibious role by sending the message that the Marine Corps does not need amphibious ships. Both of these accusations fall short with SPMAGTF-CR key leaders. Within a month of arriving in Kuwait, Col Bohm's SPMAGTF-CR-CC was operating as far inland as Al Asad, Iraq, while Col Savage's SPMAGTF-CR-AF operated throughout

Western and Central Africa, areas where a MEU lacks operational reach from its normal operations areas. As to the second argument, the Marine Corps actively continues to advocate for amphibious ships because SPMAGTF-CRs do not replicate the operational advantages of a sea-based MEU independent of friendly ports or bases; instead they complement MEU tasking.

A simple comparison between the MEU and the CRF shows the potential of combining them into a complementary force. Where the CRF relies on the support of partner and friendly nations for basing, MEUs operate uncontested from aboard ship. Where the MEU lacks inland operational reach, the CRF has established presence in the theater, cooperative relationships through TSC, and greater aerial transport capacity. Though the CRF lacks the ability to logistically sustain for a significant amount of time, the MEU is self-supporting for weeks. And while the MEU draws its strength from the aggregated whole of the MAGTF, the CRF is specifically designed and organized to operate in a dispersed fashion. Finally, both organizations are extremely responsive, capable of launching combined-arms forces in six hours or less.

Numerous potential scenarios exist in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Southwest Asia that would necessitate a combined force of this nature. Col Savage described just such a hypothetical in the form of a Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) in Africa. In that scenario, having properly tracked and anticipated the requirement, his forces postured themselves throughout the crisis area, securing key personnel, facilities, and nodes but lacked the ability to extricate more than a few persons.²³ A partner MEU sitting offshore could launch aerial assets and evacuate larger numbers of noncombatants to amphibious shipping, at which point they could be moved out of the threat area.

This is but one example that speaks to how the “complementary strengths of purpose-built sea and land-based MAGTFs...can more effectively meet combatant command

requirements, while enhancing the relevance of the Marine Corps.” Truly, it is improbable that any other service could perform either mission in the previous scenario, but in its current state, the Marine Corps would fall short as well. SPMAGTF-CRs lack the capability and MEUs lack the capacity in that they are overstretched. Paraphrasing one former SPMAGTF-CR commander, you cannot take the mission if you are not there.²⁴

Combining the Force

While the MEU already exists, as does the CRF in a different form, the forces lack a common headquarters. Currently, MEUs fall under the naval component of a GCC, while SPMAGTF-CRs fall under the Marine component of a GCC. This distinction is not insignificant if MEUs and CRFs are to be combined into a crisis response partnership, since this leaves the first common headquarters at the GCC level. But it makes little sense to assign land-based forces to a naval component, and decades of service roles and relationships do not indicate that the Navy will give up operational control of amphibious ships easily. The Marine Corps must make a cogent argument to alter this arrangement in order to provide the best C2 and coordinate within and across Unified Campaign Plan (UCP) boundaries.

The first step should provide an operational headquarters capable of employing both a MEU and a CRF. A possibility is the MARFOR (assuming it was granted OPCON of the MEU) given its current control of the SPMAGTF-CR. But these headquarters suffer from a “structure-mission mismatch” in that they are not sufficiently designed or staffed to perform this role.²⁵ This shortfall was particularly evident during SPMAGTF-CR-CC 15.1 when elements of the MAGTF were allocated to CJTF-OIR in Al Asad, Iraq, falling under the control of ARCENT.

Simultaneously, security elements fell under State Department direction, and aviation assets supported missions throughout CENTCOM [See Figure 4].

The SPMAGTF Command Element, with its unique ability to run split C2 operations, managed to function effectively though not without challenge; MARFORCENT (FWD) on the other hand, acting primarily as a sourcing agent, often had to rely on backbriefs from the heavily-tasked unit vice exercising top-down C2. The MARFORCENT (FWD) staff simply could not support active tactical direction of the unit.²⁶ This problem is unlikely to change without significant alteration to structure and mission of a MARFOR.

Equally curious is the case of SPMAGTF-CR-AF, which bases in the EUCOM Theater and has an active mission in the form of the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF). Based in Mikhail Kogalniceanu (MK), Romania, this TSC mission has particular relevance to the EUCOM Theater since the Russian annexation of Crimea in early 2014. SPMAGTF-CR-AF supports both AFRICOM and EUCOM through informal sharing agreements that fortunately have not been tested in an extreme case yet.

The Marine Corps has combined the MARFORAF and MARFOREUR components into a single command which assists in the interesting arrangement across UCP lines, but this staff, similar to MARFORCENT, is better-designed to act as a force provider and planning staff than an operational command and control headquarters. In both cases, when queried about their operational chain-of-command, SPMAGTF-CR commanders carefully crafted responses that indicated the difficult situation.²⁷

Another possibility is a unique arrangement between the MEU and CRF in which either acts as a force provider to the other in a supporting/supported relationship. Given that each command resides at the O-6 level, their capability for command should exceed the one infantry

battalion assigned to each. In the case of the CRF, a regimental commander supported by a sizeable contingent of his staff, this capability could reasonably reach three battalions without requiring significant augmentation. The case of the MEU is slightly different given its reduced capacity and integrated staff, as discussed earlier.

However, this solution presents significant challenges as well. While it rectifies the issue of increasing assets and operational reach for the supported command, it does not resolve that the formations still belong to two different components and would thus require GCC-level arbitration over operational control of forces. Additionally, the mobility of the MEU increases the potential for a cross-UCP boundary arrangement, a complication requiring an even more senior referee. Finally, the potential for tension between two peer USMC commands is not insignificant and only complicates the existing parochialism.

EF 21 describes another possibility that is ideal for this role. The Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) Headquarters is “the main effort in force development,” and one such formation exists in each MEF.²⁸ These staffs exist solely to command operational forces larger than a MEU and are appropriately resourced for that purpose. Additionally, the MEF alignments, and thus their subordinate MEB, follow the most probable crisis regions; I MEF is globally-responsive and capable of supporting both PACOM and CENTCOM, II MEF has a historical presence in the EUCOM/AFRICOM theaters, and III MEF supports PACOM (with assistance from I MEF).²⁹

The MEB could capably deploy as the common operational headquarters for both MEUs and CRFs either through a regional presence (such as in the case of 5th MEB in Bahrain) or as a Fly-in Integrated Command Element (FICE) as demonstrated during Bold Alligator exercises.³⁰ This would allow the MARFOR headquarters to focus on planning and force provision, as well

as provide a flag-level headquarters that could act as the basis for a Joint or Combined Task Force depending on the scope of the crisis or political sensitivities. This would be a particularly valuable contribution to the joint community on the part of the Marine Corps. Additionally, the MEB is an inherently flexible C2 mechanism, sensitive to the peculiarities of a MAGTF, and therefore eminently qualified to make decisions on aggregation or compositing based on the operational situation.

The challenge to this particular proposal is convincing the Navy to release operational control of ARG/MEUs. Though this seems unlikely at the moment, it is a necessary step to providing the most agile force in terms of crisis response. In the past, MEUs have had no complementary land-based partner to necessitate a headquarters other than the naval component. But the environmental requirements of today are challenging historic conventions when it comes to joint operations. Col Scott Benedict, Commanding Officer of the 24th MEU from 2013-2015, and a former SPMAGTF-CR-AF Commander made such an argument in a 2014 article when he discussed MAGTF operations that crossed UCP boundaries.

“Now is the time to meet the challenge of aggregating existing allocated maritime crisis response forces across combatant command boundaries under a single commander before we find ourselves hamstrung by outmoded policy and unnecessary restraints when attempting to realize the greater challenge of aggregating Marine forces into a MEB as a model for forward-deployed operating force employments in the future.”³¹

Though his comments specifically addressed MEUs and the C2 problems they experience from overextension and disaggregation, the sentiment could apply just as appropriately to the idea of a MEU/CRF combination under the MEB.

The Hidden Costs

Ideally, each MEF could possess as many CRFs as they have MEUs. These fighting pairs would deploy under the operational control of the parent MEB and operate in their aligned region as the GCC's crisis response force. But it would be naïve to assume that a reorganization of this nature will occur overnight without ramifications throughout the Marine Corps and potentially within the Department of Defense. Thus, these proposals cannot be universally instituted overnight.

Under *EF 21*, I MEF has a global response focus and is still structured for major combat operations. While III MEF has a standing CE in 3d MEB, the rotational nature of its forces for both the 31st MEU and the associated CRF would complicate planning and training.³² II MEF, however, has a standing CE (2d MEB) that regionally aligns with EUCOM and AFRICOM, and the MEF is well-familiar with the concept of CRFs through its sourcing of SPMAGTF-CR-AF. This is the natural organization to begin the process of transition in order to assess operational performance and effects on the force.

Designating a CE for the CRF is obviously more complicated than simply choosing a regiment. The Marine Regimental headquarters appears to be the right-sized element capable of commanding a CRF, but given that it will deploy with at most, only one of its organic infantry battalions, then at any one time no less than two other battalions are without their natural parent headquarters. This may be a lesser problem than first appears, given that battalions have been orphaned by deploying RCTs for over a decade due to combat operations with no apparent effect on training and administration. Aligning forces under the MEB is a decided shift of influence away from the Division, raising the question of whether the Division could or should take a more

active administrative role in managing Battalions, allowing Regiments (CRFs) to become operational headquarters like MEUs.

Division and MEF structure are important considerations of this decision. II MEF, for example, has nine standing battalions. Assuming permanence of the CRF alongside the MEU, six of those nine battalions would be training for, executing, or returning from a deployment at any one time, leaving a single regimental formation to serve as the GCE of the MEF in the event of a major combat operation (MCO). This does not even account for the squadrons composited to MEUs or CRFs that would require heavy doses of maintenance and recertification following deployments. One offset to this critique is that forward-deployed MAGTFs can be composited or aggregated under higher headquarters in the event of an MCO.

Taking this into account leaves the impression that the concept proposed herein is all-or-nothing, meaning the entire MEF would have to organize for crisis response. This is not an original concept and is referred to by BGen Alford as “MAGTFing the Marine Corps.”³³ The Marine Corps is certainly capable of doing this, if HQMC and civilian leadership decide upon this course, but it would fundamentally change the way the Marine Corps is structured and its role within the Department of Defense.³⁴ Most notably, it would likely eliminate the Marine Division as a standing organization. But without rigorous concept development, these are merely suppositions, again suggesting that some organization, II MEF or otherwise, be tasked with examining the issue.

Another staffing and personnel management issue requiring study is how to sustain a MEB staff that would maintain operational control of the deployed forces continuously. One possibility is that the MEB staff would not deploy until a crisis appears, as in the case of the FICE, which would ease the burdens of sea or land-basing an additional force. This “suitcase

staff³⁵ could certainly be effective, but stretches lines of communications and diminishes relationship with the GCC and Marine component. Permanently positioning the MEB staff forward in the theater is another possibility, but would require considerable coordination and likely adjustments to existing Status of Forces Agreements. Yet another solution would be the creation of a MEB staff to associate with each MEU/CRF pairing. During a drawdown it is difficult to envision this particular answer; however, realignment on a large scale may free up the necessary force structure to make such a change.

Perhaps one of the most serious limitations of this proposal is basing for the CRF. SPMAGTF-CR-AF has thus far based out of three locations – Moron, Spain, NAS Sigonella in Sicily, and MK in Romania. Though this has the advantage of prepositioning forces across a wide area, the associated C2 challenges, coupled with the diplomatic issues presented by managing a force in three different countries with three different Status of Forces Agreements may not be the most effective or efficient array. SPMAGTF-CR-CC experienced similar challenges in their dispersion across the Middle East. PACOM has no standing SPMAGTF-CR, and tempting as it may be to position a CRF on Okinawa, that may not be possible or desirable because of ongoing political sensitivities.

Any serious discussion of this topic requires acknowledgement of the fiscal cost of leasing facilities from foreign governments and providing contracted or inter-theater logistics to sustain the force. Though no estimates are readily available for SPMAGTF-CR, it is far more expensive for the military to base out of foreign nations than it is to operate from United States soil or assets. American facilities outside of the continental United States, including Guam and Hawaii, magnify time and space considerations greatly, both obviously critical to crisis response. These are undeniable challenges to using CRFs in a permanent construct, but with the successful

missions based out of Moron and Al Jaber, and continued growth of relationships with allied and partner nations, it should remain a potential solution.

Conclusion

The proposals suggested in the course of this discussion require a significant change in the way that the Marine Corps organizes, trains, and employs the Marine Expeditionary Force. Numerous legitimate critiques exist, even beyond those covered in this forum, and the most vocal critics are likely to be internal to the Marine Corps. But the Marine Corps is at a familiar crossroads of determining what it should be and what it should contribute to the Nation's defense. *EF 21* defines a path forward that is as bold as it is broad. Successful achievement of the vision laid out in this concept could contribute yet another chapter to the legacy of the Marine Corps but will only happen with the assistance of critical and creative thought and acceptance of change.

The leadership of the Marine Corps has determined that crisis response is a principal role to embrace and advertise to Combatant Commanders, and rightfully so due to the inherent advantages of the MAGTF. Nothing proposed herein is an optimal solution to the challenges this presents. But the permanent inclusion of land-based Crisis Response Forces paired with sea-based MEUs under the command umbrella of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade should elevate the Corps' capability and capacity to provide this service and could address the "new normal" in a manner more akin to Standard Operating Procedure vice ad-hoc reaction.

Endnotes

1. Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP 3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, April 16, 1998), 75; Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Policy for Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU)*, MCO 3120.13, October 29, 2015, 5, <http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/MCO%203120.13.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2015).
2. This is a disputed opinion, but the author's assertion is based on comments from personal experience in Legislative Affairs in 2013, as well as personal interview with Marine Corps leadership knowledgeable with SPMAGTF-CR. Most notably, BGen Alford, Director of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab MCWL, agreed with this assertion in the course of interview at MCWL on November 12, 2015. "We are there because of Benghazi. This country can't afford another Benghazi."
3. Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*, (Washington, DC, March 2014).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sources interviewed agreed to a theoretic 2.0 presence between the East Coast and West Coast MEUs. However, all interviewees were quick to point out that the MEUs were focused on the CENTCOM theater, that the 31st MEU (Okinawa) was providing only negligible coverage, and that transit to and from CONUS was factored into that calculation. Thus, most interviewees stated that in reality, MEU presence was 1.0 to 1.5.
6. Center for Strategic & International Studies, *Amphibious Shipping Shortfalls: Risks and Opportunities to Bridge the Gap* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2014), 3-27. In order to maintain a 3.0 presence, the Marine Corps has stated repeatedly that it requires 38 amphibious vessels. The Navy has acknowledged this number, but the 30-year shipbuilding plan does not support it. Instead, the services agreed to the OFRP, which assumes risk in maintaining 33 amphibious vessels. This accounts for 10% degradation due to maintenance leaving 30 vessels available for deployment. The OFRP also extended amphibious ship rotation cycles from 27 to 36 months causing major disruptions to critical maintenance.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Stuart Dickey, "A 'New Normal': The U.S. Marine Corps' Approach to Meeting Evolving Global Security Requirements" (Presentation, Joint Warfighting Conference, Virginia Beach, VA, May 15, 2013).
9. *Ibid.*
10. Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*; Commandant of the Marine Corps, *36th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC, January 23, 2015).
11. BGen Julian D. Alford, interview by Maj Jason Goodale, Quantico, Virginia, November 12, 2015.

12. LtCol Joel Schmidt & Maj Stephen Detrinis, “SPMAGTF-CR-AF,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 2014, 52-54. Previously, the Marine Corps provided forces to EUCOM and AFRICOM through SPMAGTF-Africa and the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF), both of which were Marine Forces Reserve missions. From 2013-2014, these combined formations developed into SPMAGTF-CR-AF (Africa) built around an infantry battalion Ground Combat Element (GCE), a flexible Logistics Combat Element (LCE), and a composite Aviation Combat Element (ACE) comprised of an MV-22 squadron reinforced with a KC-130J detachment. Comprising roughly 1,700 personnel, SPMAGTF-CR-AF coordinates across Unified Campaign Plan boundaries with EUCOM and AFRICOM and operates out of Spain, Italy, and Romania.

13. Col Jason Bohm, interview by Maj Jason Goodale, Quantico, Virginia, October 23, 2015.

14. Lieutenant Colonel Brian Bruggeman and Ben FitzGerald, *Crisis Response: Institutional Innovation in the United States Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, November 2015). Crisis response is not a defined mission of the Marine Corps under Title 10, U.S.C., however the authors provide a reasoned understanding of how this mission has become an official and principal role of the Marine Corps.

15. There is a SPMAGTF that operates in the SOUTHCOM theater that is regularly compared to the SPMAGTF-CRs. This formation is designated SPMAGTF-SC (SOUTHCOM), is comprised of approximately 250 Marines, and is focused almost exclusively on TSC. It is the author’s opinion that this force is not akin to SPMAGTF-CRs, an assertion supported by HQMC’s failure to grant the CR designation in the name.

16. Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, MCDP 3, 76-77.

17. Col Thomas Savage, “SPMAGTF-CR-AF 15.1 Post-Deployment Brief.” (Presentation, School of Advanced Warfighting, Quantico, VA, December 3, 2015).

18. Though rotary wing attack platforms would be a welcome addition to this formation, the probable distance-to-objective and speed of the Osprey preclude their use in a rapidly-developing crisis.

19. Col Thomas Savage; Col Jason Bohm, “SPMAGTF-CR-CC Rotation 15.1 National Capitol Region Post-Deployment Brief.” (Presentation, Washington, DC, May 2015). Both commanders asserted that this would have been a critical enabler to the organic table of organization for their force.

20. Col Jason Bohm. Col Bohm expressed the benefits of this arrangement during his interview. The author accepts the assertion stated here as his own opinion and no other person’s.

21. *Ibid.*

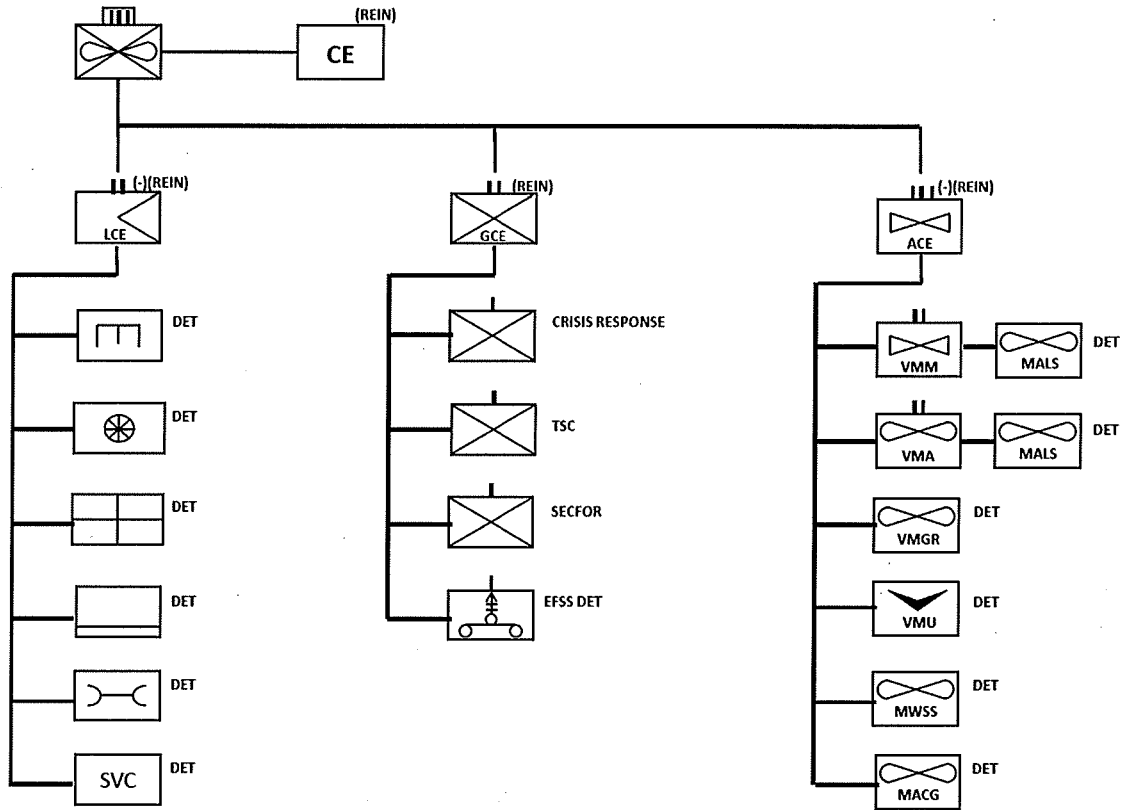
22. *Ibid.* According to Col Bohm, SPMAGTF-CR-CC provided continuity to the MEU staffs that transited the region and lacked a clear Common Operational Picture.

23. Col Thomas Savage, "Post-Deployment Brief." To be clear, Col Savage has not advocated the combination of MEUs with SPMAGTF-CR units, but did speak about the benefit of having amphibious platforms in support of SPMAGTF-CR units.
24. Col Jason Bohm.
25. Col Gregory "Hal" Douquet & LtCol Nicholas Hale, "U.S. Marine Corps Component C2," *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 2014, 26.
26. Col Jason Bohm. The implication was that the SPMAGTF-CR-CC staff typically outpaced MARFORCENT (FWD) during planning and in some cases suffered from tasking that disrupted the MAGTF structure.
27. Author's personal interpretation of Col Jason Bohm and Col Thomas Savage statements.
28. Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*.
29. This list excludes SOUTHCOM which has previously received SPMAGTF support from II MEF and MARFORRES. The author acknowledges lacking a solution to this gap at present without overextending II MEF, which is already less a regiment comparative to I MEF.
30. Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, *Amphibious Exercise Bold Alligator 2014*, After Action Report (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2014), 32-33.
31. Col Scott F. Benedict, "A Maritime Warfighting Philosophy," *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 2014, 52-54.
32. Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*. EF 21 defines the roles of the MEFs under the concept solely. The stated challenge with III MEF is the author's opinion.
33. BGen Julian D. Alford.
34. Title 10, USC mandates that the Marine Corps will consist of three divisions at any one time. Any decision to eliminate that formation would necessitate a change to federal law.
35. Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*

APPENDIX

Figure 1

PROPOSED CRISIS RESPONSE FORCE (CRF)



Note: CRF consists of approximately 2,200 personnel.



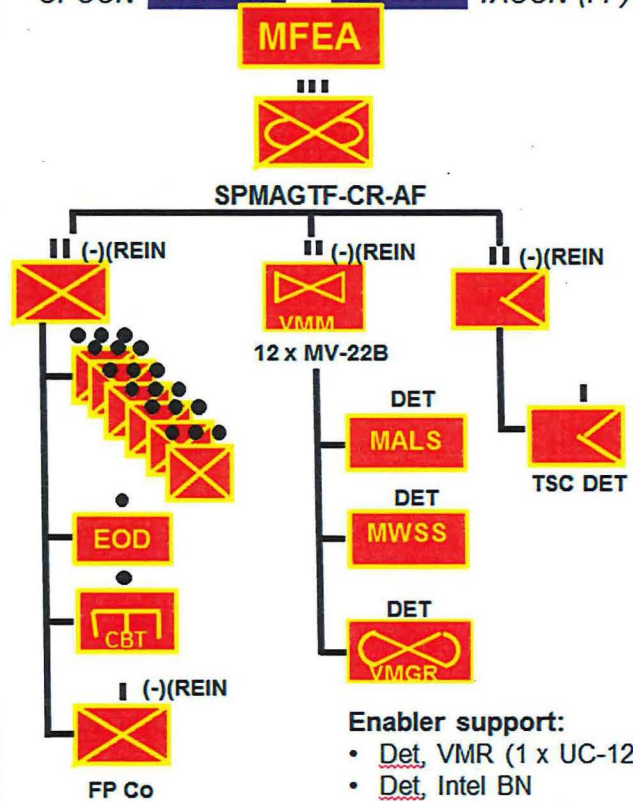
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SPMAGTF-CR-AF Composition

Task Organization

OPCON AFRICOM EUCOM TACON (FP)



- Enabler support:**
- Det, VMR (1 x UC-12)
 - Det, Intel BN
 - Det, Comm BN
 - Det, RADBN
 - Det, LE BN
 - Contracting Officer

Mission:

SPMAGTF-CR-AF conducts limited crisis response and contingency operations, enabled by Theater Security Cooperation, in order to protect and advance U.S. interests in the designated Combatant Commanders AOR.

Mobility/Fires:

- (12) MV-22B
- (4) KC-130J
- (1) UC-12
- (10) ITV-LSV
- (14) HMMWV
- (6) 60 MM Mortars

Mission Essential Tasks (METs):

- Forward Command Element (FCE)
- AMEMB Reinforcement
- Fixed-site security at multiple locations
- Support to NEO
- Support to HA/DR
- TRAP/QRF
- TSC

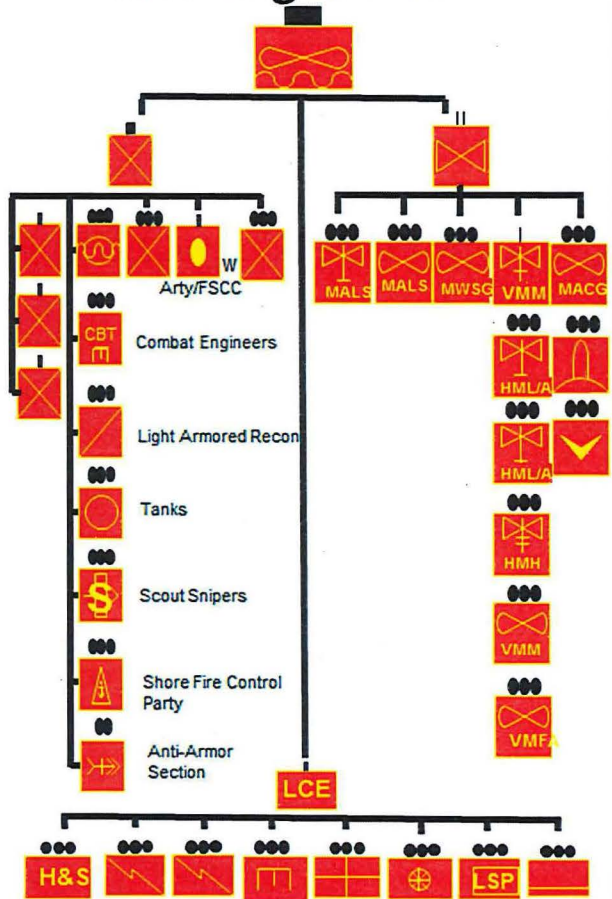
Figure 2 (Courtesy of Col Thomas Savage)



Marine Expeditionary Unit Composition



Task Organization



Mission:

Marine Expeditionary Units provide a forward deployed, flexible sea-based MAGTF capable of conducting amphibious operations, crisis response, and limited contingency operations, to include enabling the introduction of follow-on forces, and designated special operations, in order to support the theater requirements of GCCs.

Mobility/Fires:

- (12) MV-22B
- (4) CH-53E
- (3) UH-1Y
- (4) AH-1Z
- (6) AV-8B
- (2) KC-130J
- (5) Rq-21 (UAS)
- (4) M1A1 Main Battle Tanks
- (16) Assault Amphibious Vehicles (AAV)
- (8-17) Internally Transportable Vehicles – Light Strike Variant (ITV-LSV)
- (7) Light Armored Vehicles (LAV)
- (123) HMMWV
- (46) Medium Tactical Vehicles

Mission Essential Tasks (METs):

- Amphibious Assault
- Amphibious Raid
- Maritime interception operations (MIO/VBSS)
- Advance force operations
- Noncombatant Evac Ops (NEO)
- Humanitarian Assistance (HA)
- Stability Operations
- Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP)
- Joint Combined operations
- Aviation operations from expeditionary shore-based site
- Theater security cooperation activities (TSC)
- Airfield/port seizure

Figure 3 (Courtesy of Col Thomas Savage)



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Force Composition and Disposition

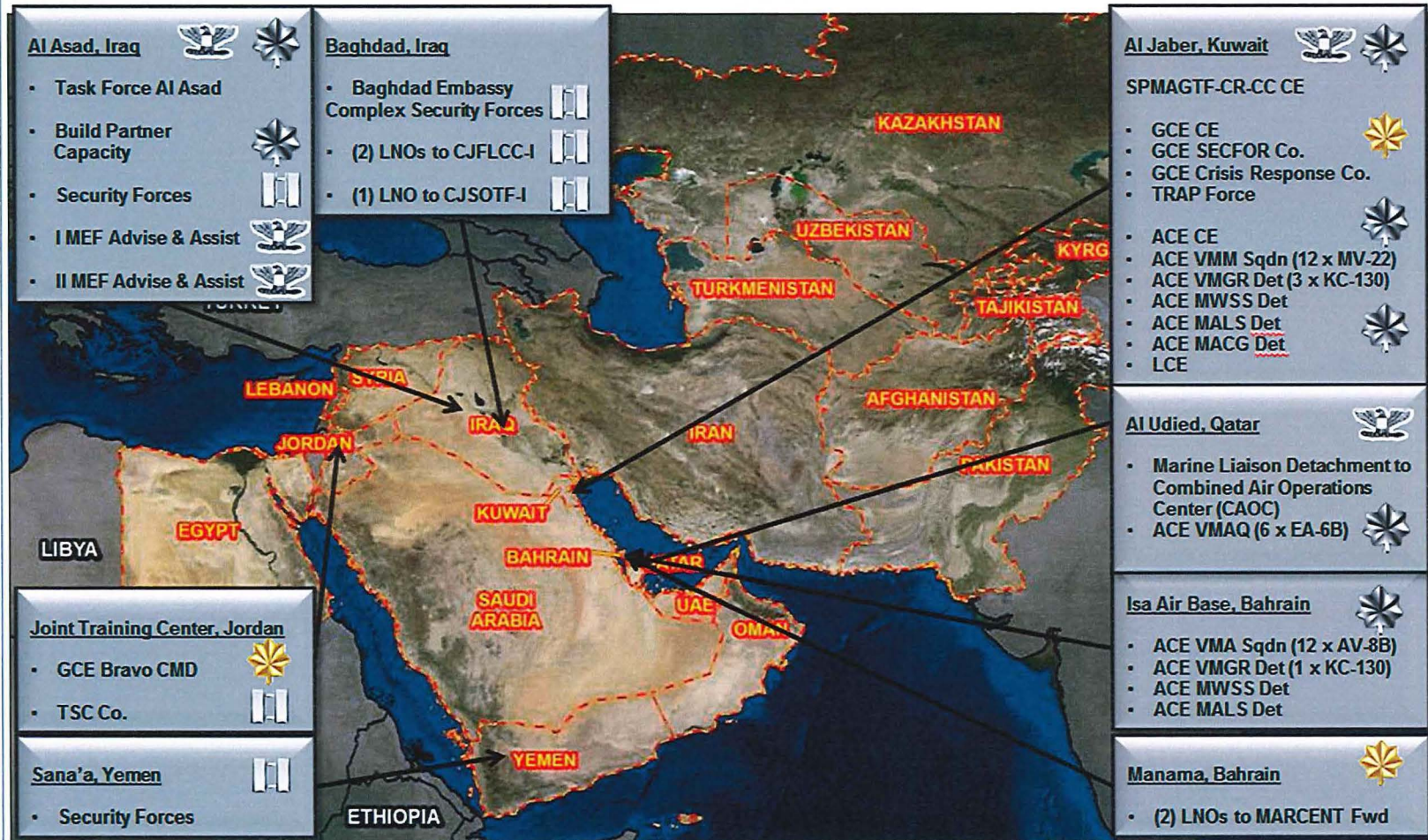
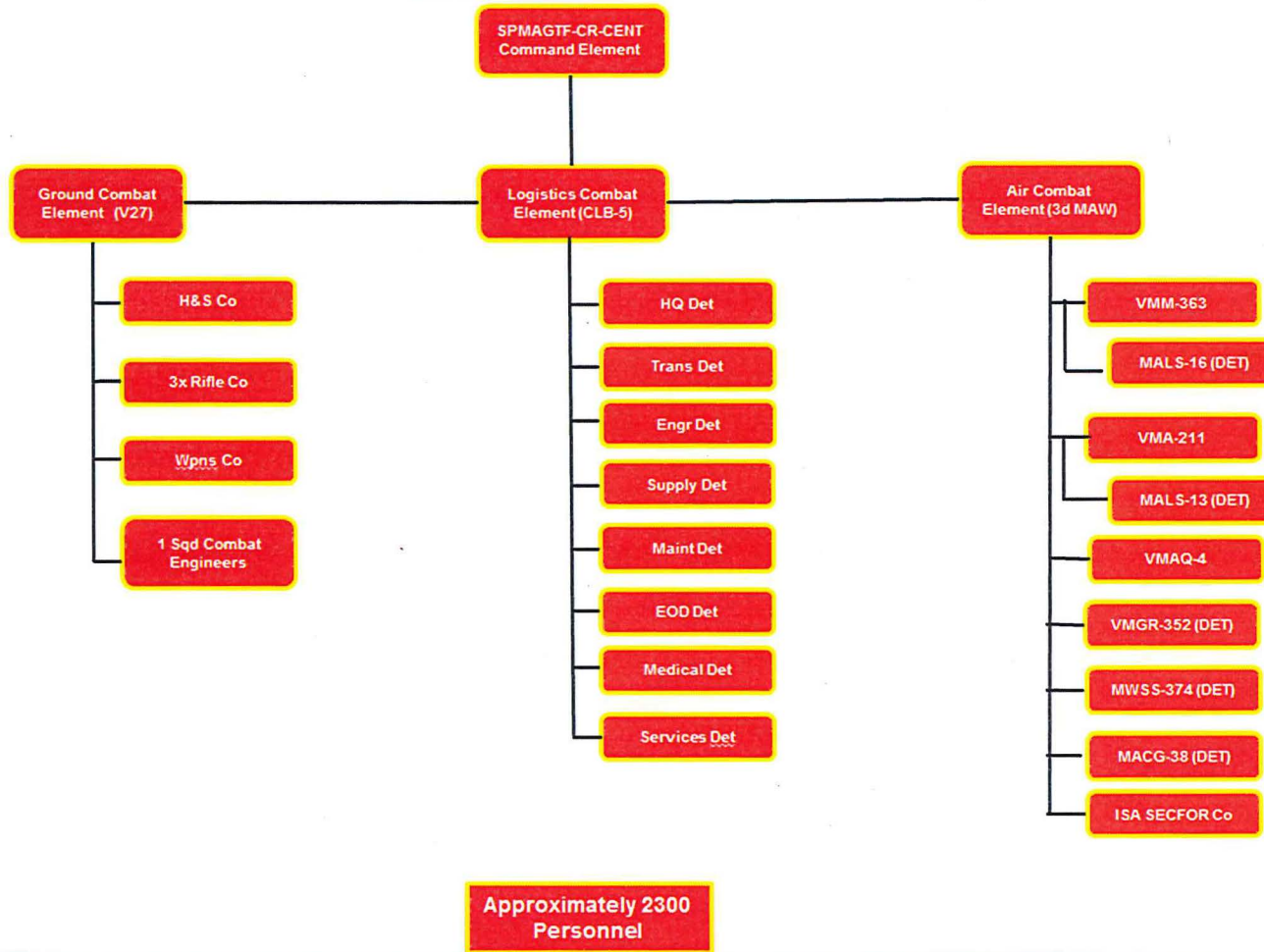


Figure 4 (Courtesy of Col Jason Bohm)

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Task Organization



Additional Information (Courtesy of Col Jason Bohm)



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Mission/METs/Characteristics

SPMAGTF-CR-CC 15.1 conducts crisis response, contingency operations, Theater Security Cooperation, Enabling Operations **and all other missions as may be directed** throughout the CENTCOM AO IOT support CDR USCENTCOM requirements in the "New Normal" environment.

**Crisis Response,
Contingency
Operations, and
Theater Security
Cooperation**

- Conduct enabling operations
- Attack Targets
- Facilitate Foreign Humanitarian Assistance
- Conduct/Support Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Activities
- Provide Security
- Conduct Embassy Reinforcement
- Conduct Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel
- Conduct Noncombatant Evacuation Operations
- Develop Partner Nation Forces
- Integrate and operate with Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) organizations

- Self-Mobile, Self-Supporting, Self-Sustaining
- Rapidly responding, highly mobile and flexible force
- Capable of C2 at multiple locations simultaneously

- Postured to respond to requirements across the full range of military operations, anywhere in the CENTCOM AO
- Enduring notification plus 6 hour Crisis Response capability

Right Force, Right Place, Right Time

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