

## Chapter 5

### Crisis Response

*In 1952, when the 82nd Congress was writing into law the Marine Corps' role in the national-security infrastructure, it recognized that the cost of maintaining a ready combat force is insignificant compared with the much higher cost of military unpreparedness. What Congress wanted...was to create a national "force in readiness... **the most ready when the nation is least ready.**"<sup>10</sup>*

#### Introduction

A **crisis** is defined as “An incident or situation involving a threat to the United States, its territories, citizens, military forces, and possessions or vital interests that develops rapidly and creates a condition of such diplomatic, economic, political, or military importance that commitment of United States military forces and resources is contemplated to achieve national objectives.”<sup>11</sup>

The key phrase that distinguishes a crisis from other types of military operations is “develops rapidly,” meaning that a given situation occurred unexpectedly or with minimal warning. Crises span the range of military operations, from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the incipient phases of major operations and campaigns. Normally, the more expeditiously resources can be brought to bear to seize the initiative, the more quickly the crisis can be contained and prevented from growing.

Our nation’s leadership has historically tasked naval forces with providing worldwide, multi-dimensional crisis response capability. A prime example of this occurred between August 1990 and June 1991. During that ten-month time period, a wide range of Navy and Marine Corps resources responded to near-simultaneous crises in several regions:

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10. Sea Power Magazine, “Almanac 2003,” (Arlington, VA: The Navy League of the United States, 2003), electronic edition.

11. JP 1-02.

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- Approximately 92,000 Marines, assigned to I Marine Expeditionary Force, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), deployed by sea and air to the Persian Gulf region. Operating from a sea base of amphibious ships and from forward operating sites ashore, they conducted *maritime interdiction operations, show of force operations, raids, demonstrations, amphibious assaults, and major combat operations* during OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM.
- The 22<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), operating from a sea base of amphibious ships, conducted *embassy security, non-combatant evacuation operations, and humanitarian assistance* in Liberia during OPERATION SHARP EDGE.
- A contingency MAGTF, operating from a sea base of amphibious ships, conducted *non-combatant evacuation operations* from Somalia during OPERATION EASTERN EXIT.
- The 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), projected from a sea base of amphibious ships to a forward operating site in Turkey, providing *humanitarian assistance* in northern Iraq during OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade, operating from a sea base of amphibious ships, provided *humanitarian assistance and disaster relief* in Bangladesh during OPERATION SEA ANGEL.
- A detachment from III Marine Expeditionary Force, deployed by air from a main operating base in Okinawa to a forward operating site in the Philippines, provided *humanitarian assistance and disaster relief* in support of OPERATION FIERY VIGIL.

A more recent example of the Marine Corps ability to rapidly respond to crisis was in January 2010, when a detachment from II Marine Expeditionary Force, deployed by sea from Camp Lejeune to various forward operating sites in Haiti, providing *humanitarian assistance and disaster relief* in support of OPERATION UNIFIED RESPONSE.

Chapter 1 described the widespread disorder and potential crises that will characterize the operating environment of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, indicating naval forces will be even more likely to conduct simultaneous or closely sequential crisis response operations around the globe than they have in the past.

## **Description of the Military Problem**

Since 1990, the Marine Corps has responded to over 100 crises worldwide—more than doubling previous historical responses for a similar period. This trend is expected to continue. Simultaneously, over the same period of time, amphibious lift has been reduced from over 60 ships to just over 30 amphibious ships. This trend is significantly impacting availability of response platforms. The numbers of United States overseas bases have decreased while impediments to access have increased; a trend which is likely to continue. Ten years of operations principally in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in training, equipment and deployment focused on operations in these specific environments; a trend that has produced a heavier force with some equipment-sets not ideally suited to rapid response. These four trends potentially place the Marine Corps' and our congressionally mandated role as the nation's force in readiness, in jeopardy.

The optimal force structure, associated lift, and global posture that balances the requirements for distributed security cooperation and counterterrorism with the competing requirement to effectively aggregate forces and respond to crises across the spectrum of operations has not been determined. Additionally, available shipping will remain constrained for the foreseeable future. Similarly, establishing certain seabasing capabilities aboard amphibious ships, such as selective offload, would likely require that they be less densely loaded, further reducing what can be embarked. Collectively, these changes in forward deployed capabilities will impose changes on how naval forces will respond to

crises. Naval forces are inherently flexible and mobile but we must validate our current positioning and structure to ensure we are optimally organized and positioned to proactively influence events forward while retaining the ability to globally respond to the unforeseen. As we seek new and innovative methods for reconfiguring our force structure, associated lift, and overall global posture, we must also consider the impact of continued Marine Corps participation in prolonged operations as described in Chapter 4.

## **Central Idea**

The Marine Corps must continue to hone its crisis response capabilities in order to continue to be the “nation’s force in readiness.” It must continue to identify those areas most critical to the geographic combatant commanders and ensure the development of crisis response capabilities to address those demands. Readiness—individual, unit, and institutional—is the most critical element of crisis response and it is one that is totally within our ability to control and influence.

Marine Corps forces are general purpose forces, designed for multiple missions as a MAGTF and will provide immediate response to an emerging crisis. Working alongside U.S. Government and private organizations, they will seek to resolve a crisis at the earliest opportunity. When required, these forward-deployed forces will enable the introduction of additional forces or resources. In such cases, forward-deployed Marine Corps forces will be complemented by additional forces (Marine Corps/Joint/Multinational) that can shift to crisis areas from other global locations. Collectively, they will provide the proper blend of capabilities appropriate to the mission. Given the likelihood that forward-deployed Marines may be the first on scene in an emerging crisis, Marine Corps command elements must be prepared to assume Joint task force command responsibilities, thereby enabling the regional combatant commander to conduct operations prior to the arrival of more robust Joint command and control elements. Achieving these goals requires a comprehensive examination of what resources should be forward deployed, pre-positioned or retained at home stations, along with a prudent estimate of available lift and time required to deploy, employ and sustain them. Toward that end, force planners must have a thorough understanding of the attributes of successful crisis response.

## Attributes of Successful Crisis Response

Successful crisis response is dependant on three fundamental attributes—speed, flexibility, and operational effectiveness. Of these three attributes, speed will be the most challenging—and therefore the Marine Corps’ area of primary concern. As noted in MCDP-3 *Expeditionary Operations*:

*The speed at which capable forces can be deployed to the scene of a crisis is often vitally important. The more quickly forces can deploy to stabilize a situation, the greater will be the likelihood of eventual success and the less may be the eventual cost. What matters, however, is not just how quickly the first forces can deploy; it is the speed at which **capable, sustainable** forces can deploy.*<sup>12</sup>

Speed of response is accelerated by a global force posture that places Marines in areas where crisis is likely to occur in order to reduce the “tyranny of distance” associated with deploying from the United States to many crisis areas. Speed of response is also facilitated by a high degree of individual, unit and institutional readiness.

Flexibility will be obtained through the expansive range of Marine force-options, mission capabilities, and task-organization aptitude. Crisis response forces must be able to deploy quickly via a variety of deployment means such as amphibious ships and military airlift, but must also be able to deploy via commercial ships and aircraft, rail or in any combination of transport modes.

Operational effectiveness will be obtained through the Marine Corps tradition of innovative and intense training, extensive operational experience via continuous employment, and overall force readiness with an expeditionary mindset. Operational effectiveness is enhanced by the ability to conduct land and sea based vertical maneuver, surface maneuver from the sea, as well as ground maneuver via mechanized, motorized and foot mobile units. These fundamental attributes provide

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12. MCDP 3, pp. 39-40.

the foundation for assessing the viability of future Marine Corps crisis response-enabling initiatives such as those described below.

## **Crisis Response Enabling Initiatives**

Chapter 4 proposes refinements to the organization and positioning of naval forces in order to enhance forward presence, security cooperation and counterterrorism capability and capacity. It pointed out that those refinements must also provide a preventative approach to likely crisis areas and the means to rapidly concentrate globally sourced joint combat power when required. Chapter 4 described the importance of evolving the naval element of the global defense posture and developing co-located and integrated naval force packages. These initiatives are equally important to enhancing Marine crisis response capability; as discussed in the previous chapter.

Additional initiatives for improving crisis response capability include, but are not limited to *global basing refinements, rejuvenated readiness training, seabasing, repositioning enhancements, tethering/modularity, enhanced access, crisis response force packages, and streamlined command, control and communications.*

## **Global Basing Refinements**

The Marine Corps must continually review its global force lay-down and ensure that it is best positioned to respond to crisis worldwide. In addition to our traditional regions for forward deployment, we recognize the growing importance of Africa and the Western Hemisphere and must identify ways to increase our global presence to cover down on these regions of rising importance. Furthermore, current efforts at widening the Panama Canal will provide opportunity for greater flexibility for sourcing of Marine forces outside the current paradigm.

Reduction in overseas bases has created potential opportunities to position Marine Corps elements in locations where a global gap in coverage may presently exist. Future movement of selected Marine Forces from Okinawa to Guam and Hawaii provide greater global distribution of Marines. Identification of select cooperative security locations that may be permanently manned by Marines and resourced

with select equipment and supplies, offer additional options for increasing global Marine Corps force presence. Repositioning additional amphibious ships in Hawaii or Guam as well as shore basing of selected assets in critical areas could further enhance crisis response capabilities.

## **Rejuvenated Readiness**

Readiness—individual, unit, and institutional—is central to effective crisis response and is an area completely within our ability to rejuvenate. Ten years of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in training programs, equipment solutions, and deployment patterns that support operations in those environs. As we draw down from Iraq we must rejuvenate our readiness posture across the force. Readiness includes operations, maintenance of equipment, medical and dental, legal affairs, and family readiness elements. Each of these elements must be in the proper balance in order to achieve the highest possible levels of Marine Corps readiness.

Numerous initiatives at the small-unit level such as Lightening the MAGTF, Enhanced Company Operations and Enhanced MAGTF Operations, as they continue to evolve, will provide additional capability to effectively respond to crises foreseen in the operating environment of the future.

## **Seabasing**

Sea-based forces can be adapted for a wide array of missions and operations. They can improve speed of response by acting on indications and warnings, free from diplomatic constraints, to reposition closer to an emerging crisis. The sea base can also provide a stable, safe, and fully equipped command and control capability that is already operational while en route to the scene of crisis. Sea-based forces can respond to a crisis while minimizing force protection requirements ashore. With relatively modest enhancements to connectors, materiel handling equipment and procedures, and command and control suites, we can further enhance crisis response speed, flexibility, and operational effectiveness.

## **Maritime Positioning Force (MPF) Enhancements**

The MPF enhancement provides an important element to craft sea-based capability for use in benign or low-threat environments and will enable the Navy and the Marine Corps to hone tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that are necessary to execute this capability. In support of this enhanced maritime positioning ship (MPS) concept of operations, three T-AKE auxiliary dry cargo ships have been shifted to provide logistics support to Marine Corps units ashore. Further, the Navy will provide for at-sea transfer of vehicles from a cargo ship and provide an interface with Landing Craft Air-Cushioned vessels. The Navy will procure mobile landing platforms (MLP) to fulfill this capability. These MLPs will be based on an ALASKA-class crude oil carrier modified to be a float-on/float-off vessel. These ships will provide concept validation, operational testing, and an incremental operational capability. The three current maritime positioning squadrons will each have a MLP and a T-AKE to supplement the current maritime positioning force.

History has proven our MPF program to be a tremendous crisis response enabler. The improved at-sea transfer and selective off-load capabilities of these squadrons will further enhance speed of response and operational effectiveness with the added benefit of being able to tailor the footprint ashore as required. Marine Corps forces must participate actively in the development of TTPs and continue to think of ways to improve the crisis response capabilities of our maritime preposition program as well as chart the future course for MPF.

### **Tethering/Modularity**

Crisis response speed and flexibility can be enhanced through forward deploying only necessary assets; preferably based at sea or cooperative security locations ashore, tethered to forward reinforcement or augmentation<sup>13</sup> modules. Other assets could be located at forward

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13. Reinforcement modules provide more of the same capability. Augmentation modules provide significantly different capabilities.

operating sites or even main operating bases that are farther away from the crisis scene, but still regionally accessible. For example, prior to deployment a Marine Expeditionary Unit would task organize and embark aboard amphibious shipping those capabilities necessary to conduct security cooperation and crisis response tasks unique to the region. The balance of the Marine Expeditionary Unit's capabilities would, if needed for an unanticipated crisis, be delivered via tailored modules drawn from MPS or forward operating sites. These modules might be delivered directly by the prepositioning ships or by means of high-speed connectors. Furthermore, tilt-rotor and heavy lift aircraft might be used to ferry modules from main operating bases or forward operating sites.

### **Crisis Response Force Packages**

Crisis response speed can be further enhanced through refinement of high-readiness, "lead-element" force packages such as JTF-nucleus capable Forward Command Elements, Disaster Assessment Teams, Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Teams, Global Response Forces, and Marine Expeditionary Units forward-deployed on amphibious ships. Additional skills, such as contracting expertise to support a variety of economic initiatives, will greatly enhance crisis response effectiveness and efficiency. Capable of response within hours of a crisis, these first-on-the-scene elements provide an immediate presence with many benefits, to include a visible statement of U.S. involvement, Joint-enabled command and control suites, preliminary defense of key U.S. installations such as embassies, first-hand intelligence gathering capability and a Public Affairs planning and response capability responsible for initial liaison with local authorities. Over time, these initial-response elements can be augmented or reinforced with follow-on forces if required.

The possibility of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high yield Explosives (CBRNE) event has increased markedly over the past decade and represents a capability set currently demanded by all regional combatant commanders. Responding to such an event prevents unique challenges and opportunities for a crisis response force. The Marine Corps needs to think comprehensively about this critical response

area, determine how best to support such an event, identify the required capabilities, and begin the process of capability development.

## **Streamlined Command, Control, and Communications**

Crisis response speed and operational effectiveness can be enhanced through streamlining interagency communications and net-centric information-sharing processes, authorities, and technologies between Marine command elements and other joint and coalition forces, and government and non-government agencies. This may include assignment of Marines to liaison duties to facilitate communications between Marine-led forward command elements and other organizations, such as the State Department. The objective will be to reduce the time required to activate, coordinate, and ultimately take effective integrated action in response to a crisis.

## **Implications for Capability Development**

Thorough experimentation, wargaming, and assessment are required to determine the optimal force structure and global posture that will generate Marine Corps forces agile enough to deploy rapidly, robust enough to sustain themselves in an expeditionary environment, and strong enough to succeed in likely missions. Key DOTMLPF elements of that effort will include:

- Developing crisis response force modules afloat and ashore, to include the development of a more responsive CBRNE capability (e.g. a lighter, easier to deploy subset of the current capability set or forward positioned modules in select geographic areas) and options for increasing the number of forward deployed MEUs..
- Developing, in partnership with the Navy, an interoperable system of main operating bases, forward operating sites, cooperative security locations, sea base platforms and high-speed connectors.
- Establishing, in coordination with the other services and the combatant commanders, a command and control architecture that

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integrates service, joint, interagency and multinational processes, authorities, and technologies for crisis response.

- Developing, in coordination with the other services and the combatant commanders, a streamlined global force management system for deployment, employment and sustainment planning and coordination.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented ideas for organizing and positioning Marine Corps forces to expeditiously and effectively respond to future crises. Crisis response is always difficult, and is made even more so when amphibious lift is constrained and challenges to access exist in the operating area. As our nation's force in readiness, the Marine Corps will improve speed, flexibility, and operational effectiveness to upgrade its responsiveness in crisis situations.