

# “Send in the Marines”

## MAGTF Operations

The call “Send in the Marines!” has been sounded over 200 times since the end of World War II -- *an average of once every 90 days*. Our nation’s leaders have great confidence in the Marine Corps’ ability to succeed anytime, anywhere, and in any situation. The basis for such confidence is a highly effective form of operations uniquely suited to the Marine Corps’ statutory role as the nation’s force in readiness: Marine Air-Ground Task Force Operations -- or **MAGTF Operations**.

MAGTF Operations provide the National Command Authorities (NCA) and the joint regional Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) with an unmatched combination of *deployment and employment* options. As the range of missions depicted on the cover suggests, one of the key reasons that Marines are so frequently called upon is that MAGTF Operations make them among the most versatile instruments of U.S.



national military power. MAGTF Operations provide decision makers -- both diplomatic and military -- with an immediately available and precisely programmable “rheostat” of tailored, cost-effective crisis response capabilities, applicable across the conflict spectrum.

## Getting to the Fight, and Getting it Right

The foundation for MAGTF Operations is built upon the six core competencies listed and described on the back cover. They define a force that can be flexibly employed to accomplish the entire range of military missions, either independently or as part of a joint warfighting team, with certain success. But that’s only half of the story. For an expeditionary force in readiness and joint task force enabler, being able to quickly deploy forces to a distant area of operations, with the precise capabilities necessary to accomplish

the mission, is just as important as employing forces once they arrive.

That’s what MAGTF Operations are all about: using the right size force, with the right set of skills, to get the job done rapidly and with the appropriate amount of force required. To accomplish this, MAGTF Operations rely upon scalable task organizations, building upon whatever force is “first on the scene,” until the capabilities necessary to accomplish the mission are available. This unique, building-block approach conserves both Marine combat power and scarce defense resources.

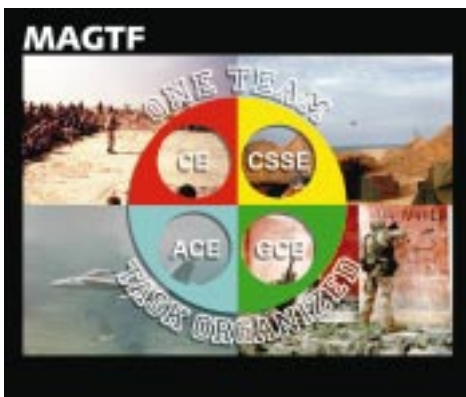
Although such a building block approach sounds straight forward, it requires detailed planning and integration, and three inter-connected force requirements:

- Highly trained, *first-on-the-scene forces*, able to handle a multitude of tasks well.

- A heavier *forcible entry force* that can kick in and hold the door open for follow-on joint forces in the face of determined enemy opposition.

- A flexible *expansion force*, capable of augmenting or reinforcing first-on-the-scene MAGTFs, creating new, more powerful MAGTFs, or deploying the full combat power of a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF; see inset overleaf).

The thread that weaves the above requirements together is simple: no matter the level or size, or the capabilities emphasized, each MAGTF has the same basic structure -- with command, ground combat, air combat, and combat service support elements. Consequently, when building up capabilities toward the full combat power of the MEF, the elements of smaller, building-block MAGTFs can be readily absorbed into their next higher-level companion element. The net result is an unprecedented ability to rapidly tailor on-scene capabilities to the mission, and to ratchet these capabilities up or down as the situation develops.



## First on the Scene: Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

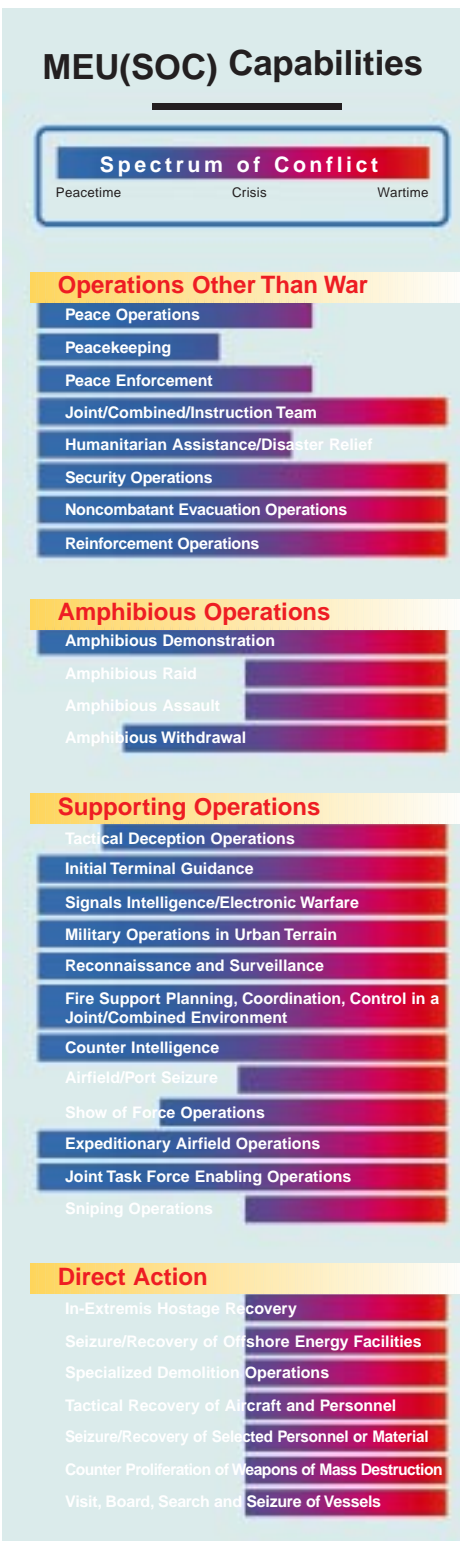
The basic building block for MAGTF Operations is the Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), or MEU(SOC). These unique units are specifically designed to be the Marines’ first-on-the-scene force. As such, each MEF deploys a MEU(SOC), embarked aboard a 3- to 5-ship Navy Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), to operate in the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, and throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These 2,200-strong MAGTFs are formed around a task organized command element, a reinforced infantry battalion, a composite squadron with helicopters and vertical/short take-off and landing (V/STOL) fixed wing aircraft, and a versatile support element with 15 days of accompanying supplies to support operations ashore.



Since MAGTF Operations depend so much on the ability of the first-on-the-scene force, MEUs are among the most highly trained elements of the MEFs and thus carry the special designator “special operations capable.” To earn this designation, each MEU undergoes an intensive 26-week, standardized pre-deployment training program. Progressive improvements in individual and unit skills allow the MEU to execute a full range of conventional operations -- from humanitarian assistance to combat raids -- as well as selected maritime “direct action” operations (see accompanying chart).

A MEU’s pre-deployment training culminates with a thorough evaluation that certifies it to be “special operations capable.” In addition to being able to demonstrate the entire spectrum of required capabilities, *MEU(SOC)s must be able to plan and execute any assigned mission within six hours of notification, and be able to conduct multiple missions simultaneously.*

Also, all MEU(SOC)s conduct a Joint Task Force Enabler exercise as part of their predeployment training schedule. This exercise hones MEU skills as a first-on-the-scene joint force, tasked with “opening the door” for follow-on Joint Task Forces. The training focuses the MAGTF command



element on JTF procedures, and emphasizes satellite communications to allow an early arriving JTF Commander to immediately uplink and talk with regional commanders.

## First on the Scene: Air Contingency MAGTF

In the event of a fast-breaking crisis, an Air Contingency MAGTF, or ACM, may be the first MAGTF on the scene. Marine Forces, Atlantic and Marine Forces, Pacific, both provide CINCs with alert forces for Air Contingency MAGTFs, whose lead elements are able to deploy by strategic airlift within 18 hours of notification.

The ACM is composed of regular MEF combat and support forces “on standby.” As long as no crisis exists, they continue normal operations. However, if a crisis erupts and the call “Send in the Marines” is sounded, the forces form up as a cohesive MAGTF and prepare for the mission at hand.

Unlike the MEU(SOC), which has the ability to force its way ashore in the face of armed opposition, ACMs require a secure airfield to which to deploy. Given this, an ACM can be precisely sized for the mission and available airlift, ranging in size from a reinforced rifle company with a small combat service support element, up to a regimental size force, complete with headquarters, aviation, and combat service support elements. As such, they can be employed for a variety of independent conventional missions, or reinforce other first-on-the-scene Marine or joint forces.



## For Forcible Entry: The Amphibious MEF

While MEU(SOC)s and ACMs can do a multitude of tasks well, they aren’t always enough to defeat an enemy, especially at the high end of the conflict spectrum. When confronted by a numerically superior foe bent on denying U.S. forces access into a theater, regional CINCs may require a first-on-the-scene, sea-based MAGTF -- larger and more capable than the MEU(SOC) -- that can force its way ashore and pave the way for follow-on joint forces. This role is filled by a specially-configured Marine Expeditionary Force, embarked aboard amphibious assault ships.

The current Navy amphibious force is being reshaped to provide for 36 modern amphibious ships, including 12 large assault ships that can each carry a sizable, mixed complement of helicopter, tilt-rotor and V/STOL aircraft. This force will provide the means to form 12 multi-purpose Amphibious Ready Groups. These ARGs will support the peacetime deployment of MEU(SOC)s and, when necessary, combine to form a larger task force capable of transporting the amphibious



MEF to combat.

The amphibious MEF consists of up to two-thirds of the MEF’s full combat power. It is equipped with the necessary assault amphibious vehicles, landing craft, and rotary and fixed wing aircraft to conduct opposed ship-to-objective movements. When it arrives in theater, the MEF can either absorb on-scene MEU(SOC)s into its overall structure, employ them independently in support of the overall forcible entry operation, or employ them in support of other operations designated by the theater CINC.

The amphibious MEF remains the nation’s only means for **self-sustainable** forcible entry into a region in which U.S. forces are being denied access. It can seize and hold airfields and ports to enable the introduction of follow-on MEF or joint forces. Once this is accomplished, the MEF can remain in theater to conduct main or supporting attacks during joint campaigns. In the future, when equipped with advanced amphibious assault vehicles, air-cushioned landing craft, and tilt-rotor aircraft, it will be capable of projecting combat power from the sea, 25 to 75 miles over the horizon, directly against decisive objectives far inland. This concept, known as **operational maneuver from the sea**, will make the amphibious MEF an even more flexible, potent instrument of joint combat power.

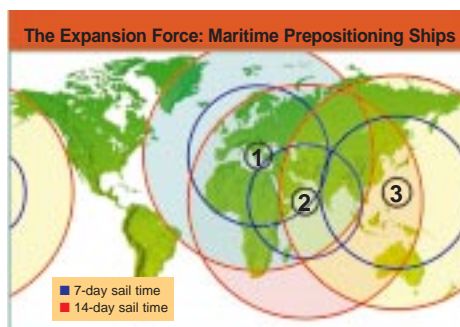
As a singular national capability, an amphibious MEF serves as a key “swing force” in the case of multiple theater operations. In other words, it would engage in one theater, and once follow-on joint forces are established, it would backload, reconstitute itself, and proceed to engage enemy

forces in the next theater.

## The Expansion Force: the Maritime Prepositioning Force

The Maritime Prepositioning Force, or MPF, is a key element of MAGTF Operations’ building block deployment approach. It is also a rapid, sustainable global crisis response capability in its own right.

The MPF consists of two parts. The first includes three squadrons of ships, strategically positioned within close proximity to the MEU(SOC) operating areas in the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Like the MEU(SOC)s, the MPF squadrons are no more than 7- to 14-days sailing time from any brewing crisis within their respective areas of coverage (see chart). In addition, two U.S. based Aviation Logistics Support Ships (one on each coast) carry a complete intermediate maintenance capability for



Marine aviation units. Their capabilities augment MPF squadrons when required.

In essence, each MPF squadron is a large MAGTF without its Marines and Sailors -- a floating “tool chest” of crisis response capabilities. In its entirety, one 4- to 5-ship squadron carries the equipment for a regimental-size mechanized MAGTF, and enough supplies for 30 days of sustained operations ashore. Unique to their crisis response heritage, MPF squadrons can, weather permitting, offload their entire cargo “in stream” (at sea) via on-board crane, landing craft, and causeway. This capability eliminates the need for well developed port facilities. The ships can also pipe bulk water and fuel ashore, adding to MAGTF sustainability in austere environments or when the infrastructure ashore has been destroyed -- either by natural disaster or by enemy action.

Squadrons are loaded in such a way as to allow individual ships to be selectively off-loaded in support of smaller, operationally independent MAGTFs. For example, one ship in each squadron is designed to augment MEU(SOC) capabilities. Others carry capabilities well suited for disaster relief and humanitarian operations. Still

others are designed to support MAGTFs involved in low intensity conflicts. In the future, the squadron “tool chest” will be even more flexible with the addition of one new ship per squadron. This will allow a squadron to deliver expanded joint task force command and control capabilities, expeditionary airfield equipment, a full field hospital, and heavy engineer assets.

The second part of the MPF are the Marines, Sailors, and aviation units that transform its floating capability sets into full-fledged MAGTFs. An MPF “fly-in-echelon” consists of up to 17,600 Marines and an additional 1,100 Sailors in the associated Naval Support Element, as well as over 120 fixed and rotary wing aircraft. When an MPF squadron and its companion fly-in-echelon of Marines, Sailors and aircraft are “married up,” they form the forward operating element of a full MEF.

The difference between the MPF fly-in-echelon and an Air Contingency MAGTF is simple. While an ACM brings its own organic ground equipment into an area of operations by aircraft, Marines in the MPF fly-in-echelon fall in on equipment delivered by ship. As such, the fly-in-echelon consists only of Marines and Sailors, their individual weapons, and a small amount of special gear. The result is a significant decrease in the number of strategic airlift sorties required to deploy the force. For example, the equipment stored on a single MPF squadron would require *more than 3,000 airlift flights* if deployed from the United States. The full combat power of an MPF-based MAGTF can thus be deployed using only 250 airlift flights -- a 92% reduction in required flights



for a force of comparable size deployed completely from the continental U.S.

The MPF provides the final dimension to Marine Corps readiness, strategic mobility and global responsiveness. Its ultimate utility is its enormous flexibility. The MPF can be used to *augment capabilities* of first-on-the-scene ACMs and MEU(SOC)s by bringing in additional equipment. It

can *selectively reinforce* ACMs or MEU(SOC)s by providing mixes of equipment and Marines that can be absorbed into on-scene command, ground combat, air combat, and combat service support elements. It can be used to *create completely new MAGTFs* operating as part of joint or combined forces, or as follow-on forces being used to exploit amphibious MEF operations. Finally, the MPF can be used to *deploy the full power of a MEF*. In this regard, by concentrating all three MPF Squadrons, the entire combat power of a heavy, mechanized MEF can be deployed to a region using less than 800 airlift flights. This is precisely what happened during Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

## MAGTF Operations: a Cost-Effective Means of Deploying and Employing Combat Power

MAGTF Operations are about accomplishing the mission, and doing it in the most efficient, cost-effective fashion. So embedded is cost-effectiveness in the MAGTF Operations building-block deployment and employment approach that it might be considered a seventh core competency.

First, by imbuing first-on-the-scene MAGTFs with such a wide range of operational capabilities, they can often resolve crises with no further augmentation. Captain O’Grady, the Air Force fighter pilot shot down over Bosnia, and the American citizens and foreign nationals trapped in a deteriorating situation in Albania, were all rescued by forward-deployed, first-on-the-scene MEU(SOC)s. Moreover, because the MEU(SOC)s are specifically designed to be forward deployed, most of the costs of MEU(SOC) crisis response operations are already included in the “sticker price” of their deployment.

Second, by sending only the units necessary to accomplish a mission, MAGTFs can be employed and deployed like a much larger force, conserving both units and operational funds. For example, on March 13, 1997, the 26th MEU(SOC), deployed aboard the amphibious ships USS Nassau, USS Nashville and the USS Pensacola, conducted a noncombatant evacuation operation of US citizens and third country nationals from the US Embassy in Tirana, Albania (Operation Silver Wake). Only nine days later, the USS Nassau split from the remainder of the amphibious task force and sailed south to take up station off the coast of West Central Africa. From there, the 26th MEU(SOC) deployed Marines to Libreville, Gabon and Brazzaville, Congo to establish intermediate and forward support bases in anticipation of possible evacuation operations of US citizens and third country nationals from Kinshasa, Zaire (Operation

Guardian Retrieval). Additionally, two 26th MEU(SOC) KC-130 tanker aircraft were positioned to provide on-call support from bases in Dakar, Senegal and Pointe Noire, Congo. In summary, elements of the 26th MEU(SOC) were employed in five different countries spanning an



area larger than the continental United States. The cost of deploying similar units from the US to accomplish the same mission would have been much more expensive.

And third, by prudently building up MAGTFs until they possess only the capabilities necessary to accomplish the mission, operations are conducted in the most efficient, cost-effective manner. A key to this approach is the flexibility provided by the MPF, specifically configured to provide a multitude of deployment and employment options. And because the MPF husbands scarce strategic airlift sorties by design, it saves not only deployment time but operational funds as well.

## MAGTF Operations: the Right Approach for the Right Mission

No other nation on earth possesses the politically and operationally flexible range of crisis response capabilities provided by MAGTF Operations. Effective across the entire spectrum of conflict, either independently or as an integral part of a joint campaign plan, MAGTF Operations are the result of more than 221 years of expeditionary experience and high readiness, and reflect six special core competencies. The broad-based, cost-effective, global crisis response capabilities provided by MAGTF Operations are exactly what the Congress had in mind when they assigned the force in readiness role to the United States Marine Corps. ■