

The MAGTF in OOTW

by Capt Kevin D. Stringer, USAR

The MAGTF possesses unique capabilities that make it extremely well suited for Operations Other Than War. The Marine Corps should emphasize and enhance its skills in this area.

In the post-Cold War era of regional instability and flashpoint crises, the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) provides U.S. policymakers and theater commanders-in-chiefs (CinCs) with a sustainable, combat-ready, and powerful force to provide deterrence, compellence, or intervention capabilities in contingency situations in littoral areas or even regions farther inland. This flexible, integrated, cohesive, and multipurpose unit package is unique in the U.S. military and cannot be matched by the other Services. This article will explore the roles and missions suited for this force in scenarios that fall under the designation of Operations Other Than War (OOTW).

Joint Pub 3-0 defines OOTW as covering a wide range of activities in which the military is used for purposes other than large-scale combat. Such operations usually involve a mix of land, sea, air, and special operations forces under the commander of a joint task force. They may occur anywhere, from foreign terri-

tory to domestic urban areas, as part of military support to the civil authority. OOTW include combating terrorism, support of counterdrug operations, nation assistance, peace operations, and various other operations on a continuum below the threshold of general war. In addition to joint forces and Department of Defense (DoD) agencies, participants in OOTW can include other Federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, the U.N., NATO, combined or multinational forces, and state and local authorities.

Of late, the U.S. Army has taken a lead in this area by providing a basic doctrinal classification framework for OOTW. It should be noted, however, that historically the U.S. Marine Corps pioneered operations in this area during the 1920s and 1930s in Latin America. This resulted in the publication of an excellent manual entitled *Small Wars*, which is still useful for the military strategist today.

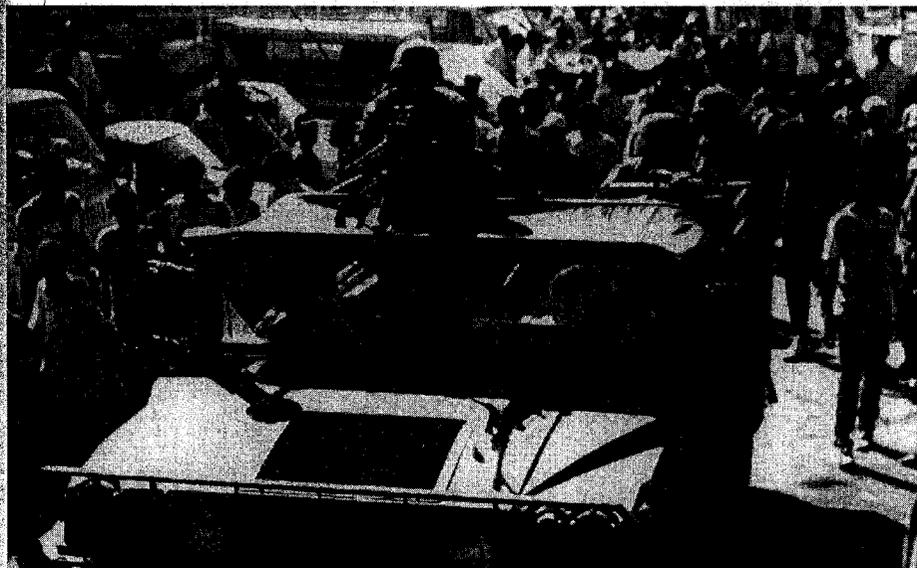
Similar to *Joint Pub 3-0*, the Depart-

ment of the Army *Field Manual 100-5 Operations* defines OOTH rather broadly, but provides the following 13 activities as a classification framework for OOTW:

- Noncombatant Evacuation Operations
- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
- Security Assistance
- Nation Assistance
- Combating Terrorism
- Peacekeeping Operations
- Peace Enforcement
- Show of Force
- Support for Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies
- Attacks and Raids
- Arms Control
- Support to Domestic Civil Authorities
- Support to Counterdrug Operations

For the majority of these operations, the MAGTF is the perfect force package for employment given the generally austere, undefined environments characterizing OOTW where forward presence is needed to promote regional stability and achieve peaceful endstates. This is not to say that the MAGTF will entirely supplant other Services in these environments, but merely that its robustness and balanced composition of force assets provide commanders and ambassadors the perfect initial force for defusing a crisis or intervening to achieve a desired state of affairs for operation resolution or for enabling the introduction of follow-on Army and Air Force units.

The MAGTF, as a floating expeditionary force, is usable and well suited to all the above with the possible exception of arms control and support to domestic authorities. Arms control is a vaguely defined operation that could include activities like weapons site inspections and the decommissioning of arms. This



Marines patrol the streets of Cap-Haitien during Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY.

activity would seem to lie more within the area of responsibility of a joint civil-military, nonexpeditionary organization. Although Marines have been involved in support to domestic authorities for humanitarian operations, these forces have often been given to U.S.-based troops and task forces rather than a floating expeditionary force like the MAGTF. Thus, the MAGTF is a force that can perform 11 out of 13 activities in OOTH.

A short summary of MAGTF usage in the 11 pertinent activities will illustrate the MAGTF's broad utility. It should be remembered that in OOTH, there is often no clear distinction between the 13 listed activities, and often one operation will have aspects of several overlapping activity areas. Also, in this environment, DoD may or may not be the lead agency in directing such operations.

• *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations:*

An excellent example of MAGTF capabilities was Operation SHARP EDGE in 1990 off the coast of Liberia. Here, the MAGTF deployed to secure the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia and assisted in the evacuation of 2,000 noncombatants. MAGTF assets also evacuated the U.S. Embassy in Somalia in 1991 in Operation EASTERN EXIT just prior to the start of the Gulf War.

• *Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief:* Operation SEA ANGEL helped restore order in Bangladesh in the wake of a crushing natural disaster.

• *Security Assistance:* The deployed MAGTF has the opportunity to engage in military-to-military contacts and can provide a wide range of security assistance in the form of training and partnership exercises to help complement U.S. diplomatic efforts in various regions of the world.

• *Nation Assistance:* This activity promotes long-term stability in the host country, or region, in order to develop sound and responsive democratic institutions and an environment that allows for orderly political change and economic progress. The MAGTF has the assets to participate in this activity as an outgrowth of other operations. Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in Northern Iraq and Eastern Turkey had elements of nation assistance in that the involved Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) enhanced stability by providing security,

medical services, and logistical assistance in setting up the resettlement camp infrastructure for the Kurdish refugees.

• *Combating Terrorism:* The MAGTF provides a ready strike capability to deter state sponsors of terrorism, and its reconnaissance and security forces can participate in the counterterrorism aspects of this activity in conjunction with other special operations forces, particularly Navy SEALs.

• *Peacekeeping Operations/Peace Enforcement:* Both of these activities play to the MAGTF's strengths. Its integrated force structure allows it to handle the ambiguity and restraint required in the peacekeeping environment where the primary objective is to maintain peace in an area of potential conflict. Its fire-

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power and robustness allow it to impose order by force on warring elements under the aegis of peace enforcement. MAGTF participation in Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia had elements of peace enforcement within its overall humanitarian and nation assistance mission.

• *Show of Force:* This activity is ideal for the MAGTF since its over-the-horizon presence off the coast of a key area can compel or deter a potential adversary into a desired course of action. MAGTF operations in the Adriatic in support of U.N. forces in Bosnia and the initial phase of Operation SHARP EDGE in Liberia had elements of this activity.

• *Support for Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies:* The MAGTF, in particular the special operations capable variety, has the capability for both of these missions. Also, historical precedence exists for this sort of MAGTF mission given the successful Marine Combined Action Program during the Vietnam War. This program involved merging Marine squads with Popular Force (Vietnamese militia) platoons and assigning them to hamlets and villages where they enhanced security, trained the militia, and inspired confidence among

the village population.

• *Attacks and Raids:* Attacks and raids are a natural mission for the MAGTF given its expeditionary nature and combined arms assets of infantry, artillery, armor, and aviation subunits.

• *Support to Counterdrug Operations:* Support for these operations, especially in Third World areas, would allow the MAGTF to provide its logistical capabilities to U.S. and allied counternarcotics forces, while its combat arms assets and expertise could add value to counterdrug organizations in an advisory capacity.

As seen from the preceding pages, the MAGTF provides a unique instrument of policy well suited to the OOTH arena. In order to enhance its capabilities and capacity for these missions, the

MAGTF of the future should place emphasis on developing and enhancing several skill areas to allow it to handle the wide variety of activities in this operational milieu. A focus on civil-military operations is essential, given “the hearts

and minds” nature of OOTW. Small unit skills and capabilities should also be emphasized given the often decentralized structure of OOTW. Other key areas for focus include civil affairs and psychological operations training, greater reconnaissance capability, sniper skills, peacekeeping training, linguistic and cultural training for junior leaders, and greater use of simulation to prepare key leaders and staff for the fast changing, and often unclear, nature of operations in the described environment.

The MAGTF is unique in its capabilities. As demonstrated by the use of the U.S. Army's OOTW framework, the MAGTF can be used as a forward instrument of policy execution in a wide number of situations. By putting aside rivalries, the other Services should allow the Marine Corps, in the form of the MAGTF, to take a lead role in this important area of national strategy.

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