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The Role of the
Marine Corps
in the Post-Cold
War Era

By General Carl E. Mundy, Jr.



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There is an acronym that I have found to be useful in describing where we are in our defense planning machinery. It also keeps me on track about what to say. The acronym is RAMBURFTS—Roles and Missions, Bottom-Up Review, and From the Sea. I will even make it longer—RAMBURFTSRES—because I want to finish up by talking about resources and the Corps.

But before “acronymizing” you, let me begin by talking a little about the strategic landscape that confronts us at the end of the 20th century. We have set aside the grand calculus of containment. The bipolar dynamic that dominated all our defense planning is obsolete, and it became obsolete virtually overnight. Four things have happened in the past five years that cannot be rescinded:

- ◆ The fall of the Berlin Wall;
- ◆ The end of the Warsaw Pact as a coherent alliance;
- ◆ The disintegration of the former Soviet Union; and
- ◆ The birth of democracy in Eastern Europe.

But the post-containment world is more confused, at least as violent as the bipolar one, and it is one that will require continued United States engagement overseas. Regional threats have replaced the “evil empire,” but as we have seen in Kuwait, even regional threats can be very dangerous to world stability. This is the backdrop against which we have to talk about current and future military strategy and force structure. So let me now turn to my acronym and its first segment, “RAM.”

As many of you know, in the spring of this year the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as mandated in law, issued a comprehensive report on the roles, missions, and functions of the Armed Forces. Let me describe these roles and missions.

Roles are the broad and enduring purposes for which the services were established by Congress. For the Army, it is the continental defense of the United States and land warfare; for the Navy, it is war at sea; and for the Air Force, it is aerial warfare.

The Marine Corps is “roled” to cut across these lines. Our role is to conduct littoral operations, those operations at the point where the land and sea come together, as part of a naval campaign—in other words, to conduct land operations, but to do them from our bases at sea. Since this role logically carries us ashore to open the littoral door if land warfare is to be waged, our role assigns us also the responsibility to conduct sustained combat operations alongside the Army in a joint environment.

The *functions* of the respective services are to provide *capabilities* to accomplish the roles I have just outlined. These functional capabilities enable our warfighting commanders to accomplish *missions* assigned them by our National Command Authorities.

As part of his review, the Chairman looked at the capabilities of the services and concluded that, on balance, we have a fairly well balanced “family” of complementary capabilities. While there are

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