



Asymmetric Warriors Maximizing the use of the Marine Corps Reserve

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A symmetric threats are multidimensional and include "military operations [that involve] the application of dissimilar strategies, tactics, capabilities, and methods to circumvent or negate an opponent's strengths while exploiting his weaknesses." (1) Today, these asymmetric threats increasingly threaten U.S. security and interests and include transnational crime, terrorism, and the destabilization of sovereign, friendly nations by internal as well as external forces. Further, these asymmetric approaches seek a psychological impact that affects an opponent's advantage and/or freedom of movement and are applied at all levels of warfare. (2)

In the current economically austere environment of the U.S. government, all effort must be made to identify and prepare those resources already available to combat the threats in the ongoing asymmetric war. The U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the United States Marine Corps (USMC) are the organizations within the Department of Defense (DOD) best prepared to answer our Nation's call to counter asymmetric threats and warfare.

The current asymmetric threat to the U.S. requires a uniquely selected, trained, and equipped warrior. USSOCOM (manned and equipped by selected soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines) has been the ideally suited organization to wage asymmetric war and has been the tool of choice for the U.S. government in combating these asymmetric threats

There are two factors that forecast an ongoing and high demand for special operations forces: budgetary pressures for a smaller, more agile force, and the continued prevalence of irregular threats. (3) The result of the ongoing asymmetric threats to the U.S. will continue to drive a tremendous demand on the existing finite resource of asymmetric warriors found in USSOCOM, which "are a scarce resource [and] constitute less than 5 percent of total U.S. military forces." (4) Given these finite resources and ever-increasing demands, it is time to recognize that the USMC, as a forward deployed expeditionary force, is well positioned to provide another important source of asymmetric warriors to deal with these ongoing asymmetric threats.

The recognition of the suitability for leveraging the capabilities of both the USSOCOM and the USMC against the asymmetric threat was identified by Andrew Feickert in his Background and Issues for Congress: "The [USMC] offers real cross-functional utility [and] can bridge the critical seam between Army and Navy operations, [and they are] culturally and operationally adept and comfortable with irregular (5) [asymmetric] warfare." (6) The culture and history of the USMC has prepared it well for asymmetric warfare and is illustrated by the recent All Marine Message recounting the history of Marines in irregular (asymmetric) warfare. To



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help reinforce those important historical capabilities and lineage, Marines assigned to Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) are now re-designated with the name "Marine Raiders." (7) -

USMC leadership recognizes the asymmetric threat and is adjusting manpower requirements and priorities to develop a force optimized for forward presence, engagement, and rapid crisis response with capabilities and capacities to include more closely integrated operations with the Navy, special operations, and interagency partners.(8) USMC leadership further realizes that the Marine Corps Reserve must remain a part of the USMC Total Force to provide strategic depth to the active component and serve as Special MAGTFs or fill a train advise role with security force assistance teams in direct support of combatant commanders' requirements.(9) These important steps demonstrate that the leadership of the USMC recognizes that the USMC, along with USSOCOM, is best positioned to identify and adapt attributes, strategies, and methods to ensure readiness to counter, deter, or defeat operational and strategic asymmetric threats and war. (10)

A key strategy to counter the asymmetric threat is through close military-to-military engagement of U.S. and foreign host nation forces that help prevent and/or counter an asymmetric threat aligned against the U.S. or its interests within that region. The most effective methods to prepare foreign host nation forces to fight an asymmetric war are through foreign internal defense (FID) and theater security cooperation (TSC) activities and missions. FID has been used effectively in protecting societies from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to security by assessing, training, advising, and assisting foreign host nation forces. (11) TSC is a broader range of activities which not only include aspects of FID but can also include Joint exercises and key leader engagements between the U.S. and foreign host nation forces.

USSOCOM has been at the forefront of the asymmetric war and the primary source for personnel, yet the USMC was the last branch of service to join USSOCOM with the formation of MARSOC in February 2006." (12) Today, USSOCOM has over 66,000 men and women, deployed in over 75 countries, working side-by-side with interagency and international partners. (13) Within USSOCOM, the USMC has approximately 3,000 active duty personnel assigned to MARSOC. (14)

MARSOC was created during a period of high operational tempo for the USMC and despite the conflicting demands for time, talent, and resources, formed an effective SOF. MARSOC assumed the same responsibilities that were assigned to the other Service components of USSOCOM such as combat operations, in addition to the traditional FID missions. During the process of creating the Critical Skills Operator (CSO) MOS, (15) MARSOC identified key characteristics found in asymmetric



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warriors. These characteristics or attributes are found in all the successful soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines assigned to USSOCOM. (See Table 1.) MARSOC built on that success by identifying ten attributes sought in all CSOs: Effective Intelligence, Adaptability, Determination, Dependability, Integrity, Initiative, Stress Tolerance, Interpersonal Skills, Physical Ability, and Teamwork. (16)

The demand for SOF personnel is high and growing. The United States Army is the largest component of USSOCOM and has relied upon its Reserve Component (RC) SOF as a key source of asymmetric warriors. "Since September 11, 2001, Army National Guard personnel of the 19th and 20th SF Groups have conducted numerous deployments as their approximately 2,000 soldiers constitute about 19% of the total Army SF." (17)

The United States Navy also maintains a RC SOF capability within its SEAL Teams 17 and 18, which are comprised of approximately 700 reservists. (18) In stark contrast to the other branches of service, the Select Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) component of MARSOC is limited to a small Individual Mobilization Augmentee (IMA) detachment of approximately 58 Marines which support active duty staff sections and are not assigned to support special operations missions. (19) The MARSOC IMA detachment was not established to provide asymmetric warriors but rather to augment the Command with staff officers and senior staff non-commissioned officers.

The former commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, LTG John F. Mulholland, Jr., sponsored research by the RAND Corporation to determine how best to utilize the Army National Guard (ARNG) SOF. LTG Mulholland sought to identify what skills the citizen soldier brought from his civilian life that made him such a valued asset to the Army SOF. While reservists do bring their civilian skills to their military job, more often it is the breadth of experience and character of the reservist or guardsman that truly helped prepare them for their role as an asymmetric warrior. What RAND discovered in the interview process of the SOF Guardsmen was the impact of their living as a civilian, which had in many ways better prepared them for their SOF mission. The civilian lifestyle and culture had contributed to the success of ARNG SOF as much as their civilian skill sets in the execution of non-kinetic missions requiring frequent interaction with host nation personnel. In discussing what they perceived as key elements of their civilian backgrounds that enhanced their capabilities as SOF soldiers, many ARNG SOF interviewees pointed to the fact that most of them lead predominately civilian lives in which they cannot rely on a chain of command or published priorities in order to achieve success. Key to this success is that they learn by experience the importance of negotiation, accommodation, compromise, persuasion, and other social skills. These skills give them an edge over their active duty counterparts in non-kinetic activities such as FID and other aspects of unconventional warfare. (20)



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As noted earlier, TSC and FID provide a valuable platform to help reduce asymmetric threats. Although TSC is similar to FID, it has a much broader scope by definition and is implemented by (non-SOF) general purpose forces (GPF). TSC is defined as activities conducted with foreign host nation forces to build relationships that promote U.S. interests, improve the host nation capability for self-defense, and provide U.S. forces with access through a variety of activities such as military exercises and training events. (21)

Because of its effectiveness, TSC is among the fastest-growing areas of demand for mission support. To help meet the demand for TSC, the USMC looked to its reserve forces to help close the gap. The USMC formed the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force–Crisis Response–Africa (SPMAGTF–CR–AF) from selected units with the SMCR. These Reserve-led SPMAGTFs were assigned the primary mission of TSC in the Africa Combatant Command Area of Operation.

From 2011 to 2014, the SPMAGTF–CR–AF mission was conducted by separate deployments each based on a reserve LtCol level command (3d and 4th Force Recon, 2/25, and 4th CEB), which had an organic command, ground combat, logistic, and aviation element. The active component (Marine Corps Forces Africa), subordinate to U.S. Africa Command, focused SPMAGTF–CR–AF on engagement through military-to-military training with foreign, host nation forces. These TSC engagements were conducted by reserve Marine teams of force reconnaissance, infantry, and combat engineering troops who taught common military skills. –

SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 (22) was established by direction of Headquarters Marine Corps to support Commander, Marine Forces Africa in early 2013, to conduct TSC missions and with a “be prepared” mission to also support crisis response operations in their area of responsibility (AOR). SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3—which deployed in July 2013 and returned in January 2014—not only conducted several TSC missions throughout the Africa Command Area of Operations but also reacted successfully to two unexpected crises near the completion of the six-month deployment. The two crises involved violence in the Central African Republic and a coup attempt in South Sudan. The SMCR leadership of SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 understood that the success of the mission would depend on the maturity, initiative, and interpersonal skills that many reservists develop working and living in the civilian world. This emphasized the importance of screening the volunteer reservists to determine who possessed the attributes needed for success in the mission. (23) The crisis response training prepared the reserve Marines and Sailors to: reinforce a U.S. Embassy, conduct a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), conduct a security convoy, support humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and conduct fixed-wing air evacuation operations with the SMCR detachment of two KC-130 cargo aircraft which were later assigned to Operation Africa 13.3. The extensive training for SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 over the four months



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of pre-deployment preparation required a budget of over \$970,000. (24) The training cost for SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 prepared the unit for a successful deployment. Unfortunately, the tremendous knowledge and experience obtained from the training and deployment of the cohesive SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 was lost when the Marines, upon completion of the six-month deployment, were dispersed and returned to one of more than 33 SMCR units.

Another example of successfully employing Marine Reservists in TSC is found with the Spanish-speaking Marines of 4th Reconnaissance Battalion, who mobilized and deployed to train Mexican Marines. The Officer in Charge (OIC) of this TSC mission stated that the reserve Marines sought for this assignment were all screened for their maturity, intelligence, and their ability to accomplish the mission. (25) The reserve Marines assigned to the Mexican Marine mission brought with them additional skills from their civilian careers, which often contributed to the success of the mission. (26)

USSOCOM is increasingly in high demand for FID and TSC missions, which require a correspondingly increased number of personnel to support. The reduction in DOD budget and personnel further stresses the finite resource of asymmetric warriors. After more than 13 years of active duty missions, the SMCR has demonstrated it is a tremendous resource for Marines that have both the required military and civilian skills as well as experience which demonstrate their suitability in performing FID and TSC missions. –

There are often unanticipated issues and unexpected crises that arise in TSC and FID missions. Therefore, consideration of a number of factors is necessary to determine whether a GPF or SOF unit is appropriate to conduct TSC. The fundamental difference between FID conducted only by SOF and TSC conducted by a GPF, is that a FID mission may result in combat operations involving the SOF unit and their partner force while TSC typically does not include combat operations. SOF has a much greater level of individual training as compared to a GPF and provides a great deal of flexibility. However, the perception by the general public of SOF as primarily used for combat operations may result, at times, in hesitancy to employ them. That is, while SOF are well-suited for TSC and crisis response actions, diplomatic considerations may restrict their use if they are not desired by the host nation and/or the U.S. Ambassador. In personal communication with the author, Maj Rick Sonnefeld, U.S. Special Forces, Office of Security Cooperation, U.S. Embassy Burundi wrote:

“One of the potential issues to research/investigate and discuss is the reluctance of some/many Embassies to simply decline USSOF involvement at all. While I think that USMC is uniquely trained, formed, and deployed via MEU/MEFs and the fact that Marines conduct training globally is a particular



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reason that SPMAGTF was originally tasked with the training role in Burundi/Uganda. That said, if the teams coming in had been “MARSOC” teams it would not have happened in Burundi, and would have created considerably more consternation in Uganda. This is based on false assumptions by DOS personnel that SOF=something surreptitious. When SOF=doing the basics better.” (27)

The USMC has determined the need to identify Marines that have the unique experience of TSC missions and has recently established a mechanism to assign an MOS for Foreign Security Force Advisor. (28)

The SMCR provides the USMC the opportunity to retain highly trained and experienced Marines who have decided, for a variety of reasons, to leave active duty and have the attributes needed in asymmetric warriors. In addition, the SMCR has Marines who have civilian skills that are advantageous in conducting TSC and FID such as law enforcement, emergency services, medical, and engineering in addition to the interpersonal skills developed in the civilian work place (see Table 2).

Some of the attributes that are needed in asymmetric warriors have been identified by MARSOC in their CSOs and are measured USMC-wide (active duty and reserve) such as: age or maturity, intelligence or GT Score, civilian education level, physical ability or physical fitness test score, and basic military skill or rifle qualification score. The SMCR compares well to their active duty counterpart in all of these basic metrics. Data from Manpower and Reserve Affairs HQMC comparing these attributes between active duty and reserve Marines (E-5 to E-9) as of September 2014 can be seen in Table 1. The SMCR has a large number of Marines who are employed in civilian occupations that provide those skills that are well-suited for use in TSC and FID.

Component	Age	GT	EDUCATION	PFT	RIFLE QUAL
Active Duty	30.6	106.1	12.3	228.9	190.7
SMCR	29.8	108.4	12.7	233.8	203.5

	Jan 2014	May 2014	
Critical Skills Operator	763	749	Discharged suitable for SMCR(37)
Reconnaissance	290	271	



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(SMCR 0321)			
Law Enforcement		3,144	
Communications & Computers		704	
Fire Service & Emergency Medical		414	
Intelligence Analyst		28	
Total SMCR population of 41,938	Total	4,561	

Conclusions

USSOCOM and the USMC have a culture and history that make them a ready and preferred source of asymmetric warriors. USSOCOM successfully utilizes reservists from the Army, Navy, and Air Force to resource the tremendous demand for asymmetric warriors, particularly in the non-kinetic activities of FID and TSC. MARSOC has only a small SMCR IMA detachment that conducts only command staff support functions. The selection and training of these reserve Marine asymmetric warriors is time consuming and expensive, as demonstrated by the pre-deployment training costs of SPMAGTF-CR-AF 13.3. That demand for TSC missions is high, is likely to keep growing, and cannot be met with the current number of asymmetric warriors found in USSO-COM and the active duty USMC. TSC missions may actually be more suitable for non-SOF units as demonstrated with the SPMAGTF mission to AFRICOM because of the perception “special operations” may have among U.S. Department of State personnel. The USMC understands the growing importance of identifying and tracking those Marines who possess asymmetric warfare skills and has created a new MOS, Foreign Security Force Advisor, in order to accomplish this task. In statistically measured basic attributes found in Table 1 such as: maturity (age), intelligence, education, fitness, and basic military skill, SMCR Marines measure the same or slightly better than their active duty Marine peers. There are approximately 4,561 (Table 2) SMCR Marines who possess a MOS and/or have a civilian occupation that would make them highly valuable and sought after for their skills and experiences related to asymmetric warfare.

Recommendations

The USMC must aggressively identify those Marines, both active duty and reserve, who have credible experience in security cooperation training-type missions and



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assign them the Foreign Security Force Advisor MOS for future assignment in a related unit or mission. The USMC can assist the DOD in meeting the demand for

TSC and FID missions by establishing a SMCR “advisor” unit which is specifically tasked with identifying, training, and mobilizing appropriate reserve Marines to support TSC missions. This SMCR unit would get formed by using existing personnel structure and facilities, with a mix of high-demand MOSs and then task-organized in a manner similar to SPMAGTF–CR–AF. The USMC should also establish a SMCR MARSOC unit, which would be formed in much the same manner as was done when MARSOC was initially stood up and use existing personnel and facilities structures. The SMCR would seek out Reserve Marines with MOSs that are in demand in MARSOC, as well as Reserve Marines who have comparable civilian skills. Implementing these recommendations quickly ensures that suitable and experienced Reserve Marines are utilized effectively in the continuing asymmetric war.

Notes

1. DOD Dictionary of Military Terms website, Joint Publication 1-02, DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, (08 November 2010, as amended through 15 January 2015), accessed on 21 February 2015 at <http://www.dtic.mil>.
2. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Strategy Review 1999, (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 1999), 2.
3. Linda Robinson, “The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces,” Council on Foreign Relations, (April 2013), 5.
4. Ibid., 6.
5. “Irregular warfare (IW) is defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.” Department of Defense, Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept, (11 September 2007), accessed on 5 March 2015 at <http://www.dtic.mil>.
6. Kevin D. Stringer and Katie M. Sizemore, “The Future of U.S. Land Power Special Operations Versatility, Marine Corps Utility,” Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 69, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2nd Quarter 2013, 87–88.
7. “The United States Marine Corps takes great pride in our special operations and irregular warfare heritage, an aspect of our Corps that has been recast over time to meet the ever-changing needs of our Nation. From 1st Lieutenant Presley O’ Bannon’s charge against the Barbary pirates in Derna, Tripoli, and the Combined Action Program of the Vietnam War, to the Central American and Caribbean incursions of the Banana Wars and the Marines of the OSS and Marine Parachute Battalions in World War II, our Corps has unfailingly answered the call for specialized action in any clime and place.” Headquarters Marine Corps, All Marine Message 039/14 170030Z dated October 2014, (Washington, DC: 17 October 2014).



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8. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness & Force Management: Total Force Planning & Requirements Directorate, Defense Manpower Requirements Report Fiscal Year 2014, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense), 113.
9. Ibid.
10. Thomas J. Williams, "Strategic Leader Readiness and Competencies for Asymmetric Warfare," Parameters, Summer 2003, 31.
11. Jeffrey Hasler, "Defining War 2011," Special Warfare, (January–February 2011), accessed on 7 October 2014 at <http://www.soc.mil>.
12. Richard Wilson, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command and the Selected Marine Corps Reserve," U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University (Quantico, VA: 2013), 9.
13. William H. McRaven, "Posture Statement–United States Special Operations Command before 113th Congress House Armed Services Committee," United States Special Operations Home Page, accessed on 7 October 2014 at <http://www.socom.mil>.
14. Ibid., 30.
15. "This new MOS was established for enlisted Marines as 0372, Critical Skills Operator (CSO). This new MOS, however, was not formally established or approved for several years during a period of high operational tempo for MARSOC from early 2006 to 2011. The 0372 MOS was implemented in October 2011." Dick Couch, Always Faithful, Always Forward, (New York, NY: Berkley Caliber, 2014), 45.
16. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, MARSOF, MARSOC Pub 1, (Camp Lejeune, NC: 12 May 2001), 4-3, accessed on 29 January 2015 at <http://www.marsoc.com>.
17. Wilson, 7.
18. Ibid.
19. Center of Naval Analysis, "Supporting a Marine Corps Reserve Special Operations Capability: Manpower Options and Issues, January 2013," distribution limited to the sponsor-specific authority N00014-11-D-0323, 40.
20. The RAND study uses the term "unconventional" when it identifies the type of warfare in which SOF soldiers fight but may also be described as asymmetric as an aspect of unconventional warfare is the use of asymmetric tactics. Ibid., 25.
21. Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy Home Page, "Guidance for Procurement Support of Theater Security Cooperation Efforts," accessed on 28 November 2014 at <http://www.acq.osd.mil>.
22. SPMAGTF–CR–AF 13.3 conducted its four-month pre-deployment training after temporary assignment to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. This Task Force was based around a SMCR Command element from the existing 4th Combat Engineer Battalion located in Baltimore, Maryland, and was assigned approximately 167 volunteer reserve Marines and sailors from over 33 different SMCR units around the country. Commander, Marine Forces Reserve, "Activation of USMCR Units (SEQ 1215) ISO SPMAGTF 13.3 OP REQ," Official Military Message, (Washington, DC: HQMC, 8 November 2012).



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23. Thomas F. Marble, "SPMAGTF Africa 13.3 Command Brief," briefing slides, Camp Lejeune, NC, SPMAGTF Africa 13.3, (23 March 2013).

24. Ibid.

25. Mike Devin, Officer in Charge, Security Cooperation Team, Marine Corps Forces Northern Command, telephone interview by author, 4 March 2015.

26. Ibid.

27. Richard Sonnenfeld, email to author, 20 November 2014.

28. Headquarters Marine Corps, "Approval of the Foreign Security Force Advisor Free MOS and Process for Experience Track Designation," MARADMIN: 472/14, (23 September 2014).

29. Alejandro Gonzalez, Manpower and Reserve Affairs HQMC, Manpower Data Lead Manager, email message to author, 11 September 2014.

30. Ibid.

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