



LANDPOWER ESSAY SERIES



No. 94-11

October 1994

CRISIS RESPONSE FORCES

by

General John W. Foss, USA (Ret.)

The post-Cold War era with the United States as the world's sole superpower has placed a new emphasis on our armed forces' ability to respond to crises rapidly, coherently and effectively. The crises of the last five years have ranged from the Gulf War to threats of a major regional conflict with nuclear overtones in Korea, from embassy evacuations to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, highlighted by our current operations in Haiti. One blinding flash of the obvious is that each and every crisis is unique, and every crisis covers a scope of activities and problems that is broader and more diverse than the relatively predictable issues of the Cold War.

During the Cold War "out of sector" or "contingency" operations were generally viewed as minor, and out of the mainstream of the East-West confrontation. The forces used for contingency operations were usually Army paratroopers, Special Operations Forces and Light Infantry, or many times Marines when Amphibious Groups were in a position to participate. Marines were responsible for the majority of embassy evacuations.

After the Berlin Wall came down (generally recognized as the end of the Cold War), the diversity of operations expanded rapidly. Desert Shield/Desert Storm, the largest American operation since Vietnam and the largest allied operation since World War II, became the defining point for the high end of the spectrum and for the degree of aggression that a single ambitious state can perpetrate. It is difficult to define the other end because operations have so often increased in scope and intensity after initiation. It is probably safe to say, however, that peacekeeping operations in the Sinai with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) represents the most stable and predictable deployment of U.S. forces. Between these extremes we have seen the deployment of forces for almost every conceivable purpose. In many circumstances hostile actions have been a part of the operation; and in all circumstances the capability to employ force has been an important ingredient in the case for deploying forces.

Landpower Essay Series is published by the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare. The series is designed to provide an outlet for original essays on topics that will stimulate professional discussion and further public understanding of the landpower aspects of national security. The content represents the personal opinions of the author and not necessarily the position of the Association of the United States Army or its members. Candidate essays of 2000 words or less may be submitted: Association of the United States Army, Institute of Land Warfare (Attn: Landpower Essay Series), 2425 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22201.

The makeup of forces more clearly demonstrates the complexity of the challenges facing our nation in these operations. Engineers, water purifying units, communications, Army airborne, light infantry, armored and mechanized infantry units, attack and lift helicopters, Joint Special Operations forces, civil affairs, psychological operations, Marine Amphibious Group Task Forces, Navy carrier groups, Seabees and Army port and logistics units, not just for U.S. forces but also to support the U.N. operations. Also AWACS, Air Force and Navy fighters, Army Patriot units and the always necessary Air Force airlift forces have been called upon. Any serious study and analysis of U.S. military deployments and commitments since the fall of the Berlin Wall would deduce that the entire range of our nation's conventional forces has been necessary and useful in meeting these diverse situations and circumstances. And I am sure any objective study would conclude that all services should retain crisis and rapid response capabilities. Such studies would also say that in the early hours and days of a crisis there is no redundancy of capability and that all forces capable of deploying, whether Army by air or Marines and carrier groups repositioning, are crucial to the deployment, rapid force building and gaining control of the situation quickly. Ask any Commander in Chief or Joint Task Force commander and he will tell you that early in any crisis the issue is not too much but rather not enough, and not which forces but when are they available.

Yet there are those who honestly believe that rapid deployment and crisis response are missions that can be assigned primarily to one service for land operations.

The Army has participated in almost all crisis responses over the past five years and has awarded over 800 Purple Hearts (more than all other services combined) during that period. The Army, charged by Title 10 with conducting land operations, has the full range of combat forces, combat support forces such as engineers, aviation and signal and necessary logistical support forces. The Army provides the greatest rapid response versatility with the Airborne, combined arms forces and Special Operations Forces supported by the full breadth of logistical capabilities to include medical, supply, ordnance, transportation and other units needed to support the contingency operations of all of the services engaged in a land campaign. The Army has the expertise and organizations to mix and match different capabilities into a cohesive task force as well as integrate allied units into that force.

Some argue the Marines can fulfill this role. The Marines, charged by Title 10 with the amphibious role and "seizing naval bases in support of naval campaigns", offer unique capabilities. The Marines are optimized for amphibious assault and usually have two to three amphibious task forces at sea at any one time and are task-organized for long-term deployments. What they have for immediate response is what was put aboard when they deployed, usually a Marine infantry battalion, four to eight tanks, an artillery battery (155mm towed), armored amphibious vehicles, light armored vehicles with 25mm guns, four to six attack helicopters and four to eight AV8 Harrier attack jets. They are excellent for raids, naval expeditionary operations and embassy evacuations which develop slowly and permit positioning of forces. Marines have only limited land combat capability, useful in initiating action but not in sustaining real campaigns or operations. Their limitation is their size, the capabilities for operations other than direct combat, the absence of combat service support on land and the steaming time required for positioning in rapidly-developing situations. Like the Army, the Marines have prepositioned equipment which allows them to respond in days with heavier forces. No serious force planner or commander can rely solely on the Marines for crisis response, but no serious planner or commander would want to exclude Marines from his task force.

Naval and air forces have unique roles to play both by themselves and as the enablers for land operations in combat, peacekeeping, humanitarian or a mix of such operations. Air Force and naval air have enforced no-fly zones in southern and northern Iraq and Bosnia for coalitions in support of the U.N. mandate. Airlift is a critical part of any operation. Naval forces are enforcing embargoes in the Caribbean, the Adriatic and Persian Gulf.

Limiting the role of any service in crisis response would limit the nation's ability to respond to specific crises. Crises may develop overnight, or they may go through relatively long germination periods such as in Bosnia or Haiti. But once the political decision to employ the armed forces of the United States has been made, Americans and the entire world expect a rapid reaction. When we have responded rapidly we have met these expectations. When forces have been slow after the announcement of action, we have been criticized. There are some who assert that when the United States responds with elements from all the services it is just a case of "letting everyone into the act". Rather, it is a case of bringing complementary capabilities to a Joint Task Force commander to resolve an issue quickly. Just as any 911 call can bring the fire department, police, rescue teams, social workers and psychologists to the enormous range of crises that occur in our society, so the post-Cold War era crises continue to demand a wide range of responses. There are few simple problems and there are even fewer simple solutions.

###

(General Foss is an AUSA Senior Fellow.)