9-1-2007

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SSI

Op-Ed
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

September 2007

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Debate rages today about the future of America's ground forces. Gone are the days when serious strategists could suggest that that utility of landpower was receding. Now no one questions its importance. But there is disagreement on the type and number of ground forces that the nation needs.

Among the most contentious points are the size of the force (by how much should the Army and Marines be enlarged?), specialized formations for irregular warfare and stabilization operations, and the role of the reserve components. All of these are vitally important. There is, though, another issue which receives less attention: the relationship between the Army and the Marine Corps—the two primary components of America's ground forces. Does the United States need two ground forces with virtually similar capabilities? I once heard a perplexed foreign officer say, "I'll never understand your military—not only does your navy have an army, but your navy's army has an air force!" Is there a strategic reason for this beyond simple tradition? If not, what should the division of labor within the ground forces be? These are not new questions but are ones that should be asked anew, given the evolving national security environment.

To answer these questions, we must first be clear on what we want ground forces to do. While nearly all strategists agree that irregular warfare and stabilization operations will be the most common tasks for the U.S. military in coming decades, there is also a broad consensus that it must retain the capability for conventional warfighting. This means the ground forces must be capable of multidivision stabilization or combat operations of relatively short duration, and smaller scale counterinsurgency support or stabilization operations lasting many years. In most cases, major operations would take place within the context of a multinational coalition, but the United States must also be able to undertake unilateral or near-unilateral action.

How, then, should the Army and Marines divide or share responsibility for these actions? Over the past century, there have been two methods. One was a functional division of labor. The Marines specialized in securing littoral regions, fighting small wars, and, later, amphibious and expeditionary operations. During the height of the Cold War, the basic idea was that the Marines would handle limited contingencies such as noncombatant

evacuations. For warfighting, they would be among the first ground forces deployed (at least for operations within a few hundred miles of the coast), later to be bolstered or replaced by Army divisions with more "staying power." This gave the United States both a rapid response capability and the ability to undertake sustained, intense conventional combat. The second method was to treat the Marines and the Army as interchangeable. During the world wars, Korea, and Vietnam, for instance, there were few capability differences between Marine and Army divisions. The differences seem to be receding today as the Army continues to make itself more expeditionary and the Marines become more sustainable.

Either of the responsibility arrangements could be used today. The Department of Defense might continue to use the Marines as rapidly deployable, initial entry forces and the Army as a follow-on. If so, it might make sense to reconfigure the Army's light and early deploying units—the 82d Airborne Division, the 7th Infantry Division (Light), 25th Infantry Division (Light), and the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry)—particularly if the Marines augment their capability to project and sustain power inland by deploying the *Osprey* or a new helicopter. The second option would be to simply allow the Marines and the Army to be interchangeable. The Marines could continue to develop special operations capability and the ability to project and sustain force inland, and the Army would retain its capabilities for initial entry operations and its organic air units while developing sea basing and other expeditionary capabilities. As in the world wars, there would be little distinction between a Marine and Army unit. Conceivably, mixed divisions or combat teams could become the norm. But there is also a third option: a geographic division of labor. The Marines, for instance, might be the primary ground force provider for the Pacific Rim and perhaps Latin America; the Army for Africa, Europe, and Central, Southwest, and South Asia. This would allow the services some degree of focus concerning cultural expertise, language, and relationships with partner militaries.

Each of these options has advantages, risks, and costs. Ultimately, the decision is strategic. Maximizing flexibility and minimizing risk by preserving redundant capabilities comes at a high cost. Can we really afford two interchangeable ground forces? A division of labor between the two, though, decreases flexibility and increases the risk that we might not have the forces we need in adequate numbers during a time of crisis. But it also diminishes redundancy. In the coming decade, broader trends may force American policymakers and strategists to take the more frugal path. If, as many defense experts predict, the United States faces a budget crunch as the population ages, infrastructure decays, and the costs of rebuilding the military after the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts mount, a division of labor between the Army and Marines, however much risk it entails, may prove necessary.

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