



The Commandant's Perspective

A Marine Corps for the 21st Century

by Gen Charles C. Krulak

As he assumes his new responsibilities, the 31st Commandant shares his vision of the Corps—what it is and what it must become to meet the challenges ahead.

The following words of the 82d Congress, so carefully crafted and articulated nearly 45 years ago, provide us with the foundation we need to move into the 21st century. They are the starting point for my vision of what the Marine Corps of the future must be:

. . . [history] has fully demonstrated the vital need for the existence of a strong force in readiness. Such a force, versatile, fast-moving, and hard-hitting, will constantly have a very powerful impact in relation to minor international disturbances. . . . Such a force can prevent the growth of potentially large conflagrations by prompt and vigorous action during their incipient stages. . . . The nation's shock troops must be the most ready when the nation generally is least ready. . . . to provide a balanced force in readiness for a naval campaign and, at the same time, a ground and air striking force ready to suppress or contain international disturbances short of large-scale war.^w

We must be prepared for the next century to be one of crisis and conflict. At least in its early years we can expect a very dynamic, uncertain strategic horizon, one that will create a pressing need for forces that are versatile enough to handle a wide range of tasks, yet powerful enough to win decisively when committed. The Marine Corps has always been that kind of versatile, decisive force in the past, and we must continue to be that force in the future.

We will accomplish this by remaining true to our heritage as innovators and improvisers. Not content to rest on our laurels or to assume that what wins today will always win in the future, we will experiment with the latest technologies, concepts, and methods to enhance the operational effectiveness of our forces. This does not mean, however, that we will be satisfied to improvise victory whenever we face a crisis. We will be a *learning* organization that systematically builds upon success and institutionalizes military excellence. In getting to that point, we must be self-critical, candid in identifying shortcomings, and relentless in our efforts to improve. In a word, we will be a force that is *professional* at every level and in every undertaking. While maintaining this professionalism, we will also be a Total Force, Active and Reserve, able to effectively integrate a full range of capabilities—ours as well as those of other Services, agencies, and nations—into a unified and focused instrument of national power.

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This superb armed force will be the world’s finest military professionals—disciplined, motivated, dedicated warriors—infused with the agility of mind and body that will be required in future conflicts. Composed of men and women who are educated to act intelligently and independently, trained to seek responsibility and accountability, and conditioned to fight with boldness and individual initiative, it will be the Nation’s premier combat force. It will be an aggressive force with a bias for action, one that develops leaders who can adapt quickly to changing situations and can capitalize on fleeting opportunities to achieve decisive results.

Building upon this critical foundation, we will be well prepared to handle a variety of missions; and will train and equip ourselves to defeat any enemy. In all of these settings, the Marine Corps will be first on the scene, first to fight, first to quell disturbances, and first to help. Operating forward, in fully capable combined arms teams, we will remain fundamentally naval and expeditionary in character, as comfortable on the seas as on the land and in the air. With the Navy, we will be able to go anywhere rapidly and project force across any shore against any foe, sustaining ourselves from sea or land bases. The Corps will be recognized as the crisis response force of choice—a certain force in an uncertain world, and ever ready

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to project the power and influence of the United States from the sea to any foreign shore. Across the entire spectrum of scenarios, ranging from a military attack against our Nation or its interests, to acts of political violence against Americans abroad, to those operations currently described as “Military Operations Other Than War,” the Nation will have one thought: “Send in the Marines.”

Above all, we will continue to be a force that lives up to a history rich in traditions, a Corps ingrained with the highest values of honor, courage, and commitment. Filled with stronger, smarter Marines, each imbued with the highest moral character and inspired by the values that have served us well throughout our history, the Corps will dominate any scene with the unconditional certainty that it is a force for good, and can be relied upon to rise to any occasion, overcome any adversity, and topple any adversary.

