

A Legacy Pete Ellis Would Embrace

Moving forward while holding firmly to our roots

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Based on our experiences with counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, many military writers have highlighted the U.S. Marine Corps' pioneer work in the field of prosecuting counterinsurgency over the past decade. They have pointed to its historical involvement in Nicaragua and Haiti in the 1920s and 1930s; and to the subsequent publication of the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual* in 1940. This book captured many of the tactics, techniques, procedures and lessons learned from those earlier conflicts in order to assist future generations of Marines. While careful to avoid the accusation of always fighting the last war, we do believe that continued threats to the U.S. and to its national security interests in the first part of the 21st century—and the likely scenarios the Marine Corps will be called upon to face—are indeed within the realm of counterinsurgency, small wars, coup d'états, civil wars, and

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revolutionary movements. Furthermore, they will often be against a stateless foe, one who may aim to leverage popular support from radicalized populations worldwide: in short, irregular warfare.

With that as a backdrop, we consider it prudent to refer to and to study the *Small Wars Manual* and the missions that the Marine Corps performed during the early part of the 20th century, well before the genesis of the U.S. Army's special operations forces (SOF). We have made a few basic assumptions. One, we will face lean economic times ahead as a U.S. military, in spite of the fact that the Marine Corps will remain

between roughly 175,000–200,000 active-duty personnel, and approximately 40,000 men and women within the Marine Corps Reserves. Two, U.S. Army SOF will lack the manpower to cover the myriad security cooperation commitments around the globe for training indigenous forces. Their manpower is roughly only 5,500 active duty personnel and 1,100 Army National Guard—a mere fraction of the Marines. Three, the expeditionary U.S. Marine Corps and its MAGTFs will return to its amphibious and seafaring traditions in the form of special purpose MAGTFs and security cooperation MAGTFs, allowing Marines to reach all points on the globe quickly with a scalable, medium-sized punch “light enough to get there quickly, but heavy enough to carry the day upon arrival, and capable of operating independently of local infrastructure [operating] throughout the spectrum of threats—irregular, hybrid, conventional—or the shady areas where they overlap.”¹

The MAGTF is a unique organization within the American military structure and is perfectly suited to claim the title of the 21st century's “force of choice.” Nothing fights like the MAGTF! Its unity of command, its ability to plan and execute faster



They will face lean economic times ahead. (Photo by Cpl Steve Lopez.)

than similar-sized organizations, and its striking power yield a potent, practical solution to the diverse challenges our Nation will face. Four, we have proven over the past 20 years not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but in the Republic of Georgia with the Georgia Deployment Program, in Djibouti with Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, and in dozens of countries in Latin America, West Africa, and Asia that the Marine Corps is the ideal choice in terms of size, composition, and mission for the execution of Phase Zero (shaping) operations. This includes the training of indigenous forces as well as other security cooperation activities. The Corps likewise demonstrates the flexibility to prosecute full-spectrum operations equally well. We like to think that if you find yourself in a “big war,” simply applying “small war” doctrine and tactics is the best road to victory. As the old axiom states, “Take care of the small things, and the big things will take care of themselves.”*

“To remain the Nation’s force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps must continuously innovate. This requires that we look across the entire institution and identify areas that need improvement and effect positive change.”² We argue that the U.S. Marine Corps’ future is already staring itself in the face. It is reaching back to its roots in the *Small Wars Manual*, yet updating many of these doctrinal lessons with our experiences over the past 20-plus years—particularly in regard to our roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. We advocate that the Marine Corps concentrate on four focus areas, do them successfully, and the Marine Corps will have its role in the first half of the 21st century firmly established:

- Establishment of local security, within an area of operations (AO), and the training of indigenous forces.
- Executing culturally adept engagement with the local populace.
- Development of basic services-oriented local governance.
- Fostering short to mid-term devel-

opment projects and vocational training in order to jump-start the foreign country’s economy, as necessary.

First, we begin with the area in which the Marines naturally feel most comfortable; i.e., the establishment of local security and the training of indigenous forces. The first part of this is already being done and will continue to be executed by the MEFs and their subordinate units. The second half will be executed by some form of Marine Corps Training & Advisory Group (MCTAG) either at Norfolk or Quantico, VA, or a combination of the two. Marines will

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attend training courses at both sites, and mobile training teams (MTTs) will likewise regularly visit the three MEFs. MTTs must be tailored to the specific geographical and cultural requirements of the target AO. Our experiences in both Iraq and Afghanistan strongly advocate for the need to retain a deployable cadre of professional trainers. Once security dominance has been achieved by the MAGTF, we must commence the process of training an indigenous security force capable of policing and prosecuting traditional military operations. We cannot squander valuable time waiting for “someone else” to get into the training business. In Iraq and Afghanistan, it took years before national structures emerged that were capable of meeting the training requirements to generate local security forces. Much of what needs to be institutionalized, has in fact already been accomplished. It simply remains untapped within our Marine Corps Lessons Management System.

During the mission analysis step of the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP), training, equipping, and advising of indigenous forces must be of prime consideration. Shaping the security situation early will guarantee

success in the operations and training phases. Our deployable, scalable training teams must be moved forward immediately after battlefield security is realized. Fielding and “operationalizing” indigenous security forces that reflect the culture and values of the general population has an immediate impact upon the overall security situation, and provides visible evidence that progress is being made. A graphic example of this occurred in late 2005 in the city of Fallujah, Iraq, only days before the constitutional referendum on 15 October. A native-born Sunni Anbari, (former Iraqi Army Special Forces Colonel), BG Salah Khalil Al-Ani, proudly strutted before his recently reconstituted local Fallujah Police—all graduates of a U.S. Marine Corps-run academy in neighboring Habbaniyah. His men were outfitted with new Iraqi police uniforms and Kalashnikovs; a fleet of brand-new Toyota 4x4s revved their engines in the dirt parking lot adjacent to the City Council Building. Two large Iraqi flags waved in the brisk breeze from the rear of each vehicle. As they roared off to patrol the streets of this ancient city, Iraqi men, women, and children lined the roadway, shouting encouragement and tossing candy at their native sons—it was a proud day to be an Iraqi in a city that less than 1 year before had been a haven for insurgents and terrorists. Once a modicum of security is attained, all focus must shift toward establishing a local police force to protect the interests of the domestic population. Nothing speaks louder than transitioning security toward local control, and that starts with the local police force.

Secondly, the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) will continue to teach cultural engagement with more in-house schooling at MCB Quantico, as well as through MTTs visiting the MEFs. CAOCL will be a center of excellence for foreign area officers (FAOs), regional affairs officers (RAOs), and civilian (retired and former) FAO/RAOs and the like. This will include capturing the recent experience of FAOs and RAOs in Iraq, as well as Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands personnel in Afghanistan. While the cultural dimension is indeed present in

*Quote by Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830–1886).



All Marines need to know and respect the organization and its values. (Photo by Cpl Owen Kimbrel.)

the *Small Wars Manual* of 1940, it needs to be revamped and updated. With the advent of the 24/7 news cycle and real time media, we most definitely must consider all of our Marines as potential strategic NCOs. Cultural mistakes are

no longer just tactical faux-pas. They will have negative strategy ramifications. The Marine Corps' Information Operations Center (MCIOC) will also need to be closely synched with CAOCL on many of these endeavors. The rationale

for this connection is that the Marine Corps will not teach culture simply for culture's sake, but rather to gain the psychological advantage against the enemy, one of the core capabilities within information operations. In essence, all Marines will need to know, respect, and live the messages that are disseminated by their command.

The third and fourth focus areas are inextricably linked, and they are based on the assumption that the civilian representatives from the U.S. Department of State (DOS), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and its implementing partners are not prepared for the most part—at least not institutionally—for a kinetic environment, or what was often referred to in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, from 2009–11 as “Hot Stabilization.”³ These individuals should arguably only enter the operational environment in the late build phase; i.e., clear, hold, and early build being handled by Marines and a cadre of civilians, former Marines,

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and special forces who neither need nor expect the duty of care that DOS and similar organizations expect and require. This arrangement will guarantee both unity of command and unity of effort at a critical time in order to make rapid progress in a stabilization-type scenario.

The third competency—basic, services-oriented governance development—will be handled almost exclusively by a civilian Marine cadre. The fourth—short- to mid-term development programs and vocational training—will be implemented and taught by a combination of civilian Marines and civil affairs Marines. Based on the operational environment and the need, the vocational training might even be accomplished in conjunction with the training of indigenous forces. Our success will often be predicated upon rapidly developing a skilled native labor force capable of maintaining the critical infrastructure within our AO. The key is that these U.S. civilians will deploy immediately alongside their uniformed counterparts. Civilian Marines and civil affairs Marines will also be expected to possess expertise in agriculture, small engines, basic medical and veterinary care, electrical engineering, civil engineering, masonry, etc. With regard to these requirements for both governance development and socio-economic development, the Marine Corps should advocate and implement some changes with how it educates Marines prior to their accession into the Active Component, during their active duty or Reserve careers, and even following separation or retirement from the military. We again target the pool of some non-standard or additional MOSs: FAO, RAO, and civil affairs. These Marines gain skills before, during, and after their active duty or Reserve careers that many of their fellow personnel do not typically acquire during their active duty careers: foreign language expertise, independent operations in a foreign environment, and a great deal of interaction and coordination with a variety of government civilian organizations and nongovernmental organizations. Additionally, these men and women would be encouraged to travel widely throughout their

careers—something that Lieutenant Colonel Earl “Pete” Ellis would surely agree with and applaud—in order to gain a greater understanding of a variety of the indigenous peoples and the areas in which future conflicts might develop. They would experience foreign cultures first hand, become proficient in the native languages of key regions around the globe, and read extensively on the history, ethnography, politics, and economy of the indigenous population.

Furthermore, based on the United States’ collective experiences in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, there are dozens of other vocations that FAOs, RAOs, and civil affairs Marines should try to target during their pre-military work experience, during undergraduate studies, during their active duty service (either enlisted or officer), and finally after their separation or retirement from the active duty military: basic development skills, civil affairs (for the non-civil affairs specialists), civil or architectural engineering, agricultural and animal husbandry training, police training, local governance development, religious-based conflict resolution skills, et al. With a fundamental shift in terms of how the Marine Corps views its work-wide deployable civilian Marines—and aimed at the retention of a highly trained segment of that population—skilled officers (and possibly future NCOs and SNCOs) can be vectored into these civilian roles as political, economic, and cultural advisors and technical operators who are fully prepared to deploy alongside their uniformed brethren. The Marine Corps should likewise establish a database to track and communicate with retired and honorably discharged Marines who have unique skills that will be required in future operations. Our conjecture is that most would gladly return to support their country and Corps in times of need!

Ultimately, we believe this proposed way ahead for the U.S. Marine Corps in the first half of the 21st century will be unique to the Armed Forces. It will also be the most operationally and cost-effective plan because most of the required

activities and training already exist in one form or another within the U.S. Marine Corps and its educational and training installations. Some organizations and their associated curricula will require revisions and restructuring, but not a wholesale creation: CAOCL, MC-TAG, MCIOC, Civil Affairs School, Security Cooperation Education and Training Center, etc. already exist. The few areas that would need to be added lie within the realm of local governance development, a variety of technical and vocational skills, and project management for socio-economic development programs. Nevertheless, these could all be added to existing schools or could be expanded within the Marine Corps University. The Corps could also make use of local community colleges and vocational training schools to gain some of these valuable skills. This is important. While one of our previously mentioned assumptions is that the Corps will remain at roughly 175,000 active duty and 40,000 Reserve Marines, it is likewise safe to predict that lean economic times will spell constrained budgets. This will mean sharp competition among the uniformed Services for limited resources; and in this environment, our vision places the Corps in the lead as America’s premier irregular warfare force. In true Marine fashion, the overall emphasis will remain on the Corps’ people and on training, far less on advanced weaponry and equipment—a legacy that LtCol “Pete” Ellis would embrace as we move forward around the globe.

Notes

1. Gen James F. Amos, The Role of the Marine Corps according to 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps’ *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC; Headquarters Marine Corps, 2010).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC, 2008).
3. Hot stabilization is a term introduced to the U.S. Marines by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development’s (DfID) stabilization unit during coalition stability operations in Helmand Province. 