

“Tree Hugging Work”

THE SHIFTING ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF THE U.S. MARINE CORPS TOWARD PEACE OPERATIONS IN THE 1990S

by Mary Elizabeth Walters, PhD

Abstract: In the post–Cold War decade, the Marine Corps gradually, if inconsistently, incorporated peace operations—what one Marine officer characterized as “tree hugging work”—as one of its core missions. Starting with Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq in 1991, followed by a host of missions around the world and culminating in the 1999 Kosovo War, the Marine Corps became increasingly involved in peace operations. Simultaneously, Marine Corps doctrine underwent a dramatic shift between 1989 and 2001, ultimately arguing that Marines were the best branch of the military to conduct peace operations. This article examines the development and interrelationship of doctrine, training, and missions relating to peace operations during the 1990s. To capture how a decade of doctrinal development, training, and missions reshaped the Marine Corps’ practice of peace operations, this article focuses on two influential missions that bookended the decade: Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq in 1991 and the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping operation that followed the 1999 Kosovo War.

Keywords: peace operations, humanitarian operations, migrant assistance operations, natural disasters, Operation Provide Comfort, Kosovo Force, Kosovo War, Persian Gulf War, Marine Corps doctrine, doctrinal changes, doctrinal development, operations other than war, OOTW, military operations other than war, MOOTW, Kurdish refugees, Albanian refugees, three block war, strategic corporal, nation assistance

Looking at a field of tents filled with ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo in 1999, a young Marine officer griped that he wished the “tree hugging work” of humanitarian aid had been left to the Air Force. A corporal complained, “I don’t know why we’re going through all the trouble building these refugee camps. It seems like it would be a whole lot easier to just go into Kosovo and take their old homes

back.”¹ This resistance did not come from a lack of caring, but from a belief that the Marines could provide more effective assistance by simply halting the campaign of ethnic cleansing. These two Marines reflect the primary identity of the U.S. Marine Corps: “fierce combat prowess.”² Yet during the course of the 1990s, an alternate strand of Marine Corps culture developed that perceived the tree hugging work of peace operations as a core mission of the Marine Corps.

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¹ Jon R. Anderson, “Marines Work on Three Fronts,” *Stars and Stripes (Europe)*, 6 May 1999, item 54, in K. J. Glueck, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Command Chronology (ComdC), 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, file 5/1732, Part 3, secs. 3-54-2, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

² Paula Holmes-Eber, *Culture in Conflict: Irregular Warfare, Culture Policy, and the Marine Corps* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 54.

In the post-Cold War decade, the Marine Corps gradually, if inconsistently, incorporated peace operations as one of its core missions. Starting with Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq in 1991, followed by a host of missions around the world and culminating in the 1999 Kosovo War, the Marine Corps became increasingly involved in peace operations. Simultaneously, Marine Corps doctrine underwent a dramatic shift between 1989 and 2001, ultimately arguing that Marines were the best branch of the military to conduct peace operations. This article examines the development and interrelationship of doctrine, training, and missions relating to peace operations during the 1990s. It traces the Marine Corps' changing approach to peace operations in the 1990s by examining two sets of doctrine, the Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) series published between 1989–91 and the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications (MCDPs) published in 1997 and 1998. The changes in doctrine during this period both reflect, and were driven by, the changing nature of missions. During the 1990s, Marines deployed on more than 70 distinct missions that fell into the broad category of peace operations.³ Marines assisted with migrant assistance operations, provided humanitarian relief in the face of natural disasters around the world, conducted peacekeeping operations, and rescued civilians from unstable areas.⁴ These are just a sampling of the wide range of places and types of peace operations on which Marines deployed, but collectively they created an environment that began to normalize peace opera-

tions as important for the Marine Corps. To capture how a decade of doctrinal development, training, and missions reshaped the Marine Corps' practice of peace operations, this article focuses on two influential missions that bookended the decade: Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq in 1991 and the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping operation that followed the 1999 Kosovo War.

Before continuing, a brief discussion of terminology is warranted. As Paul F. Diehl wryly observes, "Discussions of peace operations are notorious for their conceptual muddles."⁵ During the 1990s, terms and their meanings related to peace operations constantly shifted, within both military and academic circles. These included operations other than war (OOTW), military operations other than war (MOOTW), peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacemaking, peacebuilding, national assistance, and humanitarian assistance. Further complicating matters, one operation might shift between subsets of peace operations. While these terms have their uses, and may relate to specific United Nations (UN) Charter chapters authorizing a mission or to rules of engagement, focusing on shifting terms distracts from broader trends in Marine Corps culture and doctrine in the post-Cold War period. Therefore, throughout this article the term *peace operation* is used as an umbrella expression to refer to a host of tasks and missions.

Warfighting, FMFM 1

As Marines entered the wave of peace operations of the 1990s, they lacked a guiding doctrine. During the 1980s, Marines participated in several small wars and

³ This figure was compiled based on "Marine Corps Operations Since 1776," Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁴ Literature on peace operations in the 1990s—much less more recent operations—is very much a developing field, particularly among historians, though operations in Somalia have gotten more attention. For those interested in operations not covered in this article, the following works are excellent starting points: Robert C. DiPrizio, *Armed Humanitarians: U.S. Interventions from Northern Iraq to Kosovo* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Theo Farrell, "Sliding into War: The Somalia Imbroglio and US Army Peace Operations Doctrine," *International Peacekeeping* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1995), 194–214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533319508413551>; Philippe R. Girard, *Clinton in Haiti: The 1994 U.S. Intervention in Haiti* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, DC: United

States Institute of Peace, 1995); Michael G. MacKinnon, *The Evolution of US Peacekeeping Policy Under Clinton: A Fairweather Friend?* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Paul A. McCarthy, *Operation Sea Angel: A Case Study* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994); Col Dennis P. Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope: In Somalia with the Unified Task Force, 1992–1993* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps History Division, 2005); Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia, August 1992–March 1994* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2005); Col Nicholas E. Reynolds (USMCR), *A Skillful Show of Strength: U.S. Marines in the Caribbean, 1991–1996* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2003); Charles R. Smith, *Angels from the Sea: Relief Operations in Bangladesh, 1991* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1995).

⁵ Paul F. Diehl, *Peace Operations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 3.

counterinsurgencies, even a peacekeeping operation in Lebanon, but the FMFM revisions between 1989 and 1991 remained combat oriented. The FMFM revisions, particularly to *Warfighting*, sought to justify the utility of the Marine Corps in the Cold War while also shying away from the concept of small wars. Although the Marine Corps pioneered U.S. military thinking on small wars and counterinsurgency in the early twentieth century, formalizing many of these concepts in the 1940 *Small Wars Manual*, the Vietnam War and the 1983 Marine barracks bombings in Beirut soured the Corps' attitudes toward these murky and complex missions.⁶ Yet, as Nicholas J. Schlosser argues, Marine divisions as structured in the 1970s and 1980s would "likely be wiped out" if deployed in Europe against the Soviet Union. *Warfighting*, published in 1989, answered this problem by embracing the concept of maneuver warfare, focusing on "speed, maneuver, and mechanization over heavy armor and firepower."⁷

Warfighting argues that "maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a series of rapid, violent, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which he cannot cope."⁸ The aim is not the physical destruction of the enemy, but the destruction of their morale and ability to fight. This emphasis on morale created a niche for Marine expeditionary forces to "win quickly against a larger foe on his home soil."⁹ The doctrine explains that firepower remains important not to "incrementally" degrade enemy capability, but to "shatter the enemy's cohesion" with the "ultimate aim" of "panic and paralysis." Violence should therefore be focused at specific vulnerabilities and Marines must be prepared to decisively exploit weaknesses.¹⁰ Notably, *Warfighting's* discussion of enemy morale and how to weaken it lacks depth. Understanding the opponent's culture,

much less the local civilian population, does not feature in the doctrine at all.

The closest the FMFM series came to incorporating peace operations is a vague discussion of low intensity conflict. The 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred M. Gray Jr., envisioned these conflicts as being predominantly in "the revolutionary warfare environment" and argued that "military force is not the dominant characteristic of the struggle but is only one of several components of national power, all of which must be fully coordinated with one another."¹¹ *Campaigning*, FMFM 1-1, argues that the limited political aims of low intensity conflicts are more difficult to convert "into military conditions, as illustrated by the questionable military mission of Marine forces in Beirut 1982-84."¹² Despite that warning, *Campaigning* offers no guidance on operating in low intensity conflicts. The "means" of campaigning are identified as "tactical results—be they victories, losses, or draws."¹³ Peace operations' place in this schema is left unaddressed. Furthermore, *Tactics*, FMFM 1-3, abandons the pretense of addressing low intensity conflict; even the phrase is absent. At the tactical level, maneuver warfare "is the combination of movement and fire to gain an advantage on the enemy. The focus of effort ties together all the maneuvering and points it at the enemy so that Marines *will* win."¹⁴ Without a substantive discussion of low intensity warfare, much less peace operations, Marines' actions in the 1990s were based on ad hoc decisions and cultural assumptions.

Operation Provide Comfort, 1991

This doctrinal oversight proved to be no minor issue. According to one tally, the U.S. military deployed more than 200 peace operations between 1989 and 2000.¹⁵ Marines experienced their first humanitarian

⁶ Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), xi.

⁷ Nicholas J. Schlosser, *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare Training and Education, 2000-2010* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2015), 18, 19.

⁸ *Warfighting*, FMFM 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1989), 59.

⁹ *Warfighting*, 58.

¹⁰ *Warfighting*, 59-61.

¹¹ *Campaigning*, FMFM 1-1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1990), ii.

¹² *Campaigning*, 35.

¹³ *Campaigning*, 7.

¹⁴ *Tactics*, FMFM 1-3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1991), 18, emphasis original.

¹⁵ Frank N. Schubert, *Other than War: The American Military Experience and Operations in the Post-Cold War Decade* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), 1, 2.

and development-heavy peace operation in the wake of the Persian Gulf War. Following a failed revolt in early April 1991, more than 500,000 Kurds were stranded in “the dubious safety” of the mountains between Turkey and Iraq, while another million fled to Iran.¹⁶

International attention focused on the Kurdish refugees trapped in the mountains along the border of Turkey and Iraq. Three main factors made helping these refugees difficult. First, the Kurdish refugee crisis developed rapidly, but UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) typically need time to scale up their operations. Second, the remote and difficult terrain of the mountains may have provided the Kurds with some protection, but it also created challenges in delivering humanitarian aid. Even the U.S. military faced logistical problems operating in the mountains, much less civilian NGOs. Third, UN humanitarian organizations were in a moment of uncertainty as they sought to find their footing in the post-Cold War world. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for example, was reframing itself as an operations-oriented humanitarian agency, rather than a refugee agency that relied on operational partners. This crisis represents the first major test of the new UNHCR, and High Commissioner Sadako Ogata was initially reluctant to assume overall humanitarian responsibility. Ogata was keenly aware that the UNHCR had a very limited emergency response capability.¹⁷ Even so, advance teams from the UNHCR attempted to provide coordination, but as Gordon W. Rudd argues, “they had little resources to offer and little experience in managing relief efforts of this nature . . . and NGOs paid little attention to them.”¹⁸ As the crisis developed, the UNHCR assumed the role of the official leader of humanitarian assistance, even

as some 200 NGOs and allied military forces carried out much of the work.¹⁹ As a result of these three factors, the U.S. military found itself the primary coordinator of humanitarian aid and the primary logistics provider.

With freezing temperatures and little water or food, conditions in the mountains soon turned deadly.²⁰ In an after action report notable for its vivid imagery, Colonel James L. Jones and Staff Sergeant L. J. Tibbetts described the paths from Iraq as

littered with abandoned possessions that no longer served any utility; broken down cars, appliances, family heirlooms, furniture, suitcases that had become too heavy to carry, and tragically, people who could not withstand the rigors of the march and simply stopped fighting, to wait for death to end their suffering.²¹

Doctors Without Borders described the situation as a “medical apocalypse” and at the height of the crisis humanitarian workers reported that roughly 1,500 refugees were dying every day.²² While the freezing temperatures provided an immediate health hazard, warming temperatures would provide no relief. The little water Kurdish refugees had access to came from small mountain streams, which would go dry in summer. Operation Provide Comfort, the multinational military response to the refugee crisis, lasted from 7 April to 15 July 1991. Initially, the U.S. Army’s 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) (10th SFG [A]),

¹⁶ Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2004), 35, 36; and LtCol Ronald J. Brown (USMCR), *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991: With Marines in Operation Provide Comfort* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1995), 1, 2.

¹⁷ Anne Hammerstad provides a compelling narrative of the transformation of the UNHCR in the 1990s in *The Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor: UNHCR, Refugee Protection, and Security* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 75–80, 181, 182.

¹⁸ Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 75.

¹⁹ Hammerstad, *The Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor*, 184.

²⁰ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 1, 2.

²¹ Col J. L. Jones and SSgt L. J. Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort—The Capstone,” in J. C. Hardee, *2/8 Battalion Landing Team (BLT 2/8) Command Chronology (ComdC)*, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991, file 2/1641, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

²² Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 1, 2. It is important to note that there is no consensus on how many ethnic Kurds died during this period. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that “death rates peaked during April 13–26,” before declining as military forces delivered aid. However, the CDC estimated that the minimum total death toll while refugees were “camped on the Turkey-Iraq border” was 6,700, which casts some doubt on the estimate from Doctors Without Borders. CDC, “Public Health Consequences of Acute Displacement of Iraqi Citizens—March–May 1991,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 266, no. 5 (August 1991): 633–34.

which provided the foundation for Joint Task Force Alpha, led emergency assistance to the makeshift mountain camps of refugees. When the 10th SFG (A) arrived, they identified 12 refugee camps in the mountains, each with a population averaging 45,000. The 10th SFG (A) identified and organized camps, found the best drop zones, provided medical assistance, and planned for security requirements.²³

As the 10th SFG (A) provided humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees in the mountains along the Turkish-Iraqi border, the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24th MEU) made an amphibious assault on Sardinia as part of the Philippines Amphibious Land Exercise (PHIBLEX) 1-91. Just 12 hours into the mock assault on 9 April, however, a “hasty backload was ordered” so the 24th MEU could join Operation Provide Comfort.²⁴ Details on what the 24th MEU’s involvement would entail remained unclear. The Battalion Landing Team, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines (BLT 2/8), command chronology scathingly noted that “the lack of specific details provided by the alert and execute orders made this task [and creating a detailed mission analysis] difficult at best.” As late as 11 April, as lead elements arrived in Turkey, the MEU was still relying on guesswork in preparing for a humanitarian relief operation.²⁵ On 14 April, the 24th MEU offloaded at Turkey’s port of Iskenderun and began a 676-km trek to Silopi, near the Turkey-Iraq border, while they waited for final orders.²⁶

As most of the 24th MEU disembarked and moved to their staging base in Silopi, the MEU’s Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM 264) Black Knights flew ahead and temporarily joined Joint Task Force Alpha on 15 April. During the course of the following two weeks, the Black Knights flew more than 1,000 hours and delivered 1 million-plus pounds of aid to refugees in inaccessible areas of the moun-

tains.²⁷ For the Black Knights’ commander, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Byrtus Jr., the camp at Isikveren, Turkey, with its 80,000 refugees was a sight he would not forget: “A pall of smoke from thousands of small cooking fires hung perhaps 20 feet above the camp in a thin, neat layer.” As his three Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters approached, Byrtus realized that there was no space to land due to the camp’s overcrowding. A small area was cleared by the helicopter’s rotor wash, as people “ran . . . followed by their tents and meager belongings.” As the crew hurried to unload humanitarian supplies, “a crowd of 10,000 or more rushed the aircraft from all sides in a desperate dash for food and water.”²⁸

Finally, on 19 April, Joint Task Force Bravo was established, centered on the 24th MEU, and ordered to take charge of “security operations in northern Iraq” and assist Kurdish refugees’ return to Iraq. On 20 April at 0100, the 24th MEU conducted “a heliborne insertion” into the outskirts of the city of Zakhō, Iraq, 9.6 km south of the Turkish border. By this point, the city “was virtually empty of civilian inhabitants” as a result of intense fighting previously between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the *Iraqi 36th and 44th Infantry Divisions*. The insertion of the 24th MEU was carefully orchestrated in accordance with agreements made with Iraqi commanders at the border. Even so, Iraqi forces “seemed surprised by the sudden appearance of U.S. Marines.” BLT 2/8’s command chronology continued, “It became apparent after moving past Iraqi soldiers, that they did not want to fight or were too shocked to react.”²⁹ Colonel James L. Jones Jr. described his approach as “aggressive restraint.” Iraqi forces were given every opportunity to pull back peacefully, but the Marines were not to back down if Iraqi forces tried to “bully” them.³⁰ This approach was put to the test on multiple occasions. At one point, a Marine reconnaissance unit found itself surrounded

²³ Jones and Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort.”

²⁴ T. L. Corwin, BLT 2/8 ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991, file 1/1641, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

²⁵ J. C. Hardee, 2/8 BLT ComdC, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991, file 2/1641, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

²⁶ Hardee, 2/8 BLT ComdC, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991.

²⁷ Jones and Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort.”

²⁸ LtCol Joseph A. Byrtus Jr., “Into a Sea of Refugees: HMM-264,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 75, no. 11 (November 1991): 101, as quoted in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

²⁹ Hardee, 2/8 BLT Command Chronology, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991.

³⁰ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 55.

by roughly 50 Iraqi soldiers and needed a “hot” pickup. In a slight understatement, one member of the team told the *Navy Times*, “We had the fire power to hold them off if we had to, but it was pretty interesting for a while.”³¹ The same day, an Army special forces team near Zakho faced a similar situation.³² On 26 April, the 24th MEU and the attached 45 Commando, Royal Marines, and 1st Amphibious Combat Group, Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, set up checkpoints controlling access to Zakho and conducted 24-hour patrols of the city and surrounding area.³³ That night, the few Kurds who had already returned to Zakho “took joyfully to the streets.”³⁴

While security operations were critical, the Marines simultaneously began humanitarian relief efforts. Even as Iraqi forces continued to occupy the high grounds around Zakho, by the end of the day on 20 April, Marine engineers had broken ground on the first of several refugee camps. The following day, engineers erected the first tents. By 22 April, the 24th MEU had baseline security in the immediate area, allowing for supply trucks from Silopi to reach Zakho. The BLT 2/8 command chronology emphasized the interrelationship between security and humanitarian efforts: “The overwhelming military presence by coalition forces demonstrated our resolve to establish and maintain a security zone for the Kurdish refugees.”³⁵ The Marine Service Support Group 24 (MSSG 24) formed the core of the “largest Marine humanitarian effort in history” and did so while farther than 804 km from its sea base in Iskenderun, Turkey.³⁶ The MSSG 24 reestablished infrastructure, provided humanitarian assistance, and led the construction of several tent camps, each housing roughly 25,000 refugees.³⁷ Construction efforts sought to “involve Kurdish leaders” in both selection and organization of the camps.³⁸ As

more Kurdish refugees returned, additional Marines were diverted from security operations to humanitarian operations, such as expanding the refugee camps and dispensing food and aid. Among these Marines was Corporal Wade Sibley. As Sibley pounded tent stakes into what one reporter described as “a dank field of spring corn,” Sibley reflected, “It’s different all right. . . . We’re saving lives here and that’s satisfying. . . . But I wish we’d been here earlier. We felt kinda cheated not being in the war.” As he drove home another tent post, Sibley grunted, “Since the war ended, you know, you wonder whether people notice.”³⁹ Sibley and other Marines recognized the importance of the peace operation, but they longed for the type of war for which their training had prepared them.

In Zakho itself, MSSG 24 worked to make the refugee camps unnecessary by improving the city’s living conditions. Engineer and maintenance teams repaired the city’s power transmission facility, put in a new generator at the Zakho hospital, and repaired power and water plants. Medical and dental teams set up clinics that treated more than 2,000 patients.⁴⁰ Even once Marines outfitted the Zakho hospital with a new generator, it lacked more than a handful of nurses and had no medicine. Navy Commander O. C. Smith, the BLT 2/8 surgeon, described a six-year-old boy with second- and third-degree burns on more than 23 percent of his body: “His mother carried him down from the mountains, 20 kilometers each way, every day. . . . He should be in a hospital, but we do what we can for him here.”⁴¹ Despite the limitations of Marine medical clinics, they were better than local alternatives.

By early May, a large number of Kurdish refugees had returned to Zakho. The Coalition security zone by that point stretched 159 km across northern Iraq.⁴² A clear indication that conditions had improved dramatically came when “Kurdish leaders began to

³¹ Jim Wolf, “Combat Danger Lurks in Relief Mission,” *Navy Times*, 20 May 1991, in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

³² Wolfe, “Combat Danger Lurks in Relief Mission.”

³³ Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

³⁴ Jones and Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort.”

³⁵ Hardee, 2/8 BLT ComdC, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991.

³⁶ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, ii, 22, 87, 88.

³⁷ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 67, 77, 68, 87, 88.

³⁸ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 55, 9, 10.

³⁹ “A Different Kind of War: In Northern Iraq, the Marines Are Fighting to Save the Kurds,” *U.S. News and World Report* 110, no. 17, 6 May 1991, in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 67, 68, 87, 88.

⁴¹ Sgt Jim Fitzgibbons, “Corpsmen Help to Ease the Kurds’ Pain: Thousands Lie Sick or Dying in Mountains,” *Globe*, 16 May 1991, 14A, in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

⁴² Jones and Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort.”

complain about the suitability of [meals ready to eat] MREs as a food source.” Even as the Kurds became pickier about their food, they called Marines a new nickname: “Food Soldiers.”⁴³ An even better indication of Kurds’ growing sense of security came on 12 May, when a group of 1,500 Kurds felt comfortable holding a demonstration in downtown Zakho “calling for allies to move towards the city of Dahuk,” 40 km south of the Coalition security zone.⁴⁴ In addition to being home to 350,000 people before the crisis, Duhok was also the capital of the Duhok Province of northern Iraq, the same province from which most Kurdish refugees came. Duhok became not only a physical solution for Kurdish refugees who remained in the mountains and in refugee camps around Zakho, but also a test of American and Coalition commitment to the Kurds.

Negotiations soon began between American military forces, Iraqi forces, the United Nations, and several NGOs to allow for military and humanitarian forces to enter Duhok. Eventually, all parties agreed that Coalition forces could advance to a point 16 km north of Duhok, while Iraqi military forces and secret police would withdraw from Duhok to new positions 16 km south. Meanwhile, a small “humanitarian and logistical” Coalition military force would be allowed into Duhok accompanied by UN agencies and NGOs. Once these negotiations were completed, the 24th MEU began a carefully choreographed move south to Duhok. Lieutenant Colonel Tony L. Corwin explained that each “time the Company moved forward, it forced an Iraqi company ahead of it to withdraw.” Once Marine units reached the agreed-upon 16-km mark north of Duhok, they constructed roadblocks to prevent any unauthorized movement north toward Zakho.⁴⁵ Final-

ly, on 20 May, a small military force and humanitarian workers moved into Duhok itself, exactly one month after the 24th MEU had entered Zakho. Almost immediately, Kurdish refugees began making their way back to Duhok. On 25 May, this refugee flow reached its peak with more than 55,000 Kurds seeking temporary shelter at camps around Zakho as they traveled south.⁴⁶

As the 24th MEU left Iraq in June after most Kurds had returned to their homes, the UNHCR reluctantly described Operation Provide Comfort as “a rare example of successful humanitarian intervention.”⁴⁷ Even while lamenting a “loss of innocence” among humanitarian workers who had been forced to work with Coalition military forces, Thomas G. Weiss argues, “Access by civilian humanitarians simply would not have been possible without the overwhelming allied military presence in April.”⁴⁸ Christine Gla, a French aid worker, agreed: “I don’t choose to work with the military normally, but it’s a special situation here. Without the Marines, the situation would be much more difficult.” As Marines unloaded her supplies from Black Knight helicopters, Gla ruefully remarked that they were “Knights in Shining Armor.” Colonel James Jones, commander of the 24th MEU, simply stated, “That’s what we’re here for.”⁴⁹ Although ambitious in the number of Kurdish refugees involved, Operation Provide Comfort was constrained in both time and geographic area. Even the move toward Duhok required intense negotiations with Iraqi leaders and relied on Iraqi permission. Furthermore, U.S. military planning emphasized efforts to stabilize the situation, provide quick logistical support, and then hand everything over to the United Nations, NGOs, and the Kurds. Despite clear successes, an after action report warned that the operation “demonstrated a need for a doctrinal publication” on peace opera-

⁴³ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 66, 91.

⁴⁴ Col James L. Jones, “Operation PROVIDE COMFORT: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 75, no. 11 (November 1991): 106, in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991. Note that there are several ways to spell both the city and province of Duhok, including Dahuk, Dohuk, and Dihok. This article uses Duhok except for direct quotes.

⁴⁵ LtCol Tony L. Corwin, “BLT 2/8 Moves South,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 75, no. 11 (November 1991): 106, in Jones, 24th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1991–30 June 1991.

⁴⁶ Jones and Tibbetts, “Operation Provide Comfort.”

⁴⁷ Thomas G. Weiss, “Military-Civilian Humanitarianism: The ‘Age of Innocence’ Is Over,” *International Peacekeeping* 2, no. 2 (1995): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533319508413549>.

⁴⁸ Weiss, “Military-Civilian Humanitarianism,” 165.

⁴⁹ Cpl E. H. Hughes, “Shining Knights Assist Relief Worker,” in Hardee, 2/8 BLT ComdC, 1 July 1991–31 December 1991.

tions.⁵⁰ The experience of simultaneously providing humanitarian assistance, separating warring groups, and conducting security operations significantly influenced thinking, doctrine, and training in the Marine Corps as the 1990s progressed.

General Charles Krulak and Three Block War

In the face of potential enlisted resistance to tree hugging peace operations, senior officers worked to justify why peace operations needed to be incorporated into deployments, training, and doctrine. In particular, General Charles C. Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999, drove new doctrine and thinking. In 1997, he envisioned modern war as urban and complex, labeling it a *three block war*.

In one moment in time, our service members will be feeding and clothing displaced refugees. . . . In the next moment, they will be holding two warring tribes apart . . . and, finally, they will be fighting a highly lethal mid-intensity battle—all on the same day . . . all within three city blocks.⁵¹

In a three block war, tactics have the potential to take on strategic importance, elevating the significance of young Marines. Two years later, Krulak elaborated on this as the *strategic corporal*.

The inescapable lesson of . . . recent operations, whether humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, or traditional warfighting, is that their outcome may hinge on decisions made by small unit leaders, and by actions taken at the lowest level. . . . Success or failure will rest, increasingly, with the rifleman and with his ability to make the *right*

decision at the *right* time at the point of contact.⁵²

The concepts of three block war and the strategic corporal both emphasize the strategic implications of tactical actions, as well as the outsized influence of individual Marines.

In the complex missions envisioned by Krulak, having Marines highly trained in warfighting was insufficient in itself. Krulak described a hypothetical peace operation, Operation Absolute Agility, in a failed African country, in which a routine day overseeing the distribution of humanitarian rations descended into violence. A fictitious Corporal Hernandez, in charge of a security checkpoint, was faced with advancing militants, a downed helicopter with at least two survivors, and an injured Marine in their unit. How they responded, according to Krulak, “would determine the outcome of the mission and have potentially strategic implications.”⁵³ The decentralized nature of these operations, Krulak contended, would mean Marines would have to operate “without direct supervision from senior leadership” in environments with “a bewildering array of challenges and threats” and under intense scrutiny from the media and politicians.⁵⁴ The strategic corporal needed to be able to balance potentially conflicting mission requirements. In the case of Corporal Hernandez, directly confronting the advancing militants would likely have led to casualties among the civilians waiting to receive food aid, which would “jeopardize the success of the humanitarian mission.”⁵⁵ A tactical victory over militants could cause strategic failure. Instead, young Marines needed the training—and cultural awareness—to find alternative solutions. Furthermore, Krulak recognized that the success of peace operations rests not only on how local political elites view America and the operation, but on how ordinary civilians perceive the mission:

⁵⁰ *Operations Other Than War*, vol. 1, *Humanitarian Assistance* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1992), 18. Copies of this difficult-to-find publication are held at the Army Logistics University Library, Fort Lee, VA.

⁵¹ Charles C. Krulak, “The Three Block War: Fighting in Urban Areas,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 64, no. 5 (15 December 1997): 139–41.

⁵² Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 1 (January 1999): 20, emphasis original.

⁵³ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal,” 18–20.

⁵⁴ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal,” 20–21.

⁵⁵ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal,” 22.

“In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy.”⁵⁶ The behavior of Marines on patrol, at checkpoints, handing out humanitarian rations, and while under fire has the potential to dramatically shape and reshape local understandings of both peace operations and America.

Krulak was part of a broader change in how Marine Corps officers perceived the changing activities and role of the Corps. Having the support of the Commandant ensured that this branch of Marine Corps culture heavily influenced new doctrine and disseminated throughout the Corps. By the time of the 1999 Kosovo War, just a few months after Krulak published his second article, officers of the 26th MEU understood their actions through the conceptual framework of three block war.

The MCDP Series

The same year that Krulak formally introduced the concept of three block war, the Marine Corps replaced the FMFM series with Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications (MCDPs). The MCDP series is mostly an update to the post-Cold War environment, but the series does make important strides toward developing peace operations doctrine. This shift is visible in the adoption of military operations other than war (MOOTW) in lieu of low intensity conflict.⁵⁷ The change in terminology opened space for operations without combat or in which combat was a secondary component. *Warfighting* argues that Marines should expect to conduct operations ranging from maintaining and restoring order “in civil disturbances or disaster relief operations” to conventional war.⁵⁸ Reflecting not just a grudging acceptance of peace operations but a more fundamental cultural shift, *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP 3, argues that peace operations “have historically been Marine Corps missions” and that Marine amphibious capabilities bring a unique affinity for peace operations compared to other branches of

the U.S. military.⁵⁹ As a key mission, Marine involvement in peace operations may include “presence, civil support, counterdrug operations, peace building and peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and noncombatant evacuation operations.”⁶⁰ Readers of *Expeditionary Operations* may be surprised at the emphasis placed on refugees and internally displaced persons in the doctrine’s introduction. *Expeditionary Operations* argues that, in addition to potentially complicating a military mission, “refugee management may itself be the primary objective of an operation.”⁶¹

The MCDPs, like the earlier FMFMs, drew heavily on Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s work in how the doctrines articulated the relationship between conflict and policy.⁶² *Warfighting* states, “The single most important thought to understand about our theory is that war must serve policy.” The doctrine goes on to warn, however, that it is equally important to recognize “that many political problems cannot be solved by military means.”⁶³ Both *Strategy*, MCDP 1-1, and *Campaigning*, MCDP 1-2, emphasize that military force must be “employed in conjunction with other instruments of national power.”⁶⁴ *Expeditionary Operations* expands on this concept and applies it directly to MOOTW and peace operations, noting that political considerations are even more important in peace operations than in a conventional war. Critically, *Expeditionary Operations* argues that based on historical experience, Marines should expect to participate in peace operations that “are generally directed at limited objectives and are often of limited duration.”⁶⁵ The underlying assumption of this emerging doctrine on peace operations is that the Marine Corps would rapidly deploy to a developing crisis, stabilize the situ-

⁵⁶ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal,” 21.

⁵⁷ *Warfighting*, 4, 5.

⁵⁸ *Warfighting*, 4, 5.

⁵⁹ *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP 3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1998), 110.

⁶⁰ *Expeditionary Operations*, 4, 5, 12.

⁶¹ *Expeditionary Operations*, 16.

⁶² For a full examination of the influence of Clausewitz on Marine Corps doctrine, see Sgt Paul Boothroyd, “Clausewitz: His Influence on Current Marine Corps Doctrine,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 97, no. 7 (July 2013): 81–84.

⁶³ *Warfighting*, 23.

⁶⁴ *Campaigning*, MCDP 1-2 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 3. A similar statement can also be found in *Strategy*, MCDP 1-1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 47.

⁶⁵ *Expeditionary Operations*, 110.

ation and fulfill short-term political and military objectives, and then hand over long-term responsibility to either another branch of the U.S. government, to the United Nations and NGOs, or to the host nation itself. This set Marine Corps peace operations doctrine apart from contemporary work on nation-building or the later emergence of stability operations, which became particularly dominant during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Although the MCDPs were published before or at the same time as Krulak's articles on the three block war and strategic corporal, they draw from the same cultural strand within the Marine Corps. For example, *Strategy* argues

Every military action has potential strategic implications. . . . Marines must understand that the "distance" between local or tactical actions and the effects of these actions at the strategic or political level may be very short. Sometimes a seemingly unimportant action by any participant—a general, a platoon leader, or even one single Marine—can have a powerful political impact.⁶⁶

Strategy may lack the catchphrase *strategic corporal*, but the concept is readily apparent. Again echoing three block war, *Strategy* calls for cooperation between various "instruments of power," including military, humanitarian, diplomatic, economic, and informational. The informational component incorporated not only information management, but also targeted humanitarian aid.⁶⁷ *Campaigning* expands on this idea: "Depending upon the nature of the operation, the military campaign may be the main effort, or it may be used to support diplomatic or economic efforts." Particularly in peace operations, "the military campaign is so closely integrated with other government operations that these nonmilitary actions can be considered to be part of the campaign."⁶⁸ In addition to echoing

three block war, these statements also reflect the reality of Marine experiences in peace operations in the 1990s, such as Operation Provide Comfort, which required close cooperation with the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations, and numerous NGOs.

While the MCDP series explored peace operations, discussions remained largely conceptual. More detailed considerations focused on combat. This created a contradiction in which peace operations were held up as important missions of the Marine Corps, but no guidance was developed on how to plan or conduct a peace operation.

Peace Operations Training

At roughly the same time that the Marine Corps began drafting the MCDP series, the Corps also began to rework its training program to include peace operations. Prior to 1995, training for peace operations was largely limited to civilian evacuations. In 1995, a broader range of peace became important to the training for MSSGs. The training routines of the 26th MEU and MSSG 26 demonstrate this shift. In the first six months of 1995, MSSG 26 conducted three peace operations exercises. Whether because of the perceived significance of these new missions or the MSSG's discomfort, the unit's command chronology spends an unusual amount of space reporting on these training exercises. In the first exercise, MSSG 26 erected "a small camp" where displaced civilians received food, water, and medical treatment. The report noted, "The HA [humanitarian assistance] mission is new to the MEU and was stressed throughout the workup period."⁶⁹ About a month later, MSSG 26 conducted another exercise for the "new and very important mission" of humanitarian assistance. But, it warned, "Humanitarian Assistance missions are potentially very large in magnitude." The practice mission, on the other hand, was modest in scope, including only 20 displaced people, but it was "the MSSG's first major attempt at the HA mission. Valuable after action

⁶⁶ *Strategy*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Strategy*, 47–49.

⁶⁸ *Campaigning*, 3.

⁶⁹ D. K. Cooper, MEU Service Support Group 26 Semi-Annual ComdC, January 1995–June 1995, secs. 2–3, file 20/1733, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

comments were obtained.⁷⁰ Finally, the next month, MSSG 26 conducted a similar operation that “provided an outstanding opportunity for the MSSG to refine its procedures and internal processes.”⁷¹

While peace operations became a standard part of MSSG training, it was not until 1998 that the whole 26th MEU participated in a peace operation training exercise. In the spring of 1998, the 26th MEU took part in Dynamic Response 1998, a NATO-led stabilization force exercise in Bosnia. The exercise was built around the concept of three block war and contained aspects of peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and medium-intensity conflict. Dynamic Response aimed to “display NATO commitment to regional stability” through “aggressive presence and professionalism.”⁷² Staff Sergeant Jan Havey reflected, “I think our actions really epitomized Dynamic Response. We were there as a show of force, but also to help. I think the civilian population really saw that point and received it well.” The staff sergeant continued, “Every time you go into a peacekeeping situation you have to have two faces. You’ve got to have a peacekeeping and a war face.”⁷³ Havey’s statement offers a glimpse into how noncommissioned officers perceived peace operations. Dynamic Response was only one of a wave of exercises that incorporated peace operations in 1998. In 1999, the 26th MEU put all of this training to the test in Kosovo.

Kosovo, 1999

As the 26th MEU trained for peace operations in Bosnia in 1998, the situation in Kosovo deteriorated dramatically, culminating with a brutal Serbian cam-

paign of ethnic cleansing against ethnic Albanians and the collapse of diplomatic efforts. On 24 March 1999, NATO launched Operation Allied Force, a 78-day bombing campaign. During the next three months, more than 900,000 ethnic Albanian refugees fled into Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. An estimated 530,000 refugees found shelter in Albania, 350,000 in Macedonia, and 70,000 in Montenegro.⁷⁴ In scenes reminiscent of the Kurdish crisis and Operation Provide Comfort in 1991, the UNHCR and NGOs struggled to respond to the speed and scale of the Kosovar refugee crisis.⁷⁵ Particularly in Albania, with its poor infrastructure and rugged terrain, the U.S. military took the lead role in providing international refugee assistance.⁷⁶ On 9 June 1999, NATO and Serbia agreed to the terms of the Military Technical Agreement, ending Operation Allied Force and paving the way for the deployment of the Kosovo Force, NATO’s peacekeeping force. The 26th MEU, which had been assisting Kosovar refugees in southern Albania, entered Kosovo on 13 June and was fully established in the area of Gjilan (Gnjilane in Serbian) by 17

⁷⁴ The standard number of refugees in Albania for the crisis is 450,000. However, the Prefecture of Kukës’s records indicated that the UNHCR never registered at least 60,000 Kosovar refugees who stayed with Kukës families. For a representative UNHCR account, see Andrew Jones, *Albania: Direct and Indirect Environmental Impacts of Refugees, 17–24 September 2000* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR Engineering and Environmental Services Section, 2000), 4; and Walter Clarke, “The Humanitarian Dimension in Kosovo: Coordination and Competition,” in *Lessons from Kosovo: The KFOR Experience*, ed. Larry Wentz (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Command and Control Research Program, 2002), 214. The relevant Kukës Prefecture records are in three boxes in the Arkiva e Prefekturës së Kuksit: Dosje Nr.1.1999: Prefekti, Dosje nr.1-7. Sek. Pergjithshem nga 1-12, and Dosje nr.17, 1999. Per te ardhurit nga Kosova.

⁷⁵ The UNHCR was heavily criticized for its role during the Kosovo refugee crisis and its shortcomings are vividly detailed in Astri Suhrke et al., *The Kosovo Refugee Crisis: An Independent Evaluation of UNHCR’s Emergency Preparedness and Response*, pre-pub. ed. (Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, 2000).

⁷⁶ Mary Elizabeth Walters, “Constructing Air Power: Air Force Civil Engineers during Operation Allied Force and Operation Shining Hope, 1999” (conference paper, Society for Military History Annual Conference, Columbus, OH, 10 May 2019); and Mary Elizabeth Walters, “Unexpected Humanitarians: Albania, the U.S. Military, and Aid Organizations During the 1999 Kosovo Refugee Crisis” (conference paper, Triangle Institute for Security Studies New Faces Conference, Chapel Hill, NC, October 2018).

⁷⁰ Cooper, MSSG 26 Semi-Annual ComdC, January 1995–June 1995.

⁷¹ Cooper, MSSG 26 Semi-Annual ComdC, January 1995–June 1995.

⁷² Col E. N. Gardner, “Strategic Reserve Forces, Briefing,” 1998, 2, item 7, file 1/1732, 26th MEU January 1998–June 1998, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA; and Gardner, “Post Deployment Brief, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable,” 26 July 1998, item 1, in K. J. Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 July 1998–31 December 1998, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁷³ Cpl Jon Wilke, “Corpsman Assists in Life-Threatening Situation,” *Globe*, 21 May 1998, item 33, file 1/1732, 26th MEU ComdC, January 1998–June 1998, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

June.⁷⁷ Operations in Kosovo tested both the MCDP series and Marine training in peace operations. While the operation was largely successful, the 26th MEU identified serious gaps in both areas.

The 26th MEU's mission was to monitor and enforce "compliance with [the] ceasefire," provide humanitarian assistance, establish "Initial Basic Law and Order Enforcement and Core Civil Functions," and facilitate "Peace and Stability within the Region."⁷⁸ The commander's intent was to "Conduct Peace Enforcement Operations," but be prepared to "transition to combat operations at a moment's notice" in line with three block war.⁷⁹ Major Nathan S. Lowrey argued that Krulak's concept of the three block war "influenced the 26th MEU's concept of operations in Kosovo and contributed to the formation of parallel civil and military missions during the pursuit of peace."⁸⁰ At all levels of the 26th MEU's mission in Kosovo, peace operations occupied a central role.⁸¹

As Krulak had argued, in Kosovo the ability of the MEU to build strong relationships with local Albanian and Serbian communities, on which so much of their mission depended, rested in the hands of the strategic corporal. The commander of Battalion Landing Team, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines (BLT 3/8), Lieutenant Colonel Bruce A. Gandy, reflected that in Kosovo "within each sector the company commander acted as the military commander, police chief, and

civil administrator."⁸² Developing strong relationships with the local community relied on small unit patrols. This put the burden of trust-building on every Marine. Captain David W. Eiland used daily patrols "to foster a working relationship with the villagers and to get a feeling of the 'temperature' of the village. . . . In short, we were the villagers' security blanket."⁸³

Despite the 26th MEU's peace operations training, many officers found themselves and their soldiers unprepared for the scale of their responsibilities in Kosovo. Gandy warned,

Currently, the intensive MEU work-up training schedule does not provide any training or instruction in the area of civil affairs. In Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti [1994–95], and now Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo, Marine Corps forces have been called upon to assume these duties and assist in the restoration of core civil functions. Although it is accurate to say that fundamental tactics training provides skills necessary in this realm, it does not prepare unit commanders for the full spectrum of challenges in this arena.⁸⁴

As a result, the 26th MEU relied heavily on the six members sent from the 4th Civil Affairs Group, a Marine Reserve unit, rather than internal MEU assets. The 4th Civil Affairs Group took the lead in a wide range of activities, including coordination between the MEU, NGOs, and community leaders, providing NGO security, and negotiating power sharing ar-

⁷⁷ "Current Status of the 26th MEU (SOC)," 26th MEU, June 1999, file 6/1 Yugoslavia Peacekeeping 26th MEU Press Releases 1999, box 23/D/3/7-A/25/A/5/5, Operations Other Than War Yugoslavia Peacekeeping, 1999–2000, Box 1, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA; and B. A. Gandy, BLT 3/8 ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁷⁸ Briefing Slides, CTF 61/62 COAs for Initial Entry Force Operations in Kosovo, item 6, in K. J. Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 1, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁷⁹ Briefing Slides, 26th MEU (SOC) Initial Entry Force Operations in Kosovo, item 7, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 1.

⁸⁰ Maj Nathan S. Lowrey, "Operation Joint Guardian: The 26th MEU During Peacekeeping Operations in Kosovo, 1999," PowerPoint Presentation, 1999, file 2/1733 26th MEU C/C, box 1733 C/3/A/65 90-99, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁸¹ Briefing Slides, 26th MEU (SOC) Initial Entry Force Operations in Kosovo.

⁸² LtCol Bruce A. Gandy, "The Kosovo Commitment: Force Protection and Mission Accomplishment," *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 11 (November 1999): 45.

⁸³ Capt David W. Eiland, "The Kosovo Commitment: Company K," *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 11 (November 1999): 51.

⁸⁴ Commanding Officer, Battalion Landing Team 3/8, "Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian," 26 July 1999, item 27, in K. J. Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 2, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

rangements between Serbs and Albanians.⁸⁵ The 4th Civil Affairs Group also organized the movement of both ethnic Serbian and Albanian refugees and assisted MSSG 26 with humanitarian assistance.⁸⁶

Overreliance on the 4th Civil Affairs Group had the unintentional side effect of decreasing the buy-in of the rest of the 26th MEU to many peace operations requirements. Because the 4th Civil Affairs Group was only temporarily attached to the 26th MEU and not part of the standard chain of command, unit commanders only followed their advice when convenient and when the tactical advantage was readily apparent. For example, unit commanders were reluctant to provide security escorts for refugee convoys because it diverted resources from security patrols. The 4th Civil Affairs Group complained that this increased the “potential for violent confrontations between . . . opposing ethnic group[s] and could] have negatively impacted the MEU’s ability to fulfill its primary mission of providing security.”⁸⁷ Many of the MEU’s after action reports complained about the amount of resources devoted to humanitarian and development work. For example, the logistics section concluded, “Providing care to the Marines and Sailors of the MEU is the PRIMARY CONCERN of the medical department. We must never lose sight of this when providing humanitarian assistance to others.”⁸⁸

Despite internal resistance, the 26th MEU worked hard to provide humanitarian assistance and to restore basic infrastructure. As with Operation Provide Comfort in 1991, the MSSG played a key

role. Building on the 4th Civil Affairs Group’s work to negotiate power-sharing arrangements, the MSSG reinforced these agreements by providing supplies and engineers to get facilities operational again. On a more temporary basis, the MSSG established regular medical and dental pop-up facilities in villages throughout the 26th MEU’s area of responsibility. In addition to the humanitarian aspect of these efforts, the 26th MEU’s after action report reflected that they used their resources to “establish a relationship with hostile or indifferent communities in order to gain influence, credibility and cooperation for the line companies patrolling those villages.”⁸⁹ The MSSG 26 argued that these projects provided “another forum for communities to address numerous issues from human rights violations to weapons turn-in.”⁹⁰ BLT 3/8 also contributed to efforts to restore infrastructure. Patrols “met with local leaders to determine status of infrastructure,” focusing on the fire department, emergency services, and basic utilities. Even though BLT 3/8 patrols could rarely solve problems themselves, they “did establish the groundwork and identify requirements to follow-on forces/agencies such as the US Army, United Nations etc.”⁹¹ Captain John R. Anderson observed, “Even if we could do very little, these small, seemingly insignificant acts helped gain their trust.”⁹²

While humanitarian and development work faced the most internal pushback, the area in which the 26th MEU particularly struggled was policing. The main conduit for locals to report crime was through a 911 system established at the Gjilan police station. However, the Criminal Investigation Division’s after action report condemned the responses of the 26th MEU to these calls, reporting, “Local BLT units in the area declined to respond to a majority of calls for ser-

⁸⁵ Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 1, sec. 2; Civil Affairs Officer, “Measures of Effectiveness,” 24 July 1999, item 32, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3, secs. 3-32-1; and Commanding Officer, “MSSG-26 Measures of Effectiveness: Operation Joint Guardian,” 12 July 1999, Item 38, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3.

⁸⁶ Commanding Officer, “MSSG-26 Measures of Effectiveness: Operation Joint Guardian,” secs. 3-38-5; and Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 1, sec. 2.

⁸⁷ J. Burack, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian,” item 19, Civil Affairs After Action Report for Operation Joint Guardian, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 2, secs. 3-4.

⁸⁸ Logistics Officer, “Operation Joint Guardian Quicklook,” 19 July 1999, item 24, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 2, secs. 3-9, emphasis original.

⁸⁹ Burack, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian,” secs. 3-5.

⁹⁰ Commanding Officer, “MSSG-26 Measures of Effectiveness,” secs. 3-38-3.

⁹¹ Operations Officer, BLT 3/8, “BLT 3/8 Measure of Effectiveness Analysis,” 11 July 1999, Item 36, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3, secs. 3-36-2.

⁹² Capt John R. Anderson, “The Kosovo Commitment: Forward Operating Base,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 11 (November 1999): 50.

vice since they were there ‘to conduct tactical security patrols’ and could not be bothered with responding to citizen complaints.⁹³ When BLT 3/8 did respond, the report continued, “In some instances, individuals that were processed as detainees were actually witnesses to a crime, but were handled and processed with the criminal elements.”⁹⁴ During training, “the MEU had never, throughout all the work-ups, actually gone through a process of detaining real people . . . and have no idea how to document circumstances surrounding detention properly.”⁹⁵ Marines defaulted to treating detainees as prisoners of war, rather than potential lawbreakers.⁹⁶ BLT 3/8 was fully aware of its shortcomings, noting, “Actually apprehending people was not a problem, but the processing and transportation of detainees seemed, at times, to be more trouble than it was worth.”⁹⁷ The issue of detainees combined insufficient numbers of military police, a lack of MEU training, and legal confusion—the result was a concerning prelude to mistreatment of detainees during the Iraq War a few years later.

Despite these problems, the 26th MEU’s staff judge advocate argued that the MEU “got police functions working under the rule of law, despite the fact that when we went in, there was no law to work under, or anything planned as to how to deal with police functions.”⁹⁸ In practice, there was significant blurring between some aspects of police functions and security patrols. The mere fact of regular security patrols and Marines willing to practice “aggressive restraint” decreased violence. A week into their time in Kosovo,

Marines from BLT 3/8 captured a Serbian sniper in Gjilan who had killed two Albanian civilians. In a case the following week, Marines protected a statue of Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović from ethnic Albanians’ rioting.⁹⁹ The BLT 3/8 reported, “By default, the Marines became the security and police force in the sector” and crime in the area “declined immediately. Markets returned, shops and businesses reopened, public transportation began to run reliably again, and the lives of the citizens seemed to return closer to normal.”¹⁰⁰

The 26th MEU’s month and a half in NATO’s Kosovo Force was far from perfect. Yet even today, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo speak very favorably of American soldiers, Marines, and NATO, though they often struggle to differentiate among them. Both at the time and in oral histories, many commented that the Americans and NATO made them feel safe to return to their homes. Agim Byçi captured some of the emotion of the time, saying in an interview that after NATO forces reached Gjakova, “then began joy, merriment and bliss, life, freedom, and gratitude for the European Union and especially for America.”¹⁰¹ Islam Shahiqi, a Kosovar coffee shop owner in the 26th MEU’s area of operations, reflected, “It’s the first time in years that I feel free. . . . I was afraid during the bombing, but I was more afraid of the Serbs. Now I feel protected by NATO.”¹⁰² The 26th MEU took the training they had, expanded on it where they could, and created new policies as needed.

Conclusion

In September 2001, the Marine Corps published *Marine Corps Operations*, MCDP 1-0, which included the first Marine peace operations doctrine in its 10th

⁹³ CWO 2 Gary J. Schmidt, 26th MEU CE/Criminal Investigation Division, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian,” 17 July 1999, item 18, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 2, sec. 3-2,3.

⁹⁴ Schmidt, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian.”

⁹⁵ Capt E. F. Crail, Staff Judge Advocate, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian,” 18 July 1999, item 12, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 2, sec. 3.

⁹⁶ Schmidt, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian.”

⁹⁷ Commanding Officer, “Quick Look After Action Report Operation Joint Guardian,” secs. 3-7.

⁹⁸ Captain E. F. Crail, Staff Judge Advocate, “Measures of Effectiveness,” 25 July 1999, item 30, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3, secs. 3-30-1.

⁹⁹ Lowrey, “Operation Joint Guardian.”

¹⁰⁰ Maroco R. della Cava, “Marines Get a Taste of Wild West in Chaotic Kosovo,” *USA Today*, 21 June 1999, item 67, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3, secs. 3-67-1; and Operations Officer, Battalion Landing Team 3/8, “BLT 3/8 Measure of Effectiveness Analysis,” 11 July 1999, item 36, in Glueck, 26th MEU ComdC, 1 January 1999–31 July 1999, Part 3, secs. 3-36-2.

¹⁰¹ Agim Byçi and Neserete Nuka, interview with Mary Elizabeth Walters, Gjakova, Kosovo, 28 May 2016.

¹⁰² della Cava, “Marines Get a Taste of Wild West in Chaotic Kosovo,” secs. 3-67-1.

chapter on MOOTW.¹⁰³ The chapter highlights the “political and cultural considerations” of peace operations.¹⁰⁴ *Marine Corps Operations* argues peace operations were key to the Marine Corps’ mission.

Naval expeditions . . . have long been the instruments of choice in our Nation’s response to global contingencies. From humanitarian assistance, to peacekeeping, to combat, these forces are normally the first on scene and ready to respond. . . . They provide a power projection capability that can be tailored to meet a wide range of crises from a major theater war to military operations other than war (MOOTW).¹⁰⁵

Although *Marine Corps Operations* largely follows joint doctrine on peace operations, the Marine Corps version of peace operations is a naval expedition that responds to a rapidly developing crisis. The type of operation envisioned is very much in line with experiences in Operation Provide Comfort and Kosovo Force: a Marine unit already at sea would be diverted to respond to a crisis using its amphibious capabilities. While the operation might take place inland, as both the northern Iraq and Kosovo operations did, the versatility of Marine structures and logistics would allow Marines to respond with both overwhelming force and humanitarian aid. Once Marines established security and basic assistance, *Marine Corps Operations* envisions Marines handing over responsibility to other U.S. military forces, to the United Nations, or to NGOs.

The publication is a strong starting point for doctrinal development for peace operations. Echoing Krulak’s vision of three block war, *Marine Corps Operations* argues, “Marines may be conducting combat, peace enforcement, and humanitarian assistance op-

erations simultaneously within an emerging nation in an austere theater or a major metropolitan city.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, the strategic corporal remains key as “small unit leaders may conduct tactical actions that have operational and even strategic consequences.”¹⁰⁷ The doctrine also provided brief overviews of common subsets of peace operations, including specific tasks Marines would be expected to perform and historical examples of similar deployments. For example, the section on humanitarian assistance explains under what conditions the United States provides aid, which governmental bodies may declare a disaster, and the types of aid missions on which Marines could be deployed, and it referenced Operation Provide Comfort as one of the examples.¹⁰⁸ Though the level of detail failed to match the careful diagrams of Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) tactics and maneuvers, the doctrine was still a significant improvement from the more conceptual coverage of earlier MCDPs.¹⁰⁹

Departing slightly from the previous MCDPs, *Marine Corps Operations* urges patience because operations “may require years to achieve the desired results. . . . The patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives, for as long as necessary to achieve them, is often a requirement for success.” Throughout this period, Marines must “sustain the legitimacy of the operation” in the eyes of the American public, local populations, and the international community.¹¹⁰ Despite recognizing the potential long-term nature of peace operations and the strain that longevity might place on the mission’s legitimacy, *Marine Corps Operations* does not address what should happen when American political leaders lack the patience or interest to stay the course. This was a serious weakness, as was demonstrated by the United States’ reluctant participation in 2004’s multinational peace

¹⁰³ LtCol John A. Bass, (Ret), “Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations*,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 87, no. 10 (October 2003): 22–25.

¹⁰⁴ *Marine Corps Operations*, MCDP 1-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2001), 10-3, hereafter *Marine Corps Operations* (2001).

¹⁰⁵ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 1-3.

¹⁰⁶ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 1-6.

¹⁰⁷ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 1-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 10-8, 10-9.

¹⁰⁹ A comparison of chapter 10, “Military Operations Other Than War,” with chapter 7, “The MAGTF in the Offense,” and chapter 8, “The MAGTF in the Defense,” in *Marine Corps Operations* makes this contrast in the level of detail immediately apparent.

¹¹⁰ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 10-6.

operations in Haiti following the removal of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.¹¹¹

The Corps published *Marine Corps Operations* just days after al-Qaeda's 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Almost overnight, the strategic environment changed and the predominant mission of the Marine Corps shifted to a ground infantry role during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Marine Corps interest in peace operations evaporated. Attention shifted to counterinsurgency, nation-building, and later stability operations. Some of the concepts and practices of peace operations carried over, but in very different contexts. Worse, many of the hard-learned lessons of the 1990s were forgotten. In March 2003, U.S. Marines took control of an-Nasiriyah, Iraq. A Marine Corps colonel found himself the mayor of eight cities. He recalled, "I had no idea I would be responsible for getting the water running, turning on the electricity, and running an economy," all tasks that he should have expected based on the experiences of the 24th MEU in northern Iraq and the 26th MEU in Kosovo.¹¹²

Even though the Corps paid greater attention to peace operations in the 1990s, Marine Corps doctrine did not develop beyond the level of detail provided in 2001's *Marine Corps Operations*. This is most evident in the 2011 revision of *Marine Corps Operations*. As Commandant General James F. Amos observed in the new foreword, since 2001 Marines had deployed on a great "diversity of operations," ranging from deployments 644 km inland in Afghanistan to foreign humanitarian assistance missions.¹¹³ As a result of the changes wrought by a decade of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Corps made significant revisions to *Marine Corps Operations*. Rather than a single chapter on MOOTW, different aspects of peace operations were spread across three chapters. The first aspect of peace operations fell under the category of military engagement. One potential aspect of military engagement,

according to the updated *Marine Corps Operations*, is nation assistance, the civil and military "assistance rendered to a nation by foreign forces within that nation's territory during peacetime, crises or emergencies, or war." Nation assistance includes humanitarian and civic assistance, security assistance, and support to foreign and internal defense. These possibilities, however, receive only cursory attention—less than one full page.¹¹⁴

Peace operations received far greater coverage in the following chapter on crisis response and limited contingency operations. The revised *Marine Corps Operations* opens with a nuanced discussion of the historic precedent provided by the Corps' experience in small wars and how twenty-first century crisis response and limited contingency operations fit into U.S. national strategy. A closer examination of the specific types of operations with which Marines could be tasked reveals that the descriptions remain almost identical to those from the original 2001 publication. For example, in 2001, *Marine Corps Operations* defined *peacekeeping* as operations "conducted with the consent of all major belligerents."¹¹⁵ In 2011, the wording shifted slightly, defining peacekeeping as "military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute."¹¹⁶ Other than adjusting minor phrasing, the revised *Marine Corps Operations* did not provide further doctrinal development of peace operations.

Finally, the 2011 *Marine Corps Operations* includes a brief chapter on stability operations, a category of missions as difficult to define as peace operations and with a great deal of overlap. Indeed, *Marine Corps Operations* resorts to defining stability operations by listing the tasks and activities conducted by U.S. military forces on such missions.¹¹⁷ In six pages, *Marine Corps Operations* provides a succinct overview of stability operations and directs readers to other doctrinal publications by the Department of Defense and the Department of State for further detail. *Marine Corps*

¹¹¹ Alan McPherson, *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 185–87.

¹¹² Janine Davidson, "Giving Peacekeeping a Chance: The Modern Military's Struggle over Peace Operations," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 15, no. 2 (2004): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0959231042000282670>.

¹¹³ *Marine Corps Operations*, MCDP 1-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2011), i, hereafter *Marine Corps Operations* (2011).

¹¹⁴ *Marine Corps Operations* (2011), 4-4, 4-5.

¹¹⁵ *Marine Corps Operations* (2001), 10-12.

¹¹⁶ *Marine Corps Operations* (2011), 5-8.

¹¹⁷ *Marine Corps Operations* (2011), 12-1.

Operations itself, however, remains vague on the role of Marines during stability operations.

Today, the future approach of the Marine Corps to peace operations is once again in question. The 38th Commandant, General David H. Berger, has stated, “We cannot assume that today’s equipment, the way that we’re organized, how we train, how we select leaders, all of our warfighting concepts, we cannot assume they will remain relevant in the future. My assumption is they will not.”¹¹⁸ General Berger’s 2019 *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* calls for a rethinking of everything, from force structure to equipment. The only certainties seem to be that the Marines will remain the “naval expeditionary force-in-readiness” for the United States and that the Corps will seek deeper integration with the U.S. Navy.¹¹⁹ Colonel Paul Weaver, the head of Combat Development Command, recently remarked, “We are going to bring about a level of change in the Marine Corps that we have probably not seen at least in [our] lifetime.”¹²⁰ Most relevant for the Marine Corps’ involvement in peace operations—and in a dramatic break from the 2016 *Marine Corps Operating Concept*—Berger declared, “We are not an across-the-ROMO [range of military operations] force.” Far from including peace operations as key to the Marine Corps’ mission, Berger argues that “foreign humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and noncombatant evacuations do not define us—they are not our identity. Rather, they are the day-to-day consequence of being the force-in-readiness.”¹²¹ Furthermore, the lighter footprint that Berger calls for could well result in a diminished capability to perform logistics-heavy peace operations of the kind the 24th and 26th MEUs carried out in northern Iraq and Kosovo, respectively. Although the lasting legacy of Marine Corps peace op-

¹¹⁸ Paul McLeary, “Commandant: Marines ‘Not Optimized for Great Power Competition,’” *Breaking Defense*, 3 October 2019.

¹¹⁹ Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019), 1.

¹²⁰ Todd South, “The Commandant Has a New Plan for the Marine Corps. Here’s How Marines Will Get the Gear to Make It a Reality,” *Marine Corps Times*, 18 September 2019.

¹²¹ Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 9.

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erations practice and doctrine in the 1990s remains unclear, the 1990s nevertheless saw a dramatic change in Marine Corps culture and perceptions of peace operations.