
Expeditionary Operations



U.S. Marine Corps

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
Headquarters United States Marine Corps
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CHANGE 1 to MCDP 3
Expeditionary Operations

1. This publication has been edited to ensure gender neutrality of all applicable and appropriate terms, except those terms governed by higher authority. No other content has been affected.
2. File this transmittal sheet in the front of this publication.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE
MARINE CORPS

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert S. Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R' and 'W'.

ROBERT S. WALSH

Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps
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FOREWORD

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 3, *Expeditionary Operations*, establishes doctrine for the conduct of military operations by the U.S. Marine Corps. It describes the Marine Corps as an expeditionary force-in-readiness that is manned, trained, and equipped specifically to respond quickly to a broad variety of crises and conflicts across the full range of military operations anywhere in the world. It emphasizes the naval character of Marine Corps forces. This naval expeditionary character provides capabilities both to forward-deploy forces near the scene of potential crises as well as to deploy sustainable, combined arms teams rapidly by sea and air. With reduced overseas presence in terms of force levels and bases, these capabilities have become essential elements of our national military strategy. This publication also underscores the value of Marine Corps forces as a highly cost-effective option in a wide range of situations, including crises requiring forcible entry. Importantly, this publication establishes versatility and adaptability as critical capabilities in a broad range of circumstances for expeditionary forces in an uncertain world. Finally, this publication describes the Marine Corps' key expeditionary concepts.

This publication is compatible with the Marine Corps' capstone doctrinal publication, MCDP 1, *Warfighting*. *Warfighting* provides the broad institutional and operating philosophy that underlies all Marine Corps expeditionary operations, regardless of echelon of command or operating setting. This publication applies that philosophy more specifically to the operations of Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs) and to the types of expeditionary settings in which these forces will likely be required to operate. Where MCDP 1 describes the Marine Corps' philosophy of warfighting, this publication describes the types of operations of which Marine Corps forces must be capable.

Chapter 1 describes the complex and uncertain geopolitical environment near the turn of the 21st century—the environment in which Marine Corps forces will be required to operate. Based on chapter 1, chapter 2 establishes the need for a flexible, naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, describes the requirements of expeditionary operations, and identifies the characteristics and capabilities of Marine Corps forces that satisfy those requirements. Chapter 3 describes the particular expeditionary organizations and forces that the Marine Corps contributes in support of national interests overseas. Chapter 4 describes the operating concepts that underlie the Marine Corps' conduct of expeditionary operations. Key among these is the naval concept, operational maneuver from the sea.

This publication is designed for Marine Corps leaders who must conduct expeditionary operations or advise others on the effective

employment of Marine Corps forces and for those outside the Marine Corps who must understand Marine Corps capabilities and operating concepts. Because this publication describes concepts that are fundamental to Marine Corps operations, it is required reading for all Marines.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to C. C. Krulak. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being prominent.

C. C. KRULAK
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

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Expeditionary Operations

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Chapter 1

The Landscape: Chaos in the Littorals

*“It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.”*¹

—Niccolo Machiavelli

*“. . . a second Cold War might be upon us—a protracted struggle between ourselves and the demons of crime, population pressure, environmental degradation, disease, and culture conflict.”*²

—Robert D. Kaplan

This chapter discusses the environment in which U.S. forces in general, and Marine Corps expeditionary forces in particular, have to operate. It describes a world characterized by disorder and crisis, especially in the littoral regions of the developing world.

AFTER THE COLD WAR: THE “NEW ANARCHY”

The end of the Cold War has ushered in a period of widespread uncertainty, rapid change, and turmoil. The Cold War provided a known enemy whom we thought we understood fairly well and against whom we could prepare. The Cold War provided structure and stability. The global ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union tended to subsume lesser, regional conflicts. As local belligerents positioned themselves on opposing sides of the Cold War, local conflicts were overshadowed by the global struggle and were often suppressed out of fear of starting a global war.

The certainty, structure, and stability that the Cold War provided have disappeared. The geopolitical situation has shifted from a bipolar global structure to multiple regional power centers with a single world superpower—the United States. Conflict has arisen as political groups vie for regional dominance. Long-simmering animosities have erupted into conflict. In short, the threat has shifted from the known enemies of the Cold War to a broader, heterogeneous set of potential competitors and adversaries and a variety of types of conflict. Some of these opponents are traditional