



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20380-0001

IN REPLY REFER TO:

CMC
29 Apr 92

PERSONAL

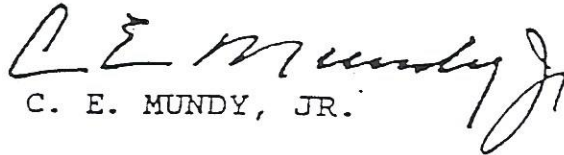
GREEN LETTER NO. 1-92

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps
To: All General Officers
All Senior Executive Service Members

Subj: VIEWS OF THE 27TH COMMANDANT ON SIZING AMERICAN
CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

Encl: (1) General Barrow's letter to the Chairman, House Armed
Services Committee of 16 April 1992

1. The enclosure, written personally, by General Barrow, needs no explanation. Although focused on the Post Cold War era, it is an ageless thesis on conventional force structuring and utility. I provide it for your professional edification and periodic reflection. Teach it to our young officers.


C. E. MUNDY, JR.

Book

St. Francisville, LA
16 April 1992

The Honorable Les Aspin
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I am writing in response to your request for comments on your approach to sizing American Conventional Forces for the post-Soviet era.

Up front -- I applaud your fine work in this matter! I found it stimulating and surely it will stir the debate. More than that, I believe it to be most appropriate for the Congress to involve itself as you have done, and so admirably.

You are on the mark to adopt a bottom-up methodology, starting with real world threats. However, you must not "hang your hat on it," for some of the results are very questionable. The best example of that is Korea.

In explaining your Iraq Equivalent Scale you state: "...the land force column in this table is the main one to focus on. Land forces -- and specifically the heavy mechanized and armored forces given the most weight in this column -- form the bulk of an offensive capability required to commit regional aggression." Later, because North Korea's army only has half as many tanks (although about equal manpower) as pre-war Iraq you assign them a ground equivalent of six-tenths!

North Korea's army is not armored and mechanized heavy because the potential battlefield they know so well is not good tank country and because they like to attack at night, recognize tanks are less effective and more vulnerable under those circumstances. But they are heavy in artillery, and I, for one, would be much more concerned about that capability than any number of tanks under the best tank employment conditions.

More importantly, as someone once said, "Success in battle is not a function of how many show up, but who they are." The pre-war Iraq army and the North Korean army may be numerically equal, but it ends there! The North Korean soldier is tough, highly trained, disciplined and would fight with fanatic determination. By my "formula" I would assign the North Korean army at least a 2.0.

I will come back to Korea later, but for now I want to expand my comments on armor/tanks in general. About sixteen years ago in an interview in the *Washington Post* I said, "Considering current and potential anti-tank capabilities, the army that brings a lot of tanks to the battlefield may be bringing more liability than asset." Desert Storm did not prove me wrong. The armored community continues to say that the best way to kill a tank is with another tank. That is like saying the best way to defeat a heavyweight is with another heavyweight, when in fact a flyweight with a thirty-eight is more certain and final. Many of our potential adversaries understand this all too well. Finally, we should cease to speak of light units and heavy units with the implication that heavy is always better.

Back to Korea. You state: "Initial investigation suggests that an air package equivalent to the Desert Storm Equivalent air for ground attack is the American reinforcement needed to defeat North Korean aggression." And later on: "Given the geography of the front and the fact that North Korea is not as large a threat as an Iraq, providing a Desert Storm Equivalent of ground attack air is a conservative plan for the defense of South Korea." My earlier comments apply. Additionally, your confidence in the capabilities and contributions of attack air in that situation is misplaced. The North Koreans have a formidable anti-air capability. They move and resupply at night, most often on foot, and often attack at night. Their initial overpowering ground attack, which might very well be decisive, is supported in depth by highly protected logistics support. For forty years they have created a monumental network of underground storage, tunnels, etc. to protect their logistics support forward.

At this point, permit me to say something about air power. Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, many hold the view that air power can be

decisive. (Desert Storm was an anomaly -- never to be replicated -- and the truth about the effectiveness of air power in that conflict, though seeping out, will never be known.)

Attack air is a supporting arm -- period. It is most useful and effective when employed in support of ground troops -- close air support and battlefield interdiction. Air left to do its own thing is often more failure than success. This was true during the Korean War and true during the Vietnam War. We learn this over and over again, seemingly to no avail.

Related subject. Mr. Chairman, I hope someone will put a stop to this nonsense that proposes bombers based in the U.S. will be the weapon of choice in dealing with distant threats. No nation has ever capitulated and no army has ever surrendered to air power. Bomber forces can play a role but they can also be counter-productive -- destroying the wrong things, killing innocent civilians, and often stimulating the enemy's will to resist.

As a related matter, please permit another digression. The four battleships should not have been decommissioned! They would be an ideal platform for post-Cold War threats -- in many situations a substitute for carriers. Indeed, during the Vietnam War virtually every target in North Vietnam was within range of battleship main batteries. For those just retired, add the Tomahawks, unmanned air vehicles and we would have a most valuable capability. As an aside, four battleships operating off the North Vietnam coast would have been more effective in destroying those targets engaged by air and we would not have had a POW/MIA problem.

If you have been patient this far, it is time to get excited about the United States Marine Corps! I will begin with a number of reminders, facts and observations:

- ° You state: "A relatively small percentage of the United States' major combat units participated in Operation Desert Storm..." You should look at this by service. The Marine Corps was disproportionately represented in that conflict -- more Marines

proportionally than any other service -- loud and clear a function of capability and readiness!

- Contrary to your accounting, in Desert Storm there were two full Marine Divisions on land, two Marine Aircraft Wings under a single Wing Commander, two Force Service Support Groups under a single Commander, and two Marine Brigades afloat.
- A Marine Division is the largest division, numerically, in the world -- virtually all combat power.
- A Marine Aircraft Wing is the largest and most diverse single entity aviation unit in the world -- four types of helicopters, light and medium attack aircraft, dual purpose aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, electronic countermeasures aircraft, and transport/refueler aircraft. It has a ground-based air defense capability. It has the capability to set up and operate air fields. It has a sophisticated air command and control capability -- and more. One should never confuse a Marine Aircraft Wing with an Air Force Wing.
- A Force Service Support Group provides motor transport, rations, fuel, engineer, maintenance support and more.
- A Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters is the command echelon over all of the above.
- All of the above is expeditionary. It is important to understand what this means. For example, Marine Aviation doesn't plan on leaving an air base in the U.S. to deploy to one that looks very much like it in Europe, Saudi Arabia or Korea. Expeditionary means, among other things, starting from scratch on the other end. Equipment, training, doctrine, techniques -- all designed to do that.
- Marine Forces task organize more often and better than anyone for forward deployment, for threat expected and in consideration of

unique weather or terrain. Whatever size force — MEF, MEB or MEU — it is designed for what needs to be done and is self contained.

- Of course all of this is fully amphibious. The Navy and Marine Corps possess the only truly forcible entry capability in the world. (Airborne forces are "entry" but not very "forcible.") This unusual capability must be preserved — for somewhere, sometime we will have to go where we are opposed.
- The three Maritime Prepositioning Forces, each composed of a 16,000 man MEB are unique. Manned from out of the three MEFs, ready to go where unopposed or in trace of an amphibious force and possessing thirty days of all classes of supply, it is the most innovative and useful addition to our nation's military capability in the past forty years or more.
- The Marine Corps is truly the nation's force-in-readiness! It is our life's blood, a state of mind — our culture, if you will. We routinely train with the forces of other nations more than any service in the world. We do it in extreme cold, deserts, mountains and jungles.
- We have never been dedicated to a specific threat. The world is our stage. The Marine Corps can be a go-it-alone-or major participant in each of your "Table I: Situations For Which Americans Might Want Military Forces."
- Our secret weapon is our young Marine. The product of quality recruiting and a most demanding recruit training experience, he is the creme de la creme of the U.S. military. He doesn't just enlist, he asks as an act of faith, "make me a Marine." We do, and he rewards us with a commitment to excellence unequalled, and a willingness to go anywhere and do anything, including making the ultimate sacrifice.

- We were never really tied to NATO, for all these years we have been global. Global threats to our interests have not diminished, if anything they have worsened. It simply doesn't make sense to draw down the Marine Corps in any substantial way, when its reason for being hasn't changed, except maybe worsened.
- What makes even less sense is the possibility of the Marine Corps giving up capabilities that have been generations in the making, while some other service(s), mission hunting post-Cold War, attempts to acquire competing capabilities.
- As bad, if not worse, is the growing determination on the part of all services, aided and abetted by JCS, OSD and "licensed" by Goldwater-Nichols, to be joint, seemingly for the sake of jointness! All want a piece of the action and at the earliest! Grenada was not a failure of inter-service communications and coordination. (Any unit from a single service will routinely cite such problems in the critique of any exercise.) The failure was in complicating the operation by assigning each service and JSOC a piece of the action! That most important principle of war -- simplicity -- was grossly violated! I am not opposed to jointness -- but it should be driven by necessity and whenever possible done sequentially. Put another way, whomever does best whatever needs to be done first should go unencumbered by the presence of forces not needed.
- Even more to the point -- a Navy doctor, having served with the Marines, in a letter to me while I was Commandant said: "I wonder if it has ever occurred to anyone that the Marines are the 'general practitioners' of our Armed Services, and therefore, like their medical analogue, make up the backbone of their profession? What the critics of this approach, both medical and military, fail to realize is that a good generalist can handle 90% of the acute problems and can skillfully stabilize and refer the other 10% -- not to mention the preventative role they are often called to play."

And so, Mr. Chairman, on this I believe we can agree: for the threats ahead, known and especially unknown, we need forces that are flexible, versatile and available. Flexible -- go to more than one kind of place. Versatile -- do more than one kind of thing. Available -- do it now! Doesn't that describe the Navy/Marine Corps team?

And so, Mr. Chairman, I respectfully recommend that you and your colleagues look to how to make the Marine Corps better, not substantially smaller.

I thank you most kindly for the opportunity to express a few of my thoughts. I commend your good work. I thank you for being who you are and I extend to you my warmest personal regards.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barrow". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Robert H. Barrow
General, USMC (Ret)
27th Commandant

Copy to:

General Carl Mundy
Commandant, Marine Corps