

# RAPID DEPLOYMENT:

## A VITAL TRUMP

by

P. X. KELLEY

*The View From the Fourth Estate feature of the September 1980 issue of Parameters reprinted an article by Thomas Toch ("Rapid Deployment: A Questionable Trump") which was critical of both the strategic concept of a US Rapid Deployment Force and the practical steps being taken to bring it to fruition. In the interest of providing readers a balanced perspective, Parameters invited Marine Corps Lieutenant General P. X. Kelley, Commander of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, to provide an authoritative public reply. The article below was submitted in response to Parameters' invitation.*

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**T**he Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force provides a new and vital dimension to the capabilities of our general purpose forces. Such a force is unique in our history. It marks the first time that a permanent, fully manned Joint Task Force Headquarters has been organized in peacetime with designated forces from all four services. Our mission is to plan, train, exercise, and prepare to deploy and employ combat forces from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

We have an integrated four-service staff headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, and a four-service Liaison Office with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. This office provides us the Washington-level connection so essential for effective crisis management. Our deputy commander is an Air Force major general, our chief of staff an Army brigadier general. So, no matter how you look at us, you see nothing but "purple," the color used to identify joint activities.

While we have been officially established only since March 1980, one would not know it by what we have accomplished. Since that time we have conducted a major command post employment exercise involving all four

major service components, participated in an extensive JCS worldwide crisis management exercise, operationally tested our complex deployment communications, and conducted major simulated and actual deployment exercises.

In my view, the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, or RDJTF, transmits a strong and powerful signal:

- To the Soviet Union, it says that we will not tolerate military adventurism. Threats to our friends and allies may constitute an assault on the vital interests of the United States, and when they do we have a military capability to respond.

- To our friends and allies, it says we are indeed a nation to be reckoned with. We are not a "paper tiger."

- To the young men and women in our Armed Forces, it says that we have confidence in their ability under any and all circumstances to do the job.

- And to the American public, it says that we, as a nation, have not forgotten our friends and allies, and that we have recognized the importance to the United States of the developing regions of the world.

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Since the end of World War II, the United States has undertaken extraordinary measures to bolster the European alliance. In my judgment, this has been the proper course, even though we might argue over "how much is enough for NATO." During the last decade and a half, however, we have seen the Soviets develop a more global perspective, so that they now appear to have designs, *along with the military capabilities to further those designs*, on other areas such as Africa and Southwest Asia. In such areas, Soviet intervention, through proxies in Angola and Ethiopia, and directly in the case of Afghanistan, has emerged as a new and disturbing threat. We as a nation cannot ignore this new Soviet overseas military threat, or the string of Soviet bases and forces to the north of Turkey, Iran, and now Pakistan. They call for new and effective US responses, and the RDJTF is one such response.

I should emphasize, however, that the concept of a Rapid Deployment Force is not truly new. A study conducted in 1977 highlighted the need for a four-service force which could deploy rapidly to meet contingencies outside NATO and Korea. Since American security priorities at the time were devoted primarily to NATO, the creation of such a contingency force was naturally placed on the back burner. But events in Afghanistan and Iran toward the end of 1979 have necessitated bringing the concept to the fore.

The RDJTF is a force of global orientation, designed primarily to cope with contingencies outside NATO and Korea. Owing to the critical importance of the Persian Gulf, it is quite natural that this region captures much of our attention, but it should be understood that the RDJTF must be prepared to deploy anywhere in the world.

**F**ormer President Carter, in his State of the Union speech on 23 January 1980, made clear the United States' determination to respond to threats to our vital interests in the Middle East. He said that any attempt by an outside power to gain control

of the Persian Gulf region would be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States and that such an assault would be repelled by any means necessary—including military force.

His concern, of course, ensued from the fact that the Free World is dependent on oil from the Persian Gulf area. Thirteen percent of the oil consumed in the United States comes from the region. Our allies depend even more heavily on it. Germany, for example, gets 45 percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf, Japan and France each 75 percent. If the flow of oil were stopped, the effect on the economies of the Western nations and Japan would be catastrophic.

Even if we as an individual nation could find a way to eliminate our dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf, our security problems would not be solved. Our security is tied directly and irrevocably to that of our allies and friends. As long as they are dependent, so are we.

Furthermore, we are strongly concerned

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Lieutenant General P. X. Kelley, USMC, is Commander of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. General Kelley is a graduate of Villanova University and the Air War College. From September 1960 to May 1961, he was the US Marine Corps Exchange Officer with the British Royal Marines. During that tour, he attended the Commando Course in England and served with 45 Commando in Aden and as a troop commander with 42 Commando in Singapore, Malaya, and Borneo. In August 1965, he was assigned to Vietnam, where he subsequently commanded 2d Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment. He returned to the United States in August 1966 and spent the next two years as the USMC Representative at the US Army Infantry School. Reassigned to Vietnam in June 1970, then-Colonel Kelley commanded the 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, until its redeployment back to the United States in May 1971; it was the last Marine ground combat unit to leave Vietnam. After appointment as brigadier general in August 1974, he was named Commanding General of the 4th Marine Division, at Camp Pendleton. In December 1979, he was nominated for his present position; he assumed command of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force on its activation, 1 March 1980. The present article is adapted from General Kelley's speech before the National Security Commission of the American Legion in Boston, 16 August 1980.



with the security and stability of the region regardless of oil. We are vitally interested in the independence of sovereign states and their freedom from Soviet domination. Those states are principally responsible for security in the region, but they cannot singly or together stand up to threats from the Soviets, who have demonstrated their willingness to use force as an aggressive instrument of national purpose. The countries of the Middle East require help from the United States—diplomatically, economically, and, if necessary, militarily—to buttress their own collective security efforts. In the aggregate, the rendering of such help is designed to protect the vital interests of the United States, its friends, and its allies in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.

It thus becomes obvious that the RDJTF is uniquely dependent on strategic mobility means, both airlift and sealift, and on the cooperation of our friends in the region—for both facilities and diplomatic support.

Unlike the Soviets, we do not have—nor do we seek—a permanent base structure near the Middle East. Navy and Marine forces can be deployed forward in time of crisis without requirements for basing en route, overflight rights, or forward operating bases. But all other forces, together with their supplies and equipment, must now move an enormous distance by air or ship. The distance from the United States to the Persian Gulf is 7000 air miles. It takes three to four weeks for a ship to move from the East Coast to the region.

Despite the distance, we have available to the RDJTF right now a balanced force which can, in a relative sense, deploy quite rapidly.

- We have carrier battle groups, two of which are presently deployed in the Indian Ocean.

- We have a Marine Amphibious Force—together with the necessary amphibious-adapted transport—which could commence movement when early warnings are received. This 50,000-man integrated air-ground team could be positioned offshore, independent of bases, to act as a strong deterrent or to move ashore when and where needed.

- We have seven supply vessels already prepositioned on station in the Indian Ocean. These ships are loaded with the heavy equipment and supplies needed to support an 11,000-man Marine amphibious brigade during an initial period of operations.

- We have 70 C-5, 234 C-141, and 490 C-130 aircraft for movement of an Army multi-division force. This force includes a combination of airborne, air-assault, mechanized, armor, ranger, and special forces elements. The transport aircraft will assist in the movement of an extensive tactical air force—including F-111s, A-7s, A-10s, F-15s, and F-4s—not to mention a conventional strategic force of B-52s from the Strategic Air Command. Of course, to do the transportation job better, we need even more strategic airlift as well as more amphibious capability and sealift.

So far as its employment is concerned, the RDJTF is designed for flexibility. We organize around the building-block principle, which means that we could tailor forces so as to respond to minor as well as major contingencies. Basically, we are designed to deter, and, if deterrence fails, to repel overt Soviet military aggression. We are not a force designed to intrude on the sovereign rights of any nation. Quite to the contrary, we are designed to insure that these same sovereign rights are maintained and protected.

Suppose, for example, that the Soviets, or any other aggressor, for that matter, seriously threatens the security of country "X" and it requests assistance from the United States. Obviously, our first reaction will be an attempt to solve the problem through diplomatic means. Should diplomacy fail we are then faced with two options:

- The first is to fall back and do nothing. In the Middle East and Persian Gulf that could be catastrophic to our future well-being.

- The other is to deploy rapidly (on invitation) the RDJTF—which acts as a deterrent by providing in the area a "credible presence." This "credible presence" transmits a signal to the Soviet Union that any further movements on its part could result in a direct confrontation with the

United States. This signal has two by-products: first, it changes the whole calculus of the adventure for the Soviets; second, it demonstrates to our friends and allies that we are willing to use force if necessary. In short, the RDJTF puts sharp and lethal teeth in the United States' foreign policy for the Middle East and Persian Gulf.

How rapid is the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force? If the United States is invited to do so, how fast can we get forces into the Persian Gulf region?

- We can put the first tactical air there in a matter of hours, some of it land-based and some of it from the carriers offshore.

- We can put the first battalion of the 82d Airborne Division there inside 48 hours, with the entire division following in less than two weeks.

- A task force of major dimensions can be deployed in the Gulf in the time it takes the Soviet Union to build up their undermanned and under-equipped divisions and then move them into the area.

How about the quality of the forces comprising the RDJTF? Even though we have acknowledged shortcomings in our military establishment, we have hundreds of thousands of superb young Americans in uniform today who have the patriotism, guts, determination, and professionalism to do the job required. The RDJTF is blessed with a goodly percentage of these young Americans. If their efforts are harmonized through the four services—and I can assure readers that

they will be—then the RDJTF will indeed be a formidable instrument in behalf of national defense.

**I** do not want to paint an overly optimistic picture of the capabilities of the RDJTF.

It is not the “do all, be all.” Like any military organization, it has its capabilities and limitations, and as the commander I am acutely aware of both sides of the coin. But, quite frankly, I am fed up with the “gloom and doom” prophets who see every Soviet soldier leaning forward in his foxhole—but every American fighting man or woman sitting on his or her backside not giving a damn. The young men and women in the Armed Forces today deserve our respect and admiration. Despite the obvious hardships which they endure almost daily, somehow or other their dedication and patriotism shine through.

I sometimes wonder where we as a nation would be today if the Weeping Willows had been in control during the Revolutionary War—or World War I—or World War II. If the modern-day analysts had looked at places like Tarawa, Iwo, or Normandy, they would have told us that the “force asymmetries” were such that we could not win. Well, we did win. The only alternative I see to a positive, yet realistic, approach is for us to hunker down and say that the job is impossible. Well, the job is not impossible—not when we have well over 200,000 young Americans who are willing, eager, and able to undertake it.

