Marine Gen. Smith: 'Expeditionary Foraging' a Component of Light, Mobile Logistics



U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Eric M. Smith, the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, speaks at the ribbon cutting ceremony at Modern Day Marine 2022 in Washington D.C. on May 10. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / photo by Cpl. Ellen Schaaf*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Marine Corps warfighting concept of Expeditionary Advance Base Operations needs light, mobile logistics to operate inside an enemy's weapon engagement zone, the Corps' assistant commandant said. Among other types of support, those logistics include "expeditionary foraging."

Gen. Eric M. Smith, speaking on Force Design 2030 in a June 15 webinar of the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank, used

the term “expeditionary foraging” to describe contracting with local merchants and vendors to supply disaggregated forces with goods and services that cannot be supplied by sealift or stockpiled because of the need to preserve mobility.

The term “foraging” brings to the mind of an American military historian an image of a soldier in the 19th century “requisitioning” – often stealing – chickens or other food sources from a local farmer to feed a moving army. The term “forage” was even applied to the type of caps – forage caps – worn by soldiers of the era.

Smith has no such thing in mind with the concept of expeditionary foraging. He cited the need to reorganize the 18 Marine combat logistics battalions to “deal with small, 80-to-100-Marine units who are strategically placed in order to facilitate fleet and joint maneuver. They have to be able to support those disaggregated units.

“Those disaggregated units have to need less,” Smith said. “We have a little pushback on this. It’s called ‘expeditionary foraging.’

“Expeditionary foraging is what we do today,” he said. “When we go to the Philippines, we have a contracting officer for a large exercise like Balikatan. That contracting officer pays a Filipino citizen for the use of a vehicle, for food, for water. We do that now. Why would we not do that in conflict? We will be in competition with an adversary for those same assets.

“But first you contract it if you can,” he said. “And then you utilize those assets that exist within any nation before you bring it yourself. It’s standard infantry business. … Expeditionary foraging doesn’t mean you’re out there with a tin cup asking for a handout. We do it now with contracting officers. One of the things we’re working to do is to place those contracting officers forward with those units. They can

contract for gravel, trucks, petroleum, all those things that, the more I procure locally, the less I have to bring.”

Smith said the logistics commands of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are still needed to support forward-deployed forces, but “we have to blunt [the enemy] in the first few days, so, yes, we take risks to do that. … We can’t build ‘iron mountains’ [of munitions and supplies] anymore. Those days have ended.”