

A Concept for Enhanced Company Operations

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Introduction: Enabling Marines to fight the long war

Abstract :

[The Marine Corps must] enable decentralized MAGTF operations—we should ensure we have the means to organize, train, and employ smaller MAGTFs built around company-sized ground combat elements by providing responsive C2I, air, and logistics resources. ...We should examine our doctrine, organization, training and manpower assignment policies to identify ways of facilitating this change.

-Final Conference Report

Future of Conflict: Hybrid Threats

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Since publication of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) in 1996, Marines have contemplated sea-based expeditionary operations against the full panoply of threats. In fact, OMFTS was one of the first official Marine Corps documents to describe the concept of "fighters," as opposed to the traditional notion of uniformed soldiers and national military forces. It has proven prescient in the years since September 11, 2001, a decade where military operations have repeatedly demonstrated the changing character of our enemies, as well as the requirement for more effective, oftentimes seemingly "non-doctrinal," force employment. Current forcible entry is a concept far removed from the landings of Korea, but that does not lessen the requirement for expertise in sea-based expeditionary operations, particularly those aimed at increasingly irregular threats. In this regard, the 1997 concept of Ship-to-Objective Maneuver (STOM) becomes increasingly relevant. While the Global War on Terror and its preeminent battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan have turned America's armed forces' attention towards the challenges of Irregular Warfare, they have also diverted attention from developing the very capabilities the United States needs if it hopes to prevent the sorts of conflict that can result in long-term and costly military interventions.

Publication of the Long War and Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025 were major steps toward orienting Marines to future military necessities. The Long War describes a distributed environment where forward presence and shaping activities seek to preclude crisis; yet, it also describes highly capable expeditionary forces with the capacity to conduct very efficient and traditional kinetic operations when required. It is incumbent on the Marine Corps combat development process to identify requirements that will lead to training, manning, and equipping Marines for the conduct of expeditionary operations across this spectrum. Tactical excellence is the bedrock on which operational acumen and, ultimately, strategic success is built.

1. The Company Commander at the Eye of the Storm

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication

1. [MCDP-1] Warfighting, with its theme of decentralized tactical operations, is timeless—and boldly underscored by current operations. Collective tasks and battlefield functions long the province of battalion commanders and their staffs have devolved to the company commander. Concomitant changes to doctrine, organization, training, manning, and equipping at the company-level have not moved as quickly. The implications are serious, as it has become increasingly clear that the company is the smallest tactical formation capable of sustained independent operations on distributed battlefields. The reality is that a great deal of work is needed to prepare the company commander for success in this ever expanding role.

Enhanced Company Operations describes an approach to the operational art that maximizes the tactical flexibility offered by true decentralized mission accomplishment, consistent with commander's intent and facilitated by improved command and control, intelligence, logistics, and fires capabilities. Enhanced Company Operations will be reliant on increased access to, and organic control of, functional support, as well as excellence at the individual, squad, and platoon levels. As such, it builds on the results of Distributed Operations experimentation and capability development to provide battalion commanders the critical link between operational planning and squad level tactical execution.

2. Implications for Combat Development

Enhanced Company Operations (ECO) will drive the full range of combat development activities towards delivering fully tested and operation

ally ready military capabilities to the company commander. Graduated experimentation, in-depth wargaming, and unbiased analysis will guide the identification and integration of solutions that address all facets of capability development, across all battlefield functions, Phase 0 through Phase 5 of the joint campaign.

The implications of ECO transcend the company, even the battalion. For the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) to reap the benefits of ECO, it will require modification to its training, organization, equipping- and perhaps, most of all, thinking-in order to fully exploit the capability. The MAGTF cannot do this alone, and the same combat development process that "enhances" the company, must ensure concomitant improvements are made to the MAGTF. The issue is far larger than the one described above as company-sized ground combat elements. The idea of company-sized MAGTFs might be more appropriate.

3. Enhancing Warfighting Capabilities and Requirements

Although it is convenient to identify requirements by functional area, it must be noted that significant overlap exists between them. As an example, intelligence drives maneuver and fires, but only if a robust command and control system exists. What follows are brief descriptions of ECO-related requirements. The list makes no pretense of being all encompassing, however, and is provided as a starting point for research, experimentation, wargaming, and other early stage combat development activities. During those events, requirements will be added and deleted as the enhanced company is better identified and scrutinized.

Your operations will be intelligence driven, but your intelligence will come mostly from your own operations. Intelligence will not be a "product," prepared and served up by higher headquarters. Rather, it will be feedback from your own actions. So you must organize for intelligence. You will need a company intelligence section-including some analysts.

-David Kilcullen,

The Twenty-eight Articles:

Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency

Intelligence is at the core of maneuver warfare and the first warfighting function that must be addressed in ECO capability development. Research, experimentation, and analysis must be performed to identify and develop a best practices model for a company-level intelligence capability that enables the company commander to collect, assess, and d

istribute action able intelligence, up, down, and across.

The company requires an organic capability to accomplish four broad intelligence-related requirements: increased situational awareness; collection and production of timely and accurate intelligence; collection management; and information management. Mission accomplishment in these areas will require a fresh look at how the company headquarters is manned, trained and equipped.

Maneuver is the product of good intelligence and must be able to adjust on the fly as the situation changes, whether from ship to objective, phase line to objective, or on day three of a peacekeeping mission. While enhanced mobility platforms continue to enter the inventory, combat developers must remain mindful that the requirement will always exist for dismounted units to accomplish selected missions. Maneuver is comprised of equal portions of mindset and mobility; the Corps approach to improving this critical capability must examine training and education every bit as much as developing air and ground mobility assets.

Investigation of mobility platforms, however, must not be limited to manned systems. The company's tactical formations, to the squad level, will require unmanned and autonomous systems that can reduce the Marine's load, carry heavy consumables, ammunition, batteries, etc. Sometimes the most critical maneuver is accomplished by the individual Marine, and often the greatest impediment to him doing so effectively is the plethora of chow, water, ammo, and batteries he must carry to the fight.

Fires involve effective use of all forms of direct and indirect fire. Their integration into the scheme of maneuver is a Marine Corps hallmark and MAGTF core competency. Never more so than on current and future battlefields, where the fan of the battalion's organic-or even immediately supporting-surface fires cannot cover the entire battlespace, and tactical units frequently operate well beyond conventional parameters of direct fire mutual support. Air-delivered fires must be accessible by leaders at all levels of the MAGTF, to include the squad leader. He must be as comfortable talking to the crew of an Air Force B-2 as he is a Marine attack helicopter. Historically, the single greatest impediment to achievement of this capability has been the relatively junior Marine's ability to provide accurate target location data. These Marines need a light weight device that provides accurate target

location, distance and direction. Just as importantly, they need the trust of their leaders, once they have been properly trained and equipped, to leverage the fires the MAGTF and joint force can provide.

The increased intelligence capability delivered by the company's intelligence cell is likely to generate more potential targets than in the past. From the purely fires perspective, this fact alone mandates development of improved company-level organic indirect fires. These fires must have better range and accuracy than the 60mm mortar, a vestige of an era when the company fought two up and one back over a battlespace measured in single digit kilometers and where suppression and area coverage were sufficient.

Of all the aspects of Marine Corps Operations in Complex and Distributed Environments, fires might be that which requires the most immediate attention of our doctrine writers. With battalions, even companies, operating over hundreds of miles and beyond the limits of mutual support, a fresh look at control measures and procedures is required.

Logistics has the potential to be the Achilles' heel of the company's ability to conduct the types of expeditionary and irregular warfare our warfighting concepts envision. Traditional and time-honored approaches need to be reviewed in the context of distributed operations in austere environments. Fast moving or dismounted tactical units will need to be secure in the knowledge that tailored re-supply will occur when they need it, with only what they need, exactly where they need it.

Perhaps more than in any other functional area, logistics can benefit from advanced technology, particularly as it relates to unmanned systems. Unmanned aerial and ground systems are a logical choice in distributed and high threat environments, both to conduct precision delivery of tailored packages and, when required, move injured Marines to where they can be safely evacuated by more traditional means.

Tactical units need a viable means of producing or foraging potable water. Reduction or elimination of the need to distribute this single commodity constitutes a giant step in streamlining company-level logistics.

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Information Operations (IO) is a critical component of every military operation. Company commanders must be able to plan and execute their

own programs, as well as exploit Joint capabilities. To achieve this.

Marines at all levels must be trained and educated on the importance of IO-as well as how to incorporate it into planning and monitor its execution. In this regard, it is no less important than fires, logistics, or any other battlefield function.

The company's IO capability must be organic to facilitate this integration. In the decentralized operations that will characterize future complex operational environments, the company commander cannot afford the delays inherent in higher level staff assessment and approval. Just as every Marine is a tactical intelligence collector, so must he be the physical embodiment of a well thought out, precisely executed, and constantly monitored IO plan.

Command and Control (C2) is not a term usually associated with the company level, at least in the past. The fact is, however, that company commanders can no longer plan and execute with paper map, grease pencil, and line of sight radios.

The company requires voice, data, and surveillance fused into a single common operating picture, in order to support centralized and distributed architectures. This includes support to highly mobile forces with on-the-move/over-the-horizon communications for disparate tactical nodes. Achieving this will require increased bandwidth and improved network services. Tactical units must gravitate from push-to-talk radio systems to mobile ad hoc mesh networking.

To be viable, solutions to the company commander's C2 gaps must be realistically useable by Marines with minimal specialized training and not create additional weight/footprint issues. Additionally, they must be compatible with the standardized Unit Operations Center Capability Set IV (battalion level), mandating an aggressive research and experimentation program to inform a similar capability at the company level. Such a standardized solution must cover dismounted and mounted operations.

Infantry Skills Simulation is a capability whose time has come and which can be used to assist in filling traditional training gaps. It does not replace live training, but Marine tactical units need the capability to use simulation technologies to train better at the individual, team, squad, and platoon levels. This runs the gamut from individual moving target engagement to tactical planning and execution. The requirement also exists for small units to virtually rehearse missions pr

ior to execution, in order to build situational awareness and intuitive decision-making skills, before they venture into harm's way.

4. Conclusion

Implementing ECO requires focusing the Marine Corps combat development process on company level operations. Capabilities that emerge from ECO will benefit not only the rifle company commander, but tactical commanders across the ground combat element and even logistics support element. By so doing, the overall capability of the MAGTF to conduct expeditionary operations in complex and austere environments will be significantly improved. ECO will present unique challenges that cannot be wished away. Factors such as weight and cube have the potential to be show stoppers. Casualty treatment and evacuation are non-negotiable, as is timely, tailored distribution of essential supplies. The operating environment envisioned by The Long War and the operational concepts that preceded it present unique challenges. It is incumbent on the operating forces and combat development community to work together to identify the capability gaps, clearly define the operational requirements, and then work tirelessly to develop the right solutions. Our Marines at the tip of the MAGTF spear deserve no less.