



# **MARINE CORPS OPERATING CONCEPT**



***How an Expeditionary Force  
Operates in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

***September 2016***

## How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Key Points

Our ability to execute the Marine Corps Operating Concept in the future operating environment will require a force that has:

- Integrated as a full partner with the Navy, Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the Joint force – *because Marines both contribute and benefit from unique and complementary capabilities across the range of military operations (ROMO) and across all five domains.*
- Devised and refined an approach to operate from more diverse platforms and expeditionary advanced bases as part of a Naval campaign – *because fighting at and from the sea was, is, and will remain a core competency that the Nation requires.*
- Exploited the ability of our largest MAGTF, the Marine Expeditionary Force, to serve as a reservoir of capability from which to tailor the force at every level – *because the Marine Corps is unique in its ability to task-organize for any situation.*
- Mastered the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century combined arms as our means to conduct maneuver warfare across all domains – *because we will exploit every opportunity to gain an advantage.*
- Organized, trained and equipped all echelons to integrate information warfare as a combination of creative thinking and advanced technology – *because conducting information warfare is what we all do, every day.*
- Designed and protected our C2 and ISR networks as a multi-source information sharing architecture that reliably serves disparate MAGTF elements – *because distributing actionable information keeps operations in chaotic environments from becoming chaotic operations.*
- Configured the MAGTF to fight and win when it fluidly distributes and concentrates elements – *because maneuver warfare and combined arms create combat power at any scale.*
- Enabled small units to achieve greater effects – *because they can leverage the full combat power of the MAGTF and Naval/Joint forces*
- Redesigned our logistics to support distributable forces across a dynamic and fully contested battlespace – *because iron mountains of supply and lakes of liquid fuel are liabilities and not supportive of maneuver warfare.*
- Learned how to use unmanned systems and automation at all echelons and in every domain – *because mastering the man-machine interface offers a revolution in military operations.*
- Set the mental and physical standards for Marine infantry through a mission-driven perspective that fully recognizes the demands on foot-mobile forces conducting operations in austere environments – *because superior infantry is a Marine Corps asymmetric advantage.*
- Developed leaders at all echelons who know how to fight in the complex terrain of densely populated urban environments and understand the power of information and information warfare – *because “fighting hard” and “fighting smart” are not mutually exclusive.*
- Designed and implemented manpower systems, policies, and processes to attract, develop, retain, and support highly qualified Marines and civilian employees prepared for the rigors of 21<sup>st</sup> century expeditionary operations – *because we are in a fight for the best and brightest talent.*
- Overcome the enduring obstacles to leveraging and sustaining “commercial-off-the-shelf systems” – *because affordable “70%” solutions now are better than outdated solutions 10 years from now.*

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HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
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As a warfighting organization, we must recognize the challenges of the future and develop an operational approach to fight and win. The MOC embraces our Naval character, expeditionary mindset, and professional approach to constantly improve and build on our foundations of maneuver warfare and fighting as a combined arms force. The challenges of the future will impact how we organize our Corps and ultimately fight our Nation's battles. The MOC describes the steps we will take to design, develop, and field a future force for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The success of this concept depends on our Marines and Sailors. Our people have always been the Marine Corps center of gravity and the key to our success as warfighters. Their ability to think critically, innovate smartly, and adapt to complex environments and adaptive enemies has always been the key factor we rely on to win *in any clime and place*.

The profession of arms is unforgiving; mistakes are paid for in blood and incompetence can lead to catastrophic defeat. When we fight, we must win. There is no alternative. The American people expect and deserve nothing less from their Marine Corps. Our preparation for the inevitable conflicts of the future begins with this operating concept. It charts how we will transform ourselves to deter and defeat the threats of tomorrow. Yet the MOC also acknowledges the timeless, violent nature of war and reaffirms our primary purpose. *The Marine Corps exists to defeat our Nation's enemies*. Even in a world of ever-increasing technology, we must continue to provide combat formations capable of closing with and destroying the enemy. This imperative drives us to demand physical toughness and resilience in our Marines and Sailors, and expect their brilliance in the fundamentals of warfighting. While the means and methods we use to wage war will evolve, we must always be prepared for the violence of combat.

The MOC does not provide an answer to every problem. Rather, it is intended to generate professional debate and discussion about our future challenges. We need every Marine and Sailor to seek creative solutions to today's and tomorrow's complex problems. We need your ideas and your critical thinking. We need to change where it makes sense, adapt as quickly as possible, and constantly innovate to stay ahead of our adversaries. Our ability to adapt more quickly than our enemies will be vital to our future success. We need all Marines to read, discuss, and challenge the ideas in the MOC. As steel sharpens steel, your review and professional recommendations will sharpen our concept of how we will fight in the future. Your proactive involvement in validating our operating concept is critical to ensuring we can *Innovate, Adapt, and Win!*

Semper Fidelis,



Robert B. Neller  
General, United States Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps

## Purpose

The purpose of our Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) is twofold:

- Describe in broad terms how the Marine Corps will operate, fight, and win in 2025 and beyond.
- Shape our actions as we design and develop the capabilities and capacity of the future force.

The goal is a Marine Corps that, as an integral part of both the Naval force and the Combined/Joint force, is a tailorable, flexible, and versatile force capable of responding to any crisis across the full range of military operations. We must be a coherent and fully integrated *Naval Force* that can contribute to deterrence, provide maritime security, perform sea control, and project power ashore to impose our will upon adversaries. We must be an *Expeditionary Force* that is trained and equipped and able to operate in austere conditions and hostile environments. We must be an *Agile Force* that can navigate the physical and cognitive dimensions of complex situations and seize the initiative. We must be a *Lethal Force* with a 21st century approach to combined arms that integrates information warfare and seeks to destroy and defeat our enemies across five domains— air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. Ultimately, we must continue to be a *Winning Force*. As Marines have always done, when our Nation calls upon us, we must fight and win regardless of the dimension or domain. *Victory is our legacy — in the past, now, and in the future.*

## The Central Problem

*The Marine Corps is not organized, trained, and equipped to meet the demands of a future operating environment characterized by complex terrain, technology proliferation, information warfare, the need to shield and exploit signatures, and an increasingly non-permissive maritime domain.*

The MOC is the starting point to address this problem by reaffirming the primacy of maneuver warfare and combined arms for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and identifying the critical tasks to develop the future force.

## Our Operating Concept: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maneuver Warfare

*The 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF conducts maneuver warfare in the physical and cognitive dimensions of conflict to generate and exploit psychological, technological, temporal, and spatial advantages over the adversary. The 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF executes maneuver warfare through a combined arms approach that embraces Information Warfare as indispensable for achieving complementary effects across five domains – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. The 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF avoids linear, sequential, and phased approaches to operations and blends maneuver warfare and combined arms to generate the combat power needed for simultaneity of action in its full range of missions. The 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF operates and fights at sea, from the sea, and ashore as an integrated part of the Naval force and the larger Combined/Joint force.*

This expansion and enhancement of our warfighting approach is necessary to ensure that we continue to defeat enemies and win our Nation's battles.



## Critical Tasks to Develop the Future Force

As a warfighting organization, we must continue to innovate and adapt to ensure that we restore and maintain our competitive edge across the spectrum of conflict over all adversaries. The MOC identifies five critical tasks and associated issue areas to guide our effort to change how we organize, train, equip, and sustain the Marine Corps to operate, fight, and win in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The scope and scale of the implied changes are not trivial; they cut across the Marine Corps as an institution. The tasks associated with these changes require us to come to terms with new missions, acquire and master new capabilities, and evolve or create organizations. The tasks are actions to achieve specific objectives.

### Critical Task: Integrate the Naval Force to Fight At and From the Sea

The Marine Corps must intellectually return to our maritime roots with a renewed focus on Naval integration, especially in light of increasing challenges to access and entry in and around the littorals. This means preserving the credibility and capability of **forward and ready Naval forces** that fully leverage modern amphibious platforms, exploring alternative approaches to power projection, and integrating MAGTF forces from amphibious warfare ships, expeditionary land bases and auxiliary ships with other forward forces. The MAGTF must **increase its role in supporting Sea Control and Power Projection** as a cohesive Naval force unit when operating in a distributed manner. The Marine Corps will accomplish this by **integrating command structures, creating lodgments, and employing Expeditionary Advanced Bases (EABs) to conduct littoral operations in a contested environment.**



### Critical Task: Evolve the MAGTF

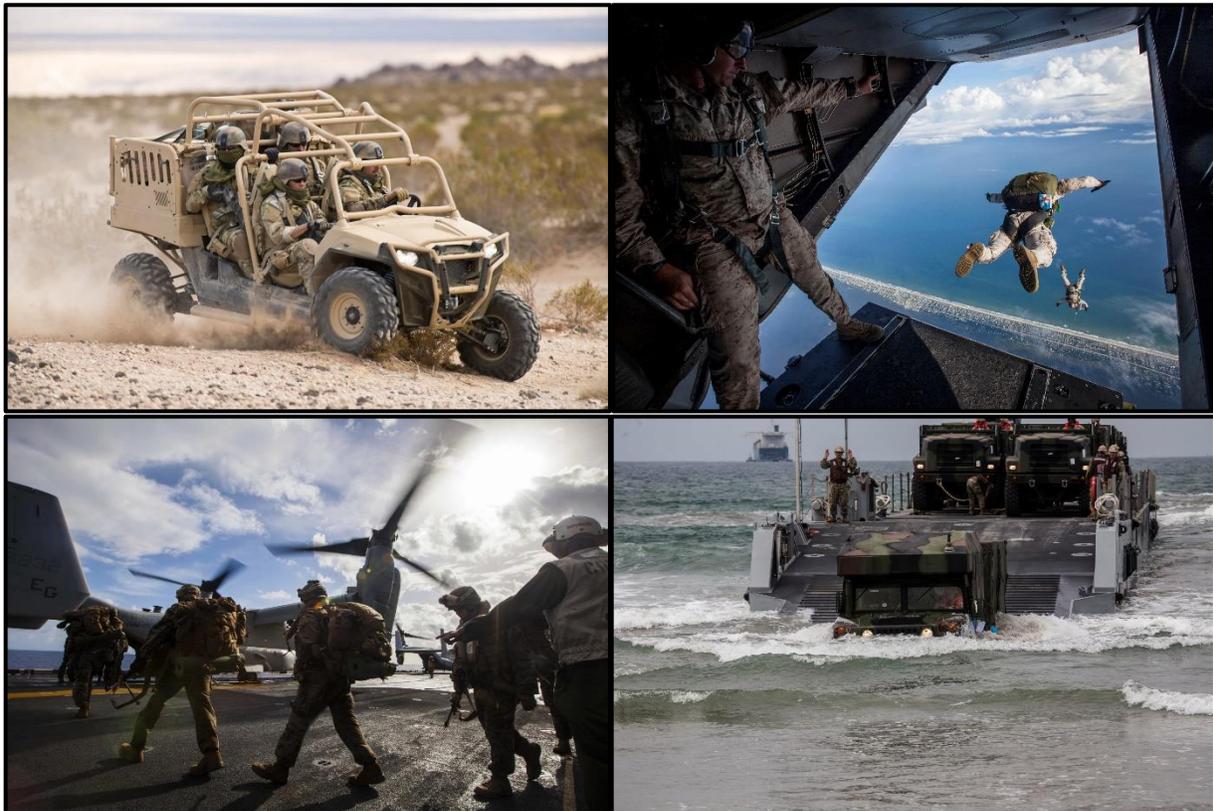
The MAGTF and its ability to task-organize across the ROMO is a proven concept that remains our “first principle” for force organization. We must examine how we organize and employ MAGTFs as units capable of meeting challenges in the future operating environment. This includes remaining capable of **MEF-level Operations** to exploit success in amphibious landings, turn an adversary’s flank, or create opportunities for future Joint force actions. This means **integrating command, control and informational tools** across the force, maintaining our ability to conduct **unified action** in Joint and Combined operations, **integrating MAGTF-SOF capabilities, overcoming the challenges of compositing forces**, and maintaining the ability to provide **distributable forces**. The MAGTF will continue to be enhanced by **exploiting automation**, especially manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) and by seeking a **total force approach to readiness** in order exploit the unique capabilities of both reserve and active forces.

### Critical Task: Operate with Resilience in a Contested-Network Environment

The future operating environment compels us to exhaust all possibilities to protect our C2 and information networks while simultaneously exploiting networking to put ourselves into position to gain all the possible advantages thereof. This includes operating with ruthless prioritization of information sharing between the various command echelons while being prepared to operate with imperfect information. We must take into account the **role of signature in offense and defense** to mitigate the enemy's targeting of our network and exploit enemy C2 vulnerabilities. We must shorten the kill chain by **networking for rapid/precise fires** and **pushing processing power to the tactical edge**. Lastly, we must utilize an **enhanced concept of intelligence** to rapidly sense, make sense of, and act upon information.

### Critical Task: Enhance Our Ability to Maneuver

Maneuver warfare remains our doctrine and requires action in the physical and cognitive dimensions of conflict. The 21<sup>st</sup> century MAGTF must be able to maneuver equally well in both dimensions to achieve psychological, technological, temporal, and spatial advantages. Maneuver warfare applies to both **Naval and littoral maneuver** and requires a **broader concept of combined arms/information warfare** that includes military information support operations (MISO), military deception (MILDEC), operations security (OPSEC), electronic warfare (EW), physical attack, special technical operations (STO), information assurance (IA), computer network operations (CNO), public affairs (PA), and civil-military operations (CMO). The MAGTF must also be prepared to conduct **urban operations in complex terrain**. This requires maintaining **infantry mobility** and utilizing both **light and heavy forces**, as well as improving **expeditionary logistics** and **operational energy** to support the MAGTF.



### Critical Task: Exploit the Competence of the Individual Marine

The Marine Corps is a personnel-centric military organization. As such, we must ensure our ability to exploit our asymmetric advantage: the U.S. Marine. We must modernize our personnel policies to improve our access to **high-quality human capital** and better **train and educate Marines for the integrated Naval force**. Training and education must be focused on **developing Marines for the harshness and complexity of the battlefield**, and **developing leaders at every echelon**. We must continue our efforts towards **cultural learning** and **emphasize quality in leadership positions**. We must **improve the return on this training and education investment** in terms of managing individual talent across the Total Force regardless of MOS and improving retention. Even as we pursue greater networking of the force, we must resist the temptation to use the connectivity to centralize decision-making, and in so doing undercut our ability to take full advantage of the qualified, trained, experienced, and capable Marine.



### Priorities and Risk

The Nation requires a Marine Corps that can fight and win in the future operating environment. To meet that requirement, the MOC outlines a force capable of conducting maneuver warfare with a 2<sup>1st</sup> century approach to combined arms that leverages the additive and complementary effects of information warfare. This force cannot be realized in part – forgoing one element to focus on another will compromise the whole. It must be created as a coherent solution, comprising to some degree all of the requisite capabilities and capacities.

Our greatest risk is that we become unbalanced in our development of a future Marine Corps that is at once Naval, expeditionary, agile and lethal. Nevertheless, we will have to contend with the limiting effect of budgetary constraints, account for technological hurdles, and promote a shared sense of urgency to fend off any argument that “business as usual” is a viable option going forward. We will consider the timelines, resources and effectiveness associated with competing ideas and alternative methods for realizing the necessary capabilities and capacities. We will look for the intersection of the highest levels of military utility, technical feasibility and institutional affordability to establish priorities for bringing this future force into being as a coherent whole.

### Summary

The Marine Corps Operating Concept provides the framework for how we will fight and win in the future operating environment. It shapes our force by outlining and developing the capabilities and capacity necessary to defeat tomorrow’s enemies. I ask that all of our partners and supporting organizations review the concept and its critical tasks to develop an appreciation for our future course and determine how they can improve their relationships with the Marine Corps. I charge all Marines and Sailors to read, discuss, debate and act on the ideas within this document. *I challenge all to help build the future force that will prove its mettle once again in combat and contribute to our legacy of victory.*

*"Fundamental to our character as a Marine Corps is our role as the Nation's force-in-readiness. We must continue to be ready for operations across the range of military operations (ROMO). At the same time, we recognize the current and future fight may not be what we experienced in the past. It will encompass not just the domains of land, air and sea, but also space and the cyber domain. It will include information operations and operations across the electromagnetic spectrum. It will involve rapidly changing and evolving technologies and concepts, which will force us to be more agile, flexible and adaptable. Most importantly, it will require Marines who are smart, fit, disciplined, resilient, and able to adapt to uncertainty and to the unknown."*

**General Robert B. Neller**  
37th Commandant of the Marine Corps

