

Closing the Seams in Naval Integration

Actual action or more spilled ink?

by Maj Andrew Roberts

Naval integration is amongst the most important issues that we now face. We are currently poised against peer competitors whilst engaged in great power competition. The need for proper naval integration is more exigent and the situation more dire than we have seen in many years. As the Marine Corps and Navy develop and implement new operational concepts such as *Distributed Maritime Operations* (DMO), *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* (LOCE), and *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (EABO) in the face of this competition, naval integration will move from being a talking point to an absolute necessity. This article proposes a way to connect concepts with doctrine to facilitate naval integration.

The Need for Integration and a Smart First Step

The operating environment is becoming fully contested across all domains by peer adversaries. These adversaries are blurring the seams between domains and creating a force designed and equipped to take full advantage of simultaneous and seamless operations in the entirety of the battlespace, including the non-physical domain of cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum. The need for the naval force to respond to this challenge was stated by Gen James F. Amos and ADM Jonathan W. Greenert while serving as Commandant of the Marine Corps and Chief of Naval Operations, respectively:

We need to remove seams that have an impact on our ability to fight as a naval team ... Marine planners must understand Fleet operations ... Navy

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We need to be able to meet the demands of the Nation. (Photo by LCpl Margaret Gales.)

staffs, especially those that employ our amphibious capabilities, will have to understand and practice employment of Marine capabilities across the range of military operations. From our perspective, the naval force of today is short of that standard.¹

By their admission, the naval force of 2013 did not meet the requirement for naval integration that their contemporary challenges were demanding from them. Five years later, with the challenges even greater, are we meeting the

requirement that the Nation demands of us?

We must no longer afford for the high-water mark to be a delineation between Navy and Marine Corps capabilities and responsibilities. It will take a naval team effort to deter and defeat peer competitors in any future joint campaign that is maritime in character, with ashore and afloat forces and capabilities seamlessly operating to achieve victory. The members of the naval team must understand their team-

mates and refine how they fight from organizational, capability, and doctrinal perspectives. Since there is no reason to have a Marine Corps without a navy, and the U.S. Navy is larger, more complex, has the greater budget, and will provide the primary warfighting forces in a maritime campaign, the Marine Corps must understand how the Navy fights. More specifically, to fully realize the competitive advantages in DMO, LOCE, and EABO, the Marine Corps must understand how the Navy fights via its composite warfare doctrine and study how to best incorporate into the larger naval effort. This is not a novel idea; in the early 1990s, the *Gazette*

in *Navy Warfare Publication 3-56 (NWP 3-56)*, *Composite Warfare: Maritime Operations at the Tactical Level of War*. The key takeaways from composite warfare doctrine that are pertinent to the C2 of naval forces are:

- Composite warfare doctrine facilitates simultaneous, integrated offensive and defensive combat operations against multiple targets and threats. The senior officer in charge of a maritime operation is designated the officer in tactical command (OTC). In a maritime operating area that has multiple task forces operating within it, the common superior will be the navy forces commander/joint force mari-

spective mission areas are: air and missile defense commander, information warfare commander, anti-submarine warfare commander, surface warfare commander, and strike warfare commander. The warfare commanders support or receive support from the other warfare commanders as the tactical situation demands and the CWC directs.

- Composite warfare doctrine is primarily focused on Navy forces at sea. With respect to Marine Corps forces, composite warfare doctrine includes amphibious operations in that the commander amphibious task force is also the CWC of the amphibious task force. Composite warfare doctrine details various command and control configurations of the amphibious task force based on size and task organization to include working with other task forces via the different support situations as detailed in *NWP 3-56*.

Of note, composite warfare doctrine does not specifically address littoral operations nor does it consider expeditionary warfare a specific warfare area. While composite warfare is not addressed specifically in the *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (Washington, DC: HQMC, September 2016), the LOCE concept proposes creating a sixth warfare area and warfare commander, expeditionary warfare and expeditionary warfare commander, respectively. Although LOCE was signed by the CNO and the CMC and published in 2017, the initial implementation of LOCE has been inconsistent but appears to be gaining more attention.

Emerging Operating Concepts: LOCE and EABO

Littoral operations include military operations in the seaward and landward portions of the maritime domain. An amphibious operation is narrower in scope than littoral operations in that it is a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force to conduct landing force operations within the littorals.⁵ This distinction is important as it applies to command and control of Marine Corps forces. As the character of naval warfare rapidly changes because of emerging technology and peer com-

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published a series of articles by a number of thoughtful Marines advocating this idea. Included among them was a piece by then-Maj Thomas Waldhauser in 1992.² That was 27 years ago—long enough time for the author to advance to full general—yet the Marine Corps has failed to heed his call for action. We must succeed this time rather than producing another abortive attempt. It should be noted that exploration does not necessarily involve a binary choice for or against adoption of composite warfare by the Marine Corps. There are those in the Navy who question whether they have the right doctrine. However, by partnering with the Navy to explore how Marine Corps forces might fight within the composite warfare doctrine, we will begin the process of experimentation that will help us refine a preferred doctrinal solution for fighting as an integrated naval team.

Navy Composite Warfare doctrine

The Navy composite warfare doctrine is an approach that allows for speed, agility, flexibility, and resilience to be fully realized and practiced. At the tactical level, the Navy fights using composite warfare doctrine, as detailed

time component commander (NFC/JFMCC). Unless the NFC/JFMCC assigns OTC command functions to one of the task forces, the NFC/JFMCC will simultaneously be an operational and tactical-level command.³ The JFMCC will be the operational commander of all maritime forces and will be the tactical commander of the multiple task forces.

- Composite warfare is conducted by the OTC to enable the decentralized control of the tactical force. It is intended to be flexibly enacted depending on the composition and mission of the force and capabilities of the adversary.

- The composite warfare commander (CWC) is an officer to whom the OTC may delegate authority to conduct some or all of the offensive and defensive functions of a task force. Usually each task force will have its own CWC, but they may be combined as the situation dictates, forming different support situations.⁴

- The CWC decentralizes control by assigning command functions associated with mission areas to warfare commanders. The five warfare area commanders responsible for their re-

petitors, the C2 arrangement between CATF and commander landing force addressed in amphibious doctrine may be inadequate to address the wider scope of 21st century littoral operations. To address the challenges inherent in conducting operations in the littorals in the face of great power competition, a new operating concept was developed. The key takeaways from LOCE that remain pertinent to the C2 of naval forces are:

- As noted above, the littorals are a subset of the maritime domain that is composed of two segments. First, the seaward portion is that area from the open ocean to the shore that must be controlled to support operations ashore. Second, the landward portion is the area inland from the shore that can be supported and defended directly from the sea.

- The term “contested” is used to encompass both the uncertain and hostile environments as defined in joint doctrine. An uncertain environment is one in which host-government forces do not have effective total control of the territory and population in the intended operational area. A hostile environment is one in which hostile forces have control.

- The increased range of modern sensors and weapons extends both seaward and landward. This blurs the distinction between operations at sea and on land creating command and control challenges of a force operating ashore as part of the naval scheme of maneuver.

- Adversaries with landbased and seabased systems have implemented sea denial strategies with long-range sensors and precision fires.

- Navy and Marine Corps forces are often employed as separate entities in an artificially divided battle space.

- MAGTF command and control is designed for seaborne power projection ashore. There is untapped potential to make significant contributions to the sea control fight from a landbased posture.

- A unified naval approach that effectively integrates sea control and maritime power projection from the littorals (seaward and landward) is needed.



Range of adversary's weapons has increased significantly and may impede amphibious operations. (Photo by Connor D. Loessin.)

In addition, LOCE introduces the idea of EABO, wherein Navy and Marine expeditionary forces operate ashore to conduct sea denial or support sea control using CWC to integrate with fleet/JFMCC operations. However, C2 of seaward-oriented but ashore-based sensors and weapons systems remains unresolved in littoral operations. Current C2 of ashore-based assets is limited to a support relationship between naval forces under the JFMCC and Marine Corps forces typically operating under the joint forces land component commander or other landbased joint command. This relationship is established at the joint forces commander level. It seems self-evident that when executing a naval scheme of maneuver, Marine forces ashore should be under the command of the OTC as either their own task force or the ashore portion of a CWC's task force. If organized as their own task force, the OTC may direct Marine forces ashore to be in one of the supporting situations as detailed in chapter six of *NWP 3-56*.

Recommendations

The takeaways from both *NWP 3-56* and LOCE, combined with the ideas in EABO, point toward the need for Marine forces to integrate into the Navy composite warfare doctrine. With that

in mind, the following recommendations are:

- Direct Training and Education Command to include *NWP 3-56* in all SNCO and officer curricula. Develop periods of instruction with Navy Education Command and request guest instructors.

- Rotate action officers in the force development enterprise, specifically Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL) and Capabilities Development Directorate, through the Navy Joint Maritime Tactics Course taught at Tactical Training Group Atlantic to gain an immediate understanding of composite warfare and how the Navy fights.

- Direct MCWL Wargaming division, in conjunction with the Navy, to design and conduct a wargame to test how an expeditionary warfare commander will be added and used in composite warfare doctrine.

- Direct MCWL Experimentations Division, in conjunction with the Navy, to design and conduct a small-scale experiment with fielded forces to test how an expeditionary warfare commander will be added and used in composite warfare doctrine.

- Direct MCWL Concepts and Plans Division, in conjunction with Navy Warfare Development Command, to

write a tactical memorandum detailing the integration of Navy and Marine Corps expeditionary warfare capabilities into composite warfare doctrine for use within the above wargames and experiments.

- Based on the results of the wargame and small-scale experiments, expand testing of the use of composite warfare doctrine and the expeditionary warfare commander into all events where Navy and Marine Corps forces exercise and train together, such as PACIFIC BLITZ and RIM of the PACIFIC.

- When discussing Marine Corps operations in the context of maritime campaigns, change the lexicon from Marine operations *supporting* the naval scheme of maneuver, to that of being *part of* the naval scheme of maneuver. Any statement or discussion of Marine Corps forces supporting the naval scheme of maneuver is flawed at the premise. The Marine Corps is part of the Naval Service, organized within the Department of the Navy, as the closing line of any personal award citation attests. Therefore, unless directly assigned to the JFLCC conducting sustained operations in a land campaign, any scheme of maneuver the Marine Corps executes is inherently naval. Marine Corps operations should not support the naval scheme of maneuver; they are an integral part of the naval scheme of maneuver.

- Any discussion of naval integration begins and ends with command arrangements, to include the assignment of missions, battlespace, task organization, and command relationships. Marines, particularly senior leaders, must ask themselves hard questions: Will we work directly for a navy OTC or CWC? Not “does it make sense,” but will we allow ourselves to be commanded and directed by the Navy? Are we comfortable with fleet commanders using the phrase “my Marines”? The character of a maritime campaign demands that the Navy be the lead warfighting institution; Will we acquiesce to not being the “tip of the spear”? What is good for the Nation, the joint force, and the naval team may be outside our current comfort zone. Will we do it or will we

fight our friends in defense of our ego as tenaciously as we would fight the enemy in battle?

Conclusion

Composite warfare doctrine is primarily focused on naval forces afloat. It needs to be expanded to include Marine and Navy forces ashore in the littoral environment. The LOCE concept proposes the creation of a sixth warfare area, expeditionary warfare, to be commanded by an expeditionary warfare commander. This idea should be tested and analyzed in wargames and experiments. Marines must understand and be familiar with composite warfare and how the Navy fights. *NWP 3-56* should be read and studied, at the very least by SNCOs and officers. Composite warfare should be taught in professional

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military education programs from the SNCO Academy through all levels of officer professional military education. More training should be conducted with Navy units at the battalion level and above. As the speed of battle and the required speed of decision increase due to advances in fields such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, missile technology, and hyper-sonic weapons, the Marine Corps should study and potentially adopt the principles of Composite Warfare doctrine.

Composite warfare doctrine is designed to fight and defeat an enemy who is active in multiple domains simultaneously with greater speed, flexibility, and survivability and is therefore preferable to a cross-component support relationship. Essentially, composite warfare is a standardized network of support relationships solidly within the naval tradition, culture, and practice developed in response to the increasing speed and fury of naval combat, par-

ticularly in the age of missile warfare. The standard cross-component support relationship lacks the familiarity with applicable supported command SOPs, is a one-way support relationship only (i.e., not mutually supporting), and fails to appreciate the challenges of the 21st century contested littoral environment. Additionally, cross-component support between Navy and Marine forces is a near oxymoron as we are both part of the Naval Service and should not have cross-component support, particularly when Marine forces are organized under the JFMCC and working for the OTC. For these reasons, the Marine Corps must study, understand, and develop a plan to experiment with and operate within the composite warfare doctrine. It is beyond time that the Marine Corps moves past being simply naval in character and becomes truly naval in purpose. Will this article be part of a plan of action, or join its predecessors as more spilled ink? Our leaders have a choice to make.

Notes

1. Gen James F. Amos and ADM Jonathan W. Greenert, “A New Naval Era,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, (Annapolis, MD: June 2013).
2. See Maj Thomas Waldhauser, “Composite Warfare/Amphibious Warfare Doctrine Dilemma,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: November 1992).
3. Department of the Navy, *Navy Warfare Publication 3-56, Composite Warfare: Maritime Operations at the Tactical Level of War*, (Washington, DC: December 2015).
4. “SUPSITs establish a collaborative arrangement, rather than a command relationship between commanders. The commander ordering support operations will indicate the type of SUPSIT that will apply.” *NWP 3-56*.
5. Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations*, (Washington, DC: January 2017).

