



28 December 2018

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDING GENERAL MARINE CORPS WARFIGHTING LABORATORY

In the *Marine Operating Concept* (MOC) and each of his annual Frag Orders, the Commandant has consistently emphasized that we must develop and field a more lethal, resilient, and adaptive force, capable of operating in the most demanding environments. At the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab (MCWL), we continue to address the Commandant's 5 MOC Critical Tasks—integrate the naval force to fight at and from the sea; evolve the MAGTF; operate with resiliency in a contested-network environment; enhance our ability to maneuver; and exploit the competence of the individual Marine. These innovation and modernization imperatives are driven by expansive technology development gains that provide us significant opportunity, as well as by impressive adversary improvements in military capabilities and operational design. As a team—aligned to the toughest problems and best insights of the Operating Forces, and along with key organizations across Headquarters Marine Corps—we are making progress in implementing the Commandant's direction, but *we are in a race, and we have a tremendous amount of work to do.*

At MCWL, we focus our force development efforts on the 2025–2030 timeframe, driven by intensive study of the future operating environment. We have identified and are working to address 6 priority operational challenges that require an institutional solution. These challenges include:

- *Providing capabilities and operational concepts for military competition below the threshold of conflict.* The National Defense Strategy highlighted the challenge of meeting the aggression of our strategic competitors that occurs below the threshold of conflict, and that is in fact designed by our adversaries to culminate short of provoking a U.S. response. While risk tolerances and policy objectives will remain the prerogative of our senior-most leaders, we are developing concepts for applying future military capabilities in a manner that allows risk to be calibrated, and that imposes tailorable strategic or operational costs. The development of these concepts is specifically designed to support maneuver in the cognitive domain and to achieve positions of operational advantage by maneuvering in competition, in advance of active conflict.
- *Closing the force in a highly contested environment.* The Commandant often talks about “fighting to get to the fight.” Given the emergence and increasing density of adversary long-range ISR and strike capabilities, closing the force in a time-compressed, escalating contingency will be progressively more difficult over time. Forward deployed and rapidly deployable expeditionary and amphibious MAGTFs have a head start on addressing this challenge, but current capabilities and capacity are insufficient for the force closure demands of the 2025–2030 timeframe. To remain credible and relevant, our forward deployed and rapidly deployable forces *must* be able to transition, within very limited time periods, to a warfighting posture that is lethal and survivable against adversary long-range ISR and strike systems.
- *Sustaining the force in the face of high-density adversary long-range strike capabilities.* In the same manner that we expect challenges to closing the force in a future contingency, we expect it to be extremely difficult to sustain the force in this environment, across operational and tactical distances. Meeting the demands of sustaining the force in the future operating environment will require significantly improved logistics command and control, renewed consideration of pre-positioning, unmanned and autonomous logistics distribution, advanced manufacturing, battlefield logistics demand reduction, tactical-level foraging, and the execution of all sustainment activities as potentially high-risk tactical actions.

• *Providing capabilities and operational concepts optimized for conflict against great power military forces.* The future operating environment will place additional demands on MAGTFs to operate faster, with more precision, at greater ranges, from a more dispersed posture. We must be able to better sense the environment, make rapid decisions, apply force, and disrupt adversary operations. We must be able to do so as an increasingly integrated component of the naval and Joint Force, in environments in which all of our operations and activities are heavily contested across all domains. In many cases, our current and preferred solutions are inadequate for the expected future operational demands presented by our pacing challenges. Meeting these demands will require new material solutions, new approaches to training and education, and re-conceptualization of how we will structure and conduct our operations.

• *Persisting in forward locations under intense operational pressure.* Future operations against our pacing challenges or adversaries that adapt the technology of our pacing threats will demand the disciplined application of signature management techniques, as well as the integration of sophisticated tools for breaking adversary kill chains. Marine formations must excel at all the basics of camouflage, frequent displacements, dispersion, and limited communications, and gain the sophisticated tools that challenge our adversary's ability to sense the environment and to command and control their forces.

• *Sustaining small-unit excellence.* As adversary long-range ISR and strike capabilities drive us to operate from an increasingly dispersed and mobile posture, we also expect that our command and control networks will be under intense electronic and cyber-attack. To compensate for the challenges presented by this combination of factors, we will place even greater demands on individual Marines and small units. In the MOC, the Commandant tasked us to "exploit the capabilities of the individual Marine," and we are pursuing both enhancements to their capabilities, as well as tools that allow us greater leverage off their initiative and expertise.

Meeting these challenges will continue to demand the full contribution of Marines across the entire institution. Planning, coordination, and execution of our future force development activities emphasizes the participation of operating forces, but it is not enough. Articles in professional journals such as the *Gazette*, unit after-action reviews submitted through the Center for Lessons Learned (www.mccl.usmc.mil), and participation in the Commandant's Innovation Challenges (MARADMIN 617/18) are additional paths for every Marine to burn down future risk, and to help build tomorrow's Marine Corps. We are executing the Shaping Operations that will set conditions for the future fight, and we need every Marine in the fight with us!

Semper Fidelis –

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. F. Wortman', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

C. F. Wortman
Brigadier General, USMC
Commanding General, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab