

In the Same Boat

Integrating naval intelligence

by Capt Will McGee

In March 2020, the Commandant of the Marine Corps released *Force Design 2030*, the strategy outlining structural changes to the Marine Corps operating forces. It is intended to reorient the Marine Corps toward its traditional role as a naval amphibious force working in tandem with the Navy to project power ashore after two decades of expeditionary non-maritime campaigns. The major changes outlined in *Force Design 2030* primarily deal with investment/divestment decisions for the ACE and GCE, driven by the modern warfighting concepts articulated in the joint Navy and Marine Corps' Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment, and the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.¹ *Force Design 2030* does not contain specific guidance for the Marine Corps intelligence community as it deals mostly with altering the structure of the major components of the operating forces to

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act as “a landward complement to Navy capabilities” through the provision of “mobile, low-signature sensors.”

At the crux of these concepts is the development of a network of sensors to provide battlespace awareness to the fleet, and so it implies that naval integration: the ability of the Navy and Marine Corps information warfare communities is a prerequisite for the operating concept's success. This integration cannot be surged once the war begins. Instead, systemic change is required of both Services to engrain habits of cooperation in peacetime garrison operations so that they can be relied upon to seamlessly work together when

deployed. How can the Marine Corps intelligence community better integrate with the Navy to create a joint naval intelligence enterprise?

Operating Concepts Review

As noted in the joint 2017 *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE)*, since at least 2006, successive Chiefs of Naval Operations and Commandants of the Marine Corps have called for closer cooperation and integration between the two Services.² *LOCE* outlines supporting concepts to facilitate this integration: MAGTF integration into the Composite Warfare Construct, possibly as the Expeditionary Warfare Commander or Strike Warfare Commander; creation of joint blue-green fleet/Joint Force Maritime Component Command staffs; the development of Littoral Combat Groups tasked organized with additional capabilities based on an assessment of projected employment; and additional areas of exploration for future experimentation—specifically, expeditionary advanced bases. Inclusion of the Marine Corps in the composite warfare construct would allow for the MAGTF to be used as another element of the maritime force, tasked by the warfare commanders like any other Navy asset.

The Marine Corps corollary to *LOCE*, *Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations*, envisions the emplacement of expeditionary advanced bases to provide “landbased options for increasing the number of sensors and shooters beyond the upper limit imposed by the



MAGTF integration into the composite warfare construct can leverage the Navy's battlespace awareness capabilities. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Markus Castaneda.)

quantity of seagoing platforms available.” Put more generally, the idea is that groups of Marines would be emplaced onshore to support fleet operations by providing a base from which to collect information, conduct follow-on actions like act as a refueling/rearming facility, or (once counter-ship systems have been acquired) control areas of key maritime terrain.³

By distributing forces across geographically disparate locations, these concepts hope to increase the capability of the Naval Services to survive and project power in less-than-friendly environments. Both concepts call for close integration between the Navy and Marine Corps and both use “sensor” emplacement as one of the reasons for the new operating concept. LOCE calls for “[the creation of] *a modular, scalable, and integrated naval network of seabased and landbased sensors*, shooters, and sustainers that provides the capabilities, capacities, and persistent yet mobile forward presence necessary to effectively respond to crises, address larger contingencies, and deter aggression in contested littorals.”⁴ EABO, likewise, uses landbased sensors as an argument for the emplacement of expeditionary bases, specifically to “position *naval* ISR assets”⁵ and “provide expeditionary surface scouting/screening platforms.”

The structural changes outlined in *Force Design 2030* were driven by these operating concepts, with the stated purpose to “equip our Marines with mobile, low-signature sensors and weapons that can provide a landward complement to Navy capabilities for surface warfare, antisubmarine warfare, air and missile defense, and airborne early warning.” The CMC specifically calls for future planning and experimentation to “focus on capabilities required to satisfy approved naval concepts of DMO, EABO, and LOCE.”⁶

These concepts envision the use of platforms (Distributed Maritime Operations), bases (EABO), and a combination of the two (LOCE) to emplace sensors creating a network of information-collecting devices that develop battlespace awareness and inform the estimate of the naval commander. Information Warfare Community, and

particularly intelligence, officers might be a little more familiar with this idea if its authors referred to it as “collection operations” instead of “sensor emplacement” but the gist is the same. While there are kinetic operational reasons for expeditionary bases and distributed platforms, increased ability to collect intelligence is one of the most significant arguments articulated for these joint and Service concepts. Each document calls for a Navy/Marine Corps amphibious team, optimized for the future operating environment, that can create a network of collection assets to inform decision makers of the situation. The creation of a seamless network of inter-Service intelligence assets will require community-wide integration between the two Services. Members of the Navy and Marine Corps must develop habits of action in peacetime garrison operations to enable frictionless employment forward. What is the state of current integration and how can the Services be brought closer together?

State of Current Integration: Same Department, Different Services

A brief description of the author’s career will provide a useful example of the current state of integration between the naval intelligence enterprises.

I attended the Ground Intelligence Officer Course at the (then named) Navy and Marine Corps Intelligence Training Center in the fall of 2015. Even though the Marine Corps instructors were a part of a Marine Detachment in a Navy command and the inherently naval nature of the Marine Corps, the curriculum focused on intelligence support to the Marine Corps Planning Process in the context of primarily ground campaigns, and there was little communication with the Navy instructors or students during the course. Although all training literally occurred in the same building, the only interactions I had with Navy personnel occurred because my younger brother happened to be in the Navy’s intelligence officer’s course.

Four years later, I attended the MAGTF Intelligence Officer Course at the (tellingly) now-retitled Information Warfare Training Center. During this course—the last formal training

required of a Marine Corps Intelligence Officer—the only formal interaction with Navy Intelligence personnel was a three-hour lecture by an Amphibious Ready Group N-2. It was a great briefing but nowhere near enough to prepare students to seamlessly operate with the Navy. At no point in the course did we discuss naval operating concepts, Navy intelligence collection assets, or any of the other topics that would prepare the student to quickly and seamlessly integrate with the fleet intelligence enterprise.

When I arrived in the fleet at 2d MarDiv, there were three deployment opportunities: the MEU, the Unit Deployment Program, and the Special Purpose MAGTF-Crisis Response-AFRICOM (SPMAGTF-CR-AF). Only one of these, the MEU, involved interaction with Navy personnel or Navy Intelligence. I deployed on the Special Purpose MAGTF-Crisis Response-AFRICOM, a rotation with tasked mission sets of crisis response and theater security cooperation. This deployment did not require substantive interaction with the Navy or Navy Intelligence personnel. The expectation was that Intelligence Officers in 2d MarDiv deploy once during a three-year tour. So, this means that roughly only one in three Marine Corps intelligence officers had any experience working in an operational setting with the Navy.

This experience gap was the norm during garrison training also. I participated in four major exercises at the MEF, division, and regimental levels: MEF Exercise 2016, BOLD ALLIGATOR 2016 and 2017, and 2d MarDiv’s Large Scale Exercise 2017. Two of these exercises did not include the Navy whatsoever. While BOLD ALLIGATOR was intended to be an amphibious exercise, in neither iteration did I ever interact with the Navy’s intelligence personnel. At the completion of my tour, I rotated to the supporting establishment.

So, to summarize, none of this training or education has substantively addressed naval intelligence subjects, nor has my operational experience provided the opportunity to support maritime operations. Had I returned to the operating forces after my supporting

establishment tour, I would have become a field-grade officer who has spent (exponentially) more time underway as a midshipman than as a Marine and worked far more extensively with the Royal Marines than the U.S. Navy.

My experience is anecdotal and as such limited to the time and place in which it occurred—II MEF from 2015 to 2018. I am sure I have peers with significantly more naval operating experience than I. The fact, however, that this experience is derived from specific operational employment is indicative of the broader problem: neither of the standard training or career pipelines is deliberately structured to provide joint experience with the other Naval Service, and as a result, this experience is the exception rather than the norm. Greater integration is required.

Integrating the Naval Intelligence Enterprise

If the stated intent is that the future Marine Corps and Navy operating forces operate seamlessly with one another, the intelligence warfighting function is no different from the rest of the force. Systemic changes are required to further integrate the naval intelligence enterprises. The following are suggestions for ways to more closely align the Navy and Marine Corps efforts.

Service Intelligence Centers

The *Commandant's Planning Guidance* describes the separation of the Navy and Marine Corps into two Services with distinctly different priorities by stating,

The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, however, removed the preponderance of the [Fleet Marine Force] from fleet operational control and disrupted the long-standing Navy-Marine Corps relationship by creating separate Navy and Marine Corps components within joint forces. Furthermore, Navy and Marine Corps officers developed a tendency to view their operational responsibilities as separate and distinct, rather than intertwined.⁷

Nowhere is this more evident than at the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA). MCIA was created in 1987 and intended to bridge the gap

between the (newly separated from fleet control) FMF and the national intelligence community.⁸ Located in Quantico, VA, it currently operates three lines of effort: production of intelligence estimates as required by the supporting establishment, support to the operating forces and Intelligence Community, and facilitating/coordinating efforts of the Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise.⁹ None of these responsibilities seem to be dissimilar

person collaboration. It would also ease interaction with other members of the intelligence community and the other Services' intelligence centers, most of which are located inside the beltway.

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Marines collect and report information throughout the battlespace. (Photo by Cpl Abraham Lopez.)

from those of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), except that the institutional separation between the two likely limits coordination. Structure drives function. Establish MCIA as a tenant command under ONI and integrate our Service-level intelligence centers. Space is available. Is the old ONI building being used?

Doing so would benefit both organizations. ONI would gain subject-matter expertise on intelligence support to ground operations and amphibious operations. MCIA's production responsibilities involve inherently naval concepts and would likely be better served by close coordination with the Nation's premier maritime intelligence authority. Moving MCIA onto the ONI campus and into its structure would allow for routine interaction by reducing the 90-mile round trip required for in-

formation. It would also ease interaction with other members of the intelligence community and the other Services' intelligence centers, most of which are located inside the beltway.

Since the operating services call for an integrated network of sensors, and the Marine Corps plans to double the number of unmanned aerial vehicles it operates, the cell responsible for processing, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence gathered by these vehicles should operate in this proposed structure.¹⁰ In the LOCE and EABO constructs, information collected by sensors informs decision makers of both Services, and so locating the PED for new Marine Corps ISR at a joint command would represent each Service's equities equally.

Marine Corps and Navy Intelligence Officers assigned to the proposed MCIA/ONI combination would operate in an integrated naval intelligence structure and return to the operating forces with an understanding of the other Service's threat concerns and enterprise structure, creating a subset of officers with joint naval expertise as a part of their shore tours. Integrating the Service-level intelligence centers would shift the bifurcated efforts to a mutual comprehensive focus on the maritime domain beginning with the littorals and



Analytic exchange can enhance the quality of tactical intelligence at the close-combat level.
(Photo by LCpl Sarah Hediger.)

stretching to the blue-water ocean. Our interests are intertwined; why not our intelligence centers?

Personnel Exchange in Equivalent Billets

Since Marine Aviators attend Navy schools, use Navy-funded aircraft, and are held to Navy maintenance and readiness standards, why not standardize the training and employment of Marine Corps air intelligence officers and Navy intelligence officers assigned to squadrons? Once standardized, these personnel could be exchanged for tours with the other Service. Marine intelligence officers could deploy as part of a carrier strike group and learn the Navy intelligence structure; Navy intelligence officers could integrate into the MAGTF. Precedents exist as every Marine unit deploys with Navy medical and religious personnel.

Interservice billeting would be most easily implemented in ACE billets, as these are the most similar between the two Services. A Marine Corps ground intelligence officer, for example, qualifies as an infantry officer as part of the pipeline and so has very different expertise than one could expect of a Navy intelligence officer. But, with some cre-

ative thought and crosstraining, this idea could be expanded to other billets as well. Since the Marine Corps uses Navy standards and funding for its aviation, it should not be too much trouble to formally integrate our intelligence support systems, creating a permanent reserve of junior officers who have operational experience in the other naval Service.

Analysis Exchange

Formalizing a structure for analytic exchange would integrate the two Services by allowing analysts to access products across the integrated enterprises. The Marine Corps already uses the Marine Corps Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Enterprise Knowledge Gateway (MKG). The MKG is an internet portal that resides on secure networks on which analysts upload their products. It allows an intelligence analyst at III MEF in Okinawa to read the work of analysts in, say, 6th Mar in Camp Lejeune. Either the Marine Corps could add Navy operational units to the MKG or together the two Services could develop a joint architecture for sharing tactical intelligence, enabling seamless integration

in garrison and while deployed. Threats are Service agnostic. Why is our systems not architecture?

According to the Services' operating concepts, the Navy and Marine Corps intend to operate together seamlessly in a future naval campaign. Since one of the main arguments for these concepts is the creation of a network of sensors to inform decision makers, the Services' intelligence and information warfare communities are vital to this effort—and can be leaders by deliberately making structural changes to involve the other Service in its enterprise. We may be two separate Services, but when the next war kicks off, we will be in the same boat.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*, (Washington, DC: March 2020).
2. Department of the Navy, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
4. *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*. Emphasis added.
5. *Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations*. Emphasis added.
6. *Force Design 2030*.
7. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
8. John Brown, Christina Clark, Jorge Miranda, Neri Terry, "Marine Corps Intelligence Activity Military and Civilian Interaction," (unpublished manuscript, June 2011), available at <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil>.
9. Staff, "Marine Corps Intelligence Activity," Marine Corps, (n.d.), available at <https://www.candp.marines.mil>.
10. *Force Design 2030*.

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