



MARINE CORPS AVIATION: FIGHT NOW, FIGHT TOMORROW

8 February 2021 began the most significant restructuring of the Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation organization in decades. On that day, Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation—“the Hallway”—reoriented to better support the Commandant’s vision for the 2030 Marine Corps. Following the *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* and the mandate of *Force Design 2030* implementation yields the “why” Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation is evolving. A deep analysis of that “why” leads to the “how” the Hallway is now organized. This reorganization will translate vision into capabilities.

Over the next several issues of *Marine Corps Gazette*, Marine Corps Aviation will expand upon the future force, the capabilities that force will bring to the fight, and the new capabilities-based Marine Corps Aviation staff to build out and sustain that force. In the pages of this publication, we will outline where we are headed and how we will get there.

PREMISES

In executing the Commandant’s guidance, Marine Corps Aviation always has in mind his vision and his endstate. In that vision, Marine aviation will:

- Move the expeditionary force vast distances.
- Sustain that force in the Pacific archipelagos.
- Protect that force while they are there.
- Displace that force swiftly as operations evolve.

The theme of our future force: “nothing stays put.” The Marine Corps as an expeditionary force must be agile, mobile, and survivable. That means looking to, and building upon, current warfighting philosophy and our way of doing business. This vision is built around distributed maritime operations, littoral operations in a contested environment, and expeditionary advanced base operations: DMO, LOCE, and EABO. The Marine Corps will not abandon, but rather will refine and improve upon, these concepts for operational design for a littoral fight.

In working through processes and capabilities to build the aviation combat element of the future, Marine Corps Aviation began with a set of premises. These will drive how the air-ground Marine Corps team trains and fights and, therefore, how the ACE will support the larger distributed, expeditionary campaign.

These fundamental premises are:

Strategic Level of War

- Our pacing, peer threat is China, but they are not the only threat.
- The naval expeditionary force is focused on the INDO-PACOM theater of operations.
- This theater is enormous, dispersed, naval in character, and contested.

The Operational Art

- To address the pacing threat, the Marine Corps is evolving and innovating as part of the larger naval expeditionary force.
- The Marine Corps will be an inside force, operating inside the first island chain and working inside the WEZ.
- Marine Corps aviation is fully vested in this evolution and will use a threat-informed, capabilities-based approach to force development.

Tactical Level of War

- Aviation platforms are vehicles to execute capabilities, not ends in themselves.
- Marine Corps aviation is looking to capabilities for 2030 and lead-turning 2040 and beyond.

The Road Ahead

Marine Corps Aviation will deliver the forces that today’s combatant commanders need to engage with allies and partners, compete with adversaries, deter conflict, and—if necessary—win wars, and it will also allow investment in the capabilities that future combatant commanders will require for the same missions.

With capabilities as the focus, the Marine Corps is not building a force for any one scenario; rather, this force will be ready for the front end of any conflict. This will not be the “perfect force” but can transition from one phase to another without delay. It may

not be perfect for either, but it will be good at both. As things begin to heat up in a kinetic event, the naval force's adversary will not allow our forces to "set a theater." We must be prepared across the range of military operations, and that means the ACE must be agile, mobile, and lethal.

There are several guideposts on this journey. These include the following fundamental themes:

1. Marine aviation will mass effects, not mass people and equipment, and will:
 - Generate maximum lethality.
 - Focus on maximum survivability.
 - Build a force with maximum resilience.
 - Sustain that force in a distributed, expeditionary campaign.
 - Use agility while minimizing physical footprint and electronic signature.
2. Marine aviation recognizes that mobility is key to surviving in this fight.

This means leaning down, and making more agile, our forward arming and refueling points, or FARPs. The FARP of the future will be quick and mobile and will thereby generate battlefield tempo, which creates both offensive punch and defensive capability.

3. Marine aviation will focus on signature management, which will be crucial, especially for rotary-wing platforms.

Systems of today work in an environment in which "You can see me, but you can't shoot me." The future will be: "You can't see me in the first place."

4. Marine aviation will build out capabilities as part of the naval command and control network.

Mission equipment packages must include sensors, apertures, weapons, communications, and navigation systems that will reduce risk within contested environments and increase lethality of the force and mission success. The goal is resilient networks in a communications denied environment.

5. Marine aviation will build platforms to maximize MAGTF capabilities: each platform will be a sensor, a shooter, and a communicator.

Building a rigorous, data-driven, analytically strong readiness framework will help better balance the risks and tradeoffs between satisfying immediate requirements for available forces with the imperatives of modernization.

Stepping Off

Marine Corps Aviation has rethought the aviation vision and mission and has updated both to better reflect the tight integration of staffs and processes across Headquarters Marine Corps and the naval force. The Hallway did NOT simply rename sections and continue daily operations; this is a complete rethinking of process and philosophy. The Hallway is reorganizing from linear branches into functional, capabilities-based divisions—changing mindset from focus on platforms to focus on capabilities and reorienting from being a hierarchical staff to being a dynamic system.

The *2021 Aviation Campaign Plan*, which will be outlined and expanded upon in *Gazette* in the coming months, provides structure and impetus for the new Hallway. The *Campaign Plan* is a detailed capabilities-based assessment coordinated with Headquarters Marine Corps Combat Development and Integration, tying process to capability, tethering reorganized structure to direct, tangible, innovative results, and keeping the enterprise focused tightly on what is unique about this time. Its lines of effort and lines of operation lay out guideposts on the journey to the future: integrating systems across all six functions of Marine Corps aviation in order to create a more resilient and more lethal force.

That force—integrated into a larger naval expeditionary campaign—will be prepared for a dynamic range of options. To echo the motto of III MEF: Marine Corps aviation is ready to "fight now" and will be ready to fight tomorrow.



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