

# Reinvigorating the Fleet Marine Force Architecture

The Marine Corps must align to and complement the fleet

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The 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps’ planning guidance directs the reinvigoration of the Fleet Marine Force (FMF):

In crisis prevention and crisis response, the Fleet Marine Force—acting as an extension of the Fleet—will be first on the scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis, and first to fight if required to do so.<sup>1</sup>

This is an inspiring vision and call to action for the Service. However, the question remains: Will the current FMF structure or FMF structure of old suffice to meet this vision? The answer is simply, no. Renewed funding and commitment to the dual FMF construct, FMF PACIFIC (FMF PAC), and FMF ATLANTIC (FMF LANT) is not the answer. A FMF construct that acts “as an extension of the fleet” must align with and complement the fleet. It must be integrated with the fleet at higher echelons while being forward and ready to operate with the fleet as part of a maritime campaign on a moment’s notice. Evolutionary change is insufficient; this requires abandonment of old ideas and bold steps toward a new, more effective paradigm.

We propose that the Marine Corps and Navy adopt a FMF paradigm that defines FMFs as Marine Corps units that conduct naval operations in support of the fleet commander’s concept of operations within a maritime campaign and adopts an organizational model that aligns numbered FMFs to corresponding numbered fleets (see Figure

1).<sup>2</sup> This proposed FMF paradigm reinvigorates the role of a FMF, transitioning from a consolidated administrative “type” command to a new architecture that better fulfills the Marine Corps’ mandate to support the fleet.<sup>3</sup> This redefined FMF model is best supported by a new Navy-Marine Corps component command relationship. Rather than ad-

jacent Navy and Marine components, we propose that the Naval Services create integrated Naval components.<sup>4</sup> These integrated Naval components, serving in support of combatant commanders or joint force commanders, are responsible for planning, directing, supervising, and assessing maritime campaigns.

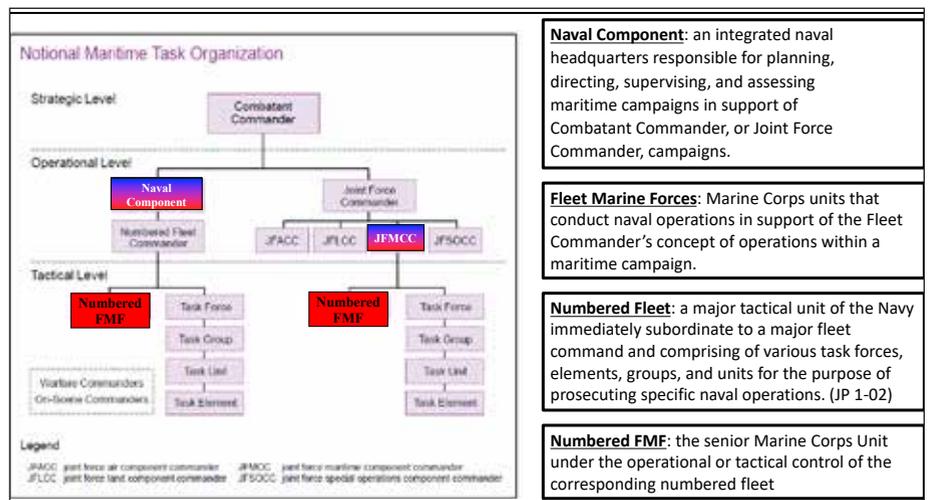


Figure 1. Modified notional maritime task organization from JP 3-32 with supporting definitions. (Figure provided by author.)

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### Naval Operations and the FMF

Over the years, the existing dual-FMF paradigm of FMFPAC and FMFLANT has failed to adapt to the framework of the *Goldwater-Nichols Act*, (Washington, DC: 1986), and the subsequent changes in Navy and joint force structure. Established on 7 December 1933 by MajGen John Russell, the FMF was a purpose-built force. Under the operational control of the Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Fleet, the FMF was established to develop, test, and evaluate amphibious operations.<sup>5</sup> This model for Marine Corps organization and employment resulted in publication and refinement of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* (Washington, DC: 1934), and proved its worth during the execution of the Second World War's Pacific maritime campaigns.<sup>6</sup>

The success of this organizational model resulted in the establishment of FMFPAC in June 1944. Three years later with the establishment of U.S. Atlantic Command, the Marine Corps created FMFLANT to support U.S. Atlantic Fleet. Diverting from Gen Russell's purpose-built FMF, FMFPAC and FMFLANT were assigned full type command status, responsible for the administrative manning, training, and equipping functions.<sup>7</sup>

After the *Nation Security Act of 1947* (Washington, DC: 1947), established periodic Unified Command Plans, and *Goldwater-Nichols* established a new joint force employment framework, the globe was effectively partitioned into geographic areas of responsibility assigned to individual unified commanders. Adapting to this construct, the Navy realigned its organizational laydown, force design, and employment methodology. Today, the Navy employs numbered fleets, immediately subordinate to the Navy component, to prosecute specific naval operations.<sup>8</sup> This model sufficiently aligns numbered fleets to support combatant commanders in accordance with the roles, responsibilities, and constraints articulated in the *Unified Command Plan*.

An FMF model that fails to align to the Navy's employment construct will result in a convoluted Navy-Marine

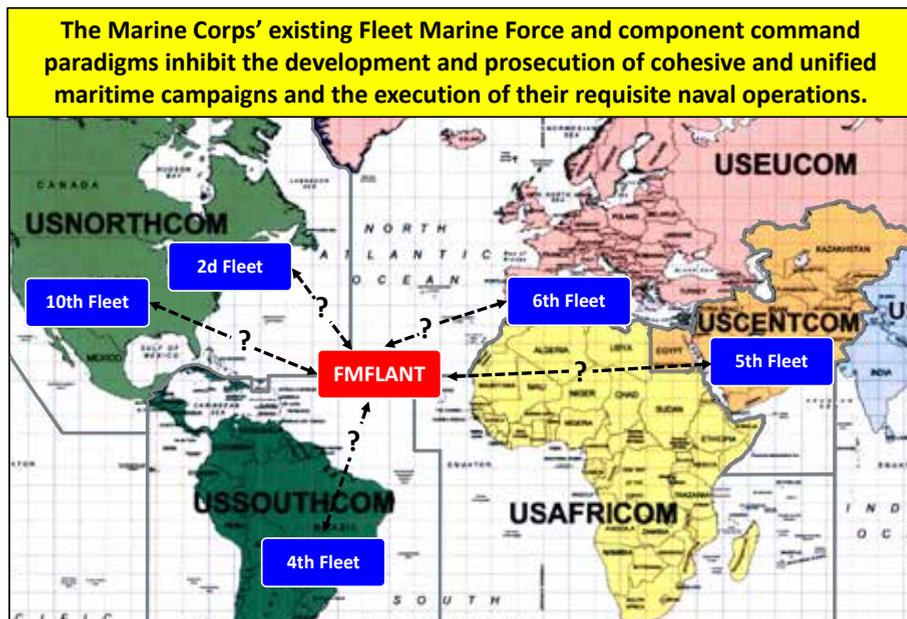


Figure 2. Convoluted Fleet and Fleet Marine Force relationships. (Figure provided by author.)

Corps relationship that subsequently inhibits the development and prosecution of cohesive and unified maritime campaigns (see Figure 2). Reinvigorating FMFPAC and FMFLANT is not the answer. To achieve the Commandant's intent of naval integration, FMFs should be organized to support numbered Fleet Commanders, not consolidated administrative type commands. To support this proposed FMF paradigm and organizational model, the Navy-Marine Corps component relationship must be assessed.

### The Naval Component and Maritime Campaigns

At the first echelon of command, Combatant Commander's or Joint Force Commanders campaign to "shape the operating environment, deter aggressors, mitigate the effects of a contingency, and/or execute combat operations in support of the overarching national strategy."<sup>9</sup> Component commands, at the second echelon, are assigned tasks from which they develop supporting campaigns and direct, supervise, and assess subordinate force activities in pursuit of objectives and effects within the first echelon's campaign (see Figure 3). In turn, units at the third echelon and below execute operations within their higher headquarters' campaign.<sup>10</sup>

The existing paradigm of independent Navy and Marine Corps components artificially bifurcates the Naval Services' echelon two headquarters. This separation leads to a misperception that the Navy and Marine Corps' operational responsibilities are separate and distinct, rather than intertwined. The result is often disparate Service-specific campaigns that impede unity of effort, operational flexibility, and integrated application of Navy-Marine Corps capabilities throughout the maritime domain. This separation contributes to sub-optimal inputs to the global

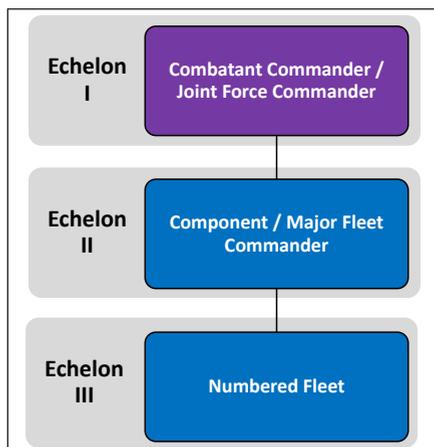


Figure 3. Command and Organizational Echelons. (Figure provided by author.)

force management, program objective memorandum, posture, and strategic capabilities processes. While this approach may have made sense over the last twenty years, with Marines operating predominately in support of a land component, strategic guidance has now changed and the Marine Corps must as well.

### Proposed FMF and Navy-Marine Corps Component Relationship

In his planning guidance, the Commandant directed the reinvention of the FMFs. To accomplish this, the Marine Corps must establish a new purpose-built FMF and Navy-Marine Corps component command relationship. We propose:

- The Marine Corps establish numbered FMFs aligned to support the numbered fleet commander's concept of operations. (see Figure 4).
- The Navy and Marine Corps establish integrated, echelon two, naval components assigned to unified, sub-unified, and, as required, joint task force commanders. (see Figure 4).

The above framework is not prescriptive in size, location, or unit type. The numbered FMF is the senior Marine Corps unit under the operational or tactical control of the corresponding numbered fleet (for example FMF 4 in support of Fourth Fleet). Depending on the numbered fleet commander's requirements, the numbered FMF could serve at the task force, task group, or task unit level and could range in size from a Marine Expeditionary Force to a small detachment.

Further, this model does is not defined by any single organizing construct such as the Marine Air Ground Task Force. Separate Marine forces, indepen-

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***—38th Commandant's Planning Guidance***

dent of the numbered FMF, can and should work for adjacent task forces, task groups, or task units. This small unit integration allows the Marine Corps to provide unique capabilities in accordance with concepts espoused in *Distributed Maritime Operations* (December 2018) and *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (March 2019) Ultimately, the task organization is dependent on the unique requirements of the supported commander and the service's assessments of Naval force requirements.

To support this FMF model, the Naval component requires meaningful integration—not merely augmentation. A Naval headquarters requires appropriate general, flag, and senior enlisted representation at key positions within the command, but this will depend on the organization's unique requirements. For example, Naval Component Pacific is likely to have larger requirements than Naval Component Europe. Additionally, the headquarters will require suitable staff organization and structure to ensure the unique and complementary capabilities of the Naval Services are appropriately represented. However, the intent is not to create additional staff requirements but rather to more efficiently employ staff officers through service-wide reorganization. In fact, efficiencies in manpower can likely be found for both Naval Services by eliminating redundancies caused by maintaining separate component headquarters.

This new naval component model ensures that the Marine Corps' forces, capabilities, and equities are appropriately represented in maritime campaigns. Most critically, it aligns the Marine Corps' force employment model to the organization and needs of the Navy. By embracing this proposed paradigm, the Naval Services will achieve integration at echelon, thereby facilitating the development and prosecution of cohesive and unified maritime campaigns and the execution of their requisite naval operations.

### Obstacles and Opportunities

The prevailing framework of having

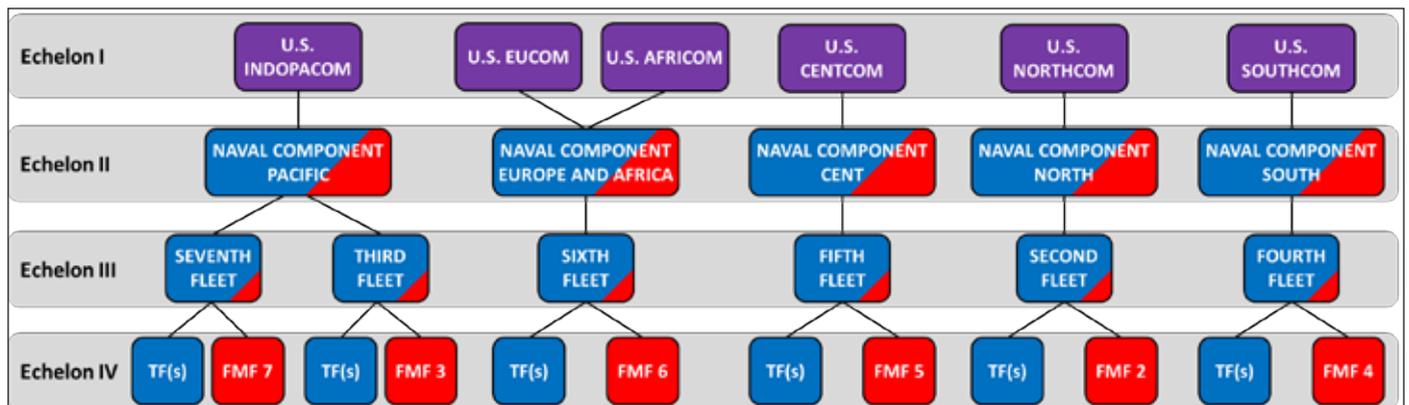


Figure 4. Proposed FMF and Navy-Marine Component Relationship. (Figure provided by author.)

two FMFs and the bifurcated second echelon headquarters of the Navy and Marine Corps is incompatible with the *Unified Command Plan* and does not best support the combatant commander. The Commandant's guidance to reinvigorate the FMF is a tremendous opportunity to reshape the structure and employment of Navy and Marine forces to most effectively accomplish the needs of combatant commanders. There will be institutional resistance to this proposal, but it is important to appreciate our own doctrine and the historical underpinnings of the FMF and fleet relationship.<sup>11</sup>

Some may argue that the purpose of an FMF is not operational but rather to inform force design and provide a force that complements the Navy. They will say this is best done by aligning FMFs to the Navy force providers. At the end of the day, this argument misses the point and the Commandant's intent as articulated in his planning guidance. Our proposal does not abdicate the Marine Corps, as a distinct Service, of its Title 10 man, train, and equip responsibilities. These responsibilities should continue to be executed by HQMC and Marine Forces Command as a consolidated type command and without confusing these functions with those of FMFs.

The Marine Corps should avoid a myopic approach to the Commandant's guidance and adapt a flexible organizational structure which aligns with the current operating environment. The realities of *Goldwater-Nichols*, geographic combatant command organization, and the roles and responsibilities of the component commands and numbered fleets highlight the importance of rejecting the two-FMF construct in favor of integrated naval components and tactical FMFs. This will ensure the Naval Services are best organized to develop and prosecute cohesive and unified maritime campaigns and conduct their requisite naval operations.

Notes

1. Gen David M. Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, August 2016).

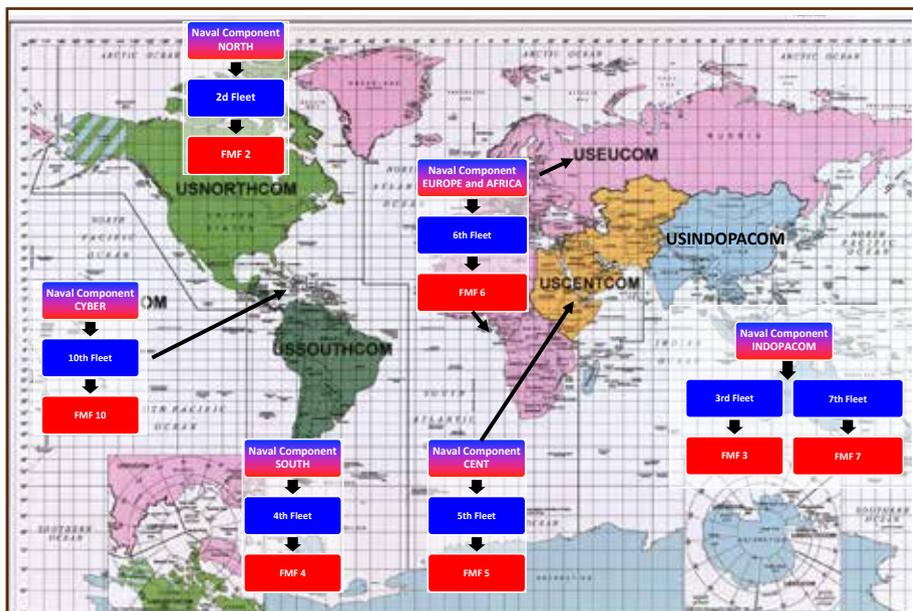


Figure 5. Depiction of modified notional maritime task organization in relation to GCC AOR. (Figure provided by author.)

**Organization is an important tool of command and control. How we organize can complicate or simplify the problems of execution. By task-organizing our force into capable subordinate elements and assigning each its own task, we also organize the overall mission into manageable parts. The organization of our force, then, should reflect the conceptual organization of the plan.**

—MCDP 6

2. Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-32; Joint Maritime Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2018). *JP 3-32* defines Naval operation as “a naval action (or the performance of a naval mission) that may be strategic, operational, tactical, logistic, or training.” See also, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 5-0; Joint Planning*, (Washington, DC: 2017). *JP 5-0* defines Campaign as “a series of related operations aimed at achieving strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space.”

3. Joseph Gradisher, “Establishing a Navy Information Dominance Type Command,” *Navy.mil*, “Online: March 2014), available at <https://www.navy.mil>. In this article, the Office of the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Dominance states, “A Navy Type Command or TYCOM, coordinates the Man, Train and Equip (MT&E) functions for specific communities within the Navy.” See also U.S. Congress, *U.S. Code, Title 10, Subtitle C, Part I, Chapter 507 Code § 5063*, (Washington, DC: 1986).

4. Department of the Navy, *Navy Doctrine Publication 1: Naval Warfare* (Washington, DC: 2010). *NDP-1* defines Naval as “the Navy and Marine Corps and, when operating with other services, the Coast Guard.”

5. George Garand and Truman Strobridge, “Western Pacific Operations,” *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, (Washington, DC: Historical Division, HQMC, 1971).

6. Ibid

7. RDML Julius Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 1959). This source provides the 27 November 1946 definition of a FMF and identifies them as full type commands. It also states, "Fleet and Task Force Commanders were relieved of distracting details, leaving them free to conduct operations, by turning over many of their former functions to type commanders based ashore, who handled the administrative details involved in manning, training, equip-

ping and keeping the ships of the fleet in a state of readiness."

8. Department of the Navy, *Navy Warfare Publication 3-32; Maritime Operations at the Operational Level of War*, (Washington, DC: 2018).

9. *Joint Publication 5-0; Joint Planning*.

10. *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations* defines operation as "a military action or the carrying out of a strategic, operational, tactical, service, training, or administrative military mission."

11. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, (Washington, DC: 1996).

>Authors' Note: All opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of the DOD, Navy, or the Marine Corps.

