

Special Purpose MAGTF KIEV After Action Report

The following fictional report is from the perspective of a Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force Commander whose force was sent to Ukraine following Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022. In this alternate history scenario, the Marine Corps force is equipped with examples of the advanced capabilities envisioned in the current—real life—Force Design 2030 modernization effort. This article was authored by "Marinus Sapiens," a retired Marine officer.

Date: 19 March 2022

From: BGen Rodriguez, Commander, SPMAGTF Kiev
To: Commandant of the Marine Corps

Subj: 30 DAY INITIAL REPORT AND ASSESSMENT

Commandant,

ADM Smith recommended I drop you a note directly with my initial observations and conclusions, vice you having to wait for my reports and assessments to be passed along the normal channels from the CJTF. I am not sharing anything with you here that I have not also shared with her. Our communications remain very resilient despite continuous attempts to disrupt our networks. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions that may better inform you and the other joint chiefs, and help you all make more informed decisions.

BLUF: To date, our mission has been an unqualified success, yet not without its share of challenges, and of course not without tragic costs. We have experienced a bit of mission creep in relation to our initial taskings, but nothing beyond what you or the other senior leaders previously experienced in Somalia, Kosovo, Haiti, Iraq, or Afghanistan. This was not due to any uncertainty or indecision at higher levels, but rather due to the willingness of those within the CJTF HQ to exploit advantages created by your Marines. This will likely continue so long as the Russians and Ukrainians are content to hold their current positions and give the diplomats time to negotiate terms for conflict termination.

Mission highlights: As of last night, here are the facts as we have been able to confirm: a) 92,348 civilians have been able to depart Kiev, and have been processed by our combined Ukrainian and NATO team in route to their next destination; b) 11,612 civilians have received medical attention, and 2,429 have been sent for follow-on medical attention to the west using a combination of USMC and Polish assets; c) 419 deceased individuals, the vast majority of whose remains were being transported by a family member fleeing Kiev have been processed appropriately; and d) 617 wounded Ukrainian soldiers have been treated by our Forward Resuscitation Surgical Teams. We have also delivered 3 babies during this period. Finally, we have also recovered two Ukrainian pilots after their helicopter was shot down (*This was done using a pair of uncrewed EMAV with an LMAM guardian angel; which may be some sort of incredible-first in warfare.*)

BDA: While our damage assessment information is imperfect, we can confirm that at a minimum we have destroyed 9 Group 3 or 4 UAS, 7 2S19 Msta SP howitzers, 4 Pantsir S1 systems, 4 Krasukha-2 systems, 2 Ka-50 attack helicopters, 2

Ka-52 attack helicopters, 17 Group 2 sUAS, 5 LMAMs, and 32 fuel or ammunition support trucks. I cannot confirm at this time how many Russian EWIA or EKIA are associated with those strikes, but can confirm 6 Syrian Foreign Fighter EKIA in single LMAM strike. Per the ROE, foreign fighters aligned with the Russians are already demonstrated hostile intent via their presence on the battlefield. We have also responded to several snipers using OPF-I and were able to eliminate the threat at the moment; however, cannot confirm if those responses resulted in EKIA. Finally, we have processed 29 Russians combatants who fled their forward lines and surrendered. They have been transferred to the Ukrainians and have spoken with ICRC personnel.

What is more astounding is how much front-line Russian equipment we *could* have destroyed given different circumstances and ROE. We are confident we have disrupted no fewer than 2 major attempts at armed reconnaissance of Kiev, and our presence to the west and northwest of Kiev has definitely altered Russian operations and schemes of maneuver. We certainly do not *see* all, but our battlespace awareness is beyond anything any of your GOs probably thinks is possible until you are part of SOCOM. We are confident that we are winning the battle of reconnaissance. *(Please send the Division CGs a thank-you note from me and tell them all those RXR experiments have paid off when it counted most.)*

Casualties: Regarding friendly forces, we have been fortunate, which is to say that our young officers and NCOs continue to perform magnificently, and as of last night have 3 KIA, and 19 WIA—of which 12 have returned-to-duty. I assume you have received at least some background related to the 3 KIA. I can confirm that one was killed as a result of blunt-force trauma after an explosion caused the side of a building to collapse. The young Marine Corporal survived the initial explosion, yet was killed when the remainder of the structure collapsed on top of him as he was attempting to recover civilians from the rubble. The next two KIAs occurred in a single incident. While we have been able to intercept incoming UAS and LMAMs, one of the intercepts “downed” the LMAM, yet didn’t cause it to explode while airborne. The LMAM was knocked off its trajectory, and impacted the ground near Marines operating our fuel farm. Two Marines were killed, and several injured; however, it could have been much worse if the actual fuel bladders had been compromised. *(*If not for the massive fuel requirements associated with our ground tactical vehicles, that fuel farm would not be required.)* We have also experienced 8 significant non-combat related injuries, which occurred in the single ACV rollover incident. Those individuals have been evacuated to Germany for follow-on care. We continue to conduct COVID rapid-screening tests with the Marines in direct physical contact with the civilian population as a force protection measure. We’ve had several false positives, yet like every Marine that has gone before them, they’re a resilient group, and have just accepted having a cotton-swap pushed up their noses as part of the routine meant to protect them. A particularly virulent strain of influenza has caused more problems.

Context / Orientation: Generally speaking, we have an area of operations in total square miles akin to that of a reinforced regiment in Iraq or Afghanistan, and an area of influence greater than that of TF Helmand or TF Leatherneck in Afghanistan. While this may not sound like a large AO in a geographic sense, the area is densely populated, and unlike anything experienced by Marines in the past 25 years. The expansion of the area of influence is completely driven by our organic UAS capabilities, to include those within the attached mobile reconnaissance company, that finally make the Hunter Warrior experiments of the late 1990s a reality.

Seventy-two hours after the warning order was issued, we were loading up aircraft, and ready to deploy. We could have moved faster, yet needed to synchronize with the other elements of force that were being aggregated in vicinity of the airport with us—and from multiple nations. While Moldova’s neutrality prevented a large ground movement from Romania, we were easily able to overcome this using MV-22, CH-53K, and KC-130J aircraft. In some ways, the absence of a ground corridor was a blessing in disguise, as it eliminated the need to refuel the ACVs during the 600km movement into position, although their overall fuel consumption remains a constant problem.

Mission and ROE: Based on the NATO/CJTF plan, we are deployed west and northwest of Kiev, and are anchored (as reported in open-source media) on the old international airport. *(While this doesn’t sound like a very expeditionary location, it was assigned to us. Our partners and allies have cargo aircraft that they are cycling in and out of here with displaced persons.)* While I suspect some of the retired folks may scream “remember Beirut,” there is simply no comparison, and our ability to defend ourselves, defend the lives of civilians, and to respond with lethal effects once hostile intent has been well-established has not yet been impeded or questioned in any manner. Per the ROE, our mission is entirely defensive, and meant to facilitate the flow of non-combatants from Kiev to the west. The two primary consequences of the ROE are that our F-35s (which are still sitting aboard the *Kearsarge* in the eastern Mediterranean) cannot turn thousands of Russian vehicles into a modern-day equivalent of the Iraqi highway of death, and that we cannot engage any Russian unit or capability that has not passively or actively engaged us. Neither is a game-changer or showstopper. As most everyone already knew, the F-35 is a flying super-sensor, and its most significant value is not in dropping large or small diameter bombs. We have made up for the inability to access those capabilities with our extended range (ER) MQ-9As, which have performed to perfection. If the

local Russian commander decided to gamble and make a major thrust toward Kiev or the international airport, our LMAMs and ROGUE fires would destroy the forward elements, and create the space and time necessary for the CJTF Commander to make a decision whether to defend or displace. Either way, we're ready, as Force Design's exponential increase in "airpower" provided via LMAMs and a variety of UAS platforms, have proved essential to supporting Marines on the ground.

Operational Paradigm: If there is one thing that may help Marines (active or retired) understand the situation here, it is the 31st Commandant's Three Block War paradigm. While I know it has been nearly a quarter century since Gen Krulak introduced that phrase into our collective lexicons, nowhere has it proven more true than here. At any one moment in time, our mobile reconnaissance company is actively engaged in reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, our information operations Marines are engaged in a battle of countering narratives on social media, our network Marines are countering non-stop attempts at denial and disruption, our assault support and ACVs are transporting thousands of at-risk civilians out of harms-way, our infantry leaders are advising and assisting their coalition counterparts, our ROGUE Fires batteries Marines are prepared to strike deep with pin-point accuracy (and have on several occasions), Marines using counter intrusion systems enabled by artificial intelligence are tracking the flow of humans on hundreds of roads simultaneously to provide maximum awareness with almost no risk, our G/ATOR Marines are tracking thousands of points-of-origin for Russian fires to determine if any are deliberately targeting friendly forces, and our infantry Marines are prepared at any moment to prevent any enemy maneuver against Kiev. Yes, the "strategic corporal" is alive and well, and thankfully so. Our every move and every interaction with the public is captured on some sort of mobile device. The Marines on the spot craft messages aligned with our CJTF narrative, and the images and message are immediately uploaded to a social media site. While I suspect some of the older folks may have an anti-social media bias, it is the best tool for sharing information quickly to thousands. As we have all been told—"every picture tells a story." That matters when there is a language barrier to overcome.

Command and Control: The BLT remains disaggregated at several locations behind the main elements of Ukrainian and Polish forces forward. While our laydown would not be unfamiliar to any company commander from OIF or OEF who operated from a distributed laydown, they would likely be surprised that we have actually been able to employ the company landing team model as envisioned by Gen Neller. Each of our company commanders have their own organic intelligence fusion centers, own organic ISR, own organic precision fires, own EW, SIGINT, and CUAS capability, and even their own remotely piloted fires capabilities. Yes—each is its own mini-MAGTF. That being said, I'm glad we have finally figured out Aviation C2 Marines are really MAGTF C2 Marines. They do so much more than just manage airspace. I'm glad we finally decided to invest in creating more of them.

While the Russians are actively attempting to destroy our networks and deny us communications, all efforts to date have failed. While we could be mistaken, we think we have been able to detect every attempt to deny services and disrupt the networks. Note—this is a gray area within the ROE. Are cyber fires and attacks a hostile act? While not everyone agrees with us, we are following the guidance of our operational law representatives, and regarding them as such. Our responses on the network are thus proportional. We can discuss this topic more when I return or on another net.

Information & Intelligence (Battlespace Awareness): As you have often noted, within the steps of the kill-chain (find, fix, track, target, engage, and assess), only one requires lethality. I know you have been subject to considerable criticism from those who think being a Marine is only about breaking things and killing people, and who don't understand the importance of battlespace awareness, reconnaissance, and counter-reconnaissance. At present, the entire success or failure of our primary missions (safe passage of non-combatants from Kiev, and protection/preservation of civilian and friendly force lives) is entirely dependent upon our ability (as LtGen Stewart was fond of saying) to rapidly sense, make sense, and act upon the data and information being collected all around us. Using the old HAW-MAW-LAW paradigm, our BLT has reinforcing rings of ISR coverage using our Swarming Group 2 UAS, Stalker XE UAS, and big-wing MQ-9AER. The Stalker gives my company commanders eyes out to 50+KM. I consume their feeds, so don't need to take any assets from them. (*While I left the VBat systems aboard the ship to ensure the MEU can maintain persistent surveillance of its immediate AO, if necessary, I could pull those VTOL systems forward as well.*) The MQ-9AERs satisfy all my needs and more at present. Notice I didn't even reference the F-35Bs. Based on the negotiated agreement with the Russians, those a/c are not allowed in the AO. (*In my assessment, even if they were allowed in, they would likely be pulled to satisfy HHQ missions—which would not cause me any problems. Wonder Woman's Invisible Jet isn't required for what we are dealing with. I am confident our Hornets could satisfy any air-to-air needs. And as noted above, the exponential increase in airpower provided by LMAMs and the assortment of UAS organic to the SPMAGTF have been game-changers for our Marines on the deck.*)

One really promising development is our AI-enabled counter UAS and counter-intrusion systems. As part of the aggregation effort, our ACE partners recommended we seek the forward deployment of the AI-enabled force protection and CUAS system they use aboard bases and stations, and that SOCOM routinely uses. While it isn't much to look at, and honestly

looks much like emergency lighting at the ballpark, it is one giant sensor capable of not only consuming an ocean of information, but also making sense of it. From our fixed site, we are able to identify not only new flows of displaced persons, but more importantly—what kind of people. Are these families carrying rollaway luggage, or are they potentially dismounted infantry? This system is smart enough to tell the difference at a considerable distance, which gives us time and space to respond accordingly. Yes—it helps shrink our OODA loops. Just as important, it can identify movement corridors that are suspiciously free of any flow of people or vehicles. It is capable of doing all of this without putting a single Marine in harms-way. Our SIGINT Marines have worked magic, and mounted the capability on some of our MRZR's, as well as on some of our uncrewed LAV-25s. As just one example of something most individuals would find “unbelievable,” our AI-enabled counter-intrusion system was able to identify the movement of a very small group of individuals acting suspiciously and moving at a snail's pace. While there was some concern this was a small group of enemy fighters, the system said “no.” Then, one of our companies, quickly using its organic VTOL Stalker, was able to determine this was a group of civilians carrying several individuals on make-shift stretchers that could no longer walk. Due to the area being a high-risk area, we were able to send several EMAs to their location, and have them load on top for the ride back to a more secure area where they could receive medical attention. *(Yes—I suspect that statement will likely drive the folks at MCWL nuts, but the EMA is actually a great CASEVAC platform. We are using the uncrewed Hunter Wolf vehicles in the same manner. You would be amazed at how many individuals understand intuitively that those vehicles are there to give them a ride, and simply climb aboard.)*

We have learned first-hand that regardless of whether in Jonesboro, North Carolina or Kiev, Ukraine, people are obsessed with recording their daily activities and posting them on social media—whether mundane or not. Every interaction between a Marine and a civilian is captured on a smart phone of some sort, and immediately pushed to Facebook, Instagram, or some other social media platform. I have heard more than one young Marine state—“this is what it must feel like to be a cop in the U.S. now.” While that sentiment is understandable, being constantly recorded is something the Marines have responded well too, and something that has become a source of operational advantage for us. Our Gen Z Marines understand this in a deeper and more sophisticated way than our older generations. We are long past the days in Iraq in which a young male using a cellphone was immediately assumed to be triggering an IED and therefore hostile. Ukrainians who have remained inside the city for some reason or another are much more likely to seek our assistance and to hazard the journey through our lines once they watch those videos, and see that the Marines are here to help them. In addition, many of the Ukrainians have been able to share pictures and videos with us of Russian equipment, which further helps in our assessments of the potential readiness of those Russian forces in closest proximity to us. It also doesn't hurt when nearly every photo captures where on the earth the photo was taken with amazing precision.

Finally, in a move reminiscent of the early days of precision-guided strikes in the Gulf War, we try to post strike videos and even reconnaissance videos online whenever possible to both demonstrate to the Ukrainians that we will fight-back in their defense if they are attacked, and to further communicate to the Russians that we see all. *(Yes—this is a stretch, and the weather does at times degrade the performance of some of our capabilities, but they don't know that.)* We are trying to reinforce their fears that we could strike whenever and wherever we want. This has had a demonstrable deterrent effect on many of the Russian forces we maintain under persistent surveillance. We've reinforced this information campaign with video feeds from our crewed and uncrewed systems operating within strike range of Russian tanks and IFVs. Some of the enterprising Marines have figured out a way to super-impose a target crosshair picture over these potential targets. We release these posts online as well to demonstrate to the Russian tankers that at any time, we could blow their turrets off. *(Yes—I know that the divestment of our tank battalions was akin to an emasculating event for many in the retired community, yet tanks are a liability. You don't need a tank to kill a tank. At last count, the Ukrainians have destroyed 288 tanks, and not one of those kills was the result of a tank vs. tank engagement. The Army offered to provide us several and we declined. Also, the psychological impact on the infantry upon witnessing tanks being destroyed cannot be overstated. When dismounted infantry see tanks burning, flipped over, or with their turrets jettisoned, the psychological impact is devastating. From comments made by some of the Russian POWs, they were completely demoralized by the LMAMs, Javelins, and Swedish NLAWs that destroyed their armor. They thought to themselves, if the Ukrainians can do that to a T-80 and even T-90, then what can they do to me in a truck? When we return, my primary staff and I could provide those in the retired community without a conception of modern combined-arms what it looks like—if you think it would help them gain a shared understanding of FD 2030.)*

All of this battlespace awareness allows me, as well as the subordinate commanders, to do something every commander wants to do—get inside the adversary's decision loop and cause friction. We have become so good at identifying even the smallest repositioning of Russian armor and firing batteries that we are able to send out any one of our UAS systems to fly a loop overhead to let them know we see them. Since most of the Russians can't tell the difference between an LMAM or Group 2/3 UAS, they quickly dismount their vehicles and seek cover. As the late Art Corbett used to preach, it is all about winning the hider versus finder competition. From our brief experience thus far, you don't actually have to engage the target in the kill-chain, but rather, provide a visible demonstration that you see them. That is enough to disrupt enemy maneuver, and seriously get inside their OODA loops.

What does all of this mean? It is not a fair fight; which is the object we have all sought for some time. Bottom line—single-battle is now a reality at the BLT level due to FD 2030, so much to the point that I'm not even sure if BLT is an acronym that we should use anymore. After all, our "BLT" now has hundreds more aircraft, including LMAMs capable of DAS and CAS, than any MAG of 2010 did. *(Yes—I have been told that some aviators don't like to refer to uncrewed systems, especially LMAMs, as aircraft; however, most everyone from our NATO allies and Ukrainian partners see things that fly as aircraft.)*

Of course, none of this would work without phenomenally capable Marines. Marines with true physical and mental endurance, and capable of grinding, capable of helping one more civilian, capable of reviewing another hour of video feeds, capable of reviewing part of our network that they have already checked 25 times before, etc. As we all learned during OIF and OEF, people-centric operations, and make no mistake, this remains a people-centric operation despite all the LMAMs, UAS, and AI enabled kit, require endurance. Your Marines have it. Just like all before.

While I know your Talent Management initiatives caused more than one retired person to have a heart-attack, please know that trusting in the ability of the individual Marine to master more than one MOS has paid off. Despite arguments to the contrary, our young people are incredibly capable. Yes—they may be more comfortable with a joystick or controller in their hands than a K-bar, but in an era of swarming UAS, AI, remotely piloted UGVs, and LMAMs—that comfort works to their advantage. Yes—they remain deadly with their small arms. *(With the introduction of the Trijicon VCOG, every Marine is now the equivalent of Carlos Hathcock.)* While I must admit that I could easily get sick looking at drone feeds, these kids can do it for days on end—and likely have done it for days on end back home. *(In the future, hopefully we can apply machine learning to all of that processing, exploitation, and dissemination.)* Your MRB Marines easily have 3 or 4 primary MOSs, and your Weapons Platoon and Weapons Company Marines are now interchangeable as Javelin gunners, recoilless rifle operators, heavy machine-gunners, and LMAM and sUAS operators. *(Please let MajGen Alford know his Hunter-Killer Platoon concept has been validated in combat.)*

While I am embarrassed to even have to comment on this in 2023, please let those who resisted gender-integrated training know that about 20% of my SPMAGTF is female. Based on the 5+1 model you instituted at recruit training, there is true integration. There are no male Marines and female Marines here. To borrow a phrase from Commandant Vandegrift concerning a previous integration effort. They are Marines, period!

As one notable personnel-related adaptation on the ground, we have used our HMLA pilots in creative ways. Even prior to arriving on-scene, based on all the video and battle-damage-assessments, the Ukrainians had parked all their attack helicopters. They are not the first military to do so. Even if we were allowed to introduce those aircraft into theater, I would not do so. A day does not go by that the Ukrainians don't shoot-down a Russian attack helicopter somewhere in the theater. Regardless, those HMLA pilots are some of the most talented and adaptive Marines in the force, and I have been able to distribute them across the force down to the platoon and squad level to give every potential maneuver element a joint aviation fires expert. In addition, we have turned several into ULAS operators, so they remain very active.

Fires: As I noted earlier, the most common exchange of fires at present happens in the cyber domain. I cannot comment on those network operations in this report; however, can report that the Marines' performance is beyond my every expectation. No augmentation outside the Service has been required.

The most significant exchanges of traditional fires occurred within our first five days on ground. In the first instance, it appears that the Russians tried to create a stampede effect along one particularly congested movement corridor in order to cause casualties, create confusion, and potentially send a message to the local population that we could not protect them. The Russians used 2S19 Msta SP howitzers that were positioned well-back of their forward line. Via a combination of our MQ-9AER and G/ATORs, we positively identified the source of the fires, and within seconds were responding via a combination of TACTOMs fired from our ROGUE batteries and fires from our Group 5. *(Yes – please remind the folks that these fire more than anti-ship missiles.)* While it would have been easy to eliminate the entire Russian battery, we chose to stick to a strict interpretation of the ROE, and only strike the two systems we could positively identify as having engaged in the fires. *Note: Due to the weather, the ground is going back-and-forth between being frozen and semi-frozen, thus we could provide video evidence of the 2S19's tracks from the point-of-origin of the fires. As a further sign that we struck the correct offending party, no counter-fires from the Russians occurred after the strike. We posted video of the strike online to create a further deterrent.

In the second instance, an adjacent Polish unit came under fire from long-range Russian rockets—likely from a BM-30. We immediately launched our UASs to act as a guardian angel. Due to the severity of the casualties, we launched several MV-22s to the scene for CASEVAC, and backed that up with a platoon of ACVs with dismounted infantry to help secure

the site. As one would anticipate, the Russians used this opportunity to attempt to create a larger mass casualty event with SP-MAGTF personnel. Regrettably for the Russian soldiers involved and their commanders, while our combined arms kit may have changed, our expertise in combined arms has not. As the MV-22s were approaching the site, several Pantsir S1s became “active”, along with several supporting EW systems. This was immediately identified. Via a combination of LMAMs and Group 5 fires, we destroyed the active systems. Once again, Russian 2S19 SP Howitzers engaged and fired several rounds that created confusion, but no casualties. These systems were destroyed with pin-point accuracy by LMAMs fired from mobile-launchers atop our ACVs. Note—this was the larger incident in which one of the ACVs responding to the initial CASEVAC rolled-over, and resulted in 8 significant injuries. The rollover was not caused by either excessive speed or unsafe maneuvers, but rather appears to have been the consequence of the overall weight of the vehicle crushing a small section bridging beneath it. Since this larger engagement, the Russians have been very reluctant to go-active with their EW systems or their Pantsir S1s.

The final major incident occurred on D+5, and involved several Russian attack helicopters. While we had been tracking these helicopters all morning, they had not engaged in active combat, and appeared to be conducting reconnaissance. Regrettably, to the far north of the city, yet well within our area of influence, we were able to watch the helicopters conduct several “gun-runs” on civilian vehicles to include several emergency vehicles. Via our MQ-9s, we maintained positive visibility over these four aircraft. Once they landed, we launched our lethal swarming Group 2 UAS, and destroyed all four aircraft on the ground without killing any air or ground crew. Once again, there was no response to this counterattack, and like the earlier incidents, we were able to post the video online to provide both a deterrent, and potentially an inducement to some of the “less committed” Russians to surrender.

As I noted earlier, we have confirmed the destruction of 32 fuel or ammunition support trucks. You may be scratching your head as to how those vehicles could commit a hostile act; yet, according to a higher level intelligence source, the Russians were preparing to make a major move on Kiev, and in preparation for that move decided to reload their firing batteries and refuel all their IFVs, tanks, SP howitzers, and mobile rocket launchers. Based on that intelligence, evidence of an armed recce, and a legal opinion that reloading their firing assets was a demonstration of hostile intent, we decided to engage in as proportional and non-escalatory manner as possible by striking fuel and ammo resupply vehicles all along the front over a two-hour period. The strikes were carried out by a combination of MQ-9AER, ROGUE delivered TACTOMs, and LMAMs. While the majority of the strikes resulted in significant secondary explosions, we cannot confirm total EKIA or EWIA. The series of strikes was posted online as with the others to demonstrate to everyone that large groups of Russian dismounts were not deliberately targeted, nor were any capabilities not currently engaged in active operations. This strike predictably provoked a major retaliatory strike by the Russians using a combination of Group 2/3/4 UAS and even LMAMs. Marines employing Stingers, MADIS, and CLAWS (compact laser) successfully interdicted all attacking aircraft/systems with zero friendly casualties. While the Army had provided higher-end ballistic missile defenses, these were not required. *(Yes—please let any who argue that we can't depend on the Army to provide tanks or other capabilities in our times of need that they are simply mistaken. The soldiers we have in support are fantastic, and have been responsive to our every need. No different than back in Iraq with BCT 1/1 or BCT 1/3.)*

As a final comment on fires, please let all the voices crying out for more LW155 know that they were right, and that it still matters. As part of our deception plan, we established two decoy firing positions using our LW155. Within hours of doing so, the Russians were actively scouting those sites using Group 2 and 3 UAS. During one of the few times Russian fires were directed at our base location, a single 2S19 fired off a few rounds at one of the decoy locations. Our response to that shot was an LMAM that completely destroyed that system. *(Within hours of hitting the deck, a Ukrainian Commander approached me and said “please tell me you brought rocket batteries and not cannons.” After responding in the affirmative, I received a 5-minute lessons-learned class from him on the liability of any towed system. Apparently in 2014-2015, the Russians gave the Ukrainians a lesson in counter-battery fire that convinced them that towed-artillery is a liability.)*

Maneuver (All domains): While it may sound heretical, the idea of exploiting gaps and going where the enemy is not in an era of ubiquitous ISR is a pleasant fiction. We still use combined arms (to include non-traditional fires) to facilitate maneuver, but that maneuver is largely predicated on deception and our ability to conceal intent. As I noted before when discussing the Three Block War, every movement we undertake is captured on a mobile device. Those devices are simply everywhere. So how do we overcome persistent adversary ISR and persistent attacks on our communications? One way is the old-fashioned way—mission command. We operate with as little communication as possible once departing friendly lines. By doing so, we are still able to generate tempo and create advantage. Whether or not the ROE allows us to conduct offensive maneuvers to close-with and destroy the adversary or not, we remain mindful of Gen Mattis’s saying that “complacency kills,” and do everything possible to operate with tactical soundness at all times.

Regarding physical movement, MRZR and JLTVs are sufficient for all our small unit tactical needs. While the ACVs have performed well, they are simply too heavy for use in some of the AO, and require too much fuel. They are also simply too big to use in crowded streets littered with abandoned cars and choked by thousands of displaced persons. Also, without top-down protection, I am concerned that one LMAM strike could result in a mass casualty event.

Our Mobile Reconnaissance Company (reinforced) remains the “secret weapon” of the SPMAGTF GCE. While I know the debate over the ARV raged for the past several years prior to your decision not to pursue that capability, based on our operations here, you made the right call. We employ a mix of crewed and uncrewed systems to meet our reconnaissance needs to include several remotely piloted LAV-25s augmented with LMAMs and Artificial Intelligence. If one were to be targeted and struck by a Russian LMAM, it would result in zero casualties. The same could not be said using an ARV or legacy LAV-25.

As our service level MWXs and IBXs demonstrated over the past several years, just because ISR and precision strike have proliferated doesn't mean that a maneuver element won't have to close-with and destroy the adversary. I am confident that if ordered to destroy the Russian BTGs to our front and northeast that our Marines will have little difficulty in doing so through fire and maneuver, even while under persistent enemy fires. Small distributable infantry formations with LMAMs, Javelins, recoilless rifles, and guardian angel UAS could penetrate Russian lines and destroy them in detail.

While our new capabilities have performed very well, it is not an entirely good news story. We continue to have issues with weather and the absence of a true all-weather capability is a problem. In addition, firing assets have large and easily discernible signatures. This remains a real problem. While I remain a fan of the saying that professionals discuss logistics and not tactics, perhaps it is time we update that phrase, and start saying that professionals talk signature management. Given a different understanding with the Russians and perhaps a more competent force to our front, we would likely have already absorbed a few body-punches and more than one bloody nose due to signature management issues. The G/ATOR is a phenomenal capability, yet has signature issues. We can discuss those on another net, but I think you are already tracking this issue.

Logistics: Of all my concerns prior to hitting the deck, those related to Logistics have largely been unwarranted due to the availability of ULAS-Large and ULAS-Medium. Amazon distribution services have nothing on the Marines we have here who are constantly flying in everything from tens of thousands of water bottles to be distributed to civilians to small generators and spare auto parts to help local civilian authorities get emergency vehicles back into operation. For true expeditionary operations (ops that we aren't exactly conducting while living on the mature infrastructure of an airport—even without power or running water), these uncrewed logistics systems are a must. For those Marines operating out on our network of forward positions, uncrewed and at-times autonomous ground vehicles are sufficient to meet their needs, and to transport supplies from our base camp to those positions without risking any Marines. Aside from these uncrewed systems eliminating risk, they also free-up a tremendous amount of labor/talent that can now be dedicated elsewhere as required.

What many may not know about this uncrewed capability is that the operators of these ULAS are all enlisted Marines—mostly Corporals and Sergeants. On top of that, most possess additional MOSs and even skills sets related to additive manufacturing. We use these systems A LOT, and therefore need a steady supply of spare parts. Our liquid metal printers and other additive manufacturing capabilities satisfy that need, and do so with the smallest footprint possible.

Regarding distribution, our uncrewed ground vehicles and ULAS-Medium have become true “life-savers.” Based on the extent of our battlespace awareness that I mentioned earlier, we can now “push” supplies forward to at-risk individuals and groups prior to them reaching our lines. Clearly, some of those on the move were forced to leave their homes with little clothing or supplies. We are able to fly in blankets, food, water, etc. to these individuals where they are vice having to wait for them to arrive. While this may not seem like that big a deal, by satisfying their immediate needs away from our main location, we can get them processed and moving along more quickly, thus mitigating the risks associated with a very large aggregation of people.

I'm glad to say all the log-focused wargames and experiments brought us a long way from the days of loading up MTRVs and LVSRs and “hitting the road” as was done in 2004 Iraq. Our approach of designing things for a lighter footprint, using uncrewed delivery systems, and especially training Marines to leverage local resources while adhering to real supply discipline is bearing fruit. Our experiences here, so long as they are incorporated into the Service's campaign of learning, will help us get even better.

As noted earlier, the fuel consumption of the ACVs remains a concern; however, at present we have not had any difficulty in keeping them fully fueled and constantly ready for employment. In a more contested environment that would not be the case. Not limited to the ACV fuel issue alone, we are very fortunate our adversary has not attempted to disrupt our supply chain. As you know, we have a lot of work to do to thrive in a Contested Logistics environment.

Force Protection: The idea of fixed-site security being a lesser warfighting need and requiring lesser capable individuals, needs to be dropped once and for all from our schema. For years, artillery guarded the rear area, and did so with great proficiency. During OIF and OEF, SMCR infantry battalions were mobilized and disaggregated for this task. Those days are over. Yes—infantry battalions, and every other unit, needs to be able to secure itself in a complex battlespace. Thankfully as earlier mentioned, AI-enabled force protection and counter-intrusion systems help immensely, as do uncrewed UGVs.

True air superiority in an era of swarming UAS and LMAMs is a pleasant fiction. Even if the Russians can't operate Su-27s with impunity due to the endurance of Ukrainians flying MIG-29, they can and will attempt to employ uncrewed systems 24/7. Because of that threat, whenever our Marines stop moving for any length of time, they must have MADIS and CLAWS. Both of these systems have performed well, and both have undoubtedly prevented casualties. *(Please let Gen Neller know that his focus on air-defense and EW for all those years finally paid off.)*

While we all remember the incredibly brave Marine UH-1N and AH-1W pilots that operated in and around Fallujah back in 2004-2005, based on the proliferation of MANPADs and LMAMs, I would never authorize another attack helicopter to get off the ground. It is simply not necessary, and the risks are too great. Every Ukrainian soldier we see is carrying either a Javelin, Stinger, sniper rifle, or some combination of the three. LMAMs and UCAV can do everything attack helicopters can do, and more, with less risk, at a lower cost, and to a greater degree of precision.

I will try to send another update in the upcoming weeks, and will be prepared to provide a full AAR to you and the EOS members upon my return, as well as meet with any interested Members. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Glossary

ACV: amphibious combat vehicle
 BLT: Battalion Landing Team
 CAS: close air support
 CASEVAC: casualty evacuation
 CJTF: Combined Joint Task Force
 CLAWS: Complementary Low Altitude Weapon System
 DAS : deep air support
 EKIA: enemy killed in action
 EMAY: Expeditionary Modular Autonomous Vehicle
 EOS: Executive Off-site
 EWIA: enemy wounded in action
 G/ATOR: Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar (G/ATOR)
 GO: General Officers
 HAW: heavy anti-armor weapon
 HMLA: Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron
 IBX: infantry battalion experimentation
 ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross
 IFV: infantry fighting vehicle
 ISR: intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
 JLTV: Joint Light Tactical Vehicle
 LAW: light anti-armor weapon
 LMAM: Lethal Miniature Aerial Munitions

LVSR: Logistic Vehicle System Replacement
 MADIS: Marine Air Defense Integrated System
 MANPADS: Man-portable air-defense system
 MAW: medium anti-armor weapon
 MQ-9A: Reaper UAV (sometimes called Predator B)
 MRB: Marine Raider Battalion
 MRZR: ultra-light combat vehicle
 MTRV: Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement
 OEF: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
 OIF: Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
 OPF-I: Organic Precision Fire - Infantry
 ROE: rules of engagement
 ROGUE: The Remotely Operated Ground Unit for Expeditionary fires
 RXR: reconnaissance-counter-reconnaissance
 SMCR: Selected Marine Corps Reserve
 SOCOM: Special Operations Command
 SPMAGTF: Special Purpose MAGTF
 TACTOM: Tomahawk
 UCAV: Unmanned combat aerial vehicle
 UGV: unmanned ground vehicle
 VCOG: Variable Combat Optical Gunsight