
U.S. Marine Corps Service Strategy 2016



United States Marine Corps

General Robert B. Neller
37th Commandant of the Marine Corps

CMC INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for future force development to ensure the Marine Corps is considered ready, relevant, and responsive across the range of military operations in the future. It will also serve to guide resource-informed, capability-driven decisions for how we man, organize, train, and equip the Marine Corps for the 21st century.

The Marine Corps' strategy is based on our assessment of the anticipated future operating environment and the opportunities, challenges, and threats presented by this environment. This strategy reaffirms our role in national defense and supports the guidance provided in the National Military Strategy and the Maritime Strategy: A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower. Our core mission, as directed by Title 10, of providing relevant naval expeditionary forces in readiness, able to respond rapidly across the range of military operations (ROMO), remains our first priority.

This document will define the strategic ends to organize, train, and equip the force consistent with the character of war in the first half of the 21st Century. The ways and means will be executed through three supporting efforts: the Marine Corps Capstone Operating Concept: Expeditionary Force 21; the Marine Corps Force Management Plan, focused on force generation and management over a near term five-year period; and the Marine Corps Enterprise Investment Plan (MCEIP), which supports capability development.

This document provides guidance for a ten year outlook. I intend to focus our efforts during my tenure as Commandant in specific areas through detailed Fragmentary Orders released at least annually. I anticipate my successor will update our futures assessment and this document.

Our adversaries are demonstrating that the character of warfare in this Century is and will remain incredibly dynamic. Our ability to remain the crisis response force for the nation, and the future of our Corps, rests upon our imaginative and innovative spirit to address these changing dynamics and guide development of tomorrow's capabilities. The future of our nation rests on our ability to out-think our foes, be disciplined and well trained, and develop and field capabilities that ensure we can fight and win our nation's battles in any clime, place, or contested space.

FOREWORD

The Marine Corps has a unique ability to task organize and "mix and match" capabilities to operate as a naval expeditionary force, a crisis response force, or engage in sustained ground combat ashore. Our strength lies in our ability to operate across the range of military operations and do so in a cost efficient, operationally effective, and tactically sound manner. However, the Marine Corps is not only the "first to fight", but is often first to respond to natural disasters, to Embassies in crisis in foreign lands, and to Combatant Command requests for skilled training, Joint and Combined exercise participation, and partner capacity building with allied forces - - Today's "3 Block War." Maintaining this full range of capabilities demands sound resource management and force development practices.

PART ONE: The Future Operating Environment Assessment

Our actions over the past 15 years of combat and crisis response provided a new chapter in the legacy of the Marine Corps. Yet, while we were meeting those combat requirements, our adversaries adapted to what they observed at an unprecedented rate. These changes are identified within the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity's *Future Operating Environment 2015-2025*, which must be understood by every Marine and Sailor. With over a decade to observe and understand our warfighting advantages in open terrain, our adversaries will likely seek to challenge us in urban and other complex environments, while continuing to focus on asymmetric advantage. Consequently, the integration of ISR, unmanned systems, lethal long range weapons, and information operations is the new reality in future warfare. Information warfare, including cyber operations and open source information technology will cut across all warfighting functions. By leveraging advances in commercial technologies, our enemies can now contest us at low cost with advanced systems. At the same time, the use of Improvised Explosive Devices and 'hiding amongst the population' will continue.

Though the character of warfare is changing, its nature and our missions do not. Marines will continue to operate as part of a forward naval expeditionary force capable of maintaining forward presence for steady state, crisis response, and contingency operations. We do not have the luxury of focusing on one identity, paradigm, or capability. As a crisis response force, we require capabilities that enable immediate employment and sustainment across the ROMO, providing our nation's leaders strategic decision space. In addition, we must be able to enable surging joint forces, especially when access is likely to be challenged. Marines cannot pick and choose mission sets. We must ensure our capabilities meet our unique tasks.

PART TWO: Strategic Ends

1. Enhanced and Integrated Naval Expeditionary Capabilities: The future MAGTF will be an agile and tailorable naval expeditionary force capable of fighting at sea, from the sea, and/or expeditionary advanced bases in crisis, contingency, or major operations across all domains. We will develop naval expeditionary forces capable of supporting establishment of sea control, denying the sea to adversaries, and conducting Operational Maneuver from the Sea in Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) environments against all possible threats. As potential adversaries continue to develop and employ A2/AD capabilities as part of an active defense-in-depth, expeditionary forces must possess the capability, equipment, and training to create gaps and exploit seams in the contested littorals, and at sea, for the larger Naval or Joint Force. Naval forces must operate, maneuver, persist, and gain and maintain the initiative within contested littoral environments against a range of threats employed by state and non-state actors.

2. Integrated and Codified relationships with the Navy, Special Operations Forces, and Inter-Agency Community: While other elements of the Joint Force will surge as directed, Marines, Sailors, and Special Operators must operate forward to build partner capacity, enable access, and respond to crisis. Working as part of an integrated team, Marines can provide enablers critical to protecting national interests and setting conditions for the Joint Force and our allies. We will strengthen and codify these relationships through wargaming, experimentation, training, exercise planning, and a resulting thorough examination of command relationships to ensure unity of effort.

3. Create and Equip the 21st Century Marine: Our Corps' performance as an expeditionary force is anchored in the philosophy of maneuver warfare, with a reliance on rapid and opportunistic action and decision making. The dynamic 21st Century environment requires a command climate which rewards initiative and tolerates mistakes – when they are the result of smart, aggressive tactics and calculated risks. Consistent with the Fleet Landing Exercises of 1935-1941 and Maneuver Warfare revolution in the 1980s, the Marine Corps will adapt and innovate by placing recent operations under critical examination for lessons learned. We must ensure we facilitate a culture of learning, intellectual curiosity, academic excellence, and the freedom to challenge existing narratives or paradigms. We will seek new ways to enable rapid decision-making that facilitates innovation, adaptation, and warfighting effectiveness to overcome increasingly capable and adaptive enemies. We must also properly equip our Marines with the best possible kit, within reasonable cost and timelines, understanding that 'perfect is the enemy of good enough.' To ensure success in this area, we must leverage other services and programs to maximize our dollars, while also acknowledging that every Marine is a rifleman, but not every Marine is an infantryman. Our 21st Century infantry must be afforded the best current and emerging technologies we can afford to ensure our pre-eminence on the future battlefield where individual Marines will continue to close with and destroy the enemy. All of these efforts must be supported with physically demanding standards that improve individual functional fitness and practices to harden and develop resiliency within every Marine. We will commit ourselves to making timely and relevant changes at a faster pace than our rapidly evolving adversaries.

4. Create the 21st Century MAGTF: Our MAGTF must evolve to provide the right capabilities in all five domains across the continuum of conflict in support of Naval and Joint expeditionary operations. Our MAGTFs must be a 'full partner' in the naval blue water fight enroute to and from the littorals – from the day we leave port until the day we return home. The ability of our adversaries to leverage surveillance, information, and lethal fires makes the principle of mass a potential liability. Complex terrain, particularly dense urban areas, coupled with the rise of information warfare, further complicate current and forecasted operational environments. These complications demand integrated MAGTF C2 that enables Distributed Operations across all our tactical formations. Our Corps, in full partnership with the Navy, must be able to distribute C2, fires, mobility, sustainment, and force protection in the face of an ever increasing threat, while also possessing the capabilities to rapidly mass effects at times and places of our choosing, to create and exploit gaps. Yet, the MAGTF as a whole does not currently possess some of the necessary capabilities where we need them most to operate in this distributed manner, especially at the company level, and if advantageous, below. To close these gaps, we must leverage our warfighting concepts to guide how our Corps evolves existing organizations, education, training, equipment, and doctrine. Doing so, we must remain focused on seeking and exploiting disruptive capabilities.

5. Exploit Technology: A military that is slow to develop new ways of fighting and exploit technology puts itself at a disadvantage and incurs risk. Harnessing the potential of automation is a prerequisite in the 21st Century. By combining digital programming and microprocessors into systems that not only perform tasks, but also respond dynamically to challenges, we will leverage automation to our advantage. We are seeing prototypes and early fielded versions of automated systems in every domain, perhaps none greater than unmanned aerial systems, where our Corps must continue to adapt.

We will immediately embrace innovative approaches to Manned-Unmanned Teaming (MUM-T) to the maximum extent possible, across all warfighting functions. MUM-T initiatives, across the MAGTF, will significantly change and improve the collective warfighting potential of our Corps.

6. Recognize and Prepare for Threats in the Urban Littorals: We must closely examine USMC roles and missions in the urban littorals and ensure our future capabilities are appropriately aligned. This is where Marines will likely find themselves and we must aggressively develop capabilities that optimize the MAGTF for employment in this environment. A key part of our solution to this challenge is simultaneously employing ISR and precise fires – kinetic and electronic weapons, to include cyber – at the tactical edge, enabled by the implementation of new MUM-T concepts. We must positively control our signature while raising our adversaries'. Another critical aspect of operating in the urban littoral is our ability to conduct surface maneuver at and from the sea, inland through waterways and urban canyons, and along coastlines with a signature of our choosing. Current and future surface connectors enable rapid projection of combat power but still create large signatures. We must explore other surface maneuver options, especially boats and small craft, to enable low signature littoral maneuver, distributed operations, and initial penetration in an A2/AD environment. Additionally, we must develop decoys, conduct signature masking, and employ deception and electronic capabilities, to reduce or mask our overall signature and gain advantage over our adversaries.

PART THREE: The Way Ahead

This Service Strategy identifies the need to be ready for uncertainty now and in the future, with a focus on high-end complex expeditionary operations. Concurrently, our concept development, education and training will identify and adapt to new operational paradigms. This strategy, along with other guidance, provides a common aim point for force management, force development, and investment planning. The end result will be enhanced operational readiness today and informed capability development for tomorrow.

Marines today continue to be engaged in essential and demanding tasks across the globe; this will never change. Even though the future holds challenges for our Corps, we can be confident that we are up to the task. Marines have always thrived on adversity. The strength of the unit, as well as of the individual Marine, has always been our insistence on success in the face of danger, uncertainty, and disadvantageous odds.

I am enthusiastic about facing and overcoming the challenges that face us because I am certain we will become a stronger Corps in overcoming them. To achieve our desired ends, *I expect Marines and Marine Commanders, at all levels, to discuss and understand this strategy and its implications.* Realizing the goals in this strategy requires a generational focus. The future Commandant of the Marine Corps who will inherit the endstate of this strategy is a Captain or Major today, which further reinforces the requirement to align education, training, and equipping for the future operating environment.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert B. Neller", written in a cursive style.

Robert B. Neller
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps