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II Marine Expeditionary Force: A June 2021 Update



By Robbin F. Laird

<u>II MEF MARINES PREPARE FOR THE HIGH-END FIGHT: MEFEX 21.1 AND DYNAMIC CAPE 21</u>	<u>3</u>
MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE EXERCISE 21.1	3
DYNAMIC CAPE 21	5
<u>THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR THE NORTH CAROLINA-BASED MARINES AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>THE MEB AND NAVAL INTEGRATION: WORKING THE NEXT PHASE OF ATLANTIC DEFENSE</u>	<u>10</u>
COLONEL DAVID EVERLY	13
<u>RESHAPING ISR FOR NAVY-USMC INTEGRATION</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>RETHINKING EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>A LOGISTICS PERSPECTIVE ON II MEF TRANSFORMATION</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>WORKING II MEF OPERATIONS IN TRANSITION</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>THE CHALLENGE OF PREPARING FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS FOR 2ND MEF</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>EXERCISE DEEP WATER: WORKING THE INTEGRATED DISTRIBUTED INSERTION FORCE</u>	<u>26</u>
MCSC: NETWORKING ON THE MOVE (NOTM) FAMILY OF SYSTEMS (FOS)	29
DESCRIPTION	29
OPERATIONAL IMPACT	29
<u>RE-SHAPING NORTH ATLANTIC DEFENSE: SHAPING A WAY AHEAD FOR NORTH-CAROLINA BASED MARINES</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>THE EVOLUTION OF C2 IN II MEF TRANSFORMATION</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>THE STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR II MEF TRANSFORMATION</u>	<u>34</u>
LIEUTENANT GENERAL BEAUDREault, COMMANDING GENERAL, II MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE	37

II MEF Marines Prepare for the High-End Fight: MEFEX 21.1 and Dynamic Cape 21

05/03/2021

During a visit to Camp Lejeune during the last week of April 2021, I had a chance to talk and interview the IIMEF leadership team. They had just concluded a major exercise, Dynamic Cape 21, which I will highlight in some of those in the forthcoming published interviews.

Dynamic Cape 21 was a continuation of an exercise conducted last Fall, MEFEX 21.1. These exercises are part of the shift from the training for the land wars to the high-end fight, and one characterized by greater integration with the U.S. Navy. The logistics side of supporting such operations was highlighted in both exercises, but notably in Dynamic Cape 21.

Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise 21.1

In a story by Sgt. Elizabeth Gerber, II MEF, published on [October 9, 2020](#), this is how the exercise was described as it began:

In the upcoming weeks, II Marine Expeditionary Force will be sending Marines and equipment to A. P. Hill, Virginia and Fort Drum, New York starting Oct. 7 for Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise 21.1.

MEFEX 21.1 is a command and control exercise conducted in a simulated deployed environment designed to enhance the interoperability and command and control between II MEF command element staff and its higher, adjacent, and subordinate command headquarters.

By conducting exercises of this nature, II MEF maintains its operational readiness, ready to provide the Marine Corps with an experienced staff capable of integrating with international allies and partner nations in a combined joint task force, charged with accomplishing a wide range of military operations at a moment's notice.

According to Major Newman, Future Operations Planner for II MEF, "MEFEX was created to support the Commanding General's Campaign Plan, aligning with USEUCOM and service planning guidance."

"The Marines have been preparing for this exercise since Nov. 2019 by taking part in professional military education and other simulated exercises," explained Newman. Approximately 1,200 Marines and sailors will be participating across the eastern United States.

II MEF is keeping the health and wellness of all participants a top priority throughout the execution of MEFEX 21.1. Leaders at all levels continue to emphasize the importance of social distancing, handwashing, surface sanitation, and proper mask wear in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. II MEF's staff is constantly monitoring and assessing the situation and are prepared to take measured actions to protect the health of our Marines and sailors.

II MEF will train to fight and win in a command and control contested environment, exercise naval warfighting in a joint and combined environment, and incorporate experimental focus areas.

In a story by 2nd Lt. Eric Bohnenkamp, II Marine Expeditionary Force published on [November 18, 2020](#), this is how the exercise was described as it concluded:

II MEF concluded Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise 21.1, which took place across the east coast at Fort Drum, New York; Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia; and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, November 13.

The exercise occurred from November 4-13 and included Marines and Sailors with II MEF training alongside NATO allies: Norway's Brigade North, French Army 6th Light Armoured Brigade, and the United Kingdom's Royal Marine 3rd Commando, and U.S. Navy partners with Second Fleet.

II Marine Expeditionary Support Battalion provided and coordinated combat service support and administrative, training, and logistical support to the MEF Command Element during MEFEX 21.1. Additionally, II MSB served as the camp commandant for all tenants at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, and provided life support to a nearly 1000-person camp.

"We have a diverse group of talented Marines and Sailors across II MSB," said Lt. Col. Robert Fairley, commanding officer, II MSB.

"Exercises such as MEFEX 21.1 provide our battalion with unique opportunities to come together and position ourselves to best support the MEF Command Element in a deployed environment." Lt. Col. Robert Fairley, II MSB commanding officer

MEFEX 21.1 enhanced command and control and interoperability with allies and partners, focused upon facing a near-peer threat in the European theater and synchronized II MEF with its subordinate commands from 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, and II Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group.

"This peer level exercise is focused upon a peer-level adversary where II MEF is dependent upon working with our allies and fleet partners," said Lt. Gen. Brian D. Beaudreault, commanding general, II MEF. "This is very much a joint-combined exercise against a near-peer threat."

The training objectives reached in the scenario were also matched by real-world accomplishments. Marines with Combat Logistics Regiment 27 drove 916 miles from Fort Drum, New York, to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina in only two-and-a-half days. CLR 27 is awaiting word from the USMC Historical Division concerning whether it was the longest the vehicle convoy in recent Marine Corps history.

The key objective of MEFEX was to find ways to tighten our integration with the allies and partners. "That was woven into this exercise in addition to tightening up the relationship with key allies and really subset of our NATO allies who are most likely matched with the capability with the Marine Corps," said Beaudreault.

Dynamic Cape 21

It started with a major logistics effort within the exercise.

As as II MEF story highlighted the focus of the exercise in a piece published on [April 15, 2021](#):

U.S. Marines with II Marine Expeditionary Force began Dynamic Cape 21.1, a live maritime prepositioning exercise that includes an Operational Logistics Exercise with a subsequent final exercise event, taking place from Apr. 7-28, 2021.

As a part of DC 21.1, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, II MEF, and Combat Logistics Regiment 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, are participating in an OPLOGEX taking place across the eastern United States.

Locations hosting the exercise include Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, Wilmington, North Carolina; and Blount Island, Florida.

During the OPLOGEX, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces will transport materiel and equipment on rail and ship and conduct pier-side offload of the USNS Williams at Blount Island Command, Florida. II MEF will also maintain an element in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina to command and control the offload while rehearsing the command's ability to deploy, employ, and redeploy a forward element.

This exercise facilitates the rapid deploy-ability of scalable naval expeditionary forces in support of major combat operations. Marines and sailors train to increase critical expeditionary capabilities and facilitate bridging the seam between operations on land and sea.

U.S. Marine Corps Col. David R. Everly, the commanding officer of 2d MEB, said units are prepared to coordinate and respond to any situation when it comes to logistics.

"They're ready to respond to any crisis," he said. "An exercise like this is just another opportunity for us to show that we have a focus on all different spectrum of challenges that are hitting us, and we're ready to respond."

The OPLOGEX provides an opportunity for II MEF to develop, refine, and test portions of theater opening and force deployment processes to gain MEF-level warfighting proficiency and readiness.

And as the exercise concluded, Sgt. Elizabeth Gerber, II MEF, provided this assessment in an article published on [April 30, 2021](#):

II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) executed Exercise Dynamic Cape (DC) 21.1, a live maritime prepositioning exercise that included an Operational Logistics Exercise (OPLOGEX) with a subsequent final exercise event, from April 7-28, 2021.

DC 21.1 was a MEF level exercise which supported the development of command and control and logistics capabilities across different areas of operations. The scenario-based training incorporated

movement of military equipment, personnel, transportation, and cross communication between II MEF, its allies, and partners.

U.S. Marines assigned to II MEF, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and 2nd Marine Logistics Group (MLG) participated in DC 21.1 with external support from the Norwegian Army's Brigade North.

During DC 21.1, the OPLOGEX took place across the Eastern United States including Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, and Blount Island, Florida. The logistical exercise showcased the Marines' ability to transport military equipment by rail, motor transport, and ship.

The OPLOGEX component of DC 21.1 was conducted by the recently activated 2nd Landing Support Battalion (LSB), 2nd MLG.

"This is our first major exercise since the activation of 2nd Landing Support Battalion," said Lt. Col. Randall Nickel, commanding officer of 2nd LSB, "Marines of 2nd LSB were supporting the reconstitution of the equipment that was assigned to the MAGTF during exercise Dynamic Cape. The realistic quality of the exercise was apparent when put to the test."

DC 21.1 has served as a crucial exercise for many components of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) in refining and instilling combat readiness across many occupational fields.

"The processes that we established for Dynamic Cape 21 are exactly the same processes that we would use in a combat operation," said Marine Corps Maj. William Hemme, the Arrival and Assemble Operations Group Supply Officer, "...as part of Dynamic Cape and the Operation Logistics Exercise, we have downloaded and we are reconstituting a single ship, the USNS D. T. Williams."

Hemme stresses the importance of a realistic simulation for those who are responsible for the embarkation and disembarkation of equipment from one location to another.

"For this particular exercise, we intentionally set up so that we would have the most realistic training we could have with the supply processes implemented," said Hemme.

Throughout DC 21.1, II MEF showcased command and control capabilities and achieved a major movement of personnel and equipment in a realistic training environment.

Without doubt, the exercises reflect testing out the transformation efforts from the intersection of the North Carolina-based Marines with 2nd and 6th Fleet with whom they work.

Clearly, this is a work in progress.

But the focus of the effort is clear which is highlighted in this [USMC article](#) which highlighted an April 7th meeting among the key commanders:

NORFOLK, Va. — U.S. 2nd Fleet (C2F) staff met with U.S. 6th Fleet (C6F) and II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) staffs virtually to discuss best practices for maritime effectiveness, Apr. 7.

Opening remarks were led by Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet, Vice Adm. Gene Black, commander, U.S. 6th Fleet, and Lt. Gen. Brian Beaudreault, commander, II Marine Expeditionary Force.

The senior leaders focused on high-end training and employment, and the capability of supporting the employment of forces, whether on the Western side of the Atlantic, the Eastern side of the Atlantic, or in the Arctic. The tri-lateral engagement strengthens security and promotes freedom across critical sea lanes in the Atlantic.

“Synchronization with our counterparts at both II MEF and Sixth Fleet is vital to seamless command and control across the vast Atlantic AOR,” said Lewis. “Whether American ships and Marines are ultimately deploying to the High North, the Eastern Med, or the Arabian Gulf, East Coast ships must first sail across the Atlantic and the relationship between our staffs is critical to success.”

The topics discussed among senior members of the respective fleet staffs included organizational structure, maritime operations center functionality, and naval integration.

“We have demonstrated our ability to operate alongside Second Fleet, integrating II MEF Marines at every step of our planning and operational execution, building our asymmetric advantage to defeat any maritime threat,” said Black. “When we operate together and with our NATO Allies, as one seamless force, we will achieve transatlantic maritime superiority.”

Discussions aimed to improve integration amongst the three commands to ensure a seamless trans-Atlantic bridge. The three commands are prepared to operate together in every domain, at all levels of warfare, from the tactical to the strategic, alongside NATO Allies and partners.

“II MEF is a maritime force inextricably linked to our Navy partners in Second and Sixth Fleets,” said Beaudreault. “Our continued discussions ensures our naval expeditionary team continues to leverage our collective capabilities and increase lethality across all domains.”

C2F exercises operational authorities over assigned ships, aircraft, and landing forces on the East Coast and the Atlantic.

C6F, headquartered in Naples, Italy, conducts the full spectrum of joint and naval operations, in concert with allied and interagency partners, in order to advance U.S. national interests and security and stability in Europe and Africa.

II MEF, headquartered in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, deploys and is employed in support of commandant commander (CCDR) requirements for contingency response or major combat operations. Aligning with the 38th Commandant's Planning Guidance, II MEF is continuing to grow its naval expeditionary force alongside C2F and C6F.

The Strategic Context for the North Carolina-based Marines and Their Transformation

05/04/2021

Recently, I had a chance to visit Camp Lejeune and talk with the leadership of IIMEF. I have visited 2nd Marine Air Wing often, most recently last December and of course, 2nd MAW is a key enabler of IIMEF operations. But both commands are in transition as the United States and its allies work to shape both warfighting and deterrence strategies to deal with the challenges posed by Russia and its authoritarian partners to the North Atlantic.

The geography for defense and deterrence has changed for the North Atlantic with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Putin's Russia. Rather than having a Warsaw Pact geography to operate from in the North Atlantic, Russia now faces a new configuration of competitors in the Northern region, with the Cold War "neutrals," Sweden and Finland become close partners of its Nordic allies and significant participants in reshaping North Atlantic defense.

The standing up of the new commands at Norfolk, a relaunched and re-configured Second Fleet and the establishment of an operational NATO command on U.S. territory, Allied Joint Forces Command, create a launch point for reworking North Atlantic maritime operations and defense.

The U.S. Navy is launching its next generation carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford into this evolving strategic context, and the Norfolk commands under Vice Admiral Lewis are reworking how to fight as a fleet with allies working in close cooperation with the United States. And in the new context, operations in the High North and working defense and security in the region with both the Russians and Chinese as players is a key part of the strategic reset.

New defense approaches and concepts of operations are being shaped by the fleet, working to shape capabilities to operate as a distributed integrated force. This obviously is a work in progress where the blueprint is being forged and shaped.

And it is about force redesign but done in the context of being able to fight tonight. It is also about reshaping blue water operations, or better expressed as blue water expeditionary operations after a two-decade priority on support to the land wars.

It is into this strategic context and US Navy fleet concept of operations redesign where 2nd MAW and IIMEF are engaging in their own force redesign as well. The Marine Corps Commandant has emphasized the importance of increased USMC-Navy integration, but this is especially challenging as the US Navy is on its own adventure for fleet warfighting redesign itself.

And for both 2nd MAW and IIMEF, they are coming out of a long period of operating in the Middle East with priorities on how to work with the US Army and allied ground forces to operate and prevail in the wars of counterinsurgency. But unlike these wars, peer competition has built into it the key challenge of mastering escalation dominance. This means that the Marines as a maneuver force need to prioritize their abilities to operate and prevail in contested air and maritime space, and to do so by sorting through how to shape a distributed integrated force with a Navy itself in the process of significant redesign.

This is hardly easy, and remembering throughout, that redesign is nice, but one has to be ready for combat operations now. This is the challenge facing IIMEF as well as 2nd MAW as it shapes its way ahead to integrate with the US Navy.

Added to this are two other dynamics of change as well, which the commands face as well, both providing tools and opportunities for significant innovation. Unlike the Cold War period, the Nordics and the British are shaping new capabilities and approaches to defense in the region. And indeed, they have new equipment, as good or more advanced than the American forces themselves are operating with. How then best to shape an open-ended co-learning process between the Navy and the Marines, on the one hand, and the allies on the other.

The other key dynamic of change involves the reshaping of U.S. airpower. For the USAF, bringing fifth generation capabilities, and using bomber capabilities are becoming key elements of reshaping the warfighting and deterrent capabilities in the region. But this shift is generational in making as well as the USAF has primarily focused on its support for the ground forces for a very long time.

The nature of the challenge faced by the USAF in re-engaging in the kind of combat capability which is now becoming central for the US Navy and its USMC partners in force integration was well articulated by Ben Lambeth in his recent book on airpower in Operation Inherent Resolve and which he discussed in a recent interview with me.

He noted in that interview that “as counterinsurgency operations became the predominant American way of war after 2003, the USAF lost a lot of muscle memory for doing much of anything else by way of higher-end force employment. And the predominant Army leadership at U.S. Central Command continued to apply its long-habituated Army thinking going forward into an entirely different situation that was presented by the rise of ISIS. A more assertive leadership in CENTCOM’s air component at the time would have pressed for a different response to the challenge it was handed in 2014 by arguing for targeting ISIS not as an insurgency, but rather as a self-avowed state in the making.”

Lambeth further added: “One must remember that the vast majority of today’s serving U.S. Air Force airmen are only familiar with Operation Desert Storm from their book reading. And even much of the USAF’s more senior leadership today has never really been exposed to higher-end aerial warfare as we last experienced it over Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in 2003. Only now are we slowly coming to realize the opportunity costs that were inflicted by this neglect for nearly two decades, during which time we fixated solely on less intense counterinsurgency warfare.”

I have been focused for several years on what I see as a clear and dramatic shift from how civilians and the military have looked at the land wars in the Middle East to now dealing with adversaries who have built forces for contested operations across the spectrum of conflict.

We have a generation of civilian and military leaders who have not lived in the context of dealing with peer nuclear powers with significant conventional capability. It is not surprising that a full and proper understanding of escalation management has atrophied as a result.

This strategic shift has had a particularly dramatic impact on maritime and airpower, which clearly should be the ascendent force elements in the Pentagon as we seek to sort through the way ahead. And the fullest possible integration of air and maritime power is the key to underwriting the strategic interests of the United States.

So how do we make the transition? How do we shape a concept of operations that is more relevant to the new strategic reality now emerging in the Pacific? And how do we prevent ground-pounders from pressing to put long-range missiles with conventional warheads into the first island chain or on allied soil ringing China without even considering their all but certain negative impact on escalation management with a nuclear power?

As the Navy and Marines work their new approaches to Atlantic defense, clearly a core partner in this effort is the shift in how the USAF approaches its operations in the region. This means that for the North Carolina-based Marines they are facing multiple transitions at the same time. They have their own transition from the land wars and shaping how to operate in denied and contested combat space.

They have to work with the Navy to shape a co-evolution of operating as a distributed but integratable force. They are shifting from the classic Cold War mission of racing to Norway to counter the Soviets prior to a German like seizure of the area to one where the Nordics themselves are reworking their defense approach out into the High North. And the USAF is working its fifth-gen tactical fighter capability working with the bombers to shape a longer-range kill web enabled combat force.

This strategic context provides the background for the transition in the Atlantic region, and it is a background different from the Pacific and deserves its own analysis as well.

In short, exercises, experimentation and cross-learning with allies, the USAF and the US Navy are key ingredients which will shape an effective way ahead for 2nd MAF and IIMEF. It also sets the challenges and opportunities facing their own force transformation.

The MEB and Naval Integration: Working the Next Phase of Atlantic Defense

05/07/2021

The Russian seizure of Crimea set in motion the return of direct defense for both Europe and the United States. With Putin's Russia reshaping its defense capabilities and concepts of operations, there is a significant reset in terms of how the United States and the allies are working force integration in the North Atlantic.

With the Nordics leading the way in terms of European responses to the Northern Flank, the reestablishment of Second Fleet and the standup of a NATO command on U.S. soil, Allied Joint Forces Command, have set in motion a Norfolk led effort for reworking how the United States Navy works with allies in shaping the way ahead in what has been called the "Fourth Battle of the Atlantic."

With the shift from the land wars to full spectrum crisis management, and with a new focus by the U.S. Navy on fleet combat operations, a new phase in working Marines with the evolving approach to Naval integration is underway.

This clearly affects the North Carolina-based Marines, and no force more so than the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade within II MEF.

During my visit to II MEF during the last week of April, I had a chance to meet with the acting commander of 2nd MEB, Colonel David Everly (see biography at the end of the article).

2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade is a very flexible force capability.

As their [website](#) highlights:

“The MEB Command Element (CE) provides a Marine Air Ground Task Force /Joint Task Force (MAGTF/JTF)-capable headquarters that can rapidly deploy and when directed composites with naval and / or land-based forward-deployed and/or rapidly deployable forces to form a MAGTF or the core element of a JTF headquarters in order to fulfill Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) operational requirements.”

But that force construct faces significant challenges as the effort to shape new approaches to naval integration unfolds. As Colonel Everly put it in our discussion: “We’re changing our culture. We’re shifting our culture back to align with the naval character of our force.”

He added that “understanding the Navy’s composite warfare concept is not something culturally ingrained in how the USMC has been trained and operates.”

But there is a cultural challenge on the Navy side as well. “Our expertise as a MEB is in composite warfare. How well does the US Navy fighting as a fleet, understand that expertise and how best to leverage that and shape new approaches to integration.”

In other words, a core challenge is co-evolution to create new combat capabilities. On the one hand, as the Navy reworks fleet operations, how best to leverage what the USMC can contribute? How should the USMC reshape to better support fleet operations, and reshape its approach to composite operations?

A key challenge is working two key elements: how to contribute as a task force element and how to be able to deploy as a self-sufficient force in a crisis?

On the one hand, what is being worked are new ways to shape modular task forces within which the Marines bring core competencies and capabilities. On the other hand, how to ensure that the Marines are a survivable force when they deploy as a unit?

For Colonel Everly, a key way ahead is to train and exercise together and to reshape interactively the kind of co-evolution which will lead to mission success. The MEB is clearly pursuing such an approach as seen in the recently completed Dynamic Cape 21 exercise. In this exercise, working how to shape expeditionary logistics as a key part of support to force projection in the North Atlantic was a key part of the effort.

Logistics is crucial as well as shaping the kind of distributed C2 which can be leveraged to craft flexible force integration as well.

That kind of effort was seen earlier this year when 2 MEB completed an Initial Response Team Exercise.

As [a story](#) released by the command indicated about this exercise:

U.S. Marines with 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade completed an Initial Response Team exercise, taking place on Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Auxiliary Landing Field Bogue, N.C., Jan. 14, 2021. The Initial Response Team exercise simulated a forward theater deployment to establish a command and control communication node for 2nd MEB with support from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263.

“We conducted an Initial Response Team fly away drill that consisted of Marines from core functional areas within the MEB,” said Maj. Jay Montgomery, G-3 future operations planner, 2nd MEB. “The team was given 24 to 96 hours to prepare for a simulated forward deployment and establish a command and control center.”

As 2nd MEB executed the exercise, they were air lifted to Marine Corps Auxiliary Landing Field Bogue and immediately began set up of their control center. This quick execution not only demonstrates the mobility and flexibility of the MEB, but also ensures proficiency of the Marines involved.

“From the moment we had boots on the ground we were able to set up communications for our staff within 20 minutes,” said Gunnery Sgt. Scott Brown, a network chief with 2nd MEB. “Being that fast to establish communications is essential to being able to enable and control units, anywhere at any given time.”

Being able to establish a command and control station on a short notice is one of the requirements for 2nd MEB’s goal of staying a force in readiness and projecting forward to prepare for an eventual II MEF deployment.

“One of the missions for MEB is to be rapidly deployable; deployments and drills like this help us rehearse the establishment of command and control,” said Col. Garrett Benson, assistant chief of staff, G-3 operations, 2nd MEB. “The Initial Response Team was a way of maintaining 2nd MEB’s proficiency in rapid deployment and getting out the door completely ready to go both administratively and medically.”

Benson said the drill showcased MEB’s ability to be anywhere, anytime. “The purpose of the exercise was to ensure we are ready at a moment’s notice in Europe, Africa or anywhere else in the world,” said Benson. “This training event was a success, and it validated our ability to deploy on a short notice, furthered our capacity to incorporate aviation assets into our movement and reinforce our relationship with II Marine Expeditionary Force staff as we look to execute these exercises like these in the future.”

The C2 piece and the expeditionary logistics pieces are two key parts of adapting 2 MEB’s composite warfare capabilities to the new focus on integrated operations with the U.S. Navy, but they are a work in progress. A couple of examples of what the MEB can bring in the future to the maritime fight are ashore fires, such as HIMARS or the Naval Strike Missile. Another example is working signature

management so that Marines operating in expeditionary base locations can provide ISR and other capabilities to the fleet.

Both face challenges. Col. Everly was part of the team that brought HIMARS to the land wars. When the HIMARS was introduced into the land wars, the focus was not on shaping them for a dynamic employment concept. I have seen at MAWTS-1, the Marines working integration of HIMARS with F-35s which is the kind of dynamic employment concept which makes sense for the way ahead for Marine Corps integration for the maritime fight.

The signature management piece is part of the larger challenge of working information warfare as part of force insertion and engagement which would enhance integratability as well. As Col. Everly put it: “The information domain is still something that both the MEB and the MEF are working to put their arms around.”

Another piece to the Marines working to enhance their ability to contribute to the 4th Battle of the Atlantic is enhanced integratability with the relevant nations in the areas of interest and operations. Col. Everly underscored that exercising and training in the region is a key part of enhanced integratability which enables the Marines working with allies can bring to the fight. “Our interoperability with the Nordics, the French and the British is a key part of our effort as well. And this is part of the co-evolution which we are experiencing as they are evolving as we are ourselves.”

An example of the kind of co-evolution underway between the Navy and 2nd MEB was highlighted in a recent composite training unit exercise (COMPTUEX) lead by the Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group. The IKE CSG Commander is [Rear Adm. Scott Robertson](#) who I interviewed last year when he was head of the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC), located in San Diego, California.

The kind of innovative thinking he was focused on in that command has been carried over in the rethinking of fleet warfare operations.

As Robertson put it in [an interview](#) on the COMPTUEX event: “We were able to actually test some of our draft C2 (command and control) elements on how would we actually fold in Marines in an EABO capacity into the [composite warfare commander] construct, which was a big step for us, figuring out how do we sit there and do mutual fire support irrelevant of whether it’s coming from an aircraft, a surface ship or an EAB established ashore somewhere.”

This is the kind of exercise effort which Col. Everly highlighted in our discussion as crucial to shaping the way ahead to deliver a more effective force going forward. But clearly, working co-evolutions of the Marines with the Navy and with the allies is a major strategic challenge, but one ripe with strategic opportunities as well.

Colonel David Everly

Colonel Everly is a native of Inglewood, California. He graduated from the University of Southern California with a BS in Business Administration.

As a company grade officer, his operational assignments were Forward Observer, Guns Platoon Commander, Headquarters Platoon Commander, Assistant Executive Officer, Fire Direction Officer, Artillery Liaison Officer and Battery Executive Officer, 3rd Battalion, 10th Marines; Target Information Officer, 26th MEU (OPERATIONS NOBLE ANVIL and SHINING HOPE -Albania, OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN -Kosovo, and OPERATION AVID RESPONSE -Turkey); Assistant Operations Officer, Operations Officer and Battery Commander, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines (OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM -Philippines/Thailand, and the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) -Okinawa, Japan.

As a field grade officer, his operational assignments were Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines (OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM); Operations Officer, 11th Marine Regiment; Commanding Officer, 5th Battalion, 11th Marines; Commanding Officer, The Basic School; AC/S G-5 Plans Officer, II MEF; Chief of Staff and Commanding Officer, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

His supporting establishment assignments include instructor and Staff Platoon Commander (SPC), The Basic School; Faculty Advisor and Expeditionary Operations Instructor, Expeditionary Warfare School; Ground LtCol Assignment Monitor and Ground Colonel Assignment Monitor, Manpower Management Division, HQMC.

His joint duties include Deputy J3 Operations Officer, Joint Inter-Agency Task Force for Former Regime Elements (OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM); Operations Directorate (J3), Current Operations (J33), Joint Staff. Junior Military Assistant to the 24th and 25th Secretaries of Defense.

Colonel Everly's civilian and military education include: US Army Field Artillery Officer Basic Course (with honors), US Army Field Artillery Career Course (with honors), Marine Corps Command and Staff Seminar Program, MS in Management and Leadership from Webster University, MS in Financial Planning from Oklahoma State University and MA in Strategic Security Studies for the National Defense University.

Col Everly's personal awards and decorations include: Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with Gold Star, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation with Gold Star, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal with Bronze Star and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Reshaping ISR for Navy-USMC Integration

05/10/2021

The terms C2, ISR and training are changing significantly in the shift from the land wars to the high-end fight. C2 is migrating from hierarchical direction to mission command and distributed operations; ISR is moving from intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance to INFORMATION to decision making for an integrated distributed force; and training is open ended learning process of how to shape modular task forces that can work together to deliver the desired crisis management and combat effects.

We have written a great deal in the past months about the very significant changes in these domains, and I have recently published [a book](#) which highlights some of these changes.

But as the Marines work with the Navy towards more effective integration for the high-end fight, both sides face significant challenges to work with one another. On the one hand, the US Navy has added new ISR capabilities in the form of P-8s and Tritons which have not been designed in any way to support the kind of maneuver operations which the Marines are built to do. On the other hand, the excellent C2 which the Marines have built to operate ashore are not built to work with the at sea maneuver force.

There is no magic technological wand which can be waved over the two forces and create integratability. This must be worked from the ground up on each side and the ultimate purpose of doing so needs to be shaped in very concrete ways and in very clear mission areas. Why are they integrating? For which crisis management or combat effect? Against which adversaries and for what demonstrated positive outcome?

During my visit to II MEF, I had the chance to discuss the way ahead on the Marine Corps side with a very experienced SIGINT officer, who is the head of II MEF G-2 and is the senior intelligence officer for the MEF, Col. William McClane. He joined the Marines towards the end of the Cold War, and as I have seen in both Marine Corps and Navy interviews, there are a smattering of such officers towards the end of the careers who bridge the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the new phase of peer competition.

Obviously, the bulk of their careers have been through the land wars period, but these officers understand how very different those wars are from facing an adversary with full spectrum forces able to conduct contested operations across the battlespace, up to and including nuclear weapons.

I have referred to this as the strategic shift, but in many ways, this is more of a strategic shock than a strategic shift. The Navy is shifting from support to land operations to blue water maneuver warfare; the Marines are shifting from being best mates of the U.S. Army to reworking into a maneuver force for full spectrum crisis management. In my own view, the question of being reworked as a maneuver force for full spectrum crisis management is only partly subsumed under an effort for enhanced integration with the Navy. Land-based operations even in the conditions of maneuver warfare is only partly part of the maritime fight.

In effect, what is happening is that as the Navy reworks its locus from the land wars to blue water expeditionary operations, the Marine Corps is reworking how it can assist in such a shift but also, how it can operate from afloat and ashore mobile bases to shape a way ahead in their ability to work with allies in interactively shaping more effective support for allied defense, on the one hand, and more effective allied integration with the Marine Corps and the joint force's ability to operate across the extended and contested battlespace.

I had a chance to talk with Col. McClane on several issues but will highlight three major ones. The first one is the return of Russia as a definer of North Atlantic defense. The second is the intelligence to information transmutation of ISR. And the third is the challenge of working more convergence between Navy and Marine Corps ISR systems.

But the overview point made by Col. McClane was clearly articulated by him: “We are in a campaign of learning to shift from COIN operations to great power competition.”

Part of that learning is re-focusing on the Russians. When I went to Columbia University for my PhD in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the universities were committed to Russian studies. They certainly are not now. If there is a refocus on dealing with the Russians, the absence of analysts with Russian knowledge, language, and substantive, is a major problem.

This is certainly reflected in refocusing a force like the USMC. What Col. McClane noted was that our Nordic allies certainly have not taken a vacation from dealing with Russians, and that their domain knowledge is a key part of shaping a rethink of how to understand Russian behavior training, and operations. And clearly, it is the Russian military we are dealing with, not the Soviet Union.

This means that there is a double knowledge challenge. The first is that much of the residual U.S. knowledge remains under a Soviet hangover. And second that fresh knowledge of how the Russians operate under President Putin militarily needs to be built out.

The second is the intelligence to information shift in ISR. As Col. McClane put it: “We tend to get too fixated on the cyber piece to the determinant of working the information piece about how Russian decision makers operate and will operate in a crisis. That is a craft which we need to master.”

The information piece is about shortening the cycle from knowing to acting, as well as working information war. Col. McClane noted that “it is crucial we master the process whereby information can be tailored for messaging that affects the adversaries’ cognitive decision making. The messaging is key.”

The third key challenge we discussed is aligning USMC and US Navy intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems. A key example is that the P-8 which is being operated by the US Navy and our allies in the North Atlantic is not generating data easily usable by the USMC. In fact, in the recent Dynamic Cape 21 exercise, the Marines were able to work much more effectively with USAF unmanned aerial systems than Navy assets in terms of ISR missions.

This means, for Col. McClane: “We need naval capability development not just US Navy, and USMC separate acquisitions in the ISR area. If we are truly going to fight a naval campaign, the Marines will need to be able to tap into U.S. Navy systems useful to a Marine air-ground task force. Fixing and resourcing the Naval ISR enterprise is a key part of shaping the way ahead.”

Rethinking Expeditionary Operations in the North Atlantic

05/12/2021

As the U.S. Navy reworks how to do blue water expeditionary operations into and through the North Atlantic with integrated capabilities with our Nordic and Baltic allies, how best to shape an expeditionary approach for an offensive-defensive enterprise?

What building blocks are essential to work more effective Marine Corps engagement in such an effort? And what does the U.S. Navy need to do to enable more effective Marine Corps engagement?

And how does the USAF and its evolving capabilities, such as the coming of F-35s at RAF Lakenheath come into play?

Finally, how does the defense transformation being undergone by our allies in the North Atlantic intersect with the changes being driven by the U.S. Navy and supported by the USMC?

The broad point is that there are several trajectories of change in the process of change and working how to get the most effective convergence of combat capability is a major challenge.

During my visit to Camp Lejeune in April 2021, I had a chance to discuss these challenges with LtCol Daniel Macsay, an Expeditionary Operations Officer. He highlighted a number of the challenges which needed to be met to enable the Marines to be effectively engaged in North Atlantic force transformation.

I will highlight a number of takeaways from the conversation, and am not holding him responsible for what I took away from the conversation. But what is clear is that the process of change has fully engaged II MEF and very experienced Marines, like LtCol Macsay are fully engaged in the process of creating real capabilities for the strategic shift from the land wars to the Fourth Battle of the Atlantic.

The first point may seem obvious but it is crucial.

There is a strategic triangle among the seabases, the land bases and airpower which enable the combat effects to be delivered throughout the North Atlantic defense arc from Florida to Finnmark.

As the Marines go ashore, or operate afloat, what is the major focus, mission or contribution?

One area of interest is the evolving capabilities for the reconnaissance mission.

How might ashore Marines throughout the arc connect with the US Navy, the Air Force and allies, to provide enhanced information central to the fight?

This could be targeting information; this could be crisis management information; this could be providing information in a key situational awareness gap.

But for this to work, the C2 side of the equation needs to be significantly worked.

How does Navy C2 onboard the amphibious and strike fleet integrate to provide a grid into which Marine Corps reconnaissance information most effectively flow?

The second point is that we are at early days in terms of Navy-Marine Corps integration.

We discussed Navy and Marine Corps targeting which currently is not well integrated.

But there is also a C2 challenge.

As LtCol Macsay put it: “We have got to get past the idea that the Navy has one lane, and we have another.

“If there’s specific skills and functions that we can do and ones they can do, then we need to work ways to operate more effectively together?”

The Marines having worked ashore in the land wars, have worked very effective C2 for fires solutions ashore.

The Navy is focused on C2 for the blue water fight.

How can these two efforts become blended with a more effective capability to work the triangle of seabases, airpower, and ashore forces?

This is a significant strategic reset that requires training, experimentation and acquisition of capabilities to enhance their ability to work together.

Scalability of the force is a key capability which is the target of Marine Corps-Navy integration but how to enable such a capability?

The third point is honing skills operating as a distributed force within an integrated battlespace.

This means shaping new skill sets, and in LtCol Macsay’s words: “Building a discipline that allows us to actually deploy with distributed command and control.

“This requires shaping capabilities where the overall commander can have a serious level of confidence in the distributed force’s ability to carry out command guidance.”

And the final point is that this needs to be done in a denied combat environment as necessary.

For this to happen, reducing demand on communications bandwidth is required.

This requires enhanced training of the forces working together in the distributed combat environment so that there is a good deal of in LtCol Macsay’s words, “implicit understanding of what to do” that does not need to be communicated over networks sucking up bandwidth.

This makes the training function increasingly important to shaping the new combat approach and capability to be relied upon in North Atlantic defense.

Rather than having to do too much explicit communications, “we need to shape enhanced implied communications capabilities.”

By reshaping operations, and the exercises that support the process of changing how to operate, the template for change is created within which technologies can be identified which further the approach.

Rather than waiting for new technologies that operate as magic wands to deliver feasible Marine Corps-Navy integration, the approach of Second Fleet and Allied Joint Force Norfolk under VADM Lewis to craft the template now and technology will follow seems to make a lot of sense to North Carolina based Marines.

A Logistics Perspective on II MEF Transformation

05/14/2021

As the Marines work with the U.S. Navy to reshape capabilities for the maritime fight, two key elements for successfully doing so are the right kind of C2 for distributed integrated operations and logistical capabilities to support such a force. The logistics piece is not an afterthought, but a key enabler or disabler for mission success.

With a sea-based force the force afloat has significant capability built in for initial operations, but the challenge is with air and sea systems to be able to provide the right kind of support at the right time and at the right place.

Engaging in operations against a peer competitor means that the force needs to be able to operate end to end in terms of secure communications and logistics. Ensuring an ability to operate from home ports or allied ports is part of the security challenge; finding ways to use air systems to move key combat assets to the various pieces on the operational chessboard in the Atlantic is crucial; and having well placed and well protected stockpiled supplies which can be moved to support the force is a key part of the overall logistics puzzle which needs to be solved.

I had a chance to discuss these challenges during my visit to II MEF in April 2021 with LtCol Perry Smith, the senior strategic mobility officer. He and his team focus on the end-to-end supply to the force, through air, sea and ground movements to deploying or deployed forces. As he noted, the Marines work end to end transportation which means that “the embarkers at the units actually do all the preparation for their own equipment, do all the certifications, do all the load planning, and move their units out.”

But when force mobilization occurs for the joint force, the Marines are competing with the other services for lift support, and in North Carolina this means that they are competing with 82nd Airborne Division “for the same ports and airfields.”

The logistics piece has two key elements. First, there is the ability to support the initial deployment of the force. And secondly, there is the challenge of sustaining the force going forward?

For the Marines, the logistics piece comes in two parts, namely, support afloat and support ashore, so there is a “naval slice and a ground slice.”

For operations in the Atlantic AOR, the Marines are working with the Navy as well as key allies to work the logistics supply chain in a dynamic combat situation. This means that they need not only to work closely with the U.S. Navy but to be able to work closely with the support structures of key NATO allies in the support of European operations, including in the High North.

The Trident Juncture 2018 exercise provided an opportunity to work closely with the Norwegians on finding more effective ways to work with their domestic transportation systems, including capabilities like Norwegian ferries, to move equipment and supplies into the operational areas.

As LtCol Smith put it: “What I saw at Trident Juncture was their willingness to make this plan work because they have to. I think they depend on us in a time of need to be able to do reception staging, onward movement, and get to the point where we can back them up in a fight if we needed to.”

And to do this requires shaping as seamless as possible a logistics supply line.

As CNO Richardson stood up the Second Fleet, a key focus was on incorporating the High North into the shaping of new defense capabilities. To do so from a USMC point of view is challenging because of limited logistical infrastructure and the clear need to rely on air systems with fairly long legs, which means the Osprey and the coming CH-53K.

There is also the challenge of the environment.

As LtCol Smith highlighted: “In the Pacific, you don’t have the problems we have in the High North with sub-zero temperatures with 24 hours of sun in the summer and two hours of daylight in the winter.”

The Norwegians are very competent in such conditions and the Marines have a lot to learn from them, and leveraging the kind of clothing, and telecoms equipment which they deploy with would make a great deal of sense.

As LtCol Smith put it: “How do we take advantage of the knowledge of our allies and leverage their capabilities for our forces to enhance our own survivability and lethality?”

The communication challenges are significant. As you operate from sea, and work with an expeditionary base, linking the two is a challenge, which requires having an airborne capability to link the two.

When looking at the North Atlantic arc from North Carolina to the Nordics, strategic mobility is delivered by a triad of airlift, sealift and pre-positioning. Where best to pre-position? How best to protect those stockpiles? And how to move critical supplies to the point of need rapidly?

Reworking the Marine Corps force to work more effectively with the U.S. Navy requires a reset of the logistics enterprise.

But with the Navy in flux, the USMC in flux, and the strategic environment in flux, and our allies in flux, how do you shape effective convergence for effective combat capability?

As LtCol Smith articulated the challenge: “How do you shape convergence of your technology, your tactics, your techniques and procedures with the assets which are available to an effective combat force?”

Good question. That is challenging with the force you have, let alone for some future force.

What can be too easily overlooked is that adding new platforms, deliver new capabilities only if they can be used by the operating forces effectively and in a sustained operating environment.

Featured Photo: U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Clay Weedman, an embarkation specialist with 2d Marine Division, ties down a vehicle onto a rail car in preparation for Operational Logistics Exercise on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., April 13, 2021. During OPLOGEX, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces will transport material and equipment on rail and ship and conduct pier-side offload of the USNS Williams at Blount Island command, Fla. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Samuel Lyden)

In an article published by II MEF on April 15, 2021, the latest logistics exercise conducted by II MEF was highlighted.

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP LEJEUNE, NORTH CAROLINA – U.S. Marines with II Marine Expeditionary Force began Dynamic Cape 21.1, a live maritime prepositioning exercise that includes an Operational Logistics Exercise with a subsequent final exercise event, taking place from Apr. 7-28, 2021.

As a part of DC 21.1, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, II MEF, and Combat Logistics Regiment 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, are participating in an OPLOGEX taking place across the eastern United States.

Locations hosting the exercise include Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, Wilmington, North Carolina; and Blount Island, Florida.

During the OPLOGEX, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces will transport materiel and equipment on rail and ship and conduct pier-side offload of the USNS Williams at Blount Island Command, Florida. II MEF will also maintain an element in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina to command and control the offload while rehearsing the command's ability to deploy, employ, and redeploy a forward element.

This exercise facilitates the rapid deploy-ability of scalable naval expeditionary forces in support of major combat operations. Marines and sailors train to increase critical expeditionary capabilities and facilitate bridging the seam between operations on land and sea.

U.S. Marine Corps Col. David R. Everly, the commanding officer of 2d MEB, said units are prepared to coordinate and respond to any situation when it comes to logistics.

"They're ready to respond to any crisis," he said. "An exercise like this is just another opportunity for us to show that we have a focus on all different spectrum of challenges that are hitting us, and we're ready to respond."

The OPLOGEX provides an opportunity for II MEF to develop, refine, and test portions of theater opening and force deployment processes to gain MEF-level warfighting proficiency and readiness.

Working II MEF Operations in Transition

05/16/2021

While reshaping how it will operate in the future, II MEF has to be ready to fight now. And to do so for 2nd and 6th Fleets as well as EUCOM. This means reshaping what it can do but to rework how it is integrated with the NAVY and the evolving joint force.

During my visit to II MEF at Camp Lejeune, I had a chance to discuss with the leadership at the MEF on the challenges of so doing and shaping a way ahead. I have also had the chance with my colleague Ed Timperlake in visiting Second Fleet, to discuss with C2F leadership the challenges of working a co-evolution with the USMC, and with the Nordics on what they view as the kind of force engagement by the Navy and Marines which dovetails most effectively into their own force transformation and reworking of European defense. These are three trajectories in motion and the challenge is to work effectively ways to ensure convergence on effective approaches.

During my visit to Camp Lejeune, I had a chance to discuss the challenges of shaping the way ahead with Col. David S. Owen, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (G-3) and LtCol Jon Erskine. For an enhanced focus on working with the U.S. Navy both officers have significant relevant experience. Among other aspects of his background, are several years of at sea experience with MEUs, and on carriers. With regard to LtCol Erskine, he was a Navy surface warfare officer who later became a Marine.

The current USMC Commandant has highlighted the importance of integration with the U.S. Navy as it focuses on the high-end fight. And to do so by finding ways for the Marines to operate in the weapons engagement zone or the WEZ. Another way to put this is to shape the ability of the Marines to operate as an “inside” force to support the “outside” force.

As the discussants at the Future Amphibious Forces, 2020 Conference last December put it, in working these kinds of issues the key question is both the strategic and tactical purpose of force redesign. As the moderator of the day, a noted former British General, highlighted at the end of the day, “We have had a very good conversation throughout the day about the future of amphibious forces.”

But as he also noted, the key challenge really was to sort through where one wanted to take those forces in terms of “what kinds of wars or conflicts were being prepared for or prioritized.”

His question underscored the core challenge facing any discussion of the way ahead for Maritime special forces or amphibious forces: What is their role in the high-end fight?

What is their role in crisis management?

And how related are the answers to these two questions?

Put another way, focusing on amphibious forces and their future quickly takes one into the realm of warfighting capabilities now, the next five years and the decade ahead.

In turn, the question is posed as well with regard to what capabilities are desired and for which concepts of operations to shape what kind of warfighting outcome?

In other words, there is no single force design which will easily embrace the range of options or be able to answer the question of prioritization for the warfighting approaches for the high-end fight.

As Col. Owen put it quite clearly in our discussion, “Above all, even if we are focused on enhanced naval integration, what we are really focused on is warfighting and how best to do it.”

It is clear that figuring out how the Marines can fight, survive and best deliver a desired combat effect while operating in the WEZ is challenging. As Col. Owen put it: “We need to figure out how best to operate within the WEZ. We have operated as MAGTFs, and MEUs and that entails bringing a force that is wholly. Capable. A MEU is a little suitcase of MEF-wide capabilities that can deliver scalable effects. It is a Swiss Army Knife. With a focus on the inside force approach, we are acting as an enabler for the joint or coalition force. How best to do so?”

One way to look at the force re-configuration is for a Marine Corps formation to operate, as Col. Owens noted, “to facilitate decisions in a larger kill web. For example, a Marine Corps Reconnaissance force could be part of a larger formation with tentacles which it extends to enable the force either through its own resources or tapping into other capabilities, such as the P-8.”

For LtCol Erskine, as a former SWO, he has very relevant domain expertise to work the problem of how Marines can contribute to a distributed kill web firing solution. He underscored the importance of working the sensor/shooter “mesh.” As he noted: “How do you connect any sensors on the battlefield to provide targeting quality data into a system and route it to the right decision-maker who has the authorities to either employ that weapon or coordinate it with other fire-decision authorities?”

If one is putting Marines inside the WEZ with strike weapons, those weapons clearly need to be integrated with the other services, to ensure that combat effectiveness is the outcome, rather than fratricide, negative impacts on the tactical situation or impacting negatively on the strategic crisis management decisions which need to be made as well in a conflict situation.

Marines in a kill web reconnaissance situation as an inside force might be aides to the process of finding targets and then passing those targets to the right shooter and use an asset they do not even own. As LtCol Erskine highlighted: “You could reach out to a JSF that’s in your engagement area, or you could reach out to a ship at sea or any aircraft flying through your airspace to pass the appropriate data for a firing solution. It may not even work for you as a Marine Corps unit.”

In effect, the goal is for the Marines to work with the joint and coalition force to shape a “fires network of things.”

For enhanced Navy and Marine Corps integration, clearly one challenge to be met is how to shape an integrated maritime campaign. How do you coordinate fires on land with fires at sea? As LtCol Erskine underscored the challenge: How do I provide those fires in support of the fleet from land-based capabilities and vice versa?”

As VADM Lewis put it in our discussions with Second Fleet, he put this challenge as one of enabling the fleet and the joint and coalition force to be able to operate either as supporting or supported elements dependent on the combat situation. Shaping such a flexible combat capability is clearly a work in progress, and when where II MEF and C2F are key innovators in shaping a way ahead.

The Challenge of Preparing for Future Operations for 2nd MEF

05/22/2021

II Marine Expeditionary Force supports service and Combatant Commander's initiative as required. At the same time, II MEF is in transition and must focus on preparing for future operations, and shape new ways to do so while being able to operate now. This is hardly an easy challenge, but one which II MEF must meet head on.

In my discussions with the CG of II MEF, Lt. General Beaudreault, he underscored that he had a first-rate team to help him meet this challenge. During my time at Camp Lejeune, I had a chance to meet a number of these leaders and certainly can reinforce what the CG told me.

At the command, the head of G-35, Future Operations is Colonel Ryan Hoyle. He noted in our discussion that for the command, a look ahead in an 18-to-24-month period is the focus of future operations. But as we discussed, the focus on change was coming through exercises but also working ways to rework the Marines ability to integrate with the Navy and with allies to shape evolving capabilities for the future fight.

His background is diverse, and very impressive. I mention this because if you want someone to work through how to work a way ahead with the force in being, it is clearly an advantage to have someone with wide-ranging experience with the current force, but also with enough experience in working with non-Marine joint and allied forces focused as well on change. Among other experiences, he has been aide to camp to the Deputy Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Amphibious Staff Officer and exercise planner at NATO's Special Operations Headquarters. And he has a Masters of Science in Political Science from the Israeli National Defense College. There is probably no force in the world which has work joint integration in a more challenging political and military environment than the IDF.

He brings this experience to the current challenging task of transitioning and preparing for the future fight while reshaping the force in being.

How do you do this?

And how is II MEF approaching this challenge?

In the discussion, there are a number of takeaways which provide answers to these difficult questions.

Where appropriate, I will quote Col. Hoyle, but I am not holding him responsible for all my takeaways from the discussion.

The Israelis provide an interesting case because post-Abraham accords, they are focusing on their ability to have a strategic reach to be able to deal with threats on their periphery. It is no surprise than that the IDF is operating a core USMC capability, the F-35, and are adding the latest capability, namely, the CH-53K. The IDF increasingly is focused on becoming more mobile and expeditionary which brings them closer to the USMC trajectory of change as well.

Col. Hoyle noted that they work within a 18 month and two and a half year planning cycle and work "to align resources to achieve the objectives that the CG or higher headquarters have given us. This is in terms of exercise preparation and providing forces of operations." He reminded that as well as the Atlantic operations, II MEF provides forces deployed to Okinawa as well.

He has the naval integration portfolio in his shop as well which encompasses amphibious training and deck and well deck certification for those ships as well.

According to Col. Hoyle: “We coordinate the entire MEU program from the formation of the force to the integration with the Navy and their deployments with both NAVEUR and MARFOREUR in terms of their tasks in support of those commands.”

The refocus on Naval integration is a major challenge.

As I noted in an earlier piece, in effect, what is happening is co-evolution of the Navy and the USMC, which means that they are working for more integration, but there are centers of excellence each will have different from one another.

It is best conceived as a Venn diagram where one is shaping enhanced overlap but recognizes that each side of the Venn is different.

If one looks at the North Atlantic as a chessboard, how do the Navy, the Marine Corps (and the USAF) and allies work the pieces on the chessboard?

How do the Marines use their afloat resources differently with the fleet?

How does the fleet fight differently with those afloat assets integrated into the fight? How do mobile or expeditionary bases play into the effort?

What pieces are placed on the chessboard which the Marines can or might be able to provide?

How do the Marines work force integration with allies afloat or ashore to provide for more integrated warfighting solutions?

With the current amphibious fleet in the Atlantic region not likely to get new ships any time soon, how can the Marines work more effectively with allies afloat? Clearly, the current integration of Marines onboard HMS Queen Elizabeth is an example or operating Ospreys off of French amphibious ships.

A key challenge which is being worked but which is strategic in character is reshaping C2 to allow for force integration in a contested fight. Clearly, command guidance is required, and empowering tactical decision making at the edge.

As the Navy and the Marines work with allies newly highlighted areas of operation, such as the High North, the challenge will be to shape flexible or modular task forces which can demonstrate interactive interoperability to expand what Marines can contribute, rather than deploying them in isolated force fragments.

Col. Hoyle put the goal of the transformation effort in the following terms: “How do we provide operational flexibility to the fleet commander, to the combatant commander, to cause the decision calculus of the adversary to change?

“To do so, you need capabilities with which to project that force, whether it’s afloat capabilities or whether it’s basing rights somewhere and having the proper airframes in order to project that force.”

In short, the focus needs to be not simply on new ways to do naval integration.

The focus has to be on effective forces that an adversary sees as viable and capable of shaping a deterrent outcome.

As Col. Hoyle put it: “You have to have your high-end capabilities demonstrated to be effective in order to ensue deterrence, because if you are not demonstrating that you have the capabilities, then no—one is really deterred.”

Exercise Deep Water: Working the Integrated Distributed Insertion Force

12/31/2020

Last July, North Carolina-based Marines organized an exercise in which they called Deep Water.

In a press release from [November 5, 2020](#), this is how II Marine Expeditionary Force described the exercise:

“Marines with 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, and 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing are conducting Exercise Deep Water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., 29 July 2020.

“II MEF conducts these training events on a consistent basis. This year, Exercise Deep Water will see two battalions conduct an air assault in order to command and control many of the various capabilities organic to II MEF in preparation for major combat operations.

“Exercise Deep Water 20 is a great opportunity for the Division to work with aviation units from Marine Corps Air Station New River and the Logistics Combat Element, as well. 2nd Marine Regiment will be the provide command and control over the 2nd battalion, 2nd regiment, and 3rd battalion, 6th regiment, the logistics and aviation units.”

Additionally, 2nd Marine Division provided further details about the exercise in a press release dated [November 5, 2020](#):

“A Regimental Combat Team (RCT) commanded by 2d Marine Division’s 2d Marine Regiment undertook a two-battalion air assault to commence Exercise Deep Water today on Camp Lejeune (CLNC). At nearly double the size of last year’s Exercise Steel Pike, Exercise Deep Water is the largest exercise of its type conducted on Camp Lejeune in decades.

“Exercise Deep Water is a 2d Marine Regiment-planned and led event that incorporates elements from across the II Marine Expeditionary Force Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). The participating Marines and Sailors will be engaged in a dynamic force-on-force scenario against a “peer-level adversary,” as simulated by 2d Marine Division’s Adversary Force Company.

“Exercise Deep Water, a regimental air assault that utilizes the whole of CLNC and the outlying training areas, will allow us to sharpen our spear and help make us more lethal,” said Col. Brian P. Coyne, commanding officer, 2d Marine Regiment.

“With Marine air (2d Marine Aircraft Wing) serving as part of a robust team that incorporates every element of the MAGTF, this exercise provides an opportunity to display the unparalleled lethality of a well-orchestrated Marine fighting force. As ‘RCT-2’ takes on an independent-thinking adversary, the ability of our squads to shoot, move, communicate, evacuate and employ effective combined arms with excellence will be put to the test.”

“In addition to the air assault, 2d Marine Regiment will be conducting offensive, defensive, and stability operations in multiple urban training settings where both conventional and hybrid adversary forces will be acting against them.

“Exercise Deep Water continues to build upon 2d Marine Division’s priority to build readiness against peer threats, in accordance with both the National Defense Strategy and the Commandant’s Planning Guidance.

“Accepting and embracing the challenge of such a highly-complex event in these trying times is a reflection of our unit’s commitment to remaining prepared for major combat operations or unexpected contingency operations, Coyne said, adding, “Along with the rest of the world, our adversaries are watching to see if we drop our guard; the visible enhancement of 2d Regiment’s combat readiness during Deep Water will help assure our enemies that they should not test our Corps.

“This training event will improve our warfighting proficiency and prepare us for tomorrow’s battles. ‘Tarawa’ (2d Marines call sign) Marines will fight and win if called,” he concluded.”

During my visit to 2nd MAW in the first week of December 2020, I had a chance to discuss the exercise and its focus and importance with Major Rew, the exercise’s air mission commander.

I learned from Major Rew that this exercise combined forces from pickup zones in North Carolina and Virginia.

The exercise consisted of a force insertion into a contested environment, meaning they used air assets to clear areas for the Assault Force, which included both USMC (AH-1Z, UH-1Y, F/A-18A/C/D, and AV-8B) and USAF aircraft (F-15E and JSTARS). Once air superiority was established, the assault force was inserted by USMC MV-22Bs and CH-53Es.

The exercise also included support aircraft such as the KC-130J and RQ-21.

The planning and execution focused on bringing a disaggregated force into an objective area that required integrated C2 with Ground, Aviation, and Logistics Combat Elements.

This C2 functionality was delivered in part by an Osprey operating as an airborne command post with a capability delivered by a “roll-on/roll-off” C2 suite, which provided a chat capability and can be found at a mobile or static command post or even in an airborne C2 aircraft.

The use of MAGTF Tablets (MAGTAB) provided a key means of digital interoperability that allowed for real time information sharing to ground elements and aviators. The MAGTAB provided the visual representation of the integrated effects and outcomes to the command element.

ISR was provided by USMC assets and by a USAF JSTARS aircraft. They used their Network-On-The-Move Airborne (NOTM-A) system to provide interoperability for the commander and assault force.

As Major Rew put it, “I think having the NOTM-A kit on the Osprey is a big win because it provides so much situational awareness. With the Osprey as a C2 aircraft, there is added flexibility to land the aircraft close to whatever operational area the commander requires. There are many capable C2 platforms across the DoD but not all of them also have the ability to immediately land adjacent to the battlefield like the Osprey does.”

One aspect of mission rehearsals the Marines are developing is to leverage Joint assets in support of an assault mission and be able to provide information to that mission force as well.

To be clear, the Marines did not march to the objective area; they flew to their objectives in various USMC lift assets accompanied by USMC rotary wing and fixed wing combat aircraft.

They were moving a significant number of Marines from two different locations, hundreds of miles apart, to nine different landing zones.

As Major Rew explained it, “We were working with a lot of different types of aircraft, and one of the challenges is trying to successfully integrate them to meet mission requirements.”

He added, “As the air mission commander, I was co-located with an infantry colonel who was the overall mission commander. We were in an Osprey for a significant period of time leading the operation from a C2 perspective.”

“In the exercise we sometimes had to solve problems during execution that required rapidly sending information to an asset so that they could complete a crucial battlefield task. We work with commander’s intent from the outset of an operation and this is especially critical during distributed operations.”

The coming of the F-35 to both Air Assaults and Distributed Operations is crucial as well.

According to Major Rew, “They’re an incredible sensor and they have the capability to be able to see what’s happening on the battlefield, assess things real time, and then send that information to the individual who needs to make a decision. Incorporating them into future exercises of this magnitude will be value-added to the entire Marine Corps.”

In effect, the Marines are working on an ecosystem for integrated and distributed force insertion.

As they build out that ecosystem, new ISR, C2 and, strike capabilities that enter the force can be plugged into the ecosystem that will allow for a continued evolution of that system. In that sense, the future is now.

MCSC: NETWORKING ON THE MOVE (NOTM) FAMILY OF SYSTEMS (FOS)

By Concepts and Programs | Marine Corps Systems Command | December 13, 2018

Description

NOTM FoS is a Satellite Communications (SATCOM)-based on-the-move command and control (C2) combat capability for all elements of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF).

Initially fielded in 2013 in response to urgent Marine Corps Forces Central Command (CENTCOM) requirements, NOTM is an Acquisition Category (ACAT) IV(M) program with a budget of \$509 million across the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) and a total life cycle cost of \$1.7 billion.

NOTM provides robust C2 wideband SATCOM capability, three external network enclaves (Secret Internet Protocol Router (SIPR), Non-secure Internet Protocol Router (NIPR) and Coalition) with access to the Global Information Grid (GIG), Next Generation Enterprise Network (NGEN), full motion video, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), and Voice over Secure Internet Protocol (VoSIP) integrated onto United States Marine Corps (USMC) tactical vehicles.

Ruggedized laptops with a full suite of Combat Operations Center (COC) tactical software (Joint Tactical Common Operational Picture (COP) Workstation (JTCW)/Command and Control Personal Computer (C2PC), Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS) Effects Management Tool (EMT)) and chat are connected between NOTM Point of Presence (PoP) vehicles to Staff Vehicles via Type 1 encrypted wireless local area networks.

A force multiplier on the battlefield, NOTM provides forward and main integrated C2 capabilities for bounding assaults to the edge of the battlespace; commanders are no longer geographically tethered to the COC. The NOTM capability is currently employed both in ground and air platforms.

Operational Impact

A force multiplier on the battlefield, NOTM provides forward and main integrated C2 capabilities for bounding assaults to the edge of the battlespace; commanders are no longer geographically tethered to the COC. The NOTM capability is currently employed both in ground and air platforms.

Re-shaping North Atlantic Defense: Shaping a Way Ahead for North-Carolina Based Marines

06/01/2021

The Navy and the Marines are reworking ways to enhance their warfighting and deterrence capabilities in the North Atlantic. This effort has been referred to as preparing for the “Fourth Battle of the Atlantic” by Adm. James Foggo III, when he was commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa.

As CNO Admiral Richardson established 2nd Fleet, he highlighted a new role of the High North as a key area of interest in dealing with the Russian challenge, one which for the direct interest of the United States is focused around what Admiral Gortney highlighted as the 10:00 O’clock threat to CONUS.

In an interview we did with the then head of Northcom and NORAD, Admiral Gortney, this is how he put the challenge:

“With the emergence of the new Russia, they are developing a qualitatively better military than the quantitative military that they had in the Soviet Union. They have a doctrine to support that wholly government doctrine. And you’re seeing that doctrine in military capability being employed in the Ukraine and in Syria.

“For example, the Russians are evolving their long-range aviation and at sea capabilities. They are fielding and employing precision-guided cruise missiles from the air, from ships and from submarines. Their new cruise missiles can be launched from Bears and Blackjacks and they went from development to testing by use in Syria.

“It achieved initial operating capability based on a shot from a deployed force. The Kh-101 and 102 were in development, not testing, so they used combat shots as “tests,” which means that their capability for technological “surprise” is significant as well, as their force evolves. The air and sea-launched cruise missiles can carry conventional or nuclear warheads, and what this means is that a “tactical” weapon can have strategic effect with regard to North America.

“Today, they can launch from their air bases over Russia and reach into North American territory.

“The challenge is that, when launched, we are catching arrows, but we are not going after the archers.

“The archers do not have to leave Russia in order to range our homeland. And with the augmentation of the firepower of their submarine force, the question of the state of our anti-submarine warfare capabilities is clearly raised by in the North Atlantic and the Northern Pacific waters.

“We need to shape a more integrated air and maritime force that can operate to defend the maritime and air approaches to North America as well as North America itself. We can look at the evolving threat as a ten o’clock and a two o’clock fight, because they originate from the ten and two. And the ten o’clock fight is primarily right now an aviation fight.”



Figure 1 This is a notional rendering of the 10 and 2 O’Clock challenge. It is credited to Second Line of Defense and not in any way an official rendering by any agency of the US government. It is meant for illustration purposes only.

But how does meeting this challenge look from the standpoint of North Carolina based Marines?

And with the enhanced focus on integration with naval forces, how will the Marines reshape their forces and approach to operate in the 10:00 O'clock area of operations?

During my visit to Camp Lejeune in April 2021, I had a chance to discuss the challenge of shaping an effective way ahead with three members of the II MEF team who have taken the longer-term perspective on meeting these challenges.

My meeting with Dr. Nick Woods, the Center for Naval Analyses II MEF Field Representative, with Dan Kelly, a retired Marine Colonel who works within the G-5, and Major Ronald Bess who works Plans as well at the command.

The three together provided a very helpful perspective in understanding how enhancing integration with the Navy looks like from a II MEF lens.

There are a number of takeaways from that conversation which I would like to highlight.

And as I have written with regard to earlier articles, I am not holding these individuals responsible for what I concluded from our conversation, but thank them for their insights.

There are four key takeaways.

The first is that this a work in the early phases of navigating the way ahead.

As one participant highlighted that it is extremely important that both the Navy and Marine Corps both work through what each side brings to the key warfighting functions in the North Atlantic.

Each side needs to better understand what each force can bring to the key warfighting functions, both in terms of contributions and limitations.

And with the clear focus of Second Fleet working with the only operational NATO command on U.S. territory, how best to work with Allied Joint Forces Command?

For example, if there is a shift from engaging the Marines built around the large deck amphibious ship, what then is the role of frigates or destroyers in supporting Marine Corps operations?

The second is to understand what warfighting gaps exists as such integration unfolds, and how best to fill those gaps?

And this needs to be realistic.

What capabilities do we have now?

What would we like to have?

And what is a realistic acquisition strategy to fill those gaps? As one participant put it: "The joint force as well as those of our allies and partners all are going through change and we need to crosswalk this so we identify Marine Corps contributions and do we have any gaps."

The third is the impact of potential disconnect between what the Combatant Commands want from Marine Corps forces and potential new paths for future Marine Corps development.

The demand side clearly needs to change to provide for room for transformations that might well attenuate Marine Corps capability in the near to middle term but provide for prospects for new capabilities down the road.

The fourth is the general challenge of reworking how the fourth battle of the Atlantic would be fought.

How will the joint and maritime forces work together most effectively with allies to deliver the desired combat and crisis management effects?

This ties back to the first point, namely, ensuring that the Navy and the Marine Corps work through most effectively how to deliver with regard to the key warfighting functions in a correlated and where possible integrated manner?

As one participant put it: “We need to go to the White Board and work through each of the key functions to ensure that we can deliver an integrated capability before we let go of any current capabilities which we have.”

And as another participant concluded: “there is a strong argument to be made for divesting of legacy capabilities now in favor of future capabilities that would provide a greater contribution to European defense in the future.”

The Evolution of C2 in II MEF Transformation

06/04/2021

As II MEF transforms, a key challenge is force cohesion and force aggregation. For example, with the current Marine Expeditionary Unit, the MEU has a well-defined organic capability which allows it to operate effectively and to scale up with force integration with other force units. But going forward, how will the MEF forces be organized? What will the force packages look like? How much organic ISR and fire power? How much reliance on externally supplied ISR and fire power? And how to build a viable distributed but integratable force?

The only way such questions will be answered effectively is with the evolution of C2 capabilities, and systems which can shape integratable modular task forces, which can either be the supported or supporting building block for a scalable force.

But working C2 to achieve the kind of force flexibility which could lead to significant reworking of the mosaic of a joint or coalition force is a major challenge.

During my visit to II MEF in April 2021, I had a chance to discuss these issues across the command, but with an opportunity as well to focus specifically on the C2 piece with II MEF’s G-6 command, which is the communications element. I had a chance to discuss C2 issues with the Assistant Chief of Staff of G-6, Colonel Hyla and Master Gunnery Sergeant Stephens, II MEF Defense Information Network Chief.

We discussed a number of aspects of the C2 challenges and transition. I will not hold them responsible for my takeaways from our conversation, but there were four key takeaways from my point of view.

The first is that the goal of greater Navy and Marine Corps integration faces a major challenge of ensuring that the two forces can work over compatible ISR and C2 systems. This simply is not the case currently. If there is an end goal of empowering Marines to be able to provide ISR to the fleet to enable fire solutions, or ashore Marines to leverage Navy ISR and provide for firing solutions either from afloat or ashore assets, the C2 needs to be adequate and effective to do so.

Data from various Navy systems must be usable by afloat or ashore Marines. USMC aviation assets afloat or ashore can provide for firing solutions organically or in terms of current USMC C2, but if third party targeting in support of the fleet is desired then C2 needs to be integratable across the fleet into the Marine Corps force.

The second is that meeting the challenge of what the Aussies refer to as transient software advantage is a major challenge. An ability to rewrite software code ahead of adversary capability to disrupt ISR/C2 systems is crucial. During a visit to Jax Navy last year, I saw the P-8 team working such an approach with regard to rewriting code. In an interview with Lt. Sean Lavelle, he described the approach as follows:

They are focusing on ways to execute in-house software development under PMA-290, the Program Office for the P-8. Within PMA-290 is an office called the Software Support Activity, which Lt. Lavelle and his team works with. There they are focused on building a system on the P-8 where mission system data, including data links, and information generated by the sensor networks goes to the “sandbox” which is a secure computing environment that can take data, process it, and generate decision-making recommendations for the operator or alert them to tactical problems. It does not directly push data to the aircraft, so it is divorced from safety of flight software considerations.

According to Lt. Lavelle: “This allows us to push updates to the sandbox on timescales measured in days or weeks, rather than years. The Weapons School is building the software for the sandbox based on operators’ experiences, while the traditional acquisitions enterprise builds the infrastructure to allow that development. The process is that we observe the fleet’s problems, we write code to solve those problems, we send the finished application to PMA-290, they do a security analysis, and then they push it back to be integrated onto the aircraft. We are funding this process operationally rather than on a project basis. We have four to six people at the weapons school at any one time who are trained to write software for the sandbox.” [UU](#)

The Marines are focused on a similar effort. As Col. Hyle put it: “The Marine Corps has recognized the need to code ourselves, and we have our first cohort of what is now 0673s is the new Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).”

The third is working new ways to integrate with core allies in terms of C2 capabilities This rests not simply on sorting through ways to work more traditional security arrangements, but new innovative ways of leveraging commercial networks in secure manners as well. II MEF has been hard at work in this area, notably in working with Canadians, Norwegians, the British and French forces in Europe to be able to shape shared C2 capabilities in new and innovative ways.

The fourth is the force aggregation and disaggregation issue noted at the beginning of this article. As Colonel Hyla put it: “How do we fit into the transformation of Composite Warfare? For example, I

may be working under potentially the MEF today, but we may for a couple days move over to work for the carrier strike commander, or we may transfer a couple aircraft to work for the anti-sub warfare commander for a couple days, depending on the availability of assets in the battlespace. But we're not used to cutting away a platoon or a battery from a battalion or a company from a battalion to work for the Navy for a day or two and then come back to us. We've got to make sure, once they decide how we do that, that all our C4 systems align and work with them and we can talk with them, whoever our direct combat boss is in the battlespace."

Much easier to do with briefing slides than with operational forces. And being able to fight tonight remains an imperative as II MEF serves many masters, including, EUCOM, Second and Sixth Fleet

[1] Robbin Laird, *Training for the High-End Fight*, Chapter Three, 2021,
https://www.amazon.com/Training-High-End-Fight-Strategic-Shift/dp/1098350758/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=training+for+the+high+end+fight&qid=1620576406&sr=8-1

The Strategic Opportunities and Challenges for II MEF Transformation

During late April 2021, I had the chance to visit IIMEG at Camp Lejeune. This command is a key part of the overall effort to reshape the working relationship between the operational Navy and the USMC to enable integrated operations. The entire effort encompassed by Second Fleet, Allied Joint Force Command, 2nd Marine Air Wing and IIMEF constitutes a significant reshaping of how to fight the 4th Battle of the Atlantic.

For IIMEF, such an effort provides both significant challenges and significant opportunities for transformation. The significant challenge can be put simply: the US Navy is in the throes of significant change as it refocuses on blue water operations and fighting as a fleet. This is a work in progress. The USMC under the current Commandant is focused on reshaping to work with the Navy more effective in integrated operations, but doing so when the fleet itself is changing is particularly challenging.

And the strategic shift from the land wars to blue water expeditionary operations is very challenging as an entire generation of Naval and Marine Corps sailors and Marines and their officer have worked in support of COIN and not upon high end warfare.

At the same time, for IIMEF there are significant opportunities as well. The redesign of North Atlantic defense is coming at a time when the Nordic allies are committed to direct defense and to enhancing their own integration to deal with the Russian challenges. Although IIMEF is not the epicenter for receiving new Marine Corps kit, with the exception of the CH-53K (it does not have F-35Bs as part of its organic fighting force, e.g.), it must find ways to innovate with the kit it has and to find new ways to work with an evolving US Navy to sort through how to deliver combat effects from ashore and at sea in support of the maritime fight.

I had a chance to discuss those challenges and opportunities with the three-star IIMEF Commander, Lieutenant General Brian D. Beaudreault, a very experienced Marine who has worked with the core group of leaders who have stood up the innovation cluster from Norfolk through North Carolina to shape a way ahead for a more integrated USMC-USN effort in the Atlantic.

We started by his highlighting the command guidance he has received from the USMC Commandant. As Lt. General Beaudreault put it: “Paraphrasing the guidance: tighten your lifelines with second and sixth fleet. As they Navy shapes itself to do distributed maritime operations, how do we help, and how do we reconfigure?”

One of the challenges clearly is working both with Second and Sixth Fleet, with C2F as the new kid on the block and Sixth Fleet reworking its efforts in Atlantic defense. There is a clear command issue which needs to be sorted out going forward which is important in helping the Marines to better integrate with Navy evolution. Second Fleet C2 authorities end with Greenland with 6th Fleet having C2 authorities after that point. But Vice Admiral Lewis is the commander as well of Allied Joint Force Command whose forces obviously extend beyond Greenland into the continent. In my discussions in the command during my visit, these issues was raised several times and clearly this is a work in progress.

The reason this is especially important for the Marines as that (in my view), a key Cold War mission for the Marines was to get to Norway as rapidly as possible to reinforce their efforts against the Soviets. In those days, the Warsaw Pact geography gave the Russians key advantages in a conflict which they do not have in the new geography. The Soviets planned in case of conflict, a German style operation against Norway and Denmark. This is off the table as the Nordic integration of Finland, with Sweden, with Norway with Denmark, and out to the wider reaches of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland, with Iceland as the perimeter of this geographical reach of the Nordic region creates a new strategic situation and opportunity.

For the Marines, a key contribution to the maritime fight in the region is clearly to be able to operate afloat and ashore, and interactively between the two in providing key reconnaissance, key choke point capabilities and fires in support of the maritime maneuver force. And at the outset, the new capabilities which the Marines are developing will be viewed by the Navy as complimentary to their capabilities, and will need to demonstrate to the fleet that some of their sea denial and sea control functions can be ceded to the Marines in time of conflict.

In effect, a chessboard is being shaped where the fleet interacts with air and land assets to create a 360-degree operational area from Florida to Finnmark. And the goal as seen by Lt. General Beaudreault is to “leave no operational seams the Russians can exploit in times of conflict.”

A key tool set important to the reworking is clearly training and exercises. Lt. General Beaudreault emphasized that what is occurring is a “refocus on scale” where the focus is upon the expeditionary strike force level, not at the MEB level. The C2 redesign efforts prioritized by VADM Lewis are a key part of how IIMEF is addressing how to shape the kind of distributed force capability which can deliver a more effective integrated force able to deliver the kind of crisis management and combat effects needed in the North Atlantic.

As Lt. General Beaudreault put the challenge: “What command and control arrangements do we need for a naval distributed force to be effective?” And as this being designed, tested and exercised how will the MEF be reshaped as a key partner in the maritime fight?

The recent testimony of the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency highlighted the central nature of the Russian challenge to the United States and its allies. For the United States, in many ways the most direct threat to our country comes from the forces operating from the Kola Peninsula. This means that

although China may be the pacing threat, warfighting and deterrence of the Russians is crucial. What this means is that experimentation to shape the integrated distributed force needs to reinforce combat capability and not have open ended disruption which reduces the ability to engage the adversary at his time and choosing.

What this means in turn is that there is a clear need to work with the kit that IIMEF has now and not a decade from now. Part of this is reimagining what the amphibious forces can bring to the maritime fight. Part of this is focusing on how legacy assets like Hueys and Cobras can be retrofitted with anti-surface weapons and sensors. Part of this is relaying on the central role which Ospreys can play in moving forces and support across the chessboard. In other words, modernization accounts need to keep abreast of how the Marines can support the kind of innovation underway with the fleet and the allies in the Atlantic.

In the Commandant's focus on the Pacific, IIMEF is prioritized. This leaves IIMEF in the position to ensure that it can work more effectively with allies in support of the reshaping of the Marines role in the maritime fight. As Lt. General Beaudreault put it: "One of our lines of effort in the campaign plan is to deepen our ties with our alliance partners, and not just from an interoperability, I mean truly interdependence, and not just integrated, but interdependent."

And this clearly is happening with what Rear Admiral Betton, Deputy Commander of Allied JFC. Refers to as the "relevant nations." In our recent interview with Betton in Norfolk (I first interviewed him in Portsmouth when he as the first commander of HMS Queen Elizabeth) he underscored how the allied and U.S. efforts were blending and how that blending was central to the strategic redesign.

As Betton put it: "The U.S. is by far the dominant figure of NATO, but it's not the only piece. And it's not always just the heavy metal that is relevant. It's the connectivity, it's the infrastructure and the architecture that enables the 30 nations of NATO to get so much more than the sum of the parts out of their combined effort. But it's particularly the relevant nations in the operational area and their ability to work together which is an important consideration."

<https://sldinfo.com/2021/03/the-role-of-allied-joint-force-command-norfolk-in-atlantic-defense-the-perspective-of-its-deputy-commander/>

This perspective is certainly shared by Lt. General Beaudreault and is part of the focus on redesign of IIMEF. He highlighted in our discussion their working relationships in recent exercises with the UK Royal Marines, with the French 6th Light Armored Brigade, operational working relationships in Norway, with the Canadians, with the Dutch, etc.

This is not just about exercising, it is about shaping an integratable force, and doing so is a key part of ensuring that Atlantic defense capabilities can be enhanced even while China is being focused on as the "pacing threat."

We discussed some of the innovations being pursued by IIMEF. One innovation is working a way ahead to be able to deploy fires ashore in support of the maritime maneuver force. Currently, they are working with the HIMRS artillery systems and anticipate working in the near term with the naval strike missile, which of course, was developed by the Norwegians but is managed on the U.S. side by Raytheon. A second innovation is working new ways to work C2 and firing solutions, and their work with 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg is an important part of this effort. He noted that later this year,

IIMEF will be working with 18th Airborne Corps in support of a Navy large-scale exercise to work C2 enabled third party firing solutions.

Lt. General Beaudreault highlighted what he saw a key role ahead for amphib in the Atlantic theater of operations. The current force needs better C2 and as I focused on last year, integrating Vipers with Romeos onboard amphib provide for enhanced sea control and sea denial options as well. He argued that going forward with a new generation of amphib he would like to see them have organic fire power to operate more independently. This is how he put it: “We need more air defense systems, and we need more offensive striking capability out of an amphib with less reliance on cruisers, destroyers, in the future.”

In terms of next steps in working integration, he highlighted the importance of the role which the Marines can make to the maritime fight in terms of sensing. He argued that a key effort will be to “refashion Marine Corps reconnaissance. What can we put on manned aircraft and unmanned systems to help extend the eyes and ears of the Navy?”

Expeditionary basing is being work as well to “help unlock naval maneuver from support of forces ashore. How can we best help support naval maneuver from our distributed forces ashore? And crucial to all of this will be our ability to change the C2 arrangements we have to be able for our forces to be either the supported or supporting capability in a blue water maneuver force.”

Such an approach which can be labelled as Naval-Marine Corps integration obviously involve integratability with Air Forces as well. Notably, if the Marines do not have organic F-35s, they are relying then on Nordic air power which in the case of Norway and Denmark are F-35s.

With the re-focus as well on the High North and progress in Nordic integration, there clearly is a rethinking of what the USMC’s role in supporting a maneuver force in support of the direct defenses of Northern Europe through to the Baltics. This is a major challenge and one driving the force design which IIMEF is undergoing in interaction with the changes occurring in Norfolk and the Nordics as well.

Lieutenant General Beaudreault, Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Force

Lieutenant General Beaudreault was commissioned in May 1983 upon graduation from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and was designated as an infantry officer upon completion of training.

His operational assignments include: Platoon Commander and Company Executive Officer, 1st Bn, 3rd Marines, Kaneohe Bay, HI; Assistant Operations Officer, Logistics Officer, Maritime Special Purpose Force Commander and G Company Commander, Battalion Landing Team 2/9, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (SOC), Camp Pendleton, CA (Operation RESTORE HOPE, Somalia); Inspector-Instructor, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Marines, Memphis, TN; Operations Officer, 31st MEU (SOC), Okinawa, Japan (Operation Stabilise, East Timor); Regimental Executive Officer, 1st Marine Regiment, Camp Pendleton, CA; Commanding Officer, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, 13th MEU (SOC)/ Expeditionary Strike Group One (Operation Iraqi Freedom); Commanding Officer, 15th MEU(SOC), Camp Pendleton, CA (Operation Iraqi Freedom); Deputy Commander, Marine Forces Central Command/Commander MARCENT (Forward), Manama, Bahrain; Commanded Task Force South in support of flood relief in Sindh Province, Pakistan; and Commanding General, 2nd Marine Division.

His Supporting Establishment assignments include service as Guard Officer, Marine Corps Security Force Company, Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico and Director, Expeditionary Warfare School, Quantico, VA.

LtGen Beaudreault completed joint duty assignments as Ground Plans Officer (CCJ3-PP), Operations Directorate, US Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL; Deputy Director, Future Joint Force Development, Joint Staff (J7) and Deputy Director, Joint Training, Joint Staff (J7), Suffolk, VA; and most recently served as Director of Operations and Cyber (J3), U.S. Africa Command.

His professional military education includes the following: The Basic School; Amphibious Warfare School; US Army Command and General Staff College; Armed Forces Staff College; Naval War College (MA with Highest Distinction, National Security and Strategic Studies); Higher Command and Staff Course, UK Defence Academy; and Pinnacle, National Defense University.

<https://www.iimef.marines.mil/About/Leaders/Article-View/Article/529479/lieutenant-general-brian-d-beaudreault/>