

United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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MAGTF TRAINING:

THE MARINE CORPS PREPARES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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MAJOR R.D. STORER

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member:

Approved:

Date:

J.W. Gordon

Oral Defense Committee Member:

Approved:

Date:

LTCOL DREW DENNY

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** MAGTF Training: How the Marine Corps Prepares for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Author:** Major Ronald D. Storer, USMC

**Thesis:** The Marine Corps can meet its core competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through a training program that enables the Marine Air Ground Task Force utilization of its combined arms and flexibility and accomplish training Marines across the full spectrum of warfare required from forcible entry to policing.

**Discussion:** The Marine Air Ground Task Force is the premier warfighting organization for the Marine Corps. Its capability and flexibility has been its hallmark. Since 2004, training for the counter-insurgency, or COIN fight has been the primary focus for the Marine Corps. It has ignored its traditional core competency ability to not only conduct amphibious operations but also utilize combined arms as a MAGTF. Combined Arms is more than just putting rounds on targets with air and artillery, it is conducting operations with the MAGTF seamlessly allowing the concentration of the force to fight the enemy weakness through training and integration.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps has ordered a renewed effort to get back to core competencies that separate the Marine Corps from the other services. These core competencies' focus on the MAGTF and what it provides to Department of Defense and the Nation. The Commandant's Vision 2025 together with the Marine Corps Strategic Vision Group ideas of the future enemies put forth the concept of full spectrum requirements for the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps has always trained to its requirements as directed. It trained to combined arms with the combined arms exercise (CAX) program until 2004 when the Marine Corps focus changed from kinetic to counter-insurgency and policing within the Mojave Viper exercise. This new training identified as pre-deployment training focuses on the current fight and specifically on the current fights in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Conclusion:** The Marine Corps is not training for full spectrum operations. Training and Education command is prepared to re-write training and readiness manuals to direct commanders to execute training that would span across the full spectrum of warfare. The failure of the Marine Corps is to provide an adequate training venue to allow commanders to operate the MAGTF through the spectrum of warfare as directed by not only the Marine Corps core competencies, but as directed by the Commandant through his Vision 2025. A training program that allows the MAGTF to utilize its combined arms and flexibility and be able to train its Marines through the spectrum of warfare to be successful from forcible entry to policing is the future requirement.

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## Preface

I chose this topic after an incident in the summer of 2008. As an Inspector-Instructor for 4<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, I was working with the battalion to coordinate training at Twenty-nine Palms, California. The training focused on the basic Mission Essential Tasks List (METL) a tank battalion should be able to complete. We as an organization immediately ran into issues at Twenty-nine Palms, California due to pre-deployment training throughout the training areas. We were finally able to secure terrain to execute our training but I was in awe of the attitude surrounding Twenty-nine Palms, once known for its premier opportunity to utilize maneuver forces in conjunction with combined arms. The base had become a series of forward operating bases and basic lane training exercises focusing on the current pre-deployment requirements.

As I dealt with the issues to ensure my unit received training to their METL's, I began to wonder if the entire Marine Corps was focused in the right direction or were we focused on primarily the current fight. I continued to dwell on the issue until arriving at Command and Staff College. By the time school had begun, the Commandant had published his guidance and his Vision. My journey to find the answer to my question began with core competencies and ended with another question namely what training should the Marine Corps focus on for this next century? Throughout my research I was able to establish the Marine Corps strengths, what the Marine Corps views as potential future threats, how training was conducted, how training is currently conducted, and finally put forth what I believe the Marine Corps needs to do to move ahead in training Marine Air Ground Task Forces for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

I organized the paper in a sort of Marine Corps Planning Process formula, with the Commandant's vision as his intent. Then a focus on the IPB, the core competencies, the enemy and the MAGTF and its capabilities establishing the products utilized to develop courses of action. I finished the planning process with three courses of actions, or two "throw-a ways" and the one I concluded as the answer to the problem the best supports the Commandant's intent.

I would like to thank my wife Deanna for her patience during this project, the Marines I had the pleasure of interviewing at Training and Education Command as well as the Staff at the Gray Research Center for their assistance in research and editing. I would also like to thank my academic advisor Dr. John W. Gordon and military faculty advisor LtCol Darrin Denny for their patience, mentoring, and assistance in completing this project.

## Introduction

*There is little that will sober an enemy more surely than the knowledge that somewhere, just over the horizon, lies a force of well-trained, well equipped Marines in competently manned ships capable of delivering a stunning amphibious blow at a point and time of their own choosing.<sup>1</sup>*

*Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, USMC*

In 2006, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Conway, identified, among other endeavors, an initial guide to put the Marine Corps on track to be able to meet future threats. The Commandant and this author both believe the Marine Corps is one of the most flexible and highly capable forces to meet any challenge, not only with the Long War, but any future enemy that may arise around the world. Marines are justly proud of the title, "first to fight," but in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Marine Corps will require the training and equipment necessary to handle full spectrum operations from combat operations to disaster relief.

Since the end of the Cold War, US policy makers have had to wrestle with defining who our enemy is and how he will attack next. Because of the uncertainty and nature of non-state actors or terrorist organizations, the eyes to visualize the next enemy are cloudy with political debates, new terminology and confusion. Each service focused on what it thought the next threat was going to be; training on what it did best ranging among the ground services, from armored mechanized warfare at the National Training Center (NTC) for the United States Army to Combined Arms and Amphibious Exercises for the United States Marine Corps. Even though General Charles Krulak would impress upon the Marine Corps his vision of the "three block war" concept, the Marine Corps instead focused on the last war, Desert Storm. It believed through its training programs it would be able to "stand ready when the nation was least ready."<sup>2</sup> With the Long War in its seventh year, the Marine Corps has found itself trying to live up to being able to execute Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) operations across the full

spectrum of warfare. Today's Long War has created a deficiency in core competency focus for the Marine Corps, replacing its MAGTF traditional training with pre-deployment training, resulting in, failure to prepare itself for full spectrum warfare. The Marine Corps can meet its core competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through a training program that enables the Marine Air Ground Task Force utilization of its combined arms and flexibility and accomplish training Marines across the full spectrum of warfare required from forcible entry to policing.

The former Assistant Commandant, General Robert Magnus, presented a statement to the House Armed Service Committee on 9 April 2008 that stated,

*The short dwell time available at home does not allow our units the time to train to the full spectrum of missions needed to be expeditiously responsive for other contingencies. This short dwell time and heavy training focus on counterinsurgency limits the ability to develop and maintain proficiency in core competencies such as combined arms and amphibious operations.*<sup>3</sup>

The testimony given by the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps clearly identifies that the Marine Corps has had to reset itself to focus on the full spectrum core competencies capability it is supposed to be able to provide for the nation's defense. The fact that the Marine Corps has identified its requirements to maintain specific core competencies is only a portion of the fight it will have institutionally. The Marine Corps will need to focus on a range of core competencies, in short, its MAGTFs training across the full spectrum of warfare. For the Marine Corps to complete its design of a training venue or program for MAGTFs it has to identify the enemy. As in the 1930's, the Marine Corps is once again forward thinking and is creating the ground work for a future Marine Corps adaptable and capable of carrying out expeditionary MAGTF operations.

## Vision 2025

The Marine Corps Vision 2025 describes a new generation of Marines, an expeditionary force in readiness prepared to go anywhere at any time and conduct full spectrum operations. Vision 2025 identifies that the Marine Corps will employ with a regional focus able to operate in any of the combatant command areas with language and culture training capability; however, it will also be globally capable. It further discusses the need to be able to conduct security cooperation activities and respond swiftly with little warning to emerging crisis. The Commandant's Vision 2025 provides an assessment for the Marine Corps. First, the Marines in the ranks are the most potent weapon in the Corps and are a continued point of greatest emphasis.<sup>4</sup> Technology is not always the answer and should never eliminate good training and discipline.

The Commandant's second assessment concludes that the term expeditionary is truly a mindset for the individual and the institution. He requires that units focus on "traveling fast, being lean and functioning in austere conditions."<sup>5</sup> The third focus for the Commandant is naval forces. The Marine Corps will continue to be naval by nature and provide the President and the Secretary of Defense a strategic force in readiness that is mobile and can sustain itself for prolonged periods. Vision 2025 further states that, "to prevent problems and dampen instability, there is no effective substitute for ready flexible forces forward deployed,"<sup>6</sup> and always on station. This quote identifies a future of stability and support operations around the world, in support of the United States' foreign or economic policies. The Commandant identified that amphibious shipping is the right investment for future procurement, and continues to be a vital asset in ensuring a deployable ready force with global projection capability and sustainment. Finally, the assessment identifies that the nation requires an expeditionary force in readiness: the

Marine Corps will be that force beyond 2025. With a comprehensive vision of where the Marine Corps needs to go in the future, it has also taken stock of the forces core competencies. These tasks focus the Marine Corps on ensuring its' the expeditionary warfighting element the nation requires.

### The Core Competency

The Marine Corps has had several venues over the years to ensure training focused on its obligated core competencies directed by Congress. The core competencies reflect the service particular "skill sets" and describe what the service does or is responsible to do for the nation.<sup>7</sup> These core competencies delineate the Marine Corps' institutional culture and its contribution to the Department of Defense.<sup>8</sup> These competencies provide the basis for the level of experience the Marine Corps will need to maintain and provide to the nation's fights. These core competencies enable the execution of expeditionary operations across the spectrum of warfare. The Marine Corps currently has six core competencies with the first four representing enduring skill sets, reflect legislative direction, and public law. The last two represent an understanding of the emerging security environment as described in the National Strategy and defense planning priorities.<sup>9</sup>

The first core competency identifies the Marine Corps as a force in readiness, "The Corps conducts persistent forward naval engagement and is always prepared to respond as the nation's force in readiness."<sup>10</sup> As an expeditionary force, the Marine Corps with the Navy have been able to forge the institutional mindset throughout their relationship to meet this competency requirement. The second core competency establishes the Marine Corps as the unique force it is. "The Corps employs integrated combined arms across the range of military operations, and can operate as part of a joint or multinational force."<sup>11</sup> This core competency reinforces the

requirement the Marine Corps has to provide trained and ready MAGTFs prepared to fight across a full spectrum battlefield, alone or combined with joint or multinational partners.

“The Corps provides forces and specialized detachments for service aboard naval ships, on stations and for operations ashore.”<sup>12</sup> The third core competency identifies that there is a common heritage between the Marine Corps and the Navy and that through continued programs, deployments and modernization the Navy and Marine Corps will continue to work closely towards integration during deployments to project power, fight from naval vessels or austere expeditionary bases, or a combination thereof.<sup>13</sup>

The fourth and final congressionally directed core competency is that “the Corps conducts joint forcible entry operations from the sea and develops amphibious landing force capabilities and doctrine.”<sup>14</sup> This core competency is one of the hallmarks of the Marine Corps, establishing it as the premier amphibious force for the United States, prepared to operate as the lead for doctrine, training, and equipment to ensure that forces are trained and ready to execute amphibious operations. Through this competency, the Marine Corps ensures that sea-based MAGTFs can provide expeditionary forces to conduct immediate operations without the aid of local actors or governments, as self-sustaining in austere or third world regions.

The fifth and sixth core competencies are relatively new and represent skill sets the nation has called for in the latter years of the twentieth century and certainly has been required in these early years of the twenty-first century. The fifth competency states that, “the Corps conducts complex expeditionary operations in the urban littorals and other challenging environments.”<sup>15</sup> It crosses the full spectrum of warfare from forcible entry into port cities to counter-insurgency, training, advice and assist activities as well as stability tasks. The Marine

Corps has well documented its ability to conduct these types of operations, and with the world's growing population bases moving to coastal cities, the continued struggles around the world will require our nation's force being capable to conduct these types of missions.

"The Corps leads joint and multinational operations and enables interagency activities."<sup>16</sup> This sixth competency allows the Marine Corps the flexibility to work with multinational and interagency organizations across the full spectrum of warfare to provide security and stability through all elements of national power. These six core competencies thrust into the hands of Headquarters Marine Corps the responsibility to ensure forces train to execute every task and mission the nation requires for security and stability globally. These competencies further lead to purchasing or funding of equipment and training programs designed to equip and train the Marine Corps for specific tasks and missions. The Marine Corps with the equipment and training continues to write specific doctrine for new equipment and training throughout this cycle. They explain what the organization needs to provide to the Department of Defense and the President of the United States. Obviously, these competencies are Marine Corps specific, or service specific. While the United States Army would be able to meet these requirements, whether they should and the United States should dissolve the Marine Corps is a whole other topic, not for this discussion. The Marine Corps created its vision for the future by re-evaluating its core competency requirements. It has gone one more step to complete the picture for the future by identifying the enemy.

## The Enemy

The Marine Corps Combat Development Command aboard Quantico, Virginia is home to the Strategic Vision Group. The group, created by direction of the Commandant of the Marine Corps in 2007, was to focus on long range strategic posturing for the Marine Corps.<sup>17</sup> The group conducted research and identified possible trends that would drive the United States to deploy Marines into a full spectrum of operations from 2007 to 2025. They identified seven of these trends relevant to the Marine Corps' capabilities and force structure.

The first four of these drivers are all inter-related; they are globalization of populations, a demographic dichotomy, urban density and sprawl, and the concept of accelerating resource scarcity around the world. These four trends connect to the people. It identified some of these issues as forming in the developing continents of Africa and Asia. Worldwide, half of the world's population live in urban areas and more than 50% of humanity lives within the littorals defined as 200km or 120 miles from the coastline.<sup>18</sup> Because of growth in these areas and the increased need for energy and water, this study addressed possible struggles for political power to control these population centers.

Furthermore, the study notes within these large population centers there will continue to be uneven prosperity, which may further fuel uprisings between the social economic divisions. The demographic dichotomy points out intriguing facts about the aging populations in the developed world. Birth rates are down sharply and the aging population continues to grow.<sup>19</sup> This continued trend put strains developed nations work forces and militaries, possibly jeopardizing alliances because of failure to recruit a younger force.

Of the first four trends, the most important to understand is the accelerating resource scarcity driver affecting the world. The study found that current supply of natural resources

would not be able to keep pace with the expanding needs throughout the developing world, influencing the world's economies and population centers. Water scarcity, the study found, will become a significant problem for developing nations in Africa. While natural resources for energy will be scarce, the State Department can draft policy to handle the global issue, but then how would one deal with the need for water? The study identified that 40% of the world population would be living in water stressed environments by 2015.<sup>20</sup> This trend illustrates the future need of forces capable of handling power struggles within regions, distressed populations, and potential humanitarian disasters.

The last three trends identified by the study were the ongoing rise of China and India as powers, the struggle for sovereign legitimacy over identity, and the blurring character and forms of warfare. The fifth trend identifies the expanding Chinese and Indian economies, suggesting more political and diplomatic, and possibly military roles around the world by these two nations. It states that neither of these two countries would displace the United States economy as the world's largest until sometime after 2040; however, since their economies are growing these states may seek further ventures outside their borders by bolstering their possible alliances through trade agreements. The sixth trend focused on what the study calls sovereign legitimacy over identity. The study identifies that nations will struggle to maintain their sovereignty due to the influence of the other trends identified and that nations will need to adapt to maintain their legitimacy and capacity to govern their people. The seventh and final trend is the blurring character and forms of warfare. The study found that while some countries will form traditional forces others will be more inclined to work with non-state actors and form alliances creating a "Hybrid War"<sup>21</sup> situation. The nature of war will not change, but "Hybrid Wars will incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and

formations, terrorists' acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder."<sup>22</sup> The study highlighted what the Commandant's Guidance has stated: the United States Marine Corps needs to be prepared to fight across the full spectrum of warfare, from humanitarian operations and stability and support operations to training foreign military organizations and conducting traditional conventional warfare. The study concluded, "The future demands a military organization that is agile and adaptive in its approach to the unique conditions each conflict poses."<sup>23</sup> The study suggests that the Marine Corps is the force for this challenge; therefore, if the Marine Corps is going to be the force to deal with these challenges in concert with sister services and multinational partners, it should focus its training on their premier fighting organization- the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF).

The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) is the primary warfighting element for the Marine Corps. If history has taught anything it is that as an organization, the Marine Corps has stumbled to maintain tactics, techniques and procedures that have already been developed or adapted from prior clashes, wars, and deployments. The Marine Corps must take a hard look at training, and how it will execute warfare across the full spectrum of conflict rooted in how it is organized. How will the Marine Corps capture current tactics, techniques, and procedures and return to training MAGTFs across the full spectrum of warfare? The Marine Corps is one of the most flexible, adaptable forces the United States has, and in order to remain a viable force for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Marine Corps will need to implement a new training venue for its base warfighting element the MAGTF.

## The MAGTF

*I view the inherent power of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) as an irreplaceable component of this Nations plan for success in the Long War. This war demands flexible organizations that apply a mix of combat and non-lethal actions; interagency capabilities and joint warfare applications; innovative use of airpower; and synchronization of intelligence activities. For rapid integration of these capabilities-as well as providing the critical boots on the ground- the MAGTF is better prepared than any other military formation to execute the full range of operations required by the current conflict. This is the Corps' fundamental fighting organization, providing the joint force a unique, additive capability-one that is much greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>24</sup>*

*General James T. Conway  
Commandant of the Marine Corps*

Since the mid 20th Century, the Marine Corps has been the force in readiness for the United States around the globe. For the Marine Corps, versatility and flexibility is more than just men, women, and their equipment. Unlike any other element of the Department of Defense, the Marine Corps for its size and cost is the best bang for the buck when it comes to wanting to show the world, certain countries, or organizations the United States means business. Additionally, the ability to deploy within hours and days around the world with sufficient combat power is what makes the MAGTF a potent military instrument of national power.

This force is a general-purpose air ground and logistics force that organizes itself to specific requirements and specific situations. "The MAGTF is a modular organization tailor-able to each mission".<sup>25</sup> This fighting organization allows the Marine Corps at any time to employ ground forces supported by air, and logistics assets specifically tasked in a supporting role of each other, allowing maximum flexibility across a full spectrum of missions and tasks. The MAGTF is the Marine Corps main warfighting organization for the full spectrum of conflict. This organization is scalable, versatile, and expeditionary. Their flexibility contributes to its lethality, response to crisis, and overwhelming success in the past and potentially the future warfighting requirements.<sup>26</sup> The MAGTF brings a wealth of combat power to any situation

grounded in combined arms and composed of four distinct elements. The following elements make up the MAGTF: command, ground, air and logistics elements. Each element of the MAGTF brings only what is required for operations. These elements of ground combat power, aircraft, and logistics support each other and increase the MAGTF's lethality, by providing logistics fire power, flexibility, and boots on the ground to any operation.

The MAGTF provides the Marine Corps and the nation some unique capabilities. Because of the Marine Corps' naval character, the MAGTF provides the expeditionary forces required for crises around the globe. This naval character allows Marine forces to deploy without the enemy really knowing where and when the Marine Corps is coming. It allows the United States to maintain a presence in international waters for secure sea bases, and provide immediate response for humanitarian relief operations. The Marine Corps can provide credible combat power over the horizon to counter a potential adversary as an initial response to any type of crisis. This character also provides commanders the ability to flow combat power ashore sequentially, or as needed, based on the situation and the requirement. The MAGTF allows for rapid departure from an area of operations, when the forces are no longer required, allowing them to refit and continue their mission in the open water around the globe.<sup>27</sup>

With the Long War continuing to require Marine forces, the Marine Corps has not focused on MAGTF combined arms training. There is more focus on ensuring battalion and lower level forces receive the core competencies required by the reality of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to answer the question of what type of training the Marine Corps is going to conduct for future preparations, the author looked at three training venues or opportunities, which have been used in the past eight years to prepare Marines for war or are being designed to train Marines for war. In order to get back to basics, there is a requirement to revisit the training

venue that provided the Marine Corps most of its core competency training throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, the Combined Arms Exercise (CAX). This comparison and analysis of training venues will also look at the current training program Mojave Viper, and finally look at what Training and Education Command is looking at for the future.

### The Combined Arms Exercise

The CAX Program until early AY 04 facilitated MAGTF training focused on fire support tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) performed with maneuver, creating live-fire conditions to train for combat operations. The CAX program was initially a fire support coordination exercise for a reinforced infantry battalion with the other supporting elements of the MAGTF.<sup>28</sup> These exercises conducted ten times a year allowed for a continuous rotation of forces to execute training while others deployed.

The CAX exercises focused on training goals addressed by core competencies assigned to the Marine Corps through the Department of Defense. Combined arms operations were the primary core competency for the exercise force to cultivate while conducting CAX.<sup>29</sup> By operating together as a combined force, Marines were able to identify weaknesses and strengths of all elements of the MAGTF through live fire exercises in simulated combat conditions. During these exercises, “the MAGTF would conduct force deployment, planning, and execution for essential warfighting capabilities; deploy tactical forces; plan, direct, and execute intelligence operations, fires (lethal and nonlethal), NBC operations, aviation operations, air and ground maneuver, and sustainment operations in an expeditionary environment.”<sup>30</sup> The MAGTF would also exercise command and control to capture the intent of integration and synchronization of all four elements of the MAGTF in a combined arms exercise.

The Exercise Force MAGTF configured for the CAX allowed the full spectrum of capabilities and doctrinally incorporated into training. An infantry regimental headquarters provided the staff and headquarters support for the Command Element.

*The Regimental based MAGTF executes within its capabilities the roles and missions of a MAGTF while concurrently providing tactical C2 over ground combat units (infantry, artillery, reconnaissance, engineer, assault amphibian, tank, and Light Armored Reconnaissance) in a manner similar to its doctrinal role as the Ground Combat Element (GCE) of a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), or an infantry regiment as part of the Marine Division.*<sup>31</sup>

The MAGTF would be comprised of a GCE based on a reinforced infantry battalion, an Aviation Combat Element (ACE) and a Combat Logistics Group (CLG). All of these elements would bring a wide array of capabilities to the exercise, to enable the force maximum support for training.

#### Mojave Viper Exercise

The Mojave Viper Exercise at Marine Air Ground Combat Center, Twenty-nine Palms, California, enables units to streamline critical counter-insurgency training required by the Marine Corps prior to deployment. The intent for this training was to better prepare deploying units to Iraq and Afghanistan by putting them through scenarios with and without role-players focused on tactics techniques and procedures at the battalion, company, and platoon level. Mojave Viper described in the TTECG command brief is "A continuum of training that combines both kinetic and non-kinetic supporting arms across the spectrum of military operations in a counter-insurgency environment."<sup>32</sup> Two elements to the Mojave Viper charter drive its continued use by commanders. The first is that by design, it is to maintain core competency in combined-arms and the second is to conduct a mission rehearsal for Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom

deployments. Bottom line is that Mojave Viper is a training exercise that spans across lines of operations applicable for mission rehearsal while maintaining units combined arms capability.

Battalion-sized elements with detachments, similar to those they will have access to in Iraq and or Afghanistan, assemble on the ground at Mojave Viper, and then complete an array of training programs from cultural awareness to employment of combined arms. Units receive several required skills at Mojave Viper, among which are convoy live fire courses, improvised explosives, cas-evac, and command and control. Most of what has become pre-deployment training concludes during the exercise and the units then complete preparation for deployment. The tactics, techniques, and procedures can change based on real time events and after action reports ensuring the Marines are receiving up to date training for The Long War.

Mojave Viper works like the old CAX program in that it is a crawl, walk, run program of instruction and action. The introductory, "crawl," portion is academic with instruction on combined arms, urban operations, and counter-insurgency TTP's. The training phases into practical application in the form of fire support exercises and lane training, while the final phase comprised of kinetic events designed for infantry companies with supporting arms including heavy machine guns and mortars. Once the kinetic events are complete, the unit participates in a final exercise where the unit can utilize its core competency and new TTP's for their specific deployment.

Mojave Viper utilizes the ground combat, logistics, and air elements of the MAGTF, ensuring proper utilization and receipt of the training they require based on individual requirements. Portions of the past CAX program do exist throughout Mojave Viper. Elements such as the fire support-training program and the deliberate assault course remain as core competency training for both battalion command and control, and company and platoon

operations in the arena of combined arms breaching and assaulting. For units deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan the Mojave Viper training program has been exceptional based on after action reports from commanders and Marines who have completed the training; however, this is not the training program the Marine Corps needs to maintain for future fights. As units are turning their focus towards Afghanistan, after action reports are illustrating a more determined enemy than what Marines encountered in Iraq and one that requires Marines to return to the core competency of combined arms. The Marine Corps must return to the basics, get out of training in and out of firm bases and fight through forcible entry utilizing its combined arms and expeditionary skill sets.

With the Commandant's assessment of the world, its actors and states, and his vision for how the Marine Corps is going to focus and prepare itself for the next twenty odd years, there seems to be little room for error on what the focus is and what it is going to be. The Marine Corps as a whole has to make an internal effort to refocus the force and re-establish these principles if it intends to be the expeditionary force in readiness this Nation requires. The MAGTF training cell at Training and Education Command is moving forward on their proposed training program for the Marine Corps to meet the requirements the Commandant put forward in his planning guidance.

## Future MAGTF Training

Training and Education Command is developing a training program that meets the Commandant's guidance. Working together, Training and Education Command and the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Center have brought together the current training at Mojave Viper, and reincarnated the CAX program to form a MAGTF-based training program. For the Marines at Training and Education Command their starting point was to state "only after the Marine Corps reached a 2-1 deployment ratio"<sup>33</sup> during the current Long War would their program meet its full potential in training the force.

The program focuses on establishing training venues that can train MAGTFs prior to deployment. At the unit level, forces would train "core tasks"<sup>34</sup> at a Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) venue, focusing on military occupational specialty training and mission essential tasks ensuring units complete training in combined arms operations. This venue will continue throughout the year on an annual schedule reaching as many units as possible based on the deployment ratio as well as mission currently under way. The second phase of the training program revolves around "directed tasks."<sup>35</sup>

These tasks are what Training and Education Command determines are not in the "core tasks" of a unit. They focus on specific missions that drive the force structure to identify which units require the training for deployment. While some Marine units, specifically infantry units, would train to these tasks as part of their core tasks, other units, such as logistics or other ground combat elements, would only train to them when they joined a unit for deployment. These tasks focus on skill sets rooted in the Mojave Viper Exercise currently trained to for the current long war. The final training exercise that would only take place when units were available is a

MAGTF level exercise that would span the core competencies as well as work units through their directed and core tasks.

Training and Education Command has some more work to do on alignment of this training program as well as creating the directed tasks for units. The program does not provide a single venue allowing units to train to the full spectrum of warfare they could find themselves in during a single deployment. The disconnect between units and a training venue that allows a MAGTF to work together to a single accomplishment as a coordinated team is observed as a problem by this author, and should be addressed. The re-writing of training and readiness manuals seems to be extreme, as identified by Training and Education Command; however, the simple addition of addendums would suffice ensuring TTPs for specific operational environments establishing training for all elements of the MAGTF, not just the ground combat element.

### Conclusion

How should the Marine Corps prepare for the challenges of the 21st Century? It should do so by training for the full spectrum of warfare. The Marine Corps has not trained to the full spectrum with exception at lower level units up to battalion currently as time permits during a robust deployment period supporting the long war. Lessons from mistakes made by others around the world can prove to be useful. We do not have to look far. The Israeli-Hezbollah war of 2006 is an example.

At the conclusion of the Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) identified that they had some significant shortfalls because of training when it came to conventional warfare. Scholars and warfighters have been asking the question: how can a powerful western army come to a standstill by a terrorist organization on the open battlefield.

The Israeli-Hezbollah War was the first instance a terrorist organization that had won democratic elections put a force on the battlefield consisting of regular and irregular forces and conducted what some are calling "Hybrid Warfare."<sup>36</sup> The IDF concluded that air power and security forces were the wrong forces and training skill sets required to meet this new warfare. Airpower only played into the hands of the enemy and their ability to broadcast to the world where and what was being destroyed by bombs and missiles. The security training the IDF had been conducting for years for forces operating in the Gaza strip led to the decline in the forces' ability to fully integrate and conduct combined arms operations against enemy forces.

The lesson for the United States Marine Corps is that warfare is changing for the next century, and training to contend with it will need to span the full spectrum. The future of MAGTF training is now. The Marine Corps needs to find an adaptable, training exercise/venue, which can allow the MAGTF to train to core competencies, and exercise their full potential across a fluid ever-changing 21st century environment. The Mojave Viper exercise prepared the Marine Corps in its focus on the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. There has been no focus on full spectrum operations, but the Marine Corps has capitalized on lessons learned from these current conflicts. Those lessons cannot be lost to manuals like those that the TTP's of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did in the form of the Small Wars Manual. If the Marine Corps is going to regain its MAGTF full spectrum warfare adaptability, it must create a new venue. This venue will need to combine CAX and Mojave Viper in order to gain the basic skill sets to meet full spectrum requirements needed by the Marine Corps and directed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps. This training like the two venues already mentioned; needs to focus on platoon through regimental level planning and execution type orders and missions, while integrating fire

support and logistics; furthermore, from a simulated sea base, to regain the expeditionary mindset.

The foundation for this training not only should reflect the core competencies of the Marine Corps but also should embrace the future of warfare as described by the studies conducted by Marine Corps Combat Development Command. The Marine Corps must retain the ability to combat counter-insurgency; however, it cannot afford to lose its conventional capability.

Any new venue should ensure training at the regimental level, as a MAGTF. Taking after the model of the CAX program it should encompass training for the command element, the ground combat element, the logistic combat element, and the air combat element. The length of the training and exercise should retain its thirty-day window from arrival to departure in an effort to maximize unit-training opportunity. The venue should focus on platoon and company lane training; scenario based ensuring all core competency requirements are attempted. Similar to Mojave Viper, the training conducted must be in mission type orders from the command element. By issuing orders and developing products to be utilized throughout the training, the unit staff's can continue to develop the picture for higher as training is conducted linking the venue to the orders and products. Throughout the units, training the overall picture of the problem will continue to be developed. This training would culminate in a final exercise for the unit requiring forcible entry into a location, a combination of combined arms requirements, ship to shore movements, and stability and support operations ashore; ensuring all Marines within the MAGTF operate across the full spectrum of warfare, not just one portion of it. It is important that all Marines regardless of military occupational specialty receive the training through this venue, the author is not suggesting that the Marines of the Marine Logistics Group need to

complete an infantry live fire movement course, but they should be fully capable of reacting to indirect fire, and or an IED during convoy operations. The training standards for each should evaluate the unit across the full spectrum of warfare or focus in one portion of the spectrum, regardless the training is complete and the force is better prepared because of it.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps stated, "The Marine Corps is committed to providing the nation its expeditionary force of choice for tomorrow's challenges."<sup>37</sup> The Marine Corps is currently located at a unique crossroads in its history. It continues to provide trained and equipped forces around the world during this Long War. It has conducted studies, evaluations, and has focused on what future warfare is going to be. The Marine Corps has identified potential requirements for new units and equipment to meet challenges presented by the Long War. However, the Marine Corps has not improved its training programs to focus on full spectrum warfare. What it has done, is train specific units for specific deployments because of a national need during this current war. The Marine Corps can refocus the force for full spectrum requirements. It can achieve the necessary force training it requires based on the future threats identified and the guidance passed out by the Commandant. If it is only one or two regimental sized MAGTFs a year it will be better than doing nothing and finding ourselves in five years facing down a conventional or hybrid force with a Marine Corps trained and ready to conduct security and stability operations. The time for the shift is now, while the task of re-orienting training for the Marine Corps is large, it is not impossible.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2006 Commandant's Planning Guidance, 2006, 5, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/34CMCGuidance.pdf> (accessed Dec 20, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> House Armed Services Committee, *Full Committee Testimony on Status of U.S. Ground Forces, Statement of General Robert Magnus Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps*, April 9, 2008, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 5, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>5</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 53, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>6</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 53-54, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>7</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 12, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>8</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Operations*. MCDP1-0 (Washington DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, September 27, 2001), 2-2.

<sup>9</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 12, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>10</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 12, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>11</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 13, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>12</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 14, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>13</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 14, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>14</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 15, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>15</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 16, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

<sup>16</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20 2008), 16, <http://www.marines.mil/units/hqmc/cmc/Documents/MCVS2025%2030%>.

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- <sup>34</sup> Major Steve Wallace, face-to-face conversation with author, December 4, 2008.
- <sup>35</sup> Major Steve Wallace, face-to-face conversation with author, December 4, 2008.

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