

Fire Support Teams

Operating in the information environment
by Col David S. Owen & Maj Sasha J. Kuhlow

With Marine Corps Force 2025 modernization efforts gaining momentum, much emphasis has been placed on shaping higher headquarters and staff functions. The establishment of the Deputy Commandant for Information, the redesignation of MEF Headquarters Groups to MEF Information Groups (MIGs), and the growth of personnel, training opportunities, and concepts of employment are all essential to realizing this vision. The concept of employment for MAGTF information environment operations defines the information environment (IE) as “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.”¹ Under this definition, tactical units throughout the Marine Corps are actors in the information environment. Acknowledging this also means seeking opportunities to maximize the impact of operations in the information environment (OIE) by linking those on the tactical edge of the battlefield to MAGTF-level information and resources via organic and attached forces, as well as identifying opportunities to leverage theater and strategic assets in support of maneuver units on the ground.

The ability to link higher echelon capabilities with tactical elements is common practice. Over time, we’ve integrated our methods of fire support at the lowest tactical level into the fire support team for maneuver units and the firepower control team within the Air/Naval Gunfire Liaison Company. Just as forward observers, joint terminal attack controllers, and naval gunfire spot teams have become part of those teams, we should see current and emerging capabilities, such as military information support operations teams, civil affairs



The fire support team may be joined by information-related support teams. (Photo by SSgt Kowshon Ye.)

> **Col Owen: See page 6 for bio.**

>> **Maj Kuhlow: See page 6 for bio.**

teams, electronic warfare support teams, and other information-related capability enablers as part of the fire support team or firepower control team. This approach integrates non-kinetic fires into the fire support plan from the outset of an operation instead of relegating them to an extension of the company headquarters element and integrating them mid-stride. As we develop capacity, many IE capabilities will be assigned to company or battalion elements based on mission analysis; however, many high-demand, low-density capabilities will necessarily remain in general support or be assigned to different units throughout the phases of an operation.

Commanders at all levels should consider how they can complement these new capabilities by shaping unit-level manning, equipping, and training to facilitate maneuver in the IE. In this manner, the approach to lethal and non-lethal fires can be holistic, working backward from the desired end state to non-lethal shaping, to aviation and ground delivered kinetics, and finally, to the supported maneuver. In the end, this creates a decisive advantage for Marines and Sailors, ensuring we’ve exhausted every method of engagement before our units close the last 100 yards of lethal combat.

Perhaps the most contentious issue in any force modernization effort is personnel; force sizes are fixed, and growth in one field often means loss in another. As new capabilities become critical to tactical success, commanders innovate and develop internal solutions that set the groundwork for future institutional

change; the establishment of company-level intelligence and operations cells are examples. As OIE become embedded into operational planning, units must identify personnel to plan unit-level OIE, which may include developing tactical signature management plans nested in higher-level plans, requesting electronic fires, or identifying higher echelon capabilities that can support tactical maneuver. Trained company- and battalion-level personnel can also facilitate the effective employment of attached IE assets, such as military information support operations teams, electronic warfare support teams, or communication strategy and operations teams. OIE “observers and controllers” can champion requests, employ tactical IE capabilities, and create opportunities to maximize the effectiveness of OIE at the echelon level.

Another aspect of force modernization is the proliferation of new equipment that may require personnel who need specialized training, e.g., drone operators. The proliferation of sensors throughout the battlespace, the growing ability of systems to collect and process exponentially larger amounts of data, and complex communications networks will drive units—from squads to regiments—to evaluate their operations in the context of the IE. Understanding and properly employing these systems will not fall solely to the communications officer, the radio chief, or the intelligence section and may require personnel assigned to take a holistic view of these efforts. Focus will be required at all levels to effectively maneuver in the IE as coalition and adversary sensor networks increase in quantity and complexity and as the amount of information collected and transmitted during an operation grows. Trained information warfare personnel, support teams, and coordination cells will be required to understand and manage these systems and this information and incorporate systems and capabilities with operational- and strategic-level efforts.

As OIE develop and capabilities become integrated, processes must be developed to plan, coordinate, control, and synchronize at all levels. Once orders are issued through the G-3, the

MIG information warfare coordination center must be able to quickly reach out through a network of information warfare coordination cells in major subordinate commands and information warfare support teams located across the MAGTF to OIE observers, controllers, and planners at the tactical edge in order to distribute or request information. If a squad is experiencing significant electromagnetic interference, that informa-

the regimental level and below, can synchronize operations and enable tactical units to request and leverage IE assets from higher echelons. Conversely, these efforts can increase the MAGTF commander’s situational awareness across the IE battlespace and assist in shaping requirements for elite capabilities or additional authorities ahead of planning timelines. Operating in the information environment will require new ap-

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tion must rapidly reach an echelon that can identify and mitigate the source. If processes and networks are established within the MAGTF to support OIE, they can respond quickly to events on the ground. If a platoon identifies an opportunity for strategic messaging to reinforce tactical maneuver, a network of OIE observers and controllers can act quickly to coordinate support. Developing and echeloning the OIE capability across the MAGTF sets the conditions to maximize the effectiveness of OIE. Implementing processes for coordination and synchronization of OIE enables tactical commanders to capitalize on opportunities to enhance mission success during deliberate planning and as they arise on the battlefield.

Networks of individuals, systems, and information that link the tactical edge to the MAGTF to support rapid, synchronized OIE planning and execution will be essential to the effective conduct of OIE at all levels. These networks enable OIE to complement actions on the ground, act as a force multiplier for commanders, and enable non-kinetic fires to help shape the narrative of kinetic fires. Establishing a network of operators for the IE, consisting of observers, controllers, and planners at

proaches; however, current constructs such as employing observers, controllers, and liaisons—when combined with training, equipping, and establishing processes focused on OIE—can accelerate the proliferation of OIE throughout the MAGTF as we plan for the future fight.

Note

1. *Marine Air-Ground Task Force Information Environment Operations Concept of Employment*, dated 6 July 2017.

