

# Command and Control Considerations for EABO

Marine Corps integration into the fleet via the Composite Warfare Commander concept

by Marc Riccio & Maj William Grimball

***No single activity in war is more important than command and control. Done well command and control adds to our strength. Done poorly, it invites disaster, even against a weaker enemy.***

**—MCDP 6, Command and Control**

**A**s we continue to experiment with and advance the war-fighting concepts outlined in the *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, it is not too early to begin the discussion of what the command and control (C2) structure for that envisioned force and associated missions might look like. Why is this even a concern? What is new? What is different about this new orientation that would warrant a legitimate look at C2 structures? The Commandant's words in his CPG may shed some light:

Marines will focus on exploiting positional advantage and defending key maritime terrain that enables persistent sea control and denial operations forward.<sup>1</sup>

Gen Berger went even further in a recent speech at the Marine Corps Association Foundation Ground Dinner on 21 November 2019 in describing what this force would be capable of executing:

our ability to conduct sea control and sea denial operations both from sea and from key maritime terrain is an essential naval capability in modern armed conflict ... it is not a nice to have, it is essential."<sup>2</sup>

He further elaborated that

those mobile, bad attitude, tool-kit packing Marines are focused on a small set of tasks to achieve sea control and sea denial; sinking ships, shooting down planes, killing enemy forces inside the area, and stopping all force from coming in."<sup>3</sup>

These roles are hugely different than the ones Marines have played in past operations involving the Navy-Marine Corps Team. For roughly the past 80

years, the Marine Corps has focused almost exclusively on the force projection ashore part of the naval mission of amphibious or expeditionary operations; the one exception being the introduction of defense battalions in the waning days before Pearl Harbor. How we got there was up to the Navy. Once we hit the high-water mark, we took it from there.

What has changed to precipitate this monumental shift? The obvious answer is that the threat has changed. The maritime terrain is once again relevant, particularly concerning potential adversaries and global peer competitors like China and Russia, and to a lesser extent Iran and North Korea. According to Gen Berger,

China's pivot to the sea as the primary front in a renewed great power competition has fundamentally transformed the operational environment in which the Naval and Joint Force must operate.<sup>4</sup>

The U.S. Navy no longer possesses unchallenged global maritime dominance. Presumptive sea control is a

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**Specifically, the Navy and Marine Corps must confront the new reality that presumptive sea control is no longer assured for the United States—we will compete for it.**

**—Gen David H. Berger**

thing of the past. Our days of unchallenged sea control and sea denial have evaporated. Global competitors are actively and aggressively challenging that dominance. The range, volume, and sophistication of adversary anti-access and area-denial weapons make large maritime formations and fixed installations highly vulnerable and susceptible targets. Consequently, the Navy now embraces concepts such as distributed maritime operations and distributed lethality thru an integrated maritime defense. The Marine Corps' new role in supporting the maritime commander in this evolving and dangerous threat environment is captured in the *Expeditionary Advance Base Operations* (EABO) concept and the *deterrence by denial* strategy of the contact layer and the stand-in-forces.

The key change is undeniable. The Marine Corps is no longer “along for the ride” and we recognize that we must play a more significant role in supporting the maritime commander's *sea control* and *sea denial* missions. If we are going to play an active role in maritime missions, we need to understand how these naval forces (specifically expeditionary advanced bases) integrate into and are part of the overall maritime C2 structure. To achieve this understanding, the naval force must address several fundamental questions. First, *what is the envisioned role of EAB forces in the sea denial and sea control missions as well as their role in the greater deterrence by denial strategy?* Secondly, *how are they integrated into the tactical naval architecture represented by the composite warfare commander (CWC) construct?* Thirdly, *who does the EAB force work for and what is the best organization and C2 structure to optimize the EAB forces contribution to the maritime fight?*

Addressing the first question, as described in the concepts of *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* and EABO, the Marine Corps seeks to further distribute lethality by providing land-based options for increasing the number of sensors and shooters beyond the upper limit imposed by the number of seagoing platforms available. Some

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examples of capabilities that might be provided by EABO forces includes intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, coastal defense cruise missiles, anti-air missiles, forward arming and refueling of aircraft, and munitions reloading for ships and submarines.

They may also control—or at least outpost—key maritime terrain to improve the security of sea lines of communications and chokepoints, or deny their use to the enemy, and exploit and enhance the natural barriers formed by island chains.<sup>5</sup> As such, these capabilities serve to increase friendly capacity and survivability while complicating adversary targeting inside the weapons engagement zone.

The terms *stand-in forces* and *inside-forces* are prominent in any discussion or recent literature on EABO. Mr. Art Corbett describes in his February 2019 *Marine Corps Gazette* article, “Stand-In Forces: Disrupting the current struggle for dominance,” that stand-in forces are forces with disruptive new tactical capabilities (several listed above) that will persist and operate forward within an adversary's weapons engagement zone. During day-to-day competition, stand-in forces enable the United States and our partners to confront *fait accompli* gambits and malign behavior with proportionate, responsive, and credible military options to match adversary aggression with commensurate force and risk. We are in affect deterring by denial through posturing forces and resources to detect aggression quickly enough to do something about it.<sup>6</sup> During conflict, stand-in forces may be employed as one of several simultaneous operational efforts within a larger joint campaign to defeat the counter-intervention strategy of peer adversaries.<sup>7</sup> In essence, EAB



**Deputy JFMCC, BGen Chris Owens' flag flies over the JFMCC flag ship, USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) during COMEUCOM Exercise AUSTERE CHALLENGE 2009. (Photo courtesy of M.F. Riccio).**

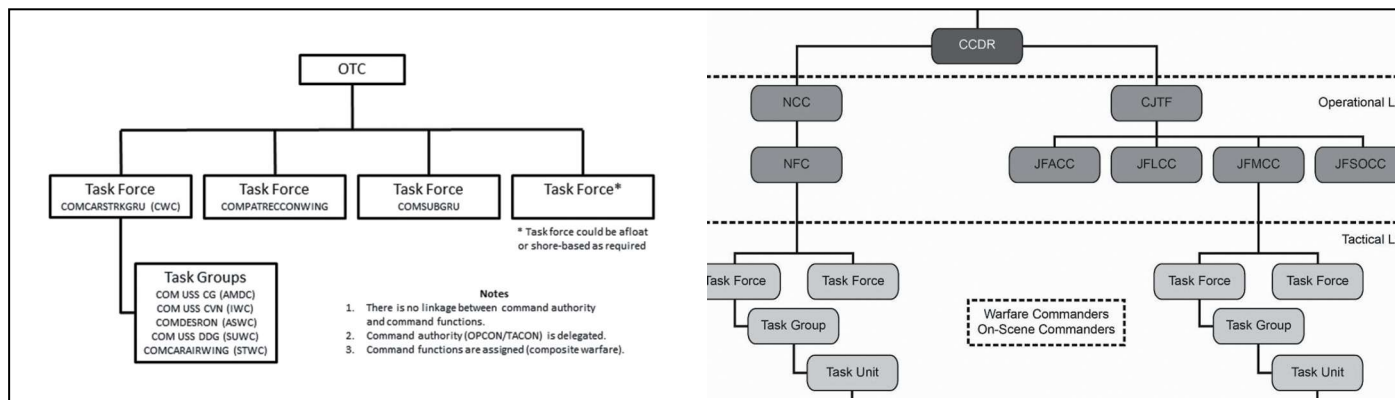


Figure 1. NWP 3-56, pages 19 and 21.)

forces are by definition stand-in forces. To clarify even further the often interchangeable terminology, stand-in forces describes a force positioned and designed to deter an adversary *fait accompli*, while inside forces describes a force that is actively operating within range of adversary long-range fires if and when deterrence fails.

With a basic understanding of the Marine Corps' role, via EABO in maritime sea control and sea denial missions, let us now shift our attention to the second question: How will these EAB forces and stand-in forces be integrated into the naval architecture represented by the CWC construct? The Commandant states,

As an organization statutorily designated for service with the Fleet during the prosecution of a naval campaign, the Marine Corps must be able to quickly and effectively integrate into the naval forces.<sup>8</sup>

The Commandant further directs the Marine Corps to prepare to operate within the CWC construct. So what is the Navy's composite warfare construct? According to the *NWP 3-56*, the composite warfare organization enables offensive and defensive combat operations against multiple targets and threats simultaneously.<sup>9</sup>

Flexibility of implementation, reinforced by clear guidance to subordinates and use of command by negation, are keys to decentralized control of the tactical force. The officer in tactical command (OTC), normally the naval force commander or joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC), may

implement a composite warfare organization whenever and to whatever extent required, depending upon the composition and mission of the force and the capabilities of the adversary.<sup>10</sup> The OTC uses task organization to enable a more reasonable span of control and to provide a framework for future delegation of authority. Tactical-level commanders task-organize to achieve military objectives by organizing assigned forces into task forces, task groups, task units, or task elements. Task organization allows an operational commander to divide and organize subordinate forces as well as assign authority and responsibility to plan and execute based on mission, platform capability, geography, or a hybrid of the three to address other issues and challenges.<sup>11</sup> (See Figure 1.)

**The basis for all command and control is the authority vested in a commander over subordinates.**

—MCDP 6

Furthermore, *NWP 3-56* states in a maritime operation area that has multiple task forces operating within it, the common superior (OTC) will be the numbered fleet commander /JFMCC. Unless this commander assigns OTC command functions to one of the task

force commanders, the command will simultaneously be an operational- and tactical-level command.<sup>12</sup>

So the question remains: How does the Marine Corps integrate into the fleet composite warfare construct as directed by the CPG?

To determine this, we must address our third and final question: Who does the EAB force work for and what is the best organization and C2 structure to optimize the EAB forces contribution to the maritime fight? As described by the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab-Futures Directorate, EABO espouses employing mobile, relatively low-cost capabilities in austere, temporary locations forward as integral elements of Fleet/JFMCC operations.<sup>13</sup>

By definition and purpose, these EAB's are inherently *maritime* in nature. Think of them as a land-based naval platform. As such, it makes sense that the EAB force would need to be tightly integrated into the naval force commander or JFMCC C2 structure just as any other at-sea or airborne platform would be. It also allows the EAB force to take advantage of the resources represented by the other warfare commanders in the naval force writ large with access to all other CWC capabilities.

If the above argument is accepted, then logically the answer to our question is the EAB force would work for the naval force commander (this could be a Navy officer or a Marine officer). What might that organization look like? One potential option, and the one we propose for further study, would be to

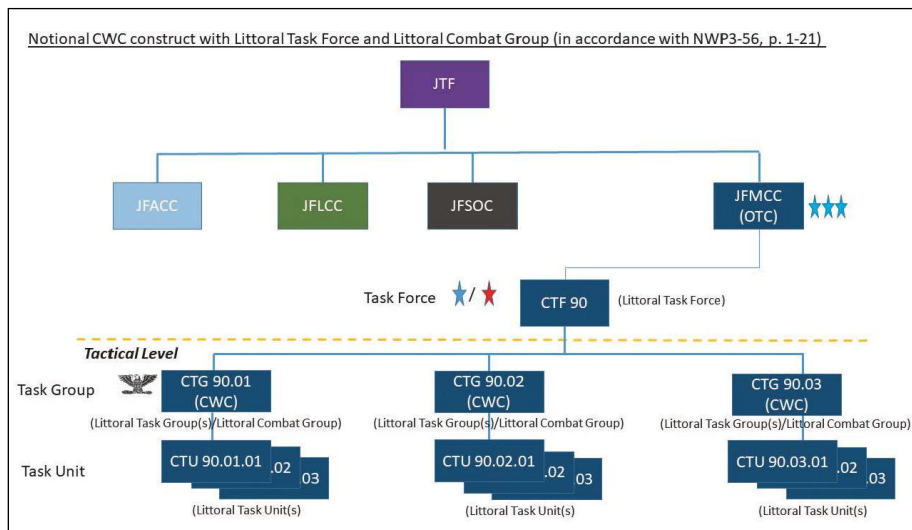


Figure 2.

develop under the numbered fleet commander/JFMCC, a littoral task force commander who would also be dual hatted as the littoral warfare commander for the Naval Force Commander/JFMCC. This commander would manage and control *all littoral operations* within a designated maritime area and inside the arc of enemy long-range fires. (See Figure 2.)

This designated littoral task force could be task organized with subordinate littoral combat groups (one or more) which would consist of afloat platforms and EAB forces. (See Figure 3.) Each of the LCGs would be assigned a specific area of operations that would or could include one or more EAB's. (See Figure 4 on next page.)

These “tool-kit packing” EABs of different sizes and capabilities would fall under the command authority (operational control) of the littoral combat group commander. In this way, the EAB would be tied directly into the CWC C2 structure overseeing all naval operations in the amphibious operations area. All collection, sensing, queuing, and shooting, both lethal and non-lethal, would be connected and coordinated by and through the littoral combat group. The EAB would indeed be an extension of the naval force commander. Although the systems that would allow this to happen have not yet been fully developed, the C2 structure that will best optimize our abilities and capabilities

as an EAB force contributing to the sea control and sea denial missions should be discussed and discerned now in order to help decide these future technical requirements.

If we agree to the supposition that an EAB force is an extension of the naval

force commander, a virtual ship on solid ground, and that these forces must be fully integrated into the CWC in support of the maritime missions of sea control and sea denial, then the next logical step is that these forces—regardless of whether they are operating as contact layer forces or blunt layer forces—work for the naval force commander (i.e., the littoral group commander in this proposed C2 structure).

Are we proposing to alter or change the time-tested commander amphibious task force/commander landing force command relationships? The short answer is no. If and when executing any of the five doctrinal amphibious operation missions, the commander amphibious task force/commander landing force, supporting/supported command relationship model is still sound. The proposed C2 structure and command relationships proposed in this article specifically address the Marine Corps' new role as an active participant in the maritime commander's sea control and sea denial efforts.

**... the C2 structure that will best optimize our abilities and capabilities as an EAB force contributing to the sea control and sea denial missions should be discussed and discerned now in order to help decide these future technical requirements.**

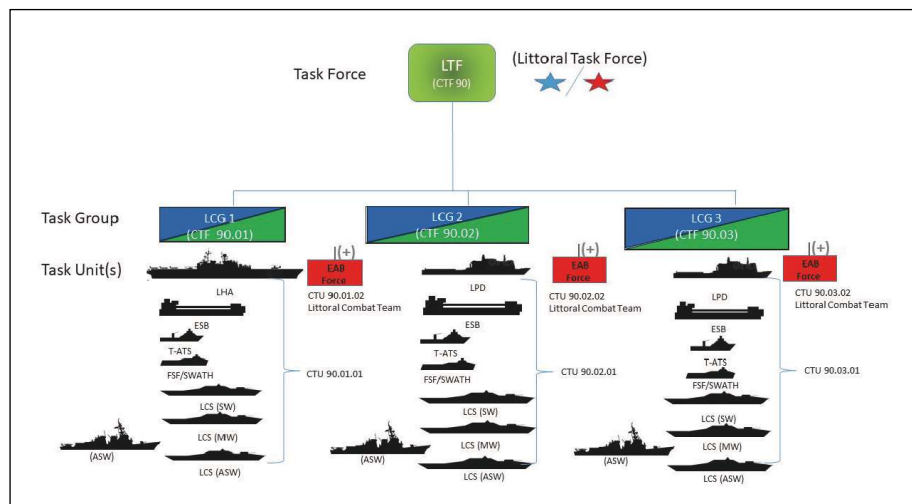


Figure 3.

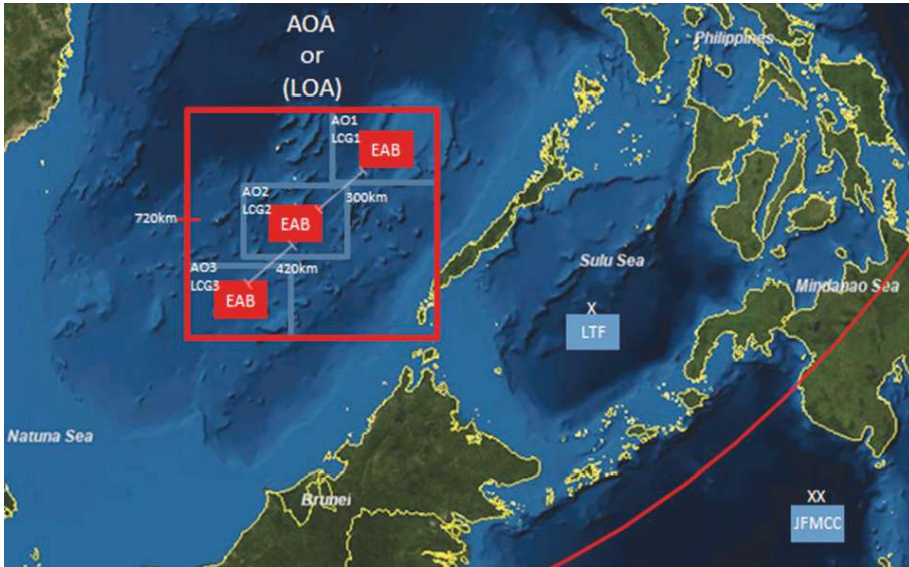


Figure 4.



Done well, command and control adds to our strength. (Photo by Cpl Xavier McNeal.)

We concur that Marine commanders are flexible and agile enough to adopt and operate within different C2 structures based on task organization and mission. If executing maritime missions in the littorals as an EAB force, the littoral task force/LCG command and control structure proposed in this article would be applied. If executing one of the five amphibious operations the commander amphibious task force/ commander landing force model would be more appropriate.

In either case, it will do us well to remember, as stated in *MCDP 6*, “Done well, command and control adds to our strength. Done poorly, it invites disaster.”<sup>14</sup> Let’s not invite disaster. We encourage rigorous debate on this crucial topic, and we look forward to advancing the discussion.

Notes

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
2. Todd South and Philip Athey, “We are the Front Line: How the Top Marine Wants the Corps Sinking Ships, Shooting Down Planes, and Killing Enemy Forces,” *Marine Corps Times*, (Springfield, VA: November 2019).
3. Ibid.
4. Gen David H. Berger, “Remarks at the MCAF Ground Dinner,” (remarks, MCAF Ground Dinner, Arlington, VA, November 2019).
5. Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, *Concepts and Programs*, (undated), available at <https://www.candp.marines.mil>.
6. Mike Gallaher, “State of (Deterrence) Denial,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Washington, DC: Elliot School of International Affairs, Summer 2019).
7. Col Art Corbett, USMC(Ret), “Stand-in Forces,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: February 2019).
8. *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*.
9. Department of the Navy, *NMWP 3-56, Composite Warfare: Maritime Operations at the Tactical Level of War*, (Washington, DC: December 2015).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. *Concepts and Programs*.
14. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, (Washington, DC: 1997).

