

Training the Force for Peer Competition

Modifying the Service level training program

by Maj Matthew T. Hawkins & Zachariah D. Riley

MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, states, “the purpose of all training is to develop forces that can win in combat.”¹ The *2018 National Defense Strategy* added specificity to the term combat by orienting the DOD’s focus on peer adversaries—namely Russia and China.² The Commandant of the Marine Corps provided additional detail through his planning guidance by stating, “we must adapt our training in a manner consistent with the threat and anticipated operational changes.”³ The strategic vision from the Secretary of Defense and the guidance from our Commandant required MAGTF-Training Command (MAGTF-TC) to modify the Service Level Training Exercise-Program (SLTE-P) to account for the art and science of war necessary to fight and win against an adversary capable of challenging them in all domains. Although many modifications have been made to the SLTE-P, it is MAGTF-TC’s intent that the program remain adaptive and responsive to force design initiatives, best practices from the FMF, and advancements in enemy capability.

Our maneuver warfare doctrine states that success in war requires a balance between the art and science. The SLTE-P is best viewed using that construct, with the Integrated Training Exercise (ITX) representing the science and MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) representing the art.

ITX focuses on training Marines on the techniques and procedures required to execute their core mission essential tasks in a live fire environment. The first modification to the ITX was updating the threat to include modeling

>Maj Hawkins is an Infantry Officer and MAGTF Planner. He is currently serving as the MAGTF Planner for MAGTF-TC.

>>Maj Riley is an Artillery Officer. He is currently serving as the Fires Planner for MAGTF-TC.



MAGTF-TC’s intent is that the SLTE-P adapts to force design initiatives. (Photo by GySgt Melissa Marnel.)

peer-adversary tactics, techniques, and equipment. This simple change forces Marines at all echelons to develop a better understanding of pacing threat capabilities and, more importantly, develop ways to defeat them. The second modification to the ITX was adapting to changes in Marine Corps concepts and equipment. This included the replacement of Mechanized and Regimental Assault Courses with the Battalion Distributed Operations Course and incorporation of electronic warfare, small UAS, and low probability of intercept/

low probability of deception communications into all ITX events.⁴ The final modification was the use of multiple technologies to provide high fidelity after action reviews to enable realtime adaption from event to event throughout the ITX program. Live fire training provides the means for MAGTF-TC to introduce the training audience to the fog, friction, and uncertainty inherent on the battlefield.

MWX is guided by our foundational doctrine which states, “only in opposed, free-play exercises can we practice the

art war.” Thus, MWX builds on the foundation established during ITX by allowing units to creatively apply the developed techniques and procedures against a free-thinking, peer adversary in a multi-domain contested environment. In order to properly replicate the challenges presented by a peer competitor, MAGTF-TC modified its approach to force-on-force training and the SLTE-P. The first modification was to establish an Adversary Force Exercise. The Adversary Force Exercise is built around a reinforced battalion augmented with new technologies that provide a peer-level enemy ground threat and the opposing will required to force continuous decision making and adaption during the course of the exercise. While this addition has been successful, it only addresses one domain in a fully contested environment. The second modification was the identification and resourcing of aircraft to present a continuous enemy air threat picture for both training audiences. While this addition combined with the ground threat poses a significant challenge to both sides, it failed to account for and replicate the full range of challenges facing FMF units on contemporary and future battlefields. The final and most challenging modification is the replication of space and information battlefield effects to truly present both sides with a multi-domain chal-

lenge. Efforts to date include utilization of program of record and contracted electronic warfare capabilities, MEF enablers to include the MEF Information Group reach back capabilities, and incorporation the Marine Corps Cyber Red Team. Together the modifications noted above have enabled MWX to become the single most realistic training

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environment for today’s commanders and has enabled adaption across the FMF.

Modifications to the SLTE-P provided the environment and stimulus required for units to innovate, adapt, and overcome the challenges associated with a peer adversary to include:

- Distribution of forces, massing of effects.
- Balancing survivability and lethality.

- Signature Management.
 - Physical and electromagnetic.
- Incorporation of non-lethal effects for fire and maneuver.
- Integration of all six OIE capability areas with traditional warfighting functions.
- Multi-domain scouting/anti-scouting (recon/counter-recon).
- Resilient and redundant kill chains.

In order to maintain the momentum achieved by modifications to the SLTE-P, it is imperative that MAGTF-TC does not rest on past successes. First, maintaining strong relationships with the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory and other elements of Headquarters Marine Corps will be critical to ensuring that ITX and MWX continue to evolve as new units and capabilities are fielded in accordance with the Commandant’s *Force Design 2030*. Second, continuing work with the Office of the Deputy Commandant for Information and all three MEF Information Groups will continue to improve the SLTE-P, specifically in the areas of unit proficiency, education, and resourcing. Finally, further incorporation of joint capabilities and units into the SLTE-P will not only increase training value for the Marine Corps but aide in the development and exploration of joint concepts.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: 1997).
2. James N. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
3. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
4. Information available at <https://vcepub.tecom.usmc.mil>.



ITX and MWX will continue to evolve as new units and capabilities are fielded to implement FD2030. (Photo by LCpl Jack Howell.)