

LCE as Rear Area Command

1st MLG embraces the RACOM mission

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IMEF MAGTF Development Program FY 2018–2020 delineates in its CG’s Warfighting Philosophy and Training Guidance section that, in fighting a single integrated battle, “the rear battle is fought by the MAGTF’s LCE to sustain and protect the force.” MEF Exercise (MEFEX) 2018, supported by the MAGTF Staff Training Program, presented the first opportunity for I MEF to exercise its LCE as the rear area command (RACOM). Upon completion of MEFEX 18 and during the facilitated after-action review, the I MEF CG reiterated his intent to retain 1st MLG as RACOM in future operations that necessitate rear area establishment. The 1st MLG fully embraces its RACOM mission and, informed by its experience during MEFEX, asserts that it is able to command rear area operations without diminishing tactical logistics support to I MEF during sustained operations ashore.

Marine Corps rear area tactics, techniques, and procedures are predominantly addressed in *MCTP 3-30C, Rear Area Operations*,¹ and *MCRP 3-30C.1, MAGTF Rear Area Security*. The term “rear area” is also included in the 2018 *Marine Corps Supplement to the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (MCRP 1-10.2)* and is defined as “that area extending forward from a command’s rear boundary to the

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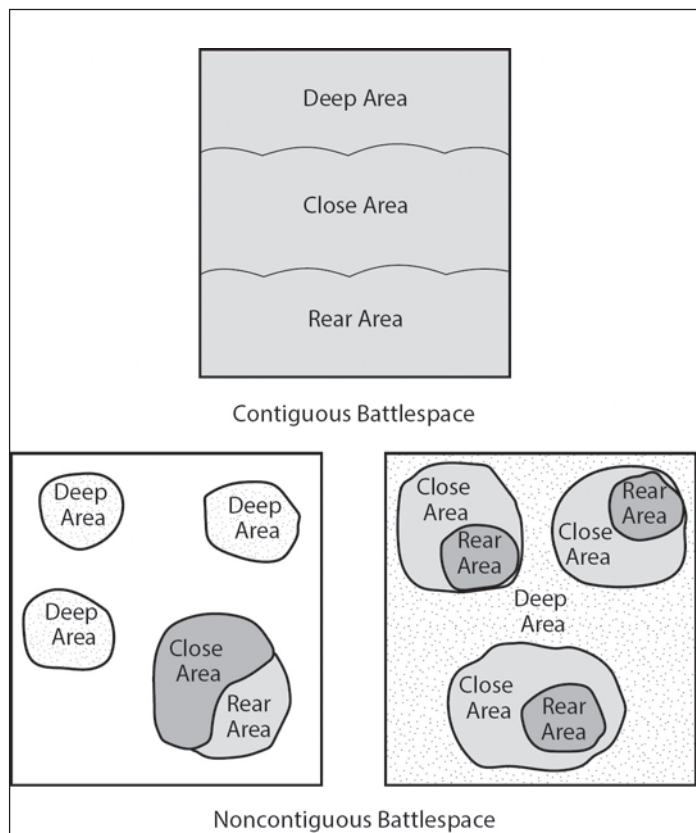


Figure 1. Notional contiguous and noncontiguous battlespace. (Image from MCRP 3-30C.1.)

rear of the area assigned to the command’s subordinate units.” *MCRP 1-10.2* further describes the rear area as “provided primarily for the performance of combat service support functions.” The rear area construct applies to contiguous and noncontiguous MAGTF battlespace (see Figure 1).² Additionally, the rear area generally expands and contracts through the phases, stages, and parts of a given operation.

Rear area functions, as enumerated in *MCTP 3-30C*, include: security, communications, intelligence, sustainment, area management, movements, infrastructure development, host-nation support.

Successful rear area operations within and between these functions require effective command and control (C2).³ To execute rear area C2, the Marine commander (Service component

or MAGTF) has three options: retain C2 of that portion of the battlespace, designate a rear area coordinator, or designate a rear area commander. Like the rear area itself, the Marine commander may alter the rear area C2 structure as an operation progresses and rear area operational demands evolve.

The rear area coordinator or rear area commander typically establishes a C2 facility from which to coordinate or direct operations, including those which involve security forces, fire support agencies, support units, movement control agencies, and bases and base clusters. The C2 facility may be within, adjacent to, or stand apart from an existing higher C2 facility. *MCTP 3-30C* prescribes that rear area C2 facilities used by rear area commanders be referred to as “rear area command posts” while those used by rear area coordinators be called “rear area operations centers” (RAOC).⁴

Early during MEFEX 18 planning, the I MEF CG, informed by output from MEFEX 16, designated 1st MLG as RACOM.⁵ To accommodate this assignment, the 1st MLG CG assumed responsibilities for overall command of the I MEF rear area battlespace and assigned rear area functions to the CO of Headquarters Regiment, 1st MLG.⁶ In this context, the 1st MLG CG was the rear area commander, and the Headquarters Regiment CO served as the rear area coordinator. Headquarters Regiment established ROAC collocated with the 1st MLG command post from which to manage the eight rear area functions.⁷ Headquarters Regiment conducted movement control, developed dynamic targets, coordinated fire missions, managed intelligence collection, and coordinated aviation support from the RAOC during MEFEX 18. Prior to MEFEX, Headquarters Regiment rehearsed the various rear area functions during regimental command post exercises in conjunction with an MLG-level command post exercises.

Because of the broader MAGTF responsibilities associated with rear area operations, Headquarters Regiment’s overall task organization was adjusted for the exercise and reinforced by 1st MLG headquarters in addition to units

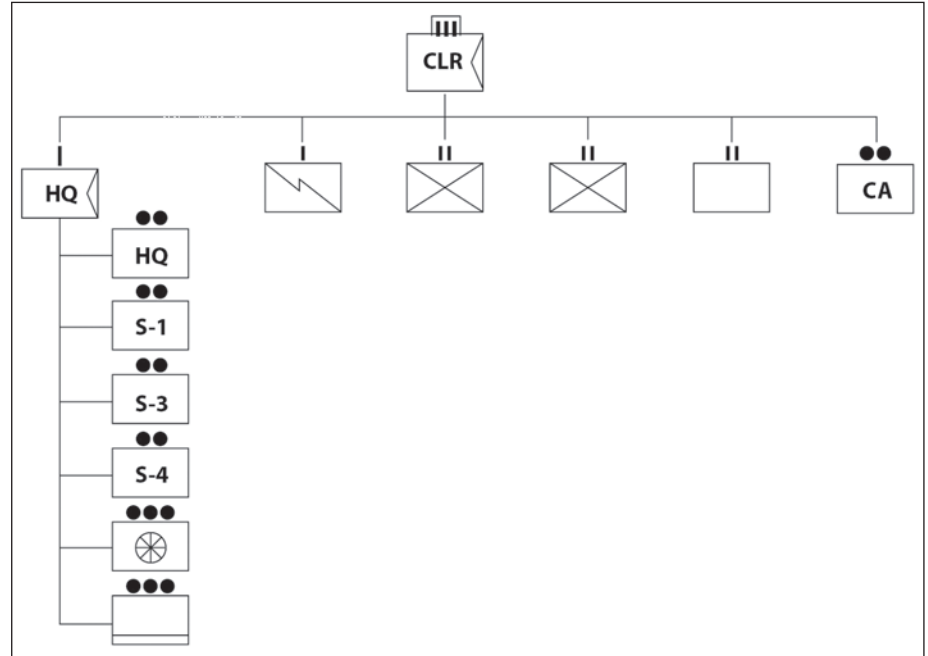


Figure 2. Headquarters regiment MEFEX 18 task organization. (Image provided by author.)

throughout the MAGTF to enable effective execution of functions that exceeded the regiment’s normal structural capacity. Headquarters Regiment retained its S-shops and communications company⁸ and was reinforced with key G-3 (operations) and G-2 (intelligence) staff members to add necessary staffing depth within the RAOC. Specifically, the 1st MLG G-3 reassigned its tactical readiness and training staff and its fire support cell entirely to the Headquarters Regiment’s RAOC. Additionally, because Headquarters Regiment lacks any regimental-level S-2 structure, 1st MLG G-2 provided intelligence officer and specialist augmentation to conduct production and analysis, collection management, and targeting. From outside 1st MLG, Headquarters Regiment was reinforced with two infantry battalions, a law enforcement battalion, and a civil affairs detachment. 3d MAW also provided an air support control officer to support rear area operations. (Task organization is depicted in Figure 2.)

Importantly, the Headquarters Regiment’s assignment to conduct rear area functions during MEFEX in no way degraded 1st MLG’s tactical logistics support to I MEF. CLR-15 provided intermediate-level maintenance and supply support to I MEF, and CLR-1,

with its task-organized combat logistics battalions, provided direct support tactical logistics support to 1st MarDiv in line with its habitual support relationships. 7th Engineer Support Battalion (7th ESB) provided general support engineering services whilst 1st Medical Battalion, with a dental company attached, maintained general support health services to I MEF and provided direct support surgical platoons to 1st MarDiv regiments.

Headquarters Regiment’s capacity across rear area functions during MEFEX was sufficient to support the exercise’s 12-hour inject schedule; however, the reinforced unit structure is insufficient for supporting extended duration 24-hour combat operations. A principal benefit of MEFEX 18 was the exercise’s clear demonstration that, to provide adequate tactical logistics support to I MEF and serve as RACOM in major combat operations, 1st MLG requires additional augmentation of key capability sets, such as fire support coordination, aviation support coordination, and intelligence.

Rear area operations require the capability to coordinate lethal and non-lethal fires in support of deliberate and dynamic targeting within the rear area. 1st MLG has limited personnel

within its table of organization with MOSs that are trained to execute fire support coordination tasks. The 1st MLG G-3's temporary reassignment of its fire support cell to the RAOC during MEFEX created gaps in 1st MLG headquarters' ability to oversee fires planning; coordinate subordinate unit fire support requirements; coordinate fires with adjacent major subordinate commands (MSC); and contribute to I MEF's fires-related boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups as an MSC. Additionally, 1st MLG collateral employment of group staff members against MSC-level fire support requirements left gaps in key staff areas. Once Future Force 2025 structure is staffed, 1st MLG headquarters will possess a supporting arms liaison team, which will begin to address this critical fire support shortfall. However, in the interim, 1st MLG requires augmentation with a capability comparable to a liaison section in support of a regimental fire support coordination center. This liaison section-like capability will conduct MSC-level fires planning at the group while MLG's organic fire support cell conducts 24-hour fire support coordination within the RAOC.⁹

The 1st MLG only has one forward air controller/air officer¹⁰ to coordinate aviation support for the entire LCE, and that officer is amply employed at the MSC-level. The battlespace ownership associated with RACOM introduces a requirement for a RAOC-specific conduit into the aviation C2 architecture beyond the preexisting MSC-level requirement. Specifically, the RAOC requires an air support element to coordinate the employment of aviation assets within rear area battlespace.¹¹

Assuming RAOC collocation with the 1st MLG CP, the dedicated rear area baseline intelligence manning requirement to conduct doctrinal intelligence operations center functions (operations, plans, production and analysis, collection, and targeting) is three officers and eight enlisted intelligence specialists/analysts. 1st MLG's limited intelligence capacity necessitates augmentation to satisfy the baseline rear area intelligence requirement.¹²

MEFEX 18 validated the requirement for rear area security force augmentation. While the attached two infantry battalions and law enforcement battalion were sufficient security forces to meet MEFEX 18's defined mission requirements, the mission scope of future rear area operations will drive security force requirements accordingly. Absent augmentation, 1st MLG will need to balance its mission requirements and shift capacity from tactical logistics support functions to source security forces internally.

Finally, 1st MLG anticipates a sustained requirement for a civil affairs capability to execute the host-nation support function of rear area operations. Should I MEF CG or the joint forces commander (JFC) establish a civil military operations center, 1st MLG will also need to coordinate with that entity.

Although the aforementioned augmentation requirements are discussed in the context of an MLG conducting a RACOM mission, these requirements apply to any other MAGTF LCE as well. Just as any unit assigned as RACOM requires appropriate task organization and augmentation, a MEB, MEU, or SPMAGTF LCE typically requires augmentation with fire and aviation support coordination, intelligence, security, and civil affairs capabilities. While the scale of augmentation depends on the size of the specific LCE involved, the overall capabilities requirements will remain unchanged.

A current of thought within the logistics community assert that MLGs and other LCEs should focus on their tactical logistics support mission and omit RACOM from their repertoire. The 1st MLG argues otherwise and considers the fundamental question regarding RACOM assignment: If not the LCE, then who? Arguably, another headquarters could perform rear area functions as effectively or potentially with less augmentation than the LCE; however, if the ACE's primary focus is operations in the deep area, and the GCE's primary focus is operations in the close area, what element of the MAGTF is most appropriately aligned to rear area operations? The LCE has the preponderance of the forces operat-

ing in the rear area, the majority of its principal sustainment nodes reside in the rear area, and many of its operations are conducted in the rear area. In other words, the LCE's primary operating area is the rear area. Thus, the LCE must embrace the requirement to manage and coordinate rear area operations as a battlespace owner.

Moreover, RACOM assignment does not necessarily degrade the tactical logistics support mission. Having an LCE commanding rear area operations does not inherently entail removing vehicle operators from behind the wheel or mechanics off the line; it does not necessitate converting service members with logistics-specific occupational specialties into security forces or using them in a provisional infantry or law enforcement capacity. The aforementioned augmentation requirements address this point.

In reality, RACOM complements and reinforces the LCE's ability to sustain the MAGTF. During MEFEX 18, 1st MLG experienced an enhanced ability to provide tailored tactical logistics support because of its RACOM role. RACOM requirements and the associated battlespace ownership compelled the 1st MLG staff to fully integrate into I MEF's battle rhythm, which yielded greater situational awareness across all 1st MLG staff functions. Such amplified integration also facilitated 1st MLG staff's ability to anticipate support requirements, which afforded I MEF and the other MSCs increased decision space. The 1st MLG's RACOM assignment during MEFEX 18 also resulted in the LCE experiencing noticeably enhanced support in the areas of targeting and intelligence collection, which in turn further improved 1st MLG's quality of support to I MEF.

Additionally, RACOM assignment directly enables the LCE's Marines and Sailors to fully integrate into all of the MAGTF's warfighting functions. It compels LCE units to extend themselves beyond traditional LCE responsibilities and forces them to be legitimate warfighting partners of the other MAGTF elements. To conduct rear area functions, the LCE's Marines and Sailors must be thoroughly proficient and conversant with vital tactical actions such

as fire support coordination, aviation support coordination, and security operations.

Another prominent counterargument that emerges when discussing the LCE as RACOM (or in discussing rear area generally) is the assertion that the rear area no longer exists. Some elements of this counterargument are experiential (e.g., operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) while others are doctrinal. Indeed, in joint doctrine, joint security operations supplanted rear area operations as codified through the revision and renaming of *Joint Publication 3-10 (JP 3-10)*, *Joint Security Operations in Theater*, in 2014 from its previous title *Joint Doctrine for Rear Area Operations*. The terms “rear area” and “rear area operations center” were also approved for deletion from the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* and are no longer recognized by the joint force. The term “joint security area” (JSA) in turn replaced rear area.

However, the doctrinal disparity between Marine Corps and joint doctrine is less substantive than it may appear upon first glance. Arguably, the terms rear area and JSA are considered analogous. The JSA is defined as a specific surface area designated by the JFC to facilitate protection of joint bases and their connecting [lines of communication that support joint operations].¹³ This definition applies in linear and nonlinear operations similar to the rear area construct in contiguous and non-contiguous battlespace. Moreover, *JP 3-10*'s notional JSA depiction (see Figure 3) is remarkably similar to *MCTP 3-30C*'s rear area depiction in a non-contiguous battlespace. Additionally, while the JSA as described in *JP 3-10* is a more evolved and explicitly holistic concept than its rear area predecessor, the term JSA, with its joint denotation, will not apply to exclusively MAGTF battlespace. Thus, rear area remains a viable Service-specific supplemental term applicable to MAGTF bat-

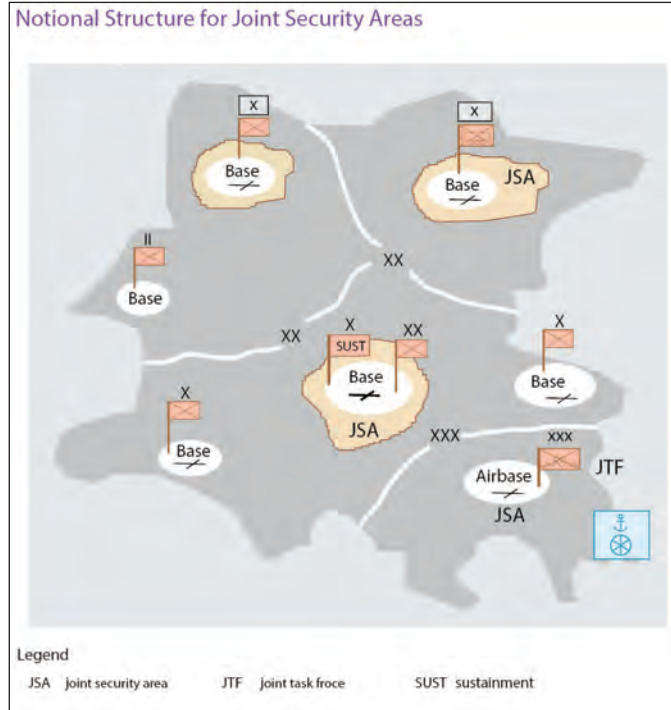


Figure 3. JSA notional structure. (Image from JP 3-10.)

tlespace,¹⁴ and as such, it was retained in the 2018 *Marine Corps Supplement to the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

Ultimately, MEFEX 18 served to justify the assignment of both the 1st MLG as the RACOM for I MEF and the LCE as RACOM within MAGTF battlespace. If appropriately task organized and augmented—as any other RACOM entity will require—the LCE is capable of commanding rear area operations without diminishing its tactical logistics support capacity. Additionally, in circumstances which dictate the establishment of a rear area within MAGTF battlespace, the LCE's mission and disposition are more appropriately aligned to rear area operations than that of any other MAGTF element.

Notes

1. Formerly *MCWP 3-41.1, Rear Area Operations*.
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 3-30C, Rear Area Operations*, (Washington, DC: May 2016).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, *I Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise-2016/Large Scale Exercise-2016*, (Quantico, VA: March 2017).

6. Headquarters Regiment, 1st MLG, was re-designated as CLR-17, effective October 2018.

7. Because of exercise particulars, the RAOC actually exercised six of the eight rear area functions during MEFEX 18; infrastructure development and host-nation support were not exercised.

8. Headquarters Regiment's food service and services companies were attached to CLR-15 to enable its general support tactical logistics mission.

9. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 3-10F, Fire Support Coordination in the Ground Combat Element*, (Washington, DC: May 2016).

10. 1st MLG headquarters table of organization denotes one captain 7502, forward air controller/air officer.

11. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCRP 3-20F.5, Direct Air Support Center Handbook*, (Washington, DC: May 2016). See also *MCTP 3-10F*.

12. While the Future Force 2025 initiative increases 1st MLG's intelligence structure in some disciplines, it does not increase the number of MAGTF/ground intelligence officer (0202/0203) or intelligence specialist (0231) billets.

13. Joint Staff, *JP 3-10, Joint Security Operations in Theater*, (Washington, DC: November 2014).

14. Within a joint operational area, the Marine component commander could potentially be assigned as the joint security coordinator responsible for overall joint security operations within the JSA(s) in accordance with *JP 3-10*; however, that circumstance is beyond the scope of the LCE RACOM discussion.

