Proposed Change

Eliminate the AC/S G-6 function from the Marine Corps

by LtCol Christopher S. Tsirlis

The famous Prussian military strategist, Gen Helmut von Moltke (circa 1857), helped shape the modern general staff model by making it more efficienct. Moltke knew that in order to be effective, the staff model needed to change and; correspondingly, he made the nessesary changes to do so. Like an artist or world-class chef, whose grand works are known for their reductions rather than their additions, Multke's vision required simplification and reordering of ingredients. This article seeks to challenge one aspect of the current Marine Corps staff model by seeking to make it more efficient. The premise is simple: *remove that which is not needed to be most effective.* Specifically, the usefulness of the current Assistant Chief of Staff G-6 staff functions at the MEF and Major Subordinate Command (MSC) levels within the Marine Corps.

>LtCol Tsirlis is the former Commanding Officer of Marine Communications Squadron 28 and has over 31 years of service.

Currently, the AC/S G-6 (and subfunctions) normally serves as the principal advisor to the commanding general and staff for enabling command and control (C2) operations in the information environment via command, control, communications, and computer (C4) systems. To greater or lesser degree this staff function has morphed into an ineffectual entity that does not provide utility to the Marine Corps. The function of the AC/S G-6 should be disbanded or subsumed by existing communications units (i.e. communication battalion MEF located within the MEF Information Group [MIG], communications squadrons [located at Marine Aircraft Wings] and communications companies [located at Division and Logistic Group]). The role of a single staff entity that supposedly synchronizes C2 system actions and network communications control for the MEF commander and subordinate MSC commanders is no longer is effective and makes the organization weaker and less effective against near-peer adversaries. The primary core functions of the AC/S G-6 could be easily adopted by subordinate levels of the organization, specifically communication battalions, communication squadrons, and communication companies. The current table of organization of the G-6 staff structure of this entity can be better distributed to communications units in the FMF, which can more effectively serve the MEF/MSC's strategic, operational, and tactical aims.

Unneeded Layers of Bureaucracy

The MEF/MSC AC/S G-6 staff function creates barriers to progress and communications choke points that hamper communication commanders in garrison and on the battlefield. It ineffectively centralizes important C4 decisions and thus hampers decentralized execution by consolidating key information stores and resources. The AC/S G-6 is naturally oriented with a top-up approach toward enabling C2 and seeks to consolidate decision making, This often creates stovepipe-based policy decisions that do not positively effect changing battlespace dynamics at the speed of war, nor does this entity properly support subordinate commanders who rely on these decisions. The G-6 currently has a disproportionate negative influence on 06XX/28XX manpower staffing issues and often fails to understand command-

The operational role of the MEF G-6 is tracking and reporting the status of communications systems and networks, not providing or operating these capabilities. (Photo by SSgt Jesse Stence.)

er requirements. From the standpoint of equipment and administration, the G-6 unevenly exerts influence on operational matters, which constrains the ability of local commanders to solve their own operational and equipment problems. The AC/S G-6 function additionally creates unneeded bureaucratic layers and redundancy, supplemented by well-intentioned functional SMEs and the ever-changing personality-based processes that accompany it, which then creates unneeded scrutiny of resources and uneven application of HQMC I-C4 policy. The net effect is long decision-making lead times and skewed manipulation of resources and ideas that do not reflect the military market demands for commanders who need flexibility and decision making space to best determine their own information requirements and the delivery methods required for it. In summary, there is not one function the AC/S G-6 does that a communications unit commander cannot do with their own staff, assuming it is staffed properly. Therefore, *Force Design 2030* should consider eliminating the AC/S G-6 function from the Marine Corps entirely and replace it with a more commincations/network commander centric model.

The efficacy of the AC/S G-6 has run its course. In today's digital networked world, the need for more top-down driven policy is clearly wrong. More policy and more rules usually equate to fewer positive outcomes. Short of being a technical advisor to the commanding general, the AC/S G-6's role is growing towards obsolescence because of what it does not effectively influence today: the network. A quick glance across the Marine Corps reveals that most AC/S G-6s (usually at the MSC level) are not even staffed at the proper O-6 level rank. This sends a clear message to the communications community about what HQMC thinks about the importance of the MSC AC/S G-6 function and its role in cyberspace.

The AC/S G-6 staff function is ineffective because it does not have the capacity to support the countless day-to-day decisions needed by commanders to support its information requirements. It also has almost no meaningful influ-

ence on programs that directly impact operations. Those decisions have already been centralized by HQMC, CD&I, and MCSC. In addition, the AC/S G-6 does not even own the network it uses and has little influence over it. Cyber Command now owns the networks and the domains we fight on. Therefore, Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command (MARFORCYBER) and correspondingly Marine Corps Cyber Warfare Group (MCCOG) have effectively replaced the traditional AC/S G-6 role for each MEF. The recent creation of the network battalions (which fall under MCCOG) may even call into question the need for communication battalions and communications squadrons in the future. The *Force Design 2030* organizational changes in recent months should go one step further and reexamine where we need to eliminate unneeded manpower structure and thus improve the Marine Corps ability to execute its mission sets in a more fluid matter. A good place to start is the AC/S G-6 and its staffs.

For example, short of directly supporting MEF-level exercises, the MEF AC/S G-6 does almost nothing for subordinate units' C2 needs that they cannot organically do for themselves. There is no reason a communications commanding officer cannot both be the principal advisor on C2 network/systems for the commanding general and an operational commander at the same time. Communications control (operational control) should be stripped from the AC/S G-6 entierely and placed in the hands of commanders of communications units. Information should travel via the shortest path necessary to get the job done not through chains of layered staff. Communication battalions/squadrons and communications company commanders can simply do what the AC/S G-6 purportedly does much better and have more agency over the successful implementation of communications control activities as a result. The extra layers of communications staff at the G-6 level do not help the commanding general make any better decisions in which a communication battalion/squadron cannot help him make. Each entity has its own system

planning and engineering teams and can easily organize and synchronize C2 network planning activities. Flattening these functions would speed up decisions and better support commander needs. The same goes for division and logistics communications companies. Plus, the real impact of any decision related to enabling C2 systems can be better facilitated by those who actually own and implement the people and equipment. The AC/S G-6 only dilutes the effectiveness of commanders.

I contend, at the MEF level, the communications battalion is more than capable of conducting all current AC/S G-6 functions, if staffed in key positions properly. Further examples, the MEB commanding general does not use the MEF AC/S G-6 staff to execute integrated naval C2 plans. Infantry regiments do not need the MEF/MSCs to facilitate C2 system support. Individual maneuver battalions and flying squadrons do not require the MEF AC/S G-6 for any planning. All of the planning and execution activities is generally done at the MSC level or below can already be facilitated by organic communication entities that currently reside within. The functions of the AC/S G-6 is already being done at the lower C2 levels more effectively and efficiently.

To paraphrase a former MEF AC/S G-6: "If the MEF only has one network to manage, then why do we need five MSC level G-6s, only one of which (Base G-6) has any real authority to operate the network? Everyone else just accesses the network." In the era of force design and preparing for the future fight, it is time we make some bold moves and restructure/repurpose the entire communications community, starting with the AC/S G-6 and its staff. We may need to even go a step further and examine establishing a communications regiment where the unit commanders can both serve as the MEF/MSC-level principal advisor to the commanding general, as well as handle any operational taskers to the maneuver units and deal with garrison issues. Communications control can simply be executed by the same unit that already has the people and equipment to execute it. There is no logical

reason that operational control and communications/network control be through two separate paths. One path, one set of decision makers, to ensure unity of command over C2 system/network support. Communication units can just as easily engage MCCOG, MARFORCYBER, and any external communication agency more effectively and with better results. Requirements generation and program office engagement would be streamlined with both CD&I and MARCORSYSCOM. Let us eliminate the layers of extra staff which currently does little to enable high quality networks and services for the Marine Corps and its mission.

Hierarchal Centralized Planning and Execution May Not Work In 2030

Force Design 2030 demands a new look at our structure. The more distributed we operate, the more we push capabilities down to the tactical level and the less we need large centralized controlling agencies filtering and influencing operational and tactical decisions. Additionally with today's current technology, we no longer require such huge formations of communication units. Our current communications tables of equipment (T/E) have little relationship with our tables of organization and are based off 20th century thinking. For example, most communications squadrons and communication battalions possess between fourteen to eighteen beyond-line-of-sight satellite systems. If you add in the network equipment and other items that are required to run a network node, you realistically only need between eight to ten cross-functional teams of Marines per node, depending on the mission. This means we really only need about 180–250 Marines of various MOSs to do what a 600 or 1,100 Marine battalion currently does—especially as we march toward Deployed MCEN and other enterprise network models that will use cloud computing at the tactical edge. Therefore, if we need a full spectrum communications node supporting a unit (whether in garrison or in the field), to a varying degree, we really need a lot less people—which means we do not need large centralized controlling agencies

like the AC/S G-6 involved in these functions.

In addition to the trend of enterprise networks with locally hosted warfighting applications, we do not require more policy or centralized control other than those who "own" the network and actually operate the network; in the Marine Corps' case, this is MCCOG. A communications battalion commander needs to answer to both the AC/S G-6, the MIG, and now MCCOG. There is no reason why we cannot flatten network C2 communications control and have supported units work directly with MCCOG for network access and day-to-day operations in both garrison and while deployed. In fact, and argument could be made that *Force Design* concepts being developed today for 2030 should consider eliminating AC/S G-6s and seek to replace the entire Marine Corps communications apparatus with MCCOG/Network Battalions cross-functional communication support teams that are geographically dispersed. These teams would be better suited to support local commanders since they are in direct operational alignment with directives from MARFORCYBER and would be better equipped to synchronize efforts with the joint force.

Lack of Innovation, Lack of Empathy = Recipe for Failure

It is my observation, almost all innovation in the last ten years in C2 systems and operational concept employment has not come from the AC/S G-6. Almost all of it comes from frontline S-6s and small unit commanders who are closest to operational problem sets and who are desperately are looking for real solutions. Many technical solutions are commercially available today yet are bogged down by AC/S G-6 SMEs who lack technical competency and are too risk adverse to change. As history demonstrates, bureaucratic entities do not innovate well, they simply ride the coattails of those who incrementally and systematically end up breaking programmatic rules in order to accomplish *their* missions. Units do this regularly because of lack of meaningful institutional support, forcing local commanders to use their O&M funds to

buy additional capabilities. Units who improve C4 system capabilities usually need to procure commercial equipment or capabilities because their current T/E does not keep up with technology or there are not enough quantities for operational use. The current requirements generation process is so cumbersome, non-iterative, and the subsequent new equipment fielding process is too slow, most units scrounge for new capabilities that facilitates their commander's needs. This leads to informal alliances with commercial venders (feeding a long standing cottage industry) and other external entity support. This is to highlight the fact that behavior should be legitimized and seen as an acceptable construct since the AC/S G-6 function continues to provide inadequate support. These practices should be encouraged in order to spearhead innovation and adaptive change in the Marine Corps. This is how innovation is usually born, from the ground up. We need to continue foster and grow from within.

FMF units, and especially communication units, should be able to independently make decisions that support their C2 needs, especially when there are technologies and concepts that could have exponential positive affects for its effectiveness. The market place of good ideas should not be prematurely killed by process and top-down driven thinking. The death of countless good ideas has come about because they were put through the very process that kills innovation—usually by slowing things down in terrible ways and stymie initiative by death by a thousand cuts. Not everyone wants to innovate, but those who do should have less restrictions put on them. Eliminating the AC/S G-6 from the decision-making process would place these decisions in the hands of communication commanders who can better increase innovation and generate more positive results for the Marine Corps wit large.

Communication Commanders as Principal Staff Advisors

Some may argue that the elimination of the AC/S G-6s would be too extreme of a shake-up and would induce too much friction into our existing staff

model. Another argument would state that the current functions of the MEF/MSC AC/S G-6 would not go away just because the staff section went away, and that those tasks would still need to be performed. Whereas this argument may be correct, at the same time, the elimination of the MEF/MSC AC/S G-6 would place control in the hands of communications unit commanders who can just as easily manage their C2 system requirements and deal directly with the required external entities that best support the organizational requirements. My answer is to flatten and eliminate what you do not need. A shake-up of this magnatute would drive other AC/S primary staff functions to better synchronize C2 requirements with the actually execution arm (supporting communications unit) for their own unit or agency. Unit commanders would be free to drive innovation and force positive change and be able to better balance both objectives with

its own training exercise and execution plan (TEEP) much more effectively. The reality is the AC/S G-6 functions are too redundant, ineffective, and becoming less valuable to the Marine Corps because they are not grounded in operational realities faced by communications unit commanders.

Less Is More

Gen Moltke is the father of the general staff model that still persists today. He was a master of planning and the implementation of new technology (use of rail) and operational art. This model is 174 years old and has worn out its welcome. Like the general staff model, the functions of the AC/S G-6 provide little value under our current and future operational construct. So we should eliminate it and use the current AC/S G-6 SME expertise and manpower in a different way. Eliminating this function would simply eliminate the redundancy of many actions that can occur in other

areas of the organization, streamline processes to be more flexible, and increase bottom-up innovation for commanders at all levels of the organization. The time has come to eliminate role of the AC/S G-6 and replace it with a better balance and flattened operational construct. While the winds of change are in the air, that time is now.

Notes

1. AC/S G-6 consists of several functions to include Operations/System Planning and Engineering, Network Operations, Spectrum, ISSM and other various information system roles.

USMC