

Fire and Forget

The Navy and Marine Corps have philosophical differences

by LCDR Virgil Fermin

In his timeless 1986 literary masterpiece *Fleet Tactics*, CAPT Wayne P. Hughes wrote, “Today’s missile battle will center on keeping the enemy uncertain of his target and its position.”¹ Maritime fires remain a foundational pillar of the Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) Concept and the Marine Corps’ operational objective to project power across the naval domain in all theaters. Procuring the ROGUE-Fires family of systems is a promising achievement for the Marine Corps as the Service continues its force modernization efforts.² However, technology is also an exhilarating enabler and exasperating disabler of progress.³

The Navy and Marine Corps have unresolved underlying philosophical differences in the employment of ground-based maritime fires. As the contemporary battlefield evolves, the ability to effectively operationalize ground-based maritime fires is increasingly urgent for the Naval Services to achieve unified tactical superiority. Respectively, the Navy needs to increase and accelerate its support of the Marine Corps’ implementation of EABO. The solution to the Navy-Marine Corps maritime fires conundrum resides in utilizing ROGUE-fires to enhance areas open to improvement while maintaining reverence for established processes that already excel.⁴

Flight of Neptune

Until recently, firing groundbased missiles at an enemy ship in the ocean seemed more conceptual than probable. The Ukraine-Russia conflict has not featured extensive maritime operations, but Russia’s loss of the *RTS Moskva* (121) *Slava-class* guided-missile cruiser in the Black Sea should elevate expectations for the Navy-Marine Corps team.⁵

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According to reports, Ukrainian forces successfully attacked the *RTS Moskva* with shore-based Neptune-guided missiles at a range of 60-65 nautical miles.⁶ In essence, Ukrainian forces’ employment of groundbased Neptune missiles in the maritime domain validates the maritime fires EAB proof of concept. The Neptune missile utilized by Ukrai-

ing functionality is the most efficient method to rapidly normalize the inclusion of the ROGUE-Fires systems into broader naval operations.⁹ In execution, simplification equates to ROGUE-Fires EABs embracing direct support roles as firing units within a larger scheme of fires concept of operations.¹⁰

The friction point with adopting ROGUE-Fires as firing units is that the construct displaces the Marine Corps as the leading effort. Thus far, the Navy has yet to move urgently on the maritime fires front, and its pragmatic approach to the issue has decelerated

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nian troops has been compared characteristically to a U.S. Harpoon missile.⁷

In contrast, the Marine Corps’ ROGUE-Fires systems can deliver multiple weapons on target with varying extended ranges. If the reports of the *RTS Moskva* engagement are accurate, the execution and effectiveness of the attack are more valuable than the range or weapon involved. The Marine Corps’ recent establishment of its first Tomahawk cruise missile battery exponentially changes the trajectory of maritime fires.⁸

Priorities and Objectives

Naval maritime fires doctrine needs to catch up to the pace of technology. To rectify the shortfall, the Navy-Marine Corps must clearly define unified priorities to accelerate the efficacy of groundbased maritime fires. Simplify-

perceptible progress. Nevertheless, the ambitions of individual Services are secondary to the Joint Force commander’s authority and responsibility to tailor the force as required for unified action.¹¹ Prioritizing ROGUE-Fires EABs as firing units creates the clarity the Navy-Marine Corps urgently needs.

The Naval Services remain indolent at an intersection between legacy amphibious operations and the integration of emerging technology. At this point, EABO should be at the forefront of daily operations and within the lexicon of all fleet practitioners. However, the fleet has yet to reach this objective, and EABO remains an unnecessarily complex futuristic discussion point. The prospect of EABO may seem unrealistic in the opinions of skeptics, and the obstacles to implementation persist due to the overly broad scope of EABO

as a concept. Respectively, waiting for all the functional sections of EABO to achieve full operational capability holds progress at risk.

Nevertheless, ROGUE-Fires EABs offer the Naval Services an uncomplicated and tangible method of rapidly implementing EABO. The Marine Corps is already comfortable operating on land in a power projection role, but it has primarily benefited Marine Corps objectives. To succeed, the Marine Corps must convince Navy stakeholders that ROGUE-Fires can integrate and prosper with existing structures.

The rudimentary objective of ROGUE-Fires EABs is to maneuver to an advantageous position in support of a major campaign or operation. Ultimately, the maneuver of ROGUE-Fires batteries must be in synchronization primarily with Navy ships in a direct support role. Fires EABs are a modern maritime tactic analogous to encirclement in traditional land-centric warfare.¹² The Fires EABs should be considered a complementary capability versus the main effort.

Another critical objective for the Services is that ROGUE-Fires EABs must have clearly defined doctrinal battery statuses and conditions. The Navy-Marine team must universally codify fires EAB conditions based on time, mobility, sustainment, and endurance.¹³ The establishment of alert statuses removes ambiguity and delineates the readiness of ROGUE-Fires EABs in a standardized language that collaborating Navy units can understand. Without predetermined constraints, fires EABs will find it difficult to establish a reverse traditional kill box from shore to sea. Demonstrating the value of fires EABs is contingent on consistency and the repeatability of Marine Corps capabilities in support of Navy units.

Demarkation Line

The Marine Corps is new to employing missile systems in the maritime domain. The ROGUE-Fires EAB command and control (C2) remains convoluted and contentious. However, effective C2 is achievable through minimalization. The delineation of an effective fires EAB C2 requires

the Marine Corps to spin out all fires EABs away from legacy fire support agencies.¹⁴ The Marine Corps proficiently employs ground fire support assets and artillery systems. However, maritime engagements with missile systems require speed and dynamic synchronization. Fires EABs optimally operate under decentralized message routing and passive clearing procedures. Therefore, they embrace a prototypical fire-and-forget arrangement and detach from the need to control all aspects of an engagement. This scheme of fires appropriately aligns with joint fire support and the Joint Force commander's

for the fleet via special instructions and tailored situationally.¹⁷ Special instructions provide commanders sufficient latitude to integrate fires EABs without compromising clarity. Additionally, formally adopting special instructions as the preferred method of delineating C2 avoids the unnecessary introduction of unfamiliar procedures.

The subsequent focal area that requires immediate consideration is the preferred communication pathway between Navy warships and fires EABs. The Navy and Marine Corps may have unspoken potential conflicting ideas on the optimal communication path be-

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imperative responsibility for all facets of joint fires planning, prioritization, coordination, and execution.¹⁵ Offensive employment of missile systems requires decision and approval beyond the ambitions of individual Services.

Connecting the Dots¹⁶

Command and control also remains a delicate aspect and an obstruction to the implementation of EABO. The Naval Services must resist the urge to jump to conclusions and push for exquisite gadgetry to solve unanswered C2 concerns. The starting point for any discussion on Fires EAB C2 must start with reverence for existing processes. Acknowledging that the traditional fluctuating supported and supporting amphibious operations C2 needs revision for fires EABs. The focal point in establishing an effective fires EAB C2 is leveraging communication methods that the Navy widely recognizes.

The Navy and Marine Corps utilize formal orders to disseminate responsibilities for various tasks. The problem with standard orders is that they may need to be more flexible for fires EABs and their temporal nature. Hence, fires EAB C2 should be officially delineated

tween firing units. All integrating units must receive orders and information via digital transmission. Artillery data and coordination systems are essential, but the Navy may need to be proficient in Marine Corps-centric architectures at the individual unit level. Marine-centric systems may also be incompatible or unavailable on coordinating platforms. Retrofitting Navy ships with Marine-centric systems is an expensive and time-consuming endeavor.

The optimal solution is to equip ROGUE-Fires EABs with components compatible with proven data link technologies and integrate them within the data exchange architecture.¹⁸ In effect, digital integration for fires EABs is achievable by descoping C2 equipment requirements in the near term. On the other hand, existing data integration is the minimum requirement to kick-start unit coordination. The Services must also formally establish redundant and secondary communication paths.

Collaboration and Discovery

MCDP1 Warfighting proclaims, "Marine leaders must be true experts in the conduct of war."¹⁹ The Navy also has a variety of experts proficient in the

conduct of war in numerous communities. The historical trend of collaborations between the Navy-Marine Corps has typically centered around amphibious ships and amphibious squadron staff. Conversely, the Naval Services

Marine Corps-DESRON pairing. The Navy-Marine Corps cannot allow another year to elapse without making tangible progress with fires EABs. As Microsoft president Brad Smith stated, “Technology innovation is not going

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must resist the urge to fall into comfortable arrangements to operationalize new maritime fire capabilities. Fires EABs have changed the paradigm for the type of expert the Marines should collaborate with. Destroyer squadrons (DESRONs) provide the Marine Corps a partner with the appropriate expertise for the complexities of maritime fires integration. Destroyer squadrons are well-versed in temporal organizations and variable deployment patterns, complementing EABO.²⁰ Moreover, DESRONs are aligned with the robust resources of the assigned aircraft carriers and surface combatants. Regarding lethality, expanded partnerships with DESRONs offer fires EABs augmented resources that amphibious squadrons cannot provide.

The Marine Corps will be well-positioned to discover the boundaries of fires EABs with DESRONs as the collaborators of choice. Descoping the functionality of fires EABs and outsourcing functions to DESRONs makes it feasible to test assumptions in the near term. Simplicity also makes it easier for the Naval Services to repeat fires EAB integration with minimal financial implications. The alternative to simplicity is committing expensive, irreversible programmatic errors and investments.²¹ If the project fails, the Naval Services can easily reconfigure or defeature the

to slow down. The work to manage it needs to speed up.²² Momentum can change the conversation and unite the Naval Services.

Notes

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