

The Marine Littoral Regiment

Opportunities within the naval command framework

by MajGen Austin E. Renforth

As the Marine Corps works diligently to meet the Commandant's *Force Design 2030* (FD2030) approach, it must take into account that the pacing threat is not the only threat Marines must prepare for. This duality of building a force of the future while maintaining a readiness to "fight tonight" focuses the Service on those tasks that are most important to the Marine Corps. In Service doctrine, it highlights, "We also see that sometimes the threshold is crossed for a short time, only to jump back down into a state of competition below the violence threshold."¹ This volatile action, along the competition continuum, will have a direct impact on the task, size, and command relationship required to satisfy the mission. This vulnerability brings with it opportunities for the newest formation, the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR). The draft mission of an MLR is to prepare the maritime environment and conduct operations to support maritime campaigning in a contested littoral environment. The MLR is the ideal stand-in force because of its ability to win the all-domain reconnaissance battle and develop an understanding of the environment and adversary capabilities.² Figure 1 represents the competition continuum and how the MLR will operate the competition space by establishing forces that persist forward alongside allies and partners within a contested area to provide the fleet, joint force, interagency, allies, and partners more options for countering an adversary's strategy.³

As a stand-in force, the MLR command relationship with a higher headquarters may vary based on where the

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joint staff is on the competition continuum. The command relationship options identified are not made to be controversial but instead are ideas to drive a dialogue on what relationship supports the MLR success. It is through the application of naval command arrangements that the MLR can best support naval warfare. Naval doctrine highlights that integrating warfighting excellence across all areas of naval warfare is the best approach to secure sea power.⁴ Applying the MLR in a composite warfare construct through

the lens of naval warfare makes solving a command relationship problem easier. The MLR in a composite warfare construct is ideal as a task group or task unit in a fluid competition continuum because of its flexibility and scalability. Successful employment of an MLR in support of a naval campaign requires simple, clear command relationships that enable unity of effort, synergy, and understanding among friendly forces. As stated by the Commandant, "The overall thrust of our *FD2030* program is to produce a Marine Corps that is prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet ops." These fleet operations will nest within overarching joint campaigns. The MLR can anticipate employment in a manner that extends the sensing capability of the fleet.

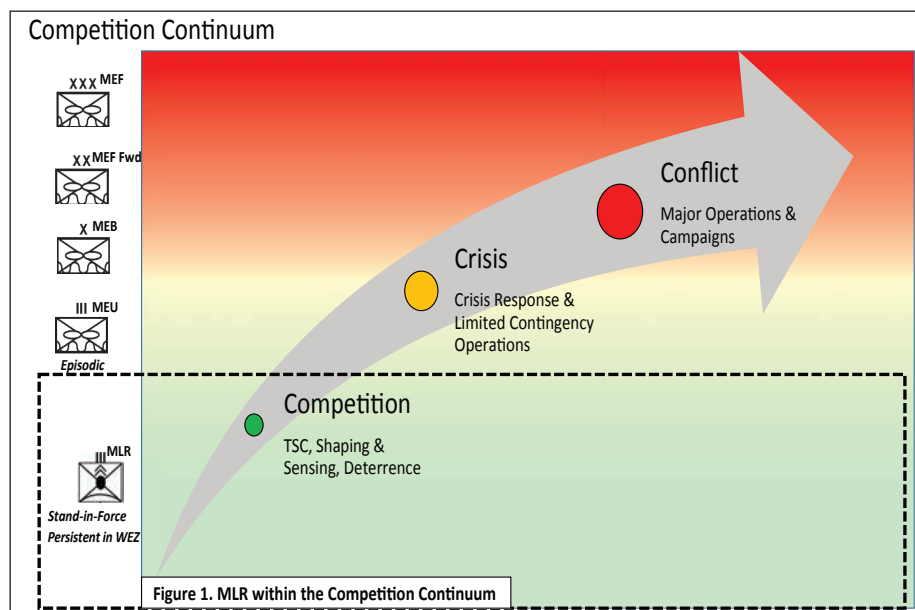


Figure 1. (Figure provided by author.)

The purpose of this article is to explore the two most likely MLR command relationships: the MLR as a task unit subordinate to a Marine Corps division or as a stand-alone force that provides capability directly to the Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC). If the joint force is operating in the crisis to conflict zones of the competition continuum, then an MLR is best positioned as a Task Unit under a Marine division. If the joint force is operating within the competition zone, then the MLR is best situated to provide capabilities directly to the Composite Warfare Commander (CWC). Figure 2 (MLR Tasks) outlines draft MLR tasks and provides a brief definition of each potential assignment.

The CWC concept shares similarities with MAGTF employment models. Both models include various warfare commanders who incorporate group command functions and are responsible for threats in an assigned domain. Both ensure unity of effort by leveraging mission-type orders and the commander's intent. CWCs may form temporary or permanent functional groups within the overall organization. Functional groups are subordinate to the CWC, can support numerous commanders, and perform duties limited by duration and scope.

In order to better appreciate the CWC concept, a general understanding of naval force organization at the tactical level is required. *Naval Doctrine Publication 1, Naval Warfare*, states the following:

Within the Navy, the fleet is the highest tactical echelon. Whether conducting operations in a maritime component, Service component, or fleet context, the commander normally task-organizes assigned tactical forces into formations with the capabilities to operate throughout the maritime domain—air, surface, subsurface, ashore, space, and the information environment—associated with their anticipated mission(s). These formations may remain at the fleet level or be scaled to provide the right mix of capability and capacity through various combinations of task forces (TFs),

Task	Description
Conduct Network Engagement	Engage with friendly, neutral, and threat networks across the battlespace. Operate with multiple services, partners, and nations.
Conduct Expeditionary Base Operations (EABO)	Maneuver and persist inside a contested maritime environment through the establishment and displacement of multiple expeditionary advanced bases in support of a naval campaign.
Support Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)	Process and synthesize joint and external intelligence products.
Conduct Expeditionary Strike	Deliver synchronized and effective lethal and non-lethal fires, including EW fires, deep air support, shore-based fires, offensive cyberspace, and integrated joint fires.
Support Surface Warfare	Employ massed fires against maritime targets from multiple distributed elements. Enable attacks against maritime surface targets by providing coordination, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting (ISRT) and MDA.
Support Operations in the Information Environment (OIE)	Support actions to gain access to adversary C2 networks, build support for U.S. presence, deter adversary aggression, disrupt adversary confidence, expose and counter malign behavior, and protect and defend friendly forces.
Coordinate air/missile defense actions	Manage ground based air defense (GBAD) engagements, expenditures, and employment. Run airspace surveillance, early warning systems, and control joint/naval air and missiles.

Figure 2. MLR Tasks. (Figure provided by author.)

task groups (TGs), task units (TUs), or task elements (TEs). Coast Guard forces, when assigned, integrate into the TF structure.⁵

Scenario #1: The MLR as a TU under a Marine Corps Division

Each Geographic Combatant Command is responsible for one or more numbered naval fleets. Each numbered fleet has subordinate commands subdivided by naval warfare and functional area. Fleet composition and organization are slightly different and depend on the unique mission sets inherent to each Geographic Combatant Command. TFs form the foundation of any fleet. Figure 3 provides an example of fleet TF numbering and associated functions.

In this scenario, the MEF CG would take on the role of Deputy TF commander. Elements of the MEF would then blend with the fleet staff and integrate with their fleet counterparts to form the required task force staff.

This gives the overall naval force full access to the inherent capabilities of the entire MAGTF and provides support for the MLR to close the kill chain. In situations where a MEF CG serves as the deputy TF commander, a Marine division or MAW may be assigned as a TG commander. Figure 4 graphically

Task Force Number	Function
TF X0	Battle Force
TF X1	Surface Warfare
TF X2	Patrol and Reconnaissance
TF X3	Logistics
TF X4	Submarine
TF X5	Naval Expeditionary Force
TF X6	Amphibious Force

Figure 3. Example Fleet Task Forces. (Figure provided by author.)

depicts these operational command relationships.

Within TG XXX.1 (X MarDiv), TU MLR supports expeditionary advanced base operations and provides additional capabilities to the other TGs, warfare commanders, functional commanders, and coordinators. TU MLR's Major Subordinate Element, X Littoral Anti-Air Battalion, performs the duties of Air Missile Defense Commander. The Littoral Combat Team of TU MLR provides capabilities to the Surface Warfare Commander via a battery of Remotely Operated Ground Unit for Expeditionary fires vehicles employing the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System. TU MLR's inherent capabilities and structure, O-6 level command, and understanding of Marine Corps operations make it an ideal choice for supporting expeditionary advanced base placement under a multi-mission TG like TG XXX.1. Figure 5 graphically depicts these tactical command relationships within a CWC construct.

Scenario #1: Advantages and Disadvantages

Employing an MLR as a TU within a Marine Corps TG provides certain advantages within the CWC construct. The TG has a greater ability to employ the full power of the MAGTF—Marines supporting Marines. Common language, shared experiences and culture, and an inherent flexibility based on training and education allows Marine Corps forces to focus efforts in support of CWC objectives. Disadvantages to this employment model arise when the presence of multiple missions creates resource competition. These factors drive units to jockey for limited resources and force the TG commander to evaluate priorities.

Scenario #2: The MLR as a Stand-alone Capability to the JFMCC

In this scenario, the MLR provides support directly to the JFMCC as a stand-alone capability. Figure 6 provides a graphical depiction of what this command relationship might look like.

MLR participation in a CWC construct while working directly for the

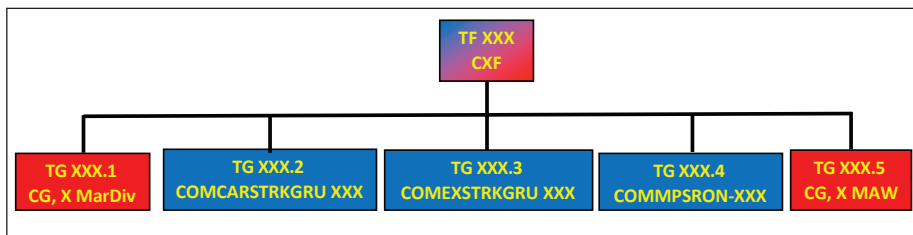


Figure 4. Operational Command Relationships. (Figure provided by author.)

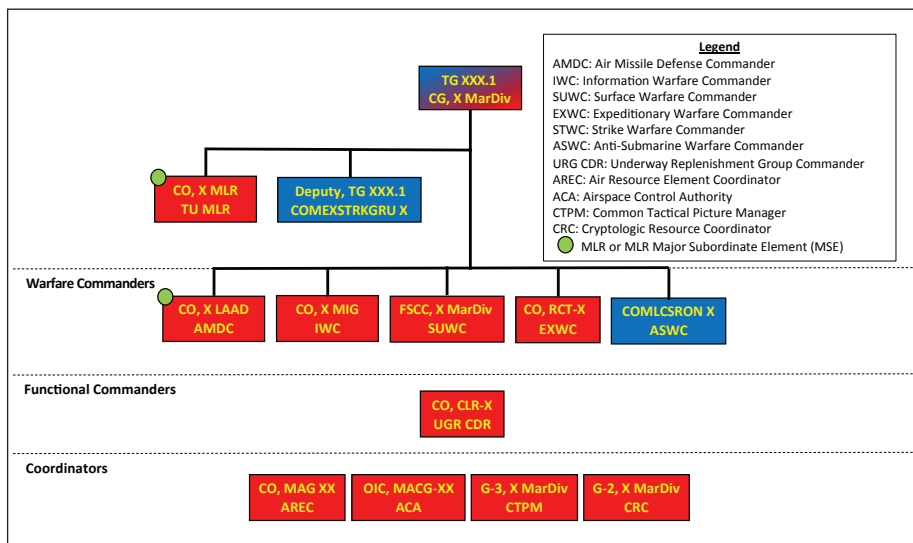


Figure 5. CWC Construct. (Figure provided by author.)

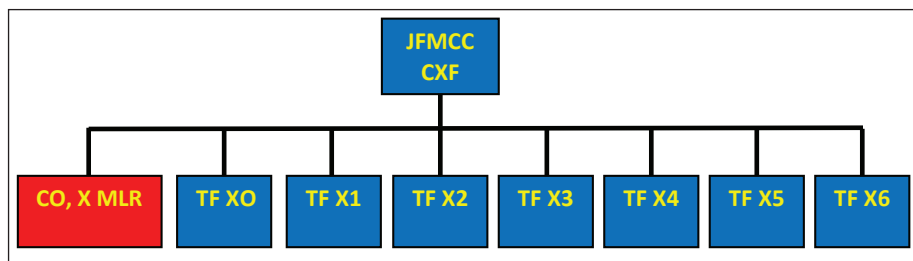


Figure 6. Scenario #2 Command Relationships. (Figure provided by author.)

JFMCC requires further clarification. In this instance, an MLR may participate in a CWC construct as the Expeditionary Warfare Commander operating in a non-continuous battle space, within the littorals, supporting broader fleet objectives (such as sea denial). Figure 7

(on following page) graphically depicts this CWC construct.

In this scenario, an MLR located on land within close proximity to key maritime terrain receives support from the JFMCC in order to accomplish a broader fleet mission. A modified Ex-

... an MLR may participate in a CWC construct as the Expeditionary Warfare Commander operating ... within the littorals, supporting broader fleet objectives ...

peditionary Strike Group composed of five ships and augmented by a replenishment vessel conducts actions within a designated operating area. This command relationship highlights some of the key tenets of naval command arrangements: flexibility and scalability. This command relationship allows the MLR to support multiple elements of the fleet without having to rely on tactical control or operational control shifts. The application of liaison cells to both JFMCC and Expeditionary Strike Group are options to ensure communication across the JFMCC is informing decision making. An increase in the command structure and the associated authorities provides more responsiveness than traditional supported/supporting relationships. The scalability of this command relationship and the small size of the MLR allows the fleet commander to adjust task organization, sub formations, and composition of units to fit specific missions, geographical areas, or threats.

Scenario #2: Advantages and Disadvantages

Employing the MLR as a stand-alone capability to the JFMCC provides certain advantages. The small force structure is easier to control, maneuver, and posture within a given space/area of operations. The tighter command relationships allow for quicker decision making

The MLR in a composite warfare construct can be effective as either a task group or task unit in a fluid competition continuum because of its flexibility and scalability.

at the fleet level. Disadvantages to this employment model derive from the requirement to leverage outside support to complete the kill chain. The resource competition previously described will happen at a higher level. Other elements controlled by the JFMCC will request the same assets required to support kill chain closure. This creates a decision at the fleet commander level based on

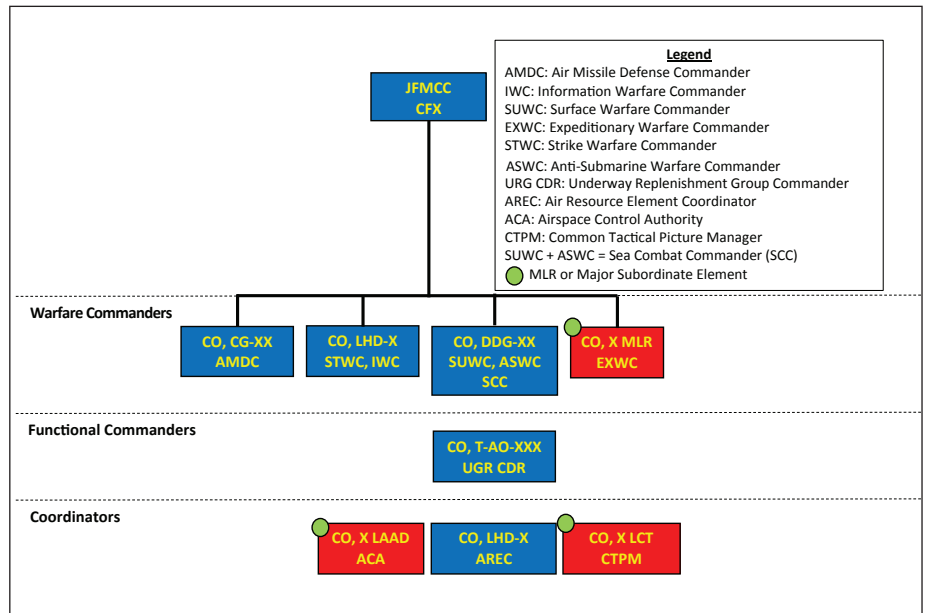


Figure 7. (Figure provided by author.)

asset/capability availability and prioritization.

Conclusion

The Commandant stated in his planning guidance,

Composite Warfare empowers subordinates to execute decentralized tactical operations—independently or integrated into a larger Naval or Joint Force—through mission command and flexible supporting relationships responsive to ever-changing tactical situations.

highlights the size and power of the MAGTF. If the MLR is a stand-alone capability to the JFMCC, then the MLR will require joint enablers to make it a full MAGTF, but if the MEF and division are overtop of the MLR, then a true MAGTF will be built.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, (Washington, DC: 2020).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Stand-in-Force*, (Washington, DC: 2019).
3. Ibid.
4. Department of the Navy, *Naval Doctrine Publication 1, Naval Warfare*, (Washington, DC: 2019).
5. Ibid.

