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| <b>14. ABSTRACT</b><br><p>The return of great power conflict led the Commandant of the Marine Corps to develop a vision for the Marine Corps that will require the force to operate in a more distributed manner than it has in the previous twenty years. For the Marine Corps to realize success in this distributed environment, small-unit leaders will be required to more fully understand and embody the institution's maneuver warfare philosophy. To maximize the combat effectiveness and lethality of the Commandant's vision, the Marine Corps must move beyond the fear-based leadership demonstrated to new Marines during entry level training and becomes their default leadership style. By replacing fear-based leadership with trust-based leadership, the Marine Corps will foster the characteristics of boldness and initiative essential to its maneuver warfare philosophy while simultaneously enhancing unit cohesion. Placing an institutional focus on leading with trust and compassion will create a culture of mutual respect, shared understanding, and accountability that facilitates both mission command and the execution of the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare doctrine.</p> |             |                                                                  |                                             |                                          |                                                                                   |  |
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

Machiavelli Was Definitely Not a U.S. Marine:  
How Fear-Based Leadership is Incongruent with the  
Marine Corps' Maneuver Warfare Philosophy

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Machiavelli Was Definitely Not a U.S. Marine: How Fear-Based Leadership is Incongruent with the Marine Corps' Maneuver Warfare Philosophy

**Author:** Major Kyle L. May, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The use of fear as a primary leadership tactic stifles subordinates' initiative and prevents the employment of maneuver warfare as a warfighting philosophy.

**Discussion:** The 2018 National Defense Strategy orients the Department of Defense to the return of great power conflict. In support of this strategy, General Berger, the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, published his Commandant's Planning Guidance outlining his vision for how the Marine Corps will support the National Defense Strategy and the United States Navy. A large part of the Commandant's Planning Guidance focuses on the need for the Marine Corps to distribute its forces in contested environments. This focus on distributed operations will require smaller units to be capable of operating independently and small-unit leaders to truly understand and embody the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy. To maximize the combat effectiveness and lethality of this vision, the Marine Corps must move beyond the fear-based leadership that is demonstrated to new Marines during entry level training and becomes their default leadership style. Trust must become the bedrock of Marine Corps leadership to foster the boldness and initiative that are requirements to fully execute the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy.

**Conclusion:** Mission command is built on a foundation of trust. Trust-based leadership creates a culture of mutual respect, shared understanding, and accountability that facilitates both mission command and the execution of the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare doctrine.

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## *Preface*

This project aims to discover how we as Marines can use leadership to maximize the lethality and combat effectiveness of the formations we lead. All too often I have observed leaders employ fear as their primary leadership tool only to be frustrated by the mediocrity it produces. Although it is impossible to predict what the future of war will bring, it is certain that leaders at all levels will be instrumental in bringing about victory, and we must stand ready to face the challenges. This requires all of us to evaluate how we lead and how our subordinates respond to our leadership.

In designing my study, I chose to evaluate how the Marine Corps introduces entry-level trainees to leadership. Our drill instructors play an integral role in transforming all of us from civilians into Marines. For many of us they serve as the first example of what a Marine leader is and how he or she should conduct themselves. In describing the methods drill instructors use to facilitate the transformation of civilians into Marines, I do not intend to paint a negative picture of these incredible Marines. Rather, this example serves to illustrate how we as leaders should strive to build upon the foundation laid by the drill instructors—further developing young Marines into warriors who embody our Corps’ maneuver warfare philosophy boldly exercising initiative in the face of uncertainty in order to impose our will on our adversary.

I would first and foremost like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife and our family for their unwavering support of me in this pursuit. I would also like to thank Dr. Paolo Tripodi for the conversations and guidance that helped to shape this study. To Dr. Brad Wineman, thank you for challenging me to think about what our society asks of us. And to all the great leaders and Marines I have had the honor of serving with, thank you and Semper Fidelis.

## **Introduction**

The following scene is known to all who have gone through Marine Corps recruit training. A white bus carrying new recruits deftly navigates the dark roads approaching the entrance to the recruit depot. Recruits sit anxiously in their seats taking in the new sights, straining in the darkness to find a reference point—something that can orient them to their home for the next thirteen weeks. Suddenly a voice from the front of the bus booms, “Put your heads down. Do not look around. Do not move until you are told.” The recruits immediately obey and assume an uncomfortable position with their heads lowered, eyes staring at the floor. The bus comes to a stop and someone steps aboard. The Marine standing at the front of the bus demands the recruits’ attention through the simple command, “Eyeballs.” Instantly, all of the recruits raise their head. While they stare, unsure of what will occur next, the Marine begins giving commands, telling the recruits that they are to collect all of their belongings and rapidly exit the bus. Once off the bus, the recruits are to stand on a set of yellow footprints and await further instruction. The Marine then begins yelling an unending series of commands at the recruits, introducing disorder, chaos, and uncertainty to provide the recruits with their first lesson of recruit training: authority figures are to be feared.

For many Marines, the scene described above becomes their introduction to Marine Corps leadership. While the scenario is somewhat different for officer candidates, both recruit training and officer candidate school (OCS) are reminiscent of the *agoge* (Upbringing) in early Sparta due to the transformation that occurs in the trainee.<sup>i</sup> For both of these warrior cultures,

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<sup>i</sup> The *agoge* in ancient Sparta served as both an institution and a process that focused on inculcating an ethos into young trainees. This ethos molded the behaviors of the Spartans and helped to militarize the society. The Spartans placed particular emphasis on training the qualities of *apatheia* (endurance or immunity to the passions), *adeia* (fearlessness), and especially *philoponia* – the love of toil (*ponos*). For further discussion see Keith, “Blood, Toil, Tearless Sweat: Sparta in Philosophical Thought of the Late Republic and Early Empire,” 10.

this initial training serves as an indoctrination into the organization's culture. The Marine Corps utilizes intimidating, aggressive Marine drill instructors to guide new trainees through the transformation from civilian to Marine. To accomplish this herculean task, the drill instructors apply carefully regulated authority and detailed control to teach and instill discipline in entry-level trainees.<sup>ii</sup> In immature organizations, such as a newly formed platoon of trainees, leaders gain compliance through the use of coercive discipline.<sup>1</sup> However, this dynamic between leaders and their subordinates retards the initiative required for success in uncertain situations. Instead, it promotes an environment where Marines unthinkingly adhere to the mandates of a leader who yells, threatens, and coerces. As a result, this can foster subordinates who perceive that leading by fear is the best way to accomplish tasks.

Recognizing the increasing complexity of the future battlefield, the need to empower lower-level leaders, and the need to further decentralize decision-making, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Al Gray, directed the publication of Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1. This manual simultaneously codified the Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy and described the leadership style that it requires. FMFM 1 states, "*Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope*" (Emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup> In this seminal publication, General Gray outlined a maneuver warfare philosophy that "requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels."<sup>3</sup> Although subsequently superseded by Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1 in 1997, the new version emphasizes the same idea: leaders should value and encourage their subordinates to display boldness and initiative.

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<sup>ii</sup> Detailed control is a prescriptive method of directing the actions of a group or organization through the direct supervision wherein the leader provides explicit instruction on when, where, and how subordinates accomplish tasks.

These two attributes require an alternative type of discipline and style of leadership than drill instructors teach and demonstrate during entry-level training. In a situation where leaders utilize fear and coercion to instill discipline, the followers simply comply with the direction of the leader and develop “a level of dependence which can be anathema to independence and initiative.”<sup>4</sup> Moving away from the use of fear as a primary leadership tool allows the Marine Corps to achieve a level of discipline that helps ensure Marines “understand the difference between right and wrong in terms of performance and behavior, and to do what is right in the absence of supervision.”<sup>5</sup> To truly embody the Marine Corps’ warfighting philosophy and meet future challenges, trust-based leadership must replace the use of fear and coercion as leadership tools at all levels.

In support of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Berger, issued his Commandant’s Planning Guidance (CPG), wherein he stated that “the Marine Corps will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness and prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, General Berger specifically identified Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) as a means by which the Marine Corps can partner with the Navy to help counter the threats from current and potential adversaries.<sup>7</sup> To accomplish this and other key tasks of the NDS, the Marine Corps must rely on small-unit leaders operating at greater distances from their higher headquarters than ever before. In doing so, the service as a whole must overcome the foundational “yellow footprint” mentality of fear-based leadership. To counter the idea that fear-based leadership is productive and the preferred model of leadership in the service, the Marine Corps must focus on developing leadership based on trust and compassion at the

lowest levels—characteristics that enable subordinates to demonstrate the traits of initiative and boldness in the face of uncertainty.

Four elements are key to comprehending why the Marine Corps must eradicate fear-based leadership from its ranks after entry-level training. First, it is essential to define and understand fear-based leadership. Next, exploring the settings where the controlled application of fear-based leadership can yield positive results demonstrates the limited utility of fear-based leadership. Third, the definitions of trust and trust-based leadership serve as the foundation for developing a maneuver warfare mindset. Finally, the role of trust-based leadership in the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy serves to demonstrate the correlation between trust-based leadership and combat effectiveness. Collectively these elements illustrate why senior leaders should ensure that maneuver warfare moves beyond a philosophy and becomes a mindset adopted by all who earn the title Marine.

### **Historical Context**

Evidence of leaders using fear to gain compliance among military trainees began to emerge around the end of the Thirty Years' War. The peace of Westphalia brought about a geopolitical shift in Europe and the emergence of the nation-state. As these new political entities developed, so did their need to maintain large standing armies. Previously, governments often relied on mercenary armies, contracted for the duration of a conflict, to achieve their military goals abroad. However, as nation-states developed and began to recognize the need for deterrent capabilities to ensure their national survival, mercenary forces became an unsustainable option. This was due to the cost involved and the relative lack of control the government could maintain over the monopoly of violence conducted on its behalf. To address this new challenge,

governments turned instead to conscription as a means to fill the ranks of the military and connect the citizenry to the defense of the nation.

As a result of conscription, the military elite required a rigid approach to indoctrinate trainees into the military. Officers used their understanding of the conscripts' fear of punishment to coerce the conscripts to demonstrate the requisite level of discipline and compliance during drills and battle. Citing Frederick the Great, historian MacGregor Knox posits that "troops must fear their officers more than all the dangers to which they may be exposed."<sup>8</sup> As applied to warfighting, centralized control resulting from this strict obedience allows leaders to achieve superior firepower and the cumulative destruction of the enemy's material assets.<sup>9</sup> An opposing view of how to conduct war is that soldiers, particularly the military elite, should demonstrate independence of thought and action. This independence lends itself to a warfighting approach that allows the military to conduct warfare by maneuver, seeking to attack problems presented by an adversary from a position of advantage. Additionally, independence allows the military elite to rely more on the technical expertise of individual military members to achieve the military objectives in support of the civilian leaders' policy goals.

These views on the composition of a military force and the appropriate warfighting philosophy result in a philosophical debate centered on military virtues. In a broad context, members of a democratic society collectively agree that the military should be obedient to the civilian government. The subjugation of the military to civilian policy makers allows military professionals to focus on their unique specialty without the requirement to also involve themselves in policy making. Two leading civil-military relations theorists, Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz, agree on this concept; however, they differ with respect to how the military should achieve the military objectives defined by the civilian leadership. In *The Soldier and The*

*State*, Huntington argues that obedience is the highest military virtue, whereas Janowitz argues in *The Professional Soldier* that independence is most important.<sup>10</sup> This question—what is the most important military professional virtue?—translates directly to the style of leadership demonstrated and perpetuated by military professionals.

Huntington's Hobbesian view of man requires the hierarchical organization of the military to achieve success through the use of discipline to subordinate the will of the individual to the will of the organization.<sup>11</sup> Thus, discipline is the tool used to bring about obedience. For Huntington, not only is the military required to be obedient to the civilian leaders, but the military must also maintain itself as a hierarchical organization wherein "each level within it must be able to command the instantaneous and loyal obedience of subordinate levels."<sup>12</sup> In this construct, the obedience of the subordinate to the mandates of the superior allows superiors to achieve their objectives.<sup>13</sup> A system such as this, as with a platoon of entry-level trainees, where the subordinate must demonstrate total obedience, is characteristic of what Christopher Kolenda describes as an immature organization: one which results in a reliance on the leader, or superior, and where members "only put forth enough effort to keep [themselves] out of trouble."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this model relies on fear-based leadership to obtain the desired outcome, and similar to a Machiavellian approach, the leader justifies draconian actions as merely following the "rules" to achieve the desired level of obedience.<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to the Huntingtonian view, Janowitz asserts that independence is the highest military virtue. In recognizing liberal society's impact on the military profession and the impact of technology on warfare, Janowitz argues that authoritarian discipline does not enable success and that, ultimately, military groups will "recognize their greater mutual dependence on the technical proficiency of their team members, rather than on the formal authority structure."<sup>16</sup>

According to this argument, “the military establishment, must strive, contrariwise, to develop the broadest decentralization of initiative at the lowest echelons.”<sup>17</sup> As a result of prioritizing independence to allow for initiative, leaders must develop a sense of self-discipline in their units to allow each unit to maintain its versatility, adaptability, and effectiveness.<sup>18</sup> For Janowitz, not only does the prioritization of independence require a change in the way the military thinks about discipline, it also mandates a shift from authoritarian, fear-based leadership to a leadership style that emphasizes group goals and indirect control.<sup>19</sup> This emphasis on goals and indirect control forms the foundation for an organization that “values and promotes versatility and independence of thought in the absence of orders.”<sup>20</sup> For the Marine Corps, this focus on goals, values, and versatility supports its maneuver warfare philosophy and the 38th Commandant’s vision for the Corps’ role in EABO and support to the Naval Fleet.

On the surface, these two theories appear to represent polar opposite ends of a spectrum. However, further analysis reveals that they present two competing perspectives on how military leaders should evaluate their leadership philosophies. When analyzing whether obedience or independence is more important, and the style of leadership needed to attain the desired virtue (or a combination of the two), the leader must acknowledge it is possible to attain both. To achieve this end, military members must progress from requiring externally imposed discipline to a collective sense of self-discipline, or what Lord Moran<sup>iii</sup> termed the “discipline of persuasion,” that allows them to recognize opportunities for the exercise of initiative.<sup>21</sup> In turn, this requires the leader to move beyond fear-based leadership to trust-based leadership.

### **Defining Fear-Based Leadership**

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<sup>iii</sup> Charles McMoran Wilson, given the title 1st Baron Moran of Manton in 1943, was a decorated British soldier in World War I and the personal physician for Winston Churchill during World War II. His in-depth study of the psychological effects of war, *The Anatomy of Courage*, provides an analysis of the true nature of courage in war. Moran’s study of courage includes an analysis of discipline, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

The mere utterance of the word fear brings to mind a multitude of unpleasant images, scenarios, and thoughts that illicit many different reactions. For many, fear is an emotion they seek to avoid. To some it is an emotion synonymous with weakness. For others, the recognition of fear, and one's action taken in the face of it, is part of the definition of bravery. The American Psychological Association defines fear as "a basic, intense emotion aroused by the detection of imminent threat, involving an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes the organism by triggering a set of physiological changes."<sup>22</sup> The key takeaway from this definition is that fear, as an intense emotion, results from the detection or perception of an imminent threat. There are no parameters that limit the threat described in this definition. Rather, the threat is subject to individuals in a given situation and their perception. Fear is not only the result of "life or death" situations, but it also arises from innumerable causes, including the threat of punishment for an action. The threat of punishment, when used by a leader to bring about an action by a subordinate, serves as a basis for understanding fear-based leadership.

Despite the common acknowledgement of this style of leadership, there has been essentially no scholarly research conducted to define what exactly fear-based leadership is and its use. Research published in peer-reviewed journals on topics such as leadership, ethics, and business management restricts its discussion of the negative aspects of leadership to impacts on the organizations and teams. Missing from these discussions is an analysis of tools leaders use to negatively coerce their subordinates. Characterizations of bad leaders often rely on terms such as toxic, authoritarian, absentee, or incompetent. While these characterizations help to describe the negative leader's attitude, they largely fail to describe the leader's style of leadership. When evaluating leadership styles, fear-based leadership most closely resembles transactional and dark

leadership. However, neither of these styles of leadership fully capture the attitudes and behaviors of leaders who base their leadership on fear.

Transactional leadership is defined as “an exchange of tasks from a person of authority to someone in his/her scope of influence.”<sup>23</sup> Transactional leadership focuses on the exchange. In this dynamic, a leader “exchanges” something, either reward or punishment, for the performance of a task. Whereas transactional leadership refers to a dynamic centered on an “exchange,” dark leadership is a broad term used to describe leaders who rely on the ideas of derailment, narcissism, and Machiavellianism to accomplish tasks.<sup>24</sup> Dark leaders employing derailment seek to advance their personal visions and ideas at the expense of the organization and their subordinates, often demonstrating poor interpersonal skills and management capabilities. Similar to leaders who use derailment, narcissistic leaders are those who are self-absorbed, entitled, arrogant, and who have self-inflated views of themselves and their leadership abilities. Furthermore, dark leadership also includes Machiavellianism, a style of leadership wherein leaders rely on lies, creating infighting among their subordinates so the leaders can be seen as the unifying element of the team, and manipulation as a way to inspire their subordinates to accomplish the work assigned to the leader.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to transactional and dark leaders, fear-based leaders use their knowledge of the follower’s fear to coerce specific behaviors in exchange for the withholding of punishment.

The concept of fear-based leadership arguably first emerged when Niccolò Machiavelli wrote about the utility of fear in his book, *The Prince*, claiming that in situations where leaders cannot be both loved and feared, it is better to be feared.<sup>26</sup> In Machiavelli’s view, employing fear preserved the leader’s position as an authority figure and the ability to maintain control of his followers. Machiavelli did not recommend the use of love to accomplish this because in his

view, “men are less hesitant about harming someone who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared.”<sup>27</sup> This view argues that love involves a series of obligations that a follower would break when his or her interests fail to align with those of the leader, making the leader susceptible to overthrow, whereas “fear is sustained by a dread of punishment which will never abandon [the leader].”<sup>28</sup> By advocating the use of fear as a leadership tool, Machiavelli and modern fear-based leaders believe they will gain the support of their followers and will be able to justify their actions based on the laws governing their organization.<sup>29</sup> Viewing themselves as the guardian of their organization causes fear-based leaders to coerce behaviors from their followers through the constant threat of punishment, a measure which the leader views as necessary to cause the follower to demonstrate a willingness to follow. In other words, Machiavelli and fear-based leaders in the military view coercion as a necessary means to ensure followers advance into battle in spite of the risk to their lives.

### **Usefulness of Fear-Based Leadership**

In organizations such as the military, where there is a need for subordinates to maintain a foundational level of discipline that includes “respect for authority; [and] instant, willing obedience to orders,” fear-based leadership may prove useful.<sup>30</sup> This “coercive discipline” is what Christopher Kolenda describes as an approach best suited for immature organizations whose members “have a low level of skill competency or have yet to internalize specified behavioral norms.”<sup>31</sup> During the times of Frederick the Great and Napoleon, when conscription prevailed as the method of entry to the armed forces, fear-based leadership served to both indoctrinate conscripts into the armed forces and to maintain control over the conscripted troops. For many of the same reasons that Machiavelli argued, fear-based leadership proved essential to enforcing discipline and ensuring the conscripts carried out the orders of their officers during

battle.<sup>32</sup> For the current study of fear-based leadership, it is most useful to examine the utility of this leadership style in the context of the transition from a citizen to a member of the armed forces.

The Marine Corps places a heavy emphasis on the transition from civilian to Marine. To facilitate a successful transition during entry-level training, the Marine Corps charges drill instructors with “ensur[ing] that the pride and traditions of [the Marine] Corps are maintained and passed on to the next generation of Marines.”<sup>33</sup> The Drill Instructor Creed, which specifically states, “I will develop them into smartly disciplined, physically fit, basically trained Marines, thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and country,” provides further evidence of this mandate.<sup>34</sup> The Marine Corps’ specific focus on discipline emphasizes the institution’s identity as something very distinct from the civilian populace. Inherent in the focus on discipline during entry-level training is the reliance on the “tools of reward and punishment with constant, direct supervision”<sup>iv</sup> to bring about behavioral changes in new trainees and to ensure compliance with established behavioral and performance standards.<sup>35</sup> In other words, drill instructors use fear-based leadership to elicit a desired response, specifically compelling trainees to move from externally imposed discipline towards self-discipline.

As applied by drill instructors, the Marine Corps uses fear-based leadership to transform civilians into basically trained Marines. By using fear-based leadership coercively to instill discipline into trainees, who later become Marines, the drill instructors help create “a common experience, a proud heritage, a set of values, and a common bond of comradeship.”<sup>36</sup> These elements of the transition from civilian to Marine provide a foundation for self-discipline upon which trust and mutual respect develop among Marines. Subsequent leaders can then foster and

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<sup>iv</sup> During entry-level training, a minimum of one drill instructor is present with the trainees at all times to provide supervision and ensure the trainees comply with the rules established for entry-level training.

further develop these characteristics to instill a maneuver warfare mindset into the trainees. Although the centralized control resulting from fear-based leadership is more akin to an attrition warfare mindset, the discipline instilled in Marines during entry-level training serves to orient them to the types of warfare, ranging from attrition to maneuver warfare, that they will encounter as they develop as both leaders and Marines.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, this selective use of fear-based leadership as a catalyst for change provides the foundation of self-discipline on which a maneuver warfare mindset is built and that allows the new Marines to develop into part of an initiative-based organization.

### **Fear as a Threat to the Maneuver Warfare Philosophy**

Whether in combat or in a garrison setting, leadership helps mitigate the effects of fear. This is not the case though when leadership is the source of an individual's fear. Regardless of the source, when individuals experience fear it can be incapacitating and demoralizing.<sup>38</sup> Writing in 1921, the Chief of the U.S. Army Medical Corps General Staff's Morale Branch, Colonel Edward L. Munson, asserted that fear is capable of weakening an army more than an enemy. It destroys the power of resistance more than any means of physical destruction, and once fear presents itself in an individual or an organization, it destroys the military value of all previous training.<sup>39</sup> These corrosive effects of fear led Munson to conclude that "the definite control of men and the direction of their actions through fear result in relative inefficiency."<sup>40</sup> In cases of extreme fear, some individuals temporarily freeze and are incapable of moving, communicating, or making decisions. During times of chaos and uncertainty inherent in war, where a Marine faces a hostile enemy intent on imposing its will on the Marine's unit, fear is a natural reaction. Unnecessarily adding a fear of the Marine's leader to this situation can have catastrophic effects.

Fear-based leaders relying on detailed control to lead their organizations, regardless of the echelon of command, create an environment where subordinates are often unwilling to perform actions unless directly prescribed by the leader. Additionally, when subordinates take action, they may only exert minimal effort based on a perception that the fear-based leader will misconstrue any attempt to further the unit's mission as a threat to the leader's authority over the unit. On the modern battlefield, this scenario may result in missed opportunities to achieve successes that could directly impact the tactical, operational, and strategic objectives of the organization.

Another development that helps to undermine the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy, while simultaneously contributing to the use of fear-based leadership, is the prevalence of technology on the modern battlefield. Ideally, technology would assist operational and strategic-level commanders' shared understanding of actions taking place in their area of responsibility, allowing these commanders to adopt what Stanley McChrystal termed the "Eyes On—Hands Off" approach.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, modern technology also allows senior leaders to observe and oftentimes try to directly influence tactical-level mission execution. During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, senior military commanders routinely observed and inserted themselves into operations executed at the company and platoon level.<sup>42</sup> This involvement of senior commanders in situations they have tasked to leaders at much lower levels conceivably elicits a fear response in junior leaders through an implied distrust in the junior leaders' ability to execute within the senior's intent. Such behavior reinforces junior leaders' reliance on fear as a leadership tactic due to the senior's overinvolvement and inferred threat of punishment for mistakes. Because senior leaders who use technology in this way display a tendency for micromanagement and an intolerance for honest mistakes, they stifle leadership development.

Actions such as these result in a negative environment where initiative and boldness suffer, and are potentially penalized, and a zero-defect mentality may become the norm.

The Marine Corps' maneuver warfare doctrine calls on all Marines to seek opportunities to "pose menacing dilemmas in which events happen unexpectedly and more quickly than the enemy can keep up with them."<sup>43</sup> This cannot occur if subordinates are afraid to act due to their leader's insistence on centralized control. Fear-based leaders thus squash the initiative of their subordinates and prevent them from seeking to gain an advantage over the adversary. This example is not limited to the idea that maneuver warfare occurs only on a physical battlefield. As technology continues to evolve, and warfare occurs in the emerging domains of cyberspace and information, fear-based leadership can have even more unfavorable impacts.

### **Adversarial Exploitation of Fear-Based Leadership**

Although there has been a great deal of intellectual effort invested to determine when and where the next great conflict will occur and how belligerents will fight, the battlefield of the future remains largely unknown. Until the next conflict actually occurs, no one will know for sure what the conflict will be, how adversaries will fight, and what new challenges may arise. However, many observers agree that the Clausewitzian characteristics of war, such as fog, friction, and uncertainty, will be present. While it is beyond the scope of this work to define the future operating environment, it is necessary to identify several assumptions. First, a noncontiguous battlefield will replace the idea of a clearly delineated battlespace with neatly drawn lines depicting the deep, close, and rear areas. Second, future conflict will include operations in all domains: land, air, sea, subsurface, space, cyber, and information. Finally, for many belligerents, technology will be both an advantage and a liability. Given these

assumptions and the likelihood that Marines will face both state and non-state actors, the Marine Corps' adherence to fear-based leadership will provide adversaries opportunities for exploitation.

Future adversaries of the United States will likely seek to gain an advantage by employing new tactics and techniques to defeat organizations led by fear-based leaders. In a "traditional" approach, the nation's adversaries may rely on the rigid hierarchical structure and decision-making of the fear-based leader's organization to gain the initiative. From this position of advantage, whether the adversary chooses to employ a strategy of attrition or maneuver is less relevant, because it will be able to dictate the terms of battle. The adversary's analysis of the actual situation, terrain, and the strength of its own forces will enable it to select the method and point of assault to directly target the fear-based leader's unit.<sup>44</sup> By assuming this mentality and approach, an adversary will most likely overwhelm fear-based leaders and defeat them, regardless of the domain contested.

Another approach future adversaries may take would be seeking to exploit the fear-based leader's organization by employing Sun Tzu's principle of avoiding the larger Marine force where it is strong and attacking precisely where it is weakest—the unit led by a fear-based leader.<sup>45</sup> By employing this principle, the adversary will seek to exploit the effect of defeating the fear-based leader's organization by penetrating into an unprotected area, inciting chaos and demoralizing the larger force to which the fear-based leader belongs.<sup>46</sup> The final "traditional" approach a future adversary may employ is the concept of time. An adversary could potentially weaponized time to defeat the fear-based leader. In taking this approach, an adversary may choose to allow a fear-based leader to destroy unit cohesion from within. The adversary may choose to observe from a distance, recognizing the corrosive effects of fear-based leadership and how the lack of trust between the leader and subordinates creates confusion and dissension.

Through the adversary's willingness to allow fear-based leaders to bring about the disintegration of their own unit, the adversary could gain the initiative and the ability to dictate the terms of battle. In doing so, the adversary will then be able to achieve a decisive victory.

In future conflict, adversaries will most likely not limit the tactics they employ to defeat fear-based leaders to the previously discussed "traditional" approaches. Rather, they may leverage new and emerging technologies to sow dissent. The nation's adversaries successfully demonstrated their ability to conduct operations in the information domain during the 2016 presidential election.<sup>v</sup> However, in the future, an adversary may weaponize information to achieve tactical victories at the lowest levels. Adversary forces may conduct operations in the information domain to cause discord to a greater extent than they currently do, by furthering their actions on social media to achieve their desired effects. The adversary may achieve these results by employing dedicated forces to use various social media platforms, selectively targeting individuals serving under fear-based leaders. The adversary may seek to create connections, establish rapport, and then attempt to cause the targeted subordinate to question his or her relationship with the fear-based leader. While it is possible that the subversive tactics will attempt to gain sympathy for the adversary's cause, it is more likely that the objective of the adversary's actions will be to erode unit cohesion and ultimately create an opportunity the adversary could exploit. Much like the non-congruent battlespace, the adversary may not limit its actions in the information domain only to interaction with the subordinates of fear-based leaders. The interconnectedness of societies and access to the abundance of information available in the public domain makes it possible for an adversary to target the friends and

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<sup>v</sup> During the run up to the 2016 presidential election, Russia conducted a multitude of operations in the information domain. These operations included hacking the Democratic candidate's campaign, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and the Democratic National Committee; spreading propaganda on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube; and staging rallies in states traditionally identified as swing states.

families of the fear-based leader's subordinates. Although these techniques require more time to achieve the desired effects, an adversary's understanding of how to use time as a weapon makes this approach viable.

Although future wars will undoubtedly have many similarities with wars of the past, emerging technologies and new domains, such as information and space, provide opportunities adversaries will seek to exploit. However, at the heart of the struggle will be the idea that the two opposing forces will do "their utmost to preserve their own strength on the one hand and destroy the enemy's on the other."<sup>47</sup> In order to achieve this end state, the nation's adversaries will seek to exploit any advantage possible. When conceptualizing how Marines can seek to gain and maintain an advantage over their enemies, they must consider every aspect of warfighting. This includes evaluating the leadership methodologies employed at every level. By ensuring that leaders do not rely on fear as a leadership tool, the Marine Corps will better safeguard its units against the potentially catastrophic impacts brought about by fear-based leadership.

### **Trust-Based Leadership**

Discussions centered on trust often avoid providing a concrete definition of the term. Even when an author provides a definition, others often refute the definition as not truly capturing the essence of the term and the emotions attached to it. Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition of trust, it is necessary to provide a basic definition from which a discussion of trust-based leadership can develop. Social scientists Denise Rousseau, Sim Sitkin, Ronald Burt, and Colin Camerer define trust as the "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another."<sup>48</sup> Based on this definition, the necessity for one party to allow another to view the first

as vulnerable is paramount. For the purpose of this study, vulnerability is the willingness to allow one's success or physical well-being to be subject to the actions of another. As detailed in the definition of trust, one party exchanges vulnerability for the reasonable expectation that the second party will demonstrate its understanding of the first party's vulnerability by responding with positive behaviors or intents to accomplish pre-agreed upon actions. When considered in the realm of leadership, both the leader and the follower can occupy the position of vulnerability with the expectation that the other will value, and not negatively exploit, this vulnerability.

For many leaders, trust is natural. However, for others, trusting their subordinates can be one of the most challenging aspects of leadership. A leader's acknowledgement that he or she can never delegate responsibility for the accomplishment of their assigned mission is the basis for the fear associated with trusting the leader's subordinates.<sup>49</sup> While the fear of failure often serves as sufficient motivation to accomplish the assigned task as discussed above, leading through fear typically results in members of an organization only performing the minimum requirements. Fear-based leadership may prove sustainable for a short period, but in the modern world where military veterans often have little problem obtaining employment outside the military, the maxim "Nobody works willingly for someone he or she fears" may result in those subordinates who display the desirable traits of boldness and initiative leaving the military.<sup>50</sup> Specific to the Marine Corps, this potential exodus will continue to erode the service's ability to execute its maneuver warfare philosophy.

Whereas fear-based leadership relies on fear to coerce a behavior from a subordinate, trust-based leadership aims to earn the respect and trust of subordinates to help limit the effects of fear. To accomplish these tasks, trust-based leaders demonstrate their vulnerability by placing trust in their subordinates. Simultaneously, leaders demonstrate commitment to the

subordinates' development through clear articulation of the organization's goals and objectives and how the subordinates' actions support the organization. Through trusting their subordinates to accomplish assigned missions, leaders who employ trust-based leadership readily accept responsibility for the actions of their subordinates and often include them in the process of developing solutions to problems when time and the situation permit. By first trusting their subordinates, leaders demonstrate their own trustworthiness. Accordingly, subordinates begin to recognize that the leader is more concerned with fostering the characteristics of boldness and initiative than with improving his or her own standing within the organization.<sup>51</sup> The development of a relationship between leaders and subordinates based on trust allows leaders greater opportunity to clearly communicate the goals and objectives of the organization. This in turn allows subordinates to demonstrate a thorough understanding of those goals and objectives by consistently meeting or exceeding the leaders' expectations. Additionally, research in the field of industrial psychology shows that when subordinates believe their leaders trust them, the subordinates work harder; they "go beyond the call of duty and [are] more content with their work."<sup>52</sup> Rewarding subordinates who demonstrate greater understanding of the leaders' expectations and intent with opportunities for increased responsibility and authority may serve to advance the relationship between leader and subordinate. Additionally, the increased responsibility may inspire the subordinate to behave in a similar manner with those the subordinate leads.<sup>53</sup> This cycle can then be repeated in perpetuity, fostering greater trust, initiative, and self-discipline in all parties. In turn, the organization benefits because "self-discipline serves as a nexus of trust between the individual and the collective."<sup>54</sup> Increased trust between the leader and subordinate results in greater organizational cohesion that extends

beyond the immediate relationship between the leader and subordinate to the organization to which both belong.

Trust between the individual and the larger organization is also a prerequisite for cohesion. One early military theorist to note this requirement was Ardant du Picq, who believed “that the cohesion resulting from the mutual trust among men and officers is what creates discipline.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, leaders employing trust-based leadership “set the conditions for the development of lethal, cohesive units that can function effectively in the physical and psychological stresses of combat.”<sup>56</sup> By fostering trust in their unit, leaders also establish the foundation for initiative and an organizational mentality “that values and promotes versatility and independence of thought in the absence of orders or in the context of a rapidly changing situation.”<sup>57</sup> Organizational trust does not apply only within large organizations. The establishment of trust inside the Marine Corps is imperative at all levels; whether it is a fire team in a Marine rifle squad or a Marine Expeditionary Force, the foundation is the same. Although at these different levels of leadership the dynamic is different due to the leader’s ability to directly interact with subordinates, both require relationships built on trust. Ultimately, leaders must demonstrate trust-based leadership by allowing their subordinates opportunities to make decisions and execute within the leaders’ intent to instill a maneuver warfare mentality in their subordinates, creating a bias for action, and fostering initiative and boldness.

When placed in the context of a warfighting organization such as the Marine Corps, trust is essential to the establishment of “esprit and the self-confidence of individuals within the unit [resulting in an] environment, [where] a Marine’s unwillingness to violate the respect and trust of peers can overcome personal fear.”<sup>58</sup> As Colonel David Hackworth, a highly decorated veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars, wrote about his time in combat, “Trust meant you’d

risk your life for your buddies, because you knew they would do the same for you, and they'd never leave you dead or dying on any hill, for any reason.”<sup>59</sup> Trust in the Marine Corps is one of the key factors that enables Marines to overcome fear in the face of the enemy, thereby using moral force to overcome both the physical and mental forces that characterize war.<sup>60</sup> Leadership is the key element to establishing trust. By employing trust-based leadership, leaders at all levels can help their subordinates to truly realize the maneuver warfare tenets of boldness and initiative.

### **Maneuver Warfare and Trust-Based Leadership**

For Marines, maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to attack not only individual adversaries but also the cohesion that holds an adversary's units together by decentralizing decision-making to allow the units in contact to overwhelm the adversary by the means they determine to be most effective.<sup>61</sup> This philosophy requires independent thinkers who are able of recognizing fleeting opportunities and exploiting them through boldness and initiative. MCDP 1 states that “by taking the initiative, we dictate the terms of the conflict and force the enemy to meet us on our terms.”<sup>62</sup> Trust-based leadership is critical to realizing this concept. By trusting the decision-making of their subordinates in increasingly complex situations, leaders empower their subordinates to recognize fleeting opportunities and take initiative to achieve success on the battlefield. Maneuver warfare requires leaders at all levels of command to instill in their subordinates a willingness to take action in the absence of orders, to be bold, and to employ disciplined initiative. A tightly controlled, regimented system of draconian leadership ruled by fear prevents these requirements from being met.

To truly implement General Gray's vision of maneuver warfare, the Marine Corps must thoroughly inculcate trust-based leadership in all of its leaders. As stated in MCDP 1, maneuver warfare, “like combined arms, applies equally to the Marine expeditionary force commander and

the fire team leader,” and it applies across the range of military operations.<sup>63</sup> Leaders who employ trust-based leadership provide guidance, direction, and vision; motivate through genuine compassion for their subordinates; and build cohesive teams based on mutual respect.<sup>64</sup> By fostering mutual respect, leaders ensure interactions with their subordinates are relations that General John A. Lejeune described as “that of a teacher and scholar” or that “between a father and son.”<sup>65</sup> The mutual respect inherent in trust-based leadership also helps to bring about Lord Moran’s “discipline of persuasion,” or discipline that has been internalized—a belief that compliance with the leader’s will and orders will ultimately lead to the desired outcome.<sup>66</sup> As this applies to maneuver warfare, trust enables action in the face of uncertainty through the knowledge that the leader has ensured the subordinate’s understanding of the leader’s intent, and the understanding that the leader will support the subordinate’s decisions. Additionally, trust-based leadership fosters the flexibility of mind required to develop creative solutions to complex problems. Such solutions will allow the subordinate to deal with constantly changing and disorderly situations that can be expected on future battlefields. Furthermore, trust allows subordinates to act independently when they recognize a different, perhaps more efficient, way to accomplish a task and fosters “an exploitive mindset that takes full advantage of every opportunity, and the moral courage to accept responsibility for this type of behavior.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Recommendations**

While many senior leaders understand and demonstrate the importance of leading with trust, the Marine Corps requires a cultural change to successfully implement trust-based leadership at all levels. The NDS and CPG outline roles and tasks the Marine Corps can only achieve through the execution of its maneuver warfare philosophy in both spirit and intent. Changing the organization’s culture should begin during entry-level training, but the desired

change must be continually reinforced as Marines progress in rank and attend professional military education (PME). In addition to changes in PME curriculum, the Marine Corps should implement a more holistic evaluation process. Although there may be initial resistance to this change due to an idea that trust is a “soft” concept, its impacts on combat effectiveness and the resulting increases in lethality will prove its value.

The Marine Corps has an obligation to provide “basically trained” Marines to the commanders of operational units. Accordingly, the Marine Corps has a responsibility to demonstrate the institution’s desired leadership style to new Marines prior to their arrival at their first unit. The ideas outlined in Marine Corps Tactical Publication (MCTP) 6-10A, *Sustaining the Transformation*, provide a basic outline of an ideal situation where the unit a new Marine will join actively participates in the transition of new Marines from an entry-level school to their first unit. To help further these ideas, the 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Neller, implemented a fourth phase to Marine Recruit Training in February 2018. This phase offers drill instructors additional time to mentor new Marines and share the future expectation of them.<sup>68</sup>

The addition of the fourth phase to recruit training was an honest attempt to begin transitioning new Marines away from fear-based leadership. However, there is an unintended obstacle to the initiative’s success. The drill instructor, who prior to the Crucible employed fear-based leadership tactics to coerce the recruits to perform, is the same Marine who 54 hours later attempts to demonstrate a different leadership style. Simply because drill instructors remove their campaign covers, sit on a footlocker in the squad bay, and talk with, rather than yell at, the new Marines does not instantly change a Marine’s perception of the drill instructor as a source of coercive discipline and fear. Despite the intent of implementing a fourth phase, there is no major

change in environment or personnel involved in leading the new Marines. Therefore, the Marine Corps has not set the conditions for the new Marines to begin to understand leadership as anything other than authority figures leading through fear.

To improve this initiative, the School of Infantry (SOI) and other follow-on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) producing schools must receive a greater emphasis and serve as examples of the Marine Corps' ideal leadership style while transitioning trainees from fear-based leadership to trust-based leadership. This starts with the Marines who serve as instructors. As an institution, the Marine Corps must place more emphasis on assigning more suitable Marines to serve as instructors at both SOI and MOS-producing schools. One method to accomplish this is to have battalion commanders nominate their best and most fully qualified corporals, sergeants, and staff sergeants for assignment to these instructor billets, similar to the nomination of officers to serve as instructors at The Basic School. A 360-degree evaluation, focused on the Marine's leadership style, should accompany this nomination. This evaluation should include select subordinates chosen to participate by the nominated Marine's immediate supervisor. Having battalion commanders associate their name (and reputation) with the nominated Marine, would serve to demonstrate the institution's emphasis on ensuring Marines selected for instructor duty are the best and most fully qualified for this instrumental role. Additionally, including input from their superiors, peers, and subordinates will help to ensure the selected Marines will demonstrate trust-based leadership. Selecting and assigning Marines who demonstrate trust-based leadership would better prepare SOI and other MOS-producing entry-level schools to accomplish their roles in sustaining the transformation and promulgating trust-based leadership throughout the Marine Corps.

Implementing periods of instruction, complete with case studies, all levels of PME, enlisted and officer, could further reinforce the utility of trust-based leadership. Focusing on rank-specific examples at the various PME schools throughout the Marine Corps would allow Marines to examine the corrosive effects of fear-based leadership as well as the benefits of trust-based leadership with their peers. Conducting such case studies in small groups will facilitate peer learning, along with the sharing of experiences and “best practices.” Including these periods of instruction for Marines of all ranks would not only demonstrate the Marine Corps’ view that trust-based leadership is essential to its maneuver warfare philosophy, but also better ensure its application across the entire force.

Finally, the Marine Corps should adopt a more holistic performance evaluation system for all Marines, not only those who receive fitness reports. This system should include input from the evaluated Marine’s peers and superiors at a minimum, and for those in leadership positions, it should include input from their subordinates as well. A digital system that includes both quantitative and qualitative questions for those participating in the evaluation would ensure the conveyance of the most accurate and comprehensive information to the senior leader conducting the evaluation. This system, and the associated reports would aid senior leaders’ decisions of who to assign to specific billets or leadership positions. Additionally, this system would assist in the screening of Marines for promotion, retention, and for officers, command. Adopting a holistic performance evaluation system would further help eliminate fear-based leadership from the Marine Corps and help ensure Marines demonstrating trust-based leadership are identified and placed in positions of increased responsibility. By identifying fear-based leaders early in their career, trust-based leaders can seize the presented opportunity to help guide them back to the institution’s belief in trust-based leadership.

## **Conclusion**

For more than 244 years, the Marine Corps has demonstrated success in its two primary missions: making Marines and winning battles. An essential part of the Marine Corps' success in both of these missions has been its ability to transform civilians into Marines. To facilitate this transformation, it is necessary to instill discipline through the use of coercion and fear-based leadership. When carefully regulated in settings such as entry-level training, fear-based leadership can be effective. However, a problem arises when fear-based leadership develops into the cultural norm. By not providing new Marines with alternative examples of what leadership in the Marine Corps can be outside of the recruit training depots, Marines will rely on their experiences and perceptions of how to lead. In many cases, this leads these new Marines to model their behavior after their drill instructors without the understanding that the drill instructors utilized fear-based leadership in a controlled environment with the sole purpose of transforming civilians into Marines. As they develop, the Marines then begin developing their leadership style based on their understanding of leadership in the Marine Corps as reliant on inciting fear as a primary means to accomplish their mission. All of this occurs without a senior leader teaching about or discussing the potentially detrimental impacts fear-based leadership can have on unit cohesion and the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy.

By following the recommendations above and placing a greater emphasis on developing young leaders who employ trust-based leadership, the Marine Corps will further General Gray's intent that all Marines develop a maneuver warfare mindset. Trust provides the foundation on which mission command is built. Trust-based leadership creates a culture of mutual respect, shared understanding, and accountability that facilitates both mission command and the execution of the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare doctrine. While there is much debate about

how the future of armed conflict will evolve, what the Marine Corps' role in future wars will be, and how the nation's leaders will define success, for the Marine Corps future success will require all Marines to have a maneuver warfare mindset. To truly achieve this, Marine leaders at every level must employ trust-based leadership. Only then will the Marine Corps truly execute its maneuver warfare philosophy relying on mission command, and the boldness and initiative of those Marines who are in the best position to make the tactical decisions that will ultimately bring about victory over the nation's foes.

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- <sup>17</sup> Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 42.
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