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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

THE CHALLENGES OF BALANCE

*A Case Study of OMFTS and the
Challenge of Developing Concepts
While Maintaining Current Relevance*

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to examine the organizational structure, doctrine, employment practices, and future capabilities of the MP in the operating forces. This inquiry hopes to make three contributions. First, by presenting the MP background and problems that are inherent within its structure, it will enable the reader to make comparisons and draw conclusions based on past practices and perceptions. The second goal is to create a greater awareness of how policy decisions, operational needs assessments, and doctrinal changes have better equipped the MP. Third, this analysis seeks to examine the MP and operators relationship in the context of future employment practices and possible alternatives to maximize capabilities. In the final analysis, this study will illustrate how MP support of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) came from obscurity to a possible force multiplier, and a rich source of lessons for MP professionals.		
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Title:** The Challenges of Balance: A Case Study of OMFTS and the Challenge of Developing Concepts While Maintaining Current Relevance
- Author:** Major Scott S. Jensen, USMC
- Thesis:** In order to maintain the Marine Corps' relevance into the 21st Century while maintaining credibility for current capabilities, future concepts cannot be divorced from the realities and limitations of resource and program requirements.
- Discussion:** This paper, through a study of the evolution of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS), analyzes the development of Marine Corps concepts in relationship to programs and resource allocation. This analysis identifies and provides insight into various friction points that exist between the Marine Corps concept development process and resource and program allocation, identifies key errors made in the past, and suggests solutions to potential dangers in the development of future concepts and programs
- Conclusion:** The Marine Corps, like all of the other services, faces extreme pressure to be prepared for the changing future. The comforts of history have seemingly been knocked loose from their very foundations. This has lead to many new threats, challenges and unknowns. No one can know what the future will truly hold. This new era demands new approaches and concepts that will render many ways of military thinking irrelevant. In light of this, Marine Corps future concepts must be based on a broad vision for the future while balanced against the requirements of today. The nature of economic realities, broad prosperity, and long-term peace has made this balancing act a challenging undertaking. Success requires focused leadership with equity in the solution, coordinated and thoughtful application of resource prioritization, and an understanding of the broad challenges faced internally and externally. No single individual or group will have the monopoly on successful future ideas. It must be done as a team.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Disclaimer	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Challenges for the Future	1
Future Concept Development	4
Program Development	6
The Evolution of OMFTS	10
Balancing the System	24
Implications for the Future	34
Bibliography	40

THE CHALLENGES OF BALANCE

A Force like ours—that tries to be relevant across a broad spectrum and to be ready as the Nation’s force in readiness—can’t concentrate on a narrow concept and remain relevant. In order to be ready when the nation is least ready, we must establish a broad concept that crosses all spectrums and allows us to maintain relevance now and in the future.

General Michael J. Williams, USMC
Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

From their very origins, Marines have sought to learn and apply new, innovative and often times irreverent solutions to the questions of “what is next.” The very nature of Marine innovation and curiosity has placed them at the point in looking for the solutions before the next challenge arises. No better example of Marine ingenuity and innovation can be found than that of the development of Amphibious concepts during the interwar period that ultimately led to the publishing of *The Tentative Landing Manual* and the introduction of the tenants of modern amphibious warfare as we know it.¹ Marines led the way again in the 1950s as doctrine on vertical envelopment matured because of the advances in helicopter technology. Then, in the late 1980s, as the U.S. faced a national threat against Iraq, the Marine Corps’ forethought once again paid off as Maritime Prepositioning Forces provided the first combat ready forces for the war. Marines are famous for their never ending quest for concepts that will lead to relevant future service

¹ For an in-depth examination of the history of the Marine Corps in the development of Modern Amphibious Warfare, see Peter A. Isely and Philip A Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951).

doctrine—supported by men, equipment, training, and structure—that will survive the test of time and answer the nations call when it is most needed.

The Marine Corps of today is once again faced with the monumental challenge of preparing for battles that will be fought in the future. The strategic landscape changed. The end of the Cold War changed the threat environment. Weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, terrorism, transnational actors, and rouge nations have all been identified as emerging threats to the Nation. Economic security, globalism, international responsibility, peace keeping, nation building, among many, have driven the use of the Nation's military power in ways not seen in history. At the same time, however, the Nation is faced with the responsibility to be prepared for two near simultaneous major theater wars.

All of this occurred against a backdrop of monumental prosperity and long-term peace that forced a reorientation of national budgetary priorities. The nation's military services have found themselves faced with shrinking budgets and struggling to meet the requirement to be ready in the short term while preparing for the future. Bright individuals have developed concepts designed to aggressively leverage the rapid growth and development of technology and information management. Some have called these ideas revolutionary. The challenge has been to identify appropriate concepts for future doctrine that meet the threats of the future with the right people, equipment, and doctrine, and at the same time provide enough resources to meet current requirements and capabilities. Put simply, the problems future thinkers faces are centered on developing concepts that are achievable without breaking the bank.

In order to maintain relevance into the 21st Century, while maintaining credibility in current capabilities, Marine Corps future concepts cannot be divorced from the realities and limitations of resource and program requirements. Future concepts refer to those ideas, visions, and plans for how operations and activities will be conducted in the future. As a concept develops and matures, it eventually becomes a defined service doctrine or capability. A concept is born in someone's mind, free of limitations. Organization, men, equipment, and training practices are provided to allow for its execution once a concept is tested and validated. Once this has been accomplished, the concept transforms into a doctrine or capability. For the sake of argument, every service doctrine or capability starts as a concept. The distinction is important.

As mentioned previously, one critical step in concept maturation is the point where equipment, structure, organization, and training is placed appropriately to allow for execution. This is where the realm of programs, resources, acquisitions, and requirements enters the picture. This step, from concept on paper to the ability to execute, is crucial and is the truth teller of a concept's future viability.

This paper, through a study of the evolution of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS), analyzes the development of Marine Corps concepts in relationship to programs and resource allocation. This analysis identifies and provides insight into various friction points that exist between the Marine Corps concept development process and resource and program allocation, identifies key errors made in the past, and suggests solutions to potential dangers in the development of future concepts and programs. A short discussion of the processes associated with concept and program development is necessary prior to delving into the specific lessons of the OMFTS Model.

FUTURE CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Marine concepts are born in Quantico, VA under the auspices of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) as part of the Combat Development System (CDS). The *National Military Strategy, ...From the Sea/Forward...from the Sea, Joint Vision 2010*, and the Commandant's Planning Guidance—when considered against asymmetrical threats, chaos in the littorals, the influence of regional power struggles and the reality of no peer competitor to the U.S.—combine as the foundation on which future Marine Corps concepts are developed.² Put in the simplest terms, a concept begins as an idea based on considerations for future operations. This idea is put on paper and then modeled. The model is then measured for consistency and judged as valid prior to actual concept approval and publishing. A concept is discussed, debated, and war-gamed. Following this period, tactics, techniques, and procedures are established to support the concept, and finally, exercises and operations continue to measure the concept.³ This non-linear process continually takes input, uses multiple tools to assess, and then makes rudder changes as problems or new ideas are discovered. While sounding very mundane and elementary, this process requires in-depth knowledge, experience, patience, and diligence.

² United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Concepts for the 21st Century*, Downloaded from <http://www.concepts.quantico.usmc.mil/emergcon/web-brief.ppt> on 2 October 2000. For more details and specifics on the Marine Corps family of future concepts, access the Marine Corps Concepts Division website at <http://www.concepts.quantico.usmc.mil>.

³ USMC, *Marine Corps Warfighting Concepts for the 21st Century*.

It is important to understanding that the Marine Corps Combat Development Command is responsible for the complete integration of a concept across a full spectrum of requirements. Within the Combat Development System, a concept is measured against the structure, equipment, training, support, and facilities that will be needed for execution. “Once a concept has been drafted, modeling identifies ideal specific required operational capabilities. From these capability, an analysis of the DOTES⁴ identifies the actions needed to achieve the capability expressed by a ‘pure requirement.’ How the requirement is actually fulfilled is laid out in a Plan of Action and Milestones.”⁵ In a perfect world, concepts—that will ultimately develop into doctrine—drive the fight for obtaining the appropriate capabilities that include the right equipment and people, the best organization, the necessary level training, and the sustainment for all of it.

The Marine Corps Combat Development System advertises that doctrine development through the emergence of new concepts is the over riding consideration when determining which equipment, technology, organization, manning and training is fielded. While this is a legitimate and appropriate approach, it is often not as easily accomplished when faced with the realities of today’s world of budget wars and resource limitations.

Evidence suggests that, despite the proximity of Quantico and Washington, the priorities and intents that MCCDC identifies, understands, and executes are not always in

⁴ DOTES stands for Doctrine, Organization, Training & Education, Equipment, and Support / Facilities. This assessment provides an organized approach to ensuring all factors are considered when addressing Marine Corps capabilities.

⁵ “*Combat Development System*,” information brief, n.p., n.d., provided on 2 October 2000 by Col. William Smith.

line with those at the Marine Corps Headquarters. This can be a very dysfunctional relationship if not handled properly. A discussion of the Marine Corps' program development process helps to understand the friction involved.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Today's fiscal environment makes it very difficult to plan the Marine Corps' future programs while seeking to successfully meet the requirements for emerging concepts as identified through the Combat Development System. Annually, the services submit their plans for future programs—how they would like to spend their share of future budgets. These plans are for the defense budget that will actually be executed two years down the road. These plans outline where the service will spend money on everything from tents, to airplanes, to hangars, to Bachelor Enlisted Quarters, and to people. These plans, once completed and combined, become the Program Objective Memorandum or POM. In 2000, the plan for fiscal year 2002 was completed. This “POM 02” not only covered those programs budgeted for 2002 but also outlined intended spending for five years worth of programs beyond the budget year. In other words, in mid-2000, the planned programs for the fiscal year 2002 budget were submitted. Along with that plan, came the expected programs for 2003 through 2007 or the “out years.” Thus, in the year 2000, the final POM 02 provided the White House and the Congress with the Department of Defense's expectations for the budget that will be signed for the year 2002 as well as the expected plans for 2003 through 2007.

In very simplified terms, the Commandant approved the Marine Corps' POM 02 input in mid-2000. This indicated the Marine Corps' desires for spending in the FY2002 budget. The plan was then coordinated with the Navy.⁶ The Secretary of the Navy then approved the combined efforts of the Marine Corps and the Navy and submitted the Department of the Navy's POM to the Secretary of Defense. In the year 2001, a budget will be signed into law for 2002 that—following the process of our government appropriations apparatus—should reflect the desires outlined in 2000 in the POM 02.⁷

The preceding description of the POM planning process is intended to highlight several key points. First, each service annually submits plans for future programs based on current and evolving service requirements, concepts, and doctrine with a calloused eye towards the reality of what the budget for that year will allow. Second, in the case of the Navy and Marine Corps, detailed coordination and justification is required to satisfy the other service and the Secretary of the Navy. Third, these plans look out over seven years, providing a good snapshot of those programs on which a service is spending money. Because of its annual updates, future projections, and competition for limited financial resources, a service's POM provides great insight into actual priorities in terms of equipment, manning, and infrastructure. In light of this, it would seem reasonable to

⁶ The Navy pays the bills for several large "Marine" programs, most notably are aviation platform such as the Joint Strike Fighter and V-22. Other programs such as Amphibious Ships and Naval Surface Fire Ships have direct impact on missions and concept put forth by the Marine Corps. In light of this, any budget and program discussions must include close coordination and agreement with the Navy.

⁷ POM planning process was outlined in the following document: "USMC POM 02 Planning Process," information brief, n.p., n.d., provided on 2 October 2000 by Col. William Smith.

expect those requirements previously identified in the Combat Development Process to be on the top priority list for POM development.

One ever-present challenge to the programmers that develop the POM is to allocate enough assets to preserve present capabilities and readiness and still provide enough resources to successfully execute future capabilities and concepts. General Michael Williams, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, likens it to a combination between an architect and a mechanic who is tasked with designing and adding to an already existing building while maintaining the structural integrity. Programs and budgets must balance across the entire design of the “structure” to ensure a sound “building” in general. Some weaknesses exist, but no weakness can be so great as to cause the building to collapse. If too many programs focus on future concepts—to the detriment of current capabilities—then the building loses balance and the inherent weakness causes collapse. In the same light, ignoring future capabilities provides the building strength in the short term, but as time passes, the structure crumbles due to neglect and age.⁸ In light of this give-and-take, everyone, at times, must accept less than full support in order to maintain a sound, safe, and survivable structure over time. Because the monetary resources are not there to fund every need and desire, the question becomes, when should sacrifices be made or, more appropriately, where can the Marine Corps afford to accept some weakness or risk in order to ensure strength elsewhere.

Obviously, making decisions on programs requires a broad understanding of Marine Corps needs, wants, and desires. That must include an understanding of future

⁸ Michael J. Williams, Gen., USMC, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, interviewed by the author, 13 October 2000.

concept requirements but encompasses much more than that. Unfortunately, Marine Corps Headquarters has not had direct tie-ins with the MCCDC processes in the past. The result has been competing or diverging priority, understanding, or direction. This friction has been particularly impacting since MCCDC develops concepts and identifies the requirements for accomplishing those concepts, yet Marine Corps Headquarters establishes the programs, resources, and budgets for the Marine Corps. There is room for great tension in this relationship.

MCCDC does not always get a complete picture of all that is competing for resources at the service level but nonetheless has been tasked to provide integrated requirements that support concepts. It is legitimate for them to expect that their priorities—a product of the combat development system—would drive programs.

Headquarters is often faced with meeting commitments and addressing issues outside the visibility of Quantico and the Combat Development System. Because they have a bigger picture, they are forced to balance the “building,” often to the detriment of MCCDC’s perceived priorities. Because a link was missing, the two were not working off the same sheet of issues and priorities. OMFTS, and the issues surrounding its development, is a great vehicle to address the problems and solutions for improving the development of future Marine Corps concepts and programs.

THE EVOLUTION OF OMFTS

In January of 1996, the operational concept of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) was first published.⁹ The first paragraph of that operational concept outlines its origins.

In the white papers, "...From the Sea" and "Forward...from the Sea," the Secretary of the Navy, with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, began the development of a new approach to naval operations. This approach places unprecedented emphasis on littoral areas, requires more intimate cooperation between forces afloat and forces ashore, introduces the concept of the naval expeditionary force, and provides the foundation for Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS).¹⁰

OMFTS was also intended to support the guidance given by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Joint Vision (JV) 2010 was issued in 1996 to provide the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) strategic direction for the common evolution of the Armed Forces to achieve new levels of effectiveness through joint warfighting.... the operational themes called for in JV 2010 are entirely compatible with OMFTS, the operational pillars explicit in JV 2010...are all imbedded within OMFTS.¹¹

⁹ Headquarters, USMC, *Concepts and Issues '98: Building a Corps for the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: Program and Resource Department, 1998), 15. Cited hereafter as *Concepts and Issues 98*. For detailed information on programs, future initiatives, budgets, and Marine Corps positions on future initiatives, reference the annually published *Concepts and Issues*. The Programs and Resources Department, Headquarters Marine Corps publishes *Concepts and Issues* concurrently with the budget and POM development process. Because it is published annually, is approved by the Commandant prior to publishing, and is based on actual budget and POM initiatives, this document provides concrete evidence of Marine priorities, positions, and requirements.

¹⁰ United States Marine Corps, *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*, Marine Corps Gazette, June 1996, A-1. Cited hereafter as *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*.

¹¹ *Concepts and Issues 98*, 15.

In 1996, times were changing and the United States Military recognized the need to keep up, and in some cases, catch up. The strategic environment had changed and the services needed to change or risk losing their relevance. The Marine Corps' answer was OMFTS.¹²

From its origins, OMFTS was seen as the next logical step in the development of amphibious warfare. Two significant changes—the changing threat faced by America's forces and the increased tactical capabilities offered by advances in technology—would allow the Marine Corps to do away with the old models for amphibious warfare.

The heart of Operational Maneuver from the Sea is the maneuver of naval forces at the operational level, a bold bid for victory that aims at exploiting a significant enemy weakness in order to deal a decisive blow. Mere movement, which may lead to indecisive results or even be counterproductive, does not qualify as operational maneuver. That is to say, operational maneuver should be directed against an enemy center of gravity—something that is essential to the enemy's ability to effectively continue the struggle.¹³

OMFTS would do away with the attrition minded amphibious approaches of the past and leverage the changing environment to allow for the execution of maneuver warfare in the naval environment. Furthermore, OMFTS had a very powerful patron leading the charge.

Historically, the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time, General Charles C. Krulak, had witnessed many of the recent “defining moments” of the Marine Corps as he grew up in a Marine family. His father, Victor, is a Marine icon that played a key role in the development of the original amphibious doctrine. In the 1950s, the senior Krulak

¹² Headquarters, USMC, *Concepts and Issues '96: First to Fight in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: Program and Resource Department, 1996), 26-27. Cited hereafter as *Concepts and Issues 96*.

¹³ *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*, A-3.

was instrumental in ensuring the Marine Corps maintained credibility and relevance in the face of challenges to its very existence. These experiences clearly had an impact on the junior Krulak as he now led the Marine Corps into a changing environment with many unknowns.

Many question the true motives of General Krulak as he pressed the OMFTS concept forward with a tenacious and energetic approach. Some speculate that he was in search of a personal legacy driven by living in the shadow of his father. However, General Krulak's recognition and understanding of the potential hazards facing the Corps in the future is a more likely scenario. He had seen first hand the potential for damage to the Corps if change was not recognized and adaptations quickly created. History indicated that the Corps would be on solid ground if it could identify a concept directed at the future that responded to the emerging threats to the nation. Krulak also knew that the competition for scarce financial resources would be keen and that the Corps needed a clear direction that met the expectations of the Nation's leaders. If the Congress, the Secretary of Defense, and the President were convinced the Corps had a good plan, then they would be more willing to provide the money needed for the Corps to proceed with some very costly programs. Among many things, OMFTS was a pragmatic vehicle for future progress.

OMFTS was intended to be more than another operational concept that would contribute to future capabilities and move amphibious operations into the 21st Century. General Krulak intended it to be the capstone concept for the Marine Corps.¹⁴ By

¹⁴ *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*, A-1 and A-6; *Concepts and Issues* 98, vii and 15

identifying a capstone concept, the Marine Corps was handed an operating vision that, in theory, would provide direction and focus for all future budgeting, spending, doctrinal thinking, and programming. OMFTS was to be the focus of effort for the Marine Corps as it moved into the 21st Century.¹⁵

The tenants of OMFTS were rapidly assimilated into the vocabularies and future “think pieces” of the time. General Krulak was known for his enthusiasm and ability to get the word out on the street, and he wasted no time in getting the word out about the exciting future ahead for the Marine Corps based on this new capstone operational concept. At first look, people became very enthusiastic about OMFTS.

In 1995, the newly established Warfighting Lab and the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (Experimental) (SPMAGTF (X))—both under the auspices of MCCDC—were responsible, through the series of Sea Dragon experiments as well as other innovations, “for developing and field testing future operational and technological concepts.”¹⁶ Once the OMFTS concept had been published, the lab played a role in assessing the future of OMFTS. Additionally, the Concepts Branch of the Warfighting Development and Integration Division (WDID) at MCCDC sponsored various implementation studies, experiments, and study groups to identify the feasibility, shortcomings, requirements, and implications of OMFTS. In other words, OMFTS had entered the formal Combat Development System (CDS). The evidence indicates, however, that OMFTS was going to be the concept of the future despite any

¹⁵ Howard, Patrick G., MajGen, USMC and LtCol Len Blasiol, USMC, *OMFTS: Forging a Path to the Future of Amphibious Warfare*, Marine Corps Gazette, June 1999, 18-19 and 21.

¹⁶ Concepts and Issues 96, 47.

shortcomings that may be found in the process. As a result, the CDS may have produced recommendations for executing OMFTS with the understanding that any suggestion of dropping the concept due to inconsistencies or limitations would not be entertained. The CDS was limited, to a certain degree, by political and leadership influences that attached specific desires and expectations. This is a dangerous way to develop a capstone concept.

The first MCCDC sponsored study of OMFTS began in March of 1996 and lasted 10 months. As stated in the studies executive summary, “the purpose of this study was to: ‘...identify any remaining deficiencies under the OMFTS Concept’ for inclusion in the 1997 Marine Corps Master Plan, which will support subsequent POM development.”¹⁷ The products of this study included a draft concept of employment for the V-22 and AAV and a revised operational mode summary / mission profile for the AAV.¹⁸ The apparent future direction of the Corps was clearly set in 1996. “OMFTS is the keystone operational concept that will drive the Marine Corps’ future...”¹⁹ However, there were significant issues being identified.

In his endorsement letter to the Commanding General of MCCDC, the Concepts Division Director wrote:

The Marine Corps is not currently equipped to fully exploit the ideas contained in Operational Maneuver From the Sea, although the principles of maneuver warfare can be applied to any littoral operation employing current systems...Impediments

¹⁷ Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) Implementation Study Executive Summary for Vol 1 and 2*, (Quantico, VA; Concepts Division, 1997), 2-1. Cited hereafter as Implementation Study Executive Summary.

¹⁸ Implementation Study Executive Summary, 1-3.

¹⁹ Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) Implementation Study (1996-2016) – Vol 1*, (Woodbridge, VA; PRC Inc, 1997), 5-2. Cited hereafter as Implementation Study Volume 1.

to fully implementing Operational Maneuver From the Sea exist and require new capabilities in the following areas: mine counter measures, logistics, fire support, command and control.²⁰

The original study contained similar language. “The study team is of the opinion that OMFTS, as it is described in the concept document, cannot be effectively implemented until conceptual framework, doctrinal and organizational foundations are laid, and equipment and training capabilities are developed.”²¹ From its very beginnings, OMFTS was intended as a foundational, institutionally changing operational concept that would impact the Marine Corps across the board in new, innovative, revolutionary and irreversible ways. The study also recognized that there was some current operational relevance:

...Marine Corps’ ability to implement OMFTS can be assessed as capable—not to standard...the MV-22 and the AAV in the future will enable the Marine Corps to practice OMFTS principles. Indeed, some measure of OMFTS can be exercised today with Landing Craft Air Cushions (LCAC) and current assault support helicopters. *But the real implementation of OMFTS requires seamless over-the-horizon communications to support command and control; responsive, accurate, and lethal fires (including sea-based fires); and a sea-based logistics system that supports maneuver and operational responsiveness.*²²

While certain aspects of OMFTS were executable, it was clear that this new concept would not only require technology and equipment expected in the inventory—MV-22, AAV, Joint Strike Fighter (JSF)—but would require earth-shattering advance in several other areas, including seabased fires and logistics and command and control.

²⁰ Implementation Study Executive Summary, 1 thru 2.

²¹ Implementation Study Executive Summary, 1-3.

²² Implementation Study Executive Summary, 2-3. Emphasis added by the author.

Interestingly, this revolutionary concept, while forging new ground and identifying requirements for technological advances unprecedented in sophistication, based its foundation on technology already on the drawing board. While the Marine Corps claimed a concepts based requirements system, this is a clear example where even a keystone concept such as OMFTS was conceived with at least a portion of the foundation laid on equipment already used, purchased, or being developed. MV-22, AAV, LCAC, Light Weight 155 (LW-155), and HMMWV were all items assumed as foundational equipment for implementation of OMFTS. One must ask what OMFTS may have looked like if no system limits had been placed on its original baseline. While the argument that technology should never drive doctrine sounds good in theory, this serves as a credible example that realistically, even new doctrines will rely on technology not necessarily developed specifically for the new concept. It would be impossible to wipe the board clean and start over with all new systems once a new concept has matured into a service doctrine. The money just isn't there for that type of reckless approach to program development.

In 1996, OMFTS was seen as just a few technological steps from reality.²³ However, attaining the necessary means to move OMFTS forward into reality within the expected timeframe²⁴ would prove difficult if not insolvable in some instances. The original concept paper highlighted the uncertain nature of new concept development by stating:

²³ Concepts and Issues 96, 27.

²⁴ Guidance given to the implementation study group set 2016 as the year that OMFTS would be fully incorporated as the keystone operational doctrine for the Marine Corps.

Refocusing the Marine Corps to meet the needs of the next century will, like all successful military innovations, involve a great deal of debate and experimentation. Many ideas will be put forward, discussed, and put to test.... And if history is any guide, the conclusions we draw will bear little resemblance to the assumptions with which we started.

The purpose of this concept paper is to begin this process of proposal, debate, and experimentation....it provides our vision of what OMFTS is and what naval forces of the near future should be able to do. In doing this, it provides a frame work for the actions of many people—Marines, sailors, civilian employees, and contractors whose work will turn the concept of OMFTS into the reality of forces capable of winning decisive victories in littoral areas.²⁵

Two of the three fundamental pillars of OMFTS frustrated the quick technological solutions to implementing OMFTS.²⁶ “Some tasks depend on new systems capabilities that are projected for 2015. If these projected capabilities do not become reality, then the STOM [Ship to Objective Maneuver] tactical concept²⁷ will need significant revisions or the concept may not be executable.”²⁸ The years following the introduction of the OMFTS concept were filled with the forecasted discussion, experimentation, and disagreement as supporting concepts and requirements were identified and refined.²⁹

²⁵ *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*, A-1.

²⁶ Implementation Study Volume 1, 5-2, identified the following as the key pillars to the foundation of OMFTS: 1) Naval Maneuver at the Operational Level, 2) Ship to Objective Maneuver, 3) Sea basing.

²⁷ Ship to Objective Maneuver seeks to leverage emerging technologies and capabilities to allow a force to bypass the “beachhead” and “operational pause” associated with a traditional amphibious landing. Increased capabilities for sea based fires and logistics, improved command and control capabilities, and improved ability to operate over the horizon all provide, in theory, the ability to maneuver directly from the sea to inland objectives. For an in-depth discussion of the STOM concept see: United States Marine Corps, *Ship-to-Objective Maneuver: A Marine Corps Concept Paper*, downloaded from <http://www.concepts.quantico.usmc.mil/stom.htm> on 29 September 2000.

²⁸ Implementation Study Volume 1, 5-17 thru 5-18.

²⁹ One obvious outgrowth of any foundational operational concept is baseline concepts required to support the keystone. OMFTS was no different. The Marine Corps Concepts division

In addition to initiatives taken at the Concepts division,

In the 31 August 1997 Frag Order to the Commandant's Planning Guidance, Gen Charles C. Krulak directed two actions aimed at identifying the organizational changes required to realize the enhanced capabilities promised by OMFTS. The first initiative was the OMFTS Working Group...tasked with establishing a framework for a 21st Century OMFTS force.... the Commandant also directed the establishment of a Force Structure Planning Group (FSPG) to identify organizational changes required to position the force to take the next steps toward OMFTS.³⁰

MCCDC was tasked with all of these initiatives. This had some interesting implications and impacts. Implementation of OMFTS was focused at MCCDC, which is normal for new warfighting concepts. While the Commandant himself was involved in the direction and establishment of OMFTS as the capstone concept, there is very little indication that other leaders or departments at the Headquarters were included, in a comprehensive way, in the discussion and development of OMFTS. This lack of coordination with the Headquarters resulted in POM and budget priorities that were negligibly impacted by

quickly went to work based on those areas of concern and discrepancy identified as inhibitors to OMFTS. The amazing result will be one of the lasting legacies of OMFTS. It is from this operational concept the Marine Corps has developed long-term developments, concepts and acquisitions in such areas as: Ship-to Objective Maneuver (STOM); Marine Prepositioning Force 2010; Sustained Operations Ashore (SOA); Comprehensive Command and Control Initiatives; Advanced Expeditionary Fire Support; Seabased Logistics; and Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Aviation. Initiatives based on the foundation of OMFTS also influenced such Navy initiatives as improved mine-counter measure support, LPD-17, and the DD-21 "Land Attack Destroyer." (Howard and Blasiol, 19). The Marine Corps Concepts Division web page, <http://www.concepts.Quantico.usmc.mil>, contains information on all current concepts.

³⁰ Howard and Blasiol, 19-20. According to the article, "The OMFTS working group's recommendations proposed measures to increase the MAGTF's mobility and combat power, while reducing its "footprint" ashore," and the FSPG, "using the OMFTS Working Group findings as a framework, ...provided recommendations for changes to tables of organization and tables of equipment that will streamline the MAGTF and enhance its warfighting capability. These changes, to be implemented between FY02 and FY05, are intended as interim measures to set the stage for later progress in implementing OMFTS." Of note, "future FSPGs will be required to address the continued evolution of the force structure."

OMFTS requirements. Additionally, OMFTS initiatives and priorities did not take into account the realities, pressures, and priorities faced at the Headquarters.

While official actions were under way to transform the Marine Corps into an OMFTS centered operating force, unofficial debate raged on concerning the positive, negative, and weak areas associated with OMFTS. The process of debate identified as necessary in the original concept paper³¹ also began and can be tracked in the pages of the Marine Corps Gazette as well as papers written at various Military professional schools. The opinions vary. Many documents lauded the concepts and ideas, some questioned the ability of the Marine Corps to execute the concepts with equipment available in the future, and others made the argument that it is time to stop discussing and time to get things rolling. A survey of articles and academic papers clearly indicates a growing frustration among many authors that believed the Corps was not properly preparing for the execution of OMFTS. Many arguments were made that, while the Corps was paying lip service to the new concepts espoused in OMFTS, actual decisions and priorities did not reflect a commitment to the new concepts. In light of the two-year POM cycle and the apparent lack of shift in the POM towards OMFTS based priorities, these concerns proved prophetic.

The 1998 Strategic Studies Group³² published an article in 1999. The article provided an over-arching definition of OMFTS. It stated, “ Broad interpretations of the OMFTS concept have obscured its true nature. Many discussions of OMFTS must

³¹ *Operational maneuver From The Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*, A-1.

overcome a monumental hurdle—achieving an accepted definition for the term.”³³ The studies group “challenge[d] the notion that OMFTS is a revolutionary endstate for future Marine Corps operations. Instead... OMFTS is an evolutionary capability that will lead to the revolution of seabasing.”³⁴ This article declared OMFTS as a means to realizing a new form of amphibious warfare that is conducted completely from the sea with no dependence on land based operations, and claimed that new technology, organization, and doctrine would allow this revolution to take place. This complete dependence on seabasing had unintended consequences that highlighted the disconnect between Headquarters and MCCDC. This specific issue is addressed later in the paper.

Following the Strategic Studies Group article, in June of 1999, MajGen Patrick Howard and LtCol Len Blasiol authored a Gazette article focused on OMFTS.³⁵ This article reaffirmed the intended role of OMFTS in the future of Marine Corps warfighting. According to this article, OMFTS

is the capstone Marine Corps warfighting concept...serves as the basis for the development of the capabilities that will frame the Marine Corps of the 21st Century...stands as the foundation of our institutions future...defines the Marine Corps contribution to the Nation’s defense in the coming century...is the ‘line of departure’ for our Combat Development System, the frame work for achieving the

³² The Strategic Studies Group consists of Command and Staff College students who work on special projects for the Commandant and CG, MCCDC.

³³ Strategic Studies Group – 1998, *Framing OMFTS: An Evolution to a Revolution*, Marine Corps Gazette, January 1999, 72.

³⁴ Strategic Studies Group – 1998, 72.

³⁵ Howard and Blasiol, 18-21. This article carries an official tone in that MajGen Howard, at the time of publishing, was the Deputy CG, MCCDC, and sat on the OMFTS working group and FSPG. Deputy CG, MCCDC, also sits on the senior level development boards in the Combat Development System discussed at the beginning of the paper. LtCol Blasiol was assigned to the Concepts Division at MCCDC.

next step in the evolution of amphibious capabilities and realization of the goal of expending the littoral battlespace through over-the-horizon operations.³⁶

General Howard and LtCol. Blasiol emphasized the importance of developing amphibious warfare for the 21st century and stressed the importance of OMFTS as “the future of our craft—amphibious warfare” and “the next step in the evolution of amphibious capabilities.”³⁷ The final elements of the document discussed programs, equipment and technology and are interesting to note. Challenging the Corps to get on the “same map sheet,” they stated that “OMFTS is the objective; pass the word.”³⁸

The closing thoughts in the article written by the Deputy CG of MCCDC and a member of the concepts branch are very interesting when analyzing the evolution of OMFTS, and in light of events that would unfold in less than year after the article was published.

[We] must look very closely at current and projected programs to ensure that our efforts are consisted with our goals. While there are several equipment programs described above that are critical enablers for OMFTS, there are also equipment programs currently under consideration that do not necessarily enhance our ability to conduct OMFTS....programs that are intended to compliment amphibious power projection should strive for a high level of ‘OMFTS-compliance.’ The guidelines we need are evident in the themes of OMFTS.... These situations require strategic-level resource allocation decisions by the senior leadership: What is the proper level of investment in such programs? How much short-term risk can we accept? Is it advisable to use limited fiscal resources for solutions that are less than optimal, but are available today?³⁹

³⁶ Howard and Blasiol, 18-19.

³⁷ Howard and Blasiol, 18.

³⁸ Howard and Blasiol, 21

³⁹ Howard and Blasiol, 21

While recognizing that the Marine Corps should not mortgage the current capabilities that make it the Nation's force in readiness, the article made it clear that OMFTS must take center stage. "OMFTS must remain the main effort for all processes and systems devoted to the development of future Marine Corps warfighting capabilities.... We must recognize our commitment to the main effort and act accordingly, allowing the principles of OMFTS to harmonize our actions and keep us on the path to success."⁴⁰ One must ask, why a concept, established as the capstone for all Marine Corps future development, focused on, studied, experimented with, and advertised for 3 years still required such strong challenges to "get on board." The events of June 1999 to September 2000 identify the source of the concerns highlighted in the article and are the crux of this study on the development of concepts in the Marine Corps.

In June 1999, General James L. Jones replaced General Krulak as the Commandant of the Marine Corps. As is always the case when leadership changes, the Marine Corps stood by to see what would be changed and modified. Knowing General Krulak's involvement and influence on OMFTS and realizing that many questions and detractors still stood, many in the trenches wondered about the future of OMFTS. Gen. Jones quickly published his initial guidance to the Corps, but one subject—OMFTS—was noticeably absent in his direction and guidance over the first year. The silence on the subject was profound in light of the position OMFTS had seized over the previous 3 years. In his first year, however, the General Jones was not standing still. He initiated several actions that were intended to focus the Marine Corps on the future, reevaluate the standing concepts and programs currently on the drawing board, and provide a

⁴⁰ Howard and Blasiol, 21

comprehensive set of recommendations for the future. It appears that the new Commandant was bidding his time while enough thought, wisdom, and experience was combined to provide a reliable, unemotional recommendation arrived at by a consensus of the Corps senior leadership.

This year of analysis resulted in the publishing of *Marine Corps Strategy 21*. According to General Jones, this document is the Marine Corps' "axis of advance into the 21st Century and focuses our efforts and resources towards a common objective."⁴¹ This new document would have definite impact on the perspectives Marines had operated under over the previous several years—it provided a *strategic* aim point for the future that was much more encompassing than the *operational* level focus of OMFTS. This strategy made the future intent for the Marine Corps very clear:

Marine Corps Strategy 21 is the capstone strategy of the Marine Corps and describes our axis of advance into the 21st century.... The Marine Corps' Vision and *Marine Corps Strategy 21* provide the basis for our warfighting concepts and guides the process of innovation, experimentation, change, and adaptation to ensure the Corps is the most ready when the Nation is the least ready.⁴²

While taking nothing away from the importance of OMFTS as an operational concept, the leadership of the Corps provided a strategic capstone that will guide the Marine Corps on a broad front across all aspects of interest while still providing a foundation on which to build multiple broad operational concepts that will meet the needs of the Nation in the 21st Century. A new term, Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare, emerged as the overarching operational concept that will—along with various supporting documents—define the

⁴¹ United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Strategy 21* (n.p., n.d.), introduction. Cited hereafter as *Marine Corps Strategy 21*.

⁴² *Marine Corps Strategy 21*, 9.

broad spectrum of operational capabilities that will be required for the Corps of the future.⁴³ OMFTS was removed from its position atop the hierarchy of Marine Corps operational concepts and added to the list of emerging capabilities.⁴⁴

For several years, the Marine Corps had sought a defining principle that would set the stage for continued relevance into the 21st Century. OMFTS had been the answer. What caused the change? What circumstances and considerations lead to a broader focus in the Marine Corps? The lessons of the last few years, as the Marine Corps wrestled with defining a direction, provide insights and cautions for future leaders when considering how concepts are developed against the backdrop of requirements and money. The remainder of this paper will identify lessons that begin to take shape from the recent past and provide a road map for future innovation and concept development.

BALANCING THE SYSTEM—CREDIBILITY NOW AND RELEVANCE IN THE FUTURE

Did the Marine Corps go wrong in focusing on OMFTS? Events of the last year indicate that OMFTS did not provide a broad enough focus to serve effectively as the capstone concept that would provide the vision needed for the Corps to continue into the future. This change should not be viewed as a reversal of the policies of the previous

⁴³ *Marine Corps Strategy 21*, 5.

⁴⁴ Very important to this discussion is an understanding that nothing in the evolution of the Corps' guiding or capstone principles has changed the importance of OMFTS as a future operational capability. OMFTS remains a viable, necessary, and well thought out concept, and, coupled with the associated supporting concepts and requirements, it will have a lasting legacy in the Marine Corps.

commandant or as a negative judgment of his priorities. Rather, it is the next logical step in the progression of future thinking. The future will build on the gains achieved through OMFTS. Yes, OMFTS focused on a very narrow front, but it also brought several initiatives and issues to light that will greatly enhance future capabilities. Several supporting concepts concerning seabasing, logistics and expeditionary fires emerged from the efforts to make OMFTS an actual capability. The Combat Development System, Requirements Process, and Program Development all received greater scrutiny because of the Corps' focus on the challenges of executing OMFTS. Finally, many systems and programs were initiated and received attention because of OMFTS. Arguably, MV-22, JSF, AAV, LPD-17, and DD-21, all systems critical to future Marine operations, would not have received the attention, funding, and priorities without the OMFTS concept driving an overarching requirement.

An overarching concept that directs the future of the Corps must provide a philosophical base that touches the unique mindset, heritage, tradition, capabilities and culture of the Marine Corps. It must recognize the innovative character of Marines throughout history. It must not only address how Marines will fight on the battlefield, but how they will conduct themselves in peace, how they will operate with other services, and how they will support each other and their families. General Jones put it this way, "Today, as always, our contribution to the nation lies in our ability to 'Make Marines, Win Battles and Create Quality Citizens.' This is a path we have taken for generations."⁴⁵ *Marine Strategy 21* recognized the importance of an "axis of advance"

⁴⁵ Headquarters, USMC, *Concepts and Issues 2000: Leading the pack in a new Era*, (Washington, DC: Program and Resource Department, 2000), 31.

that “focuses our efforts and resources towards a common objective” and “is by design a broad axis, that will adapt to changes in the strategic environment.”⁴⁶ *An OMFTS-focused approach limited the Marine Corps to an operational level focus and provided no strategic intent, direction, or endstate.*⁴⁷

Any concept designed to lead the Marine Corps strategic future must involve a broad spectrum of input, assessment, and critical thinking. The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) stated, “One of the Marine Corps’ weaker points is that our concept development is not connected very well with the headquarters. If we had passed OMFTS around the staff at HQMC we would have probably highlighted some serious problems and may have slowed it down to a more manageable pace.”⁴⁸ Three separate innovations addressed the shortcoming mentioned by the ACMC: the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC), the General Officer’s Futures Group (GOFG), and the Executive Off Sites (EOS).

In an effort to bring more visibility at a higher level to the Marine Corps Requirements Process,⁴⁹ the Commandant directed that the Marine Requirements Oversight Council be established. The MROC, chaired by the Assistant Commandant and modeled after the Joint Requirements Oversight Council on which the ACMC sits, is composed of the respective Deputy Commandants for each of the Marine Corps

⁴⁶ *Marine Strategy 21*, introduction.

⁴⁷ Emphasis added by the author.

⁴⁸ Williams interview.

⁴⁹ The beginning of this paper discussed briefly the requirements process and its direct link to the Combat Development System overseen by the Marine Corps Combat Development System.

Departments. Also participating in the MROC process is the Warfighting Development and Integration Division from MCCDC. The MROC principles serve as advocates for each element of the MAGTF, providing a high-level senior officer to protect and represent the interests of each element of the MAGTF, including the supporting establishment, thus directly linking the concerns of the operating forces with the process. Programs, concepts, ideas, and initiatives deemed important and impacting on the Marine Corps are brought before the MROC for guidance, decisions and recommendations to the Commandant. The unique makeup of this organization ensures that any issue of importance to the Marine Corps receives open and critical scrutiny across a broad spectrum of interests and brings the concept development, requirements, and programs together in order to provide visibility and guidance and reduce conflicts between programs and future concept development.

The MROC is a good thing. It has taken some time to work out all the kinks, but I think we have it just about right. The key is that it brings the advocates together to argue about things at the three star level. We just looked at Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future)...The MROC adds the senior Headquarters leaders to the concept development process, and that is what was missing. This is a great way to combine the requirement owners (advocates) with the long-range concepts.⁵⁰

In addition to establishing the MROC, General Jones directed the previous APMC, General Terrence R. Dake, to chair a General Officer's Futures Group (GOFG). This group was composed of Marine generals of all ranks and from a cross section of the Corps. CG, MCCDC hosted and provided support. They met once a month for six months. Their mission was to assess the current position of the Marine Corps, strategically, and prepare recommendations for future direction of the Corps. The results

of these meetings were presented to the Commandant who then sought the input of all of the General Officers in the Corps through the General Officer's Symposium conducted in the fall of 2000.

The GOFG came up with 23 recommendations...some we could execute tomorrow, others would take extensive time and change to implement. The bottom line was that the input was very good and substantial. The recommendations from the GOFG were taken to the General Officer's Symposium (GOS) [the last week of September 2000] for presentation and discussion. We wanted to get the Corps' leadership's view. At the GOS, we got general agreement on things. The next step will be to take it to the Executive Offsite [the week of 16 October 2000].⁵¹

The development of the MROC, coupled with the GOFG, put into play some focused, well thought out, and experience-based recommendations on the current and future decisions that needed to be made concerning the future of the Marine Corps.

The final development in ensuring a broad involvement in developing a relevant and useful plan for the future came when the Executive Offsite (EOS) was developed.⁵² Following input from the GOS, the GOFG recommendations were sent to the EOS "to let the senior leaders make decisions – kind of like taking it to the senate, once the house has agreed, and saying, 'ok, what do you think?' From the EOS we hope to bring out some approved initiatives."⁵³

The MROC, GOFG, and EOS provided visibility across the Corps and allowed input from all interested and concerned parties. Program development was represented,

⁵⁰ Williams interview.

⁵¹ Williams interview.

⁵² Quarterly, the Commandant meets with the senior leaders of the Marine Corps, all three and four stars and civilian equivalents, to discuss matters pertinent to the Marine Corps and to reach consensus on initiatives that affect the future of the Corps.

requirement development was represented, concept development was represented, and most importantly, every element of the operating force was represented. This forced a balanced approach to concept development since those who may see problems or conflicts were involved at several levels to air those concerns up front.

As late as June 1999, one general officer called for “OMFTS-compliance” in our program development and claimed “there are also equipment programs currently under consideration that do not necessarily enhance our ability to conduct OMFTS.”⁵⁴ A Marine Forces Commanders recommended adding 53 officers and 294 enlisted—for a total of 347 Marines—and moving an entire battalion from Hawaii to California to reorganize reconnaissance assets to better support OMFTS.⁵⁵ While no one argued the need to improve recon in the Marine Corps, there was a cost associated with it. An increase of 1000 Marines costs the Marine Corps \$50 million a year.⁵⁶ It would not take too many recommendations affecting relatively small functions in the Corps to break the bank. It was an issue of zero sum gain. If this were added here, who would give it up there? If Congress approved an increase in the Marine Corps total manning to support the needed increase, are they going to provide the additional money, too? The question was, do the Marines really buy off on this? General Williams explained the problem as it

⁵³ Williams interview.

⁵⁴ Howard and Blasiol, 21.

⁵⁵ Fulford, Carlton W., LtGen., USMC, and others, *Organizing Marine Corps ISR Forces for Tomorrow*, Marine Corps Gazette, June 1999, 26-27.

⁵⁶ Smith, William M., Col, USMC, Military Assistant to the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, interviewed by the author, 2 October 2000.

came to a head in early 2000 when he was still the Deputy Commandant, Programs and

Resources:

Lets look at POM 02 this year for example. We sat down and analyzed POM 02 and said, 'Ok, assume we are able to buy everything listed in POM 02,' meaning that all those things listed from FY02-07 come true and on the last day of FY07 they are all delivered on time and as programmed. What would the Corps look like? Is that what we want? We took the results to the Commandant, and they were very positive. We would have a good-looking Marine Corps.

The ACE [Air Combat Element] would be nearly reconstituted. We would not be flying any of the current platforms that we are flying today except for the EA-6B. The JSF would not be completely delivered but it would be well on its way. The GCE [Ground Combat Element] would have new artillery, rockets, light vehicles, AAV [Advance Amphibious Assault Vehicle], Remanufactured LAVs [Light Armored Vehicles], and a new infantry weapon.

All told, there is going to be a fairly dramatic change, but it ain't OMFTS! It became apparent to us after the analysis that we are buying a much more capable Marine Corps, but we aren't buying what is needed for OMFTS. The result was to send this to MCCDC to bounce off our current concepts and ask are we doing the right thing here. This is the reality of the cycle once fiscal restrains are added. We do not want to head in the wrong direction, but at the same time it can not be a dramatic change over night. It is a slow process of yearly shaping the Marine Corps through this process to make it into what we want for the future. This is why it is important to have a broad understanding of where we want to go so that year in and year out we can continue to chip away at modernizing, improving and changing that which will get us where we want to be.⁵⁷

The unintended consequences of a too narrowly focused capstone concept forced decision makers to avoid making the decisions that would have a negative impact on the Corps.

This was a vision that translated into an operational capability or concept without some clear thinking of the implications. If we advertise that we want to do everything from the sea—maneuver, logistics, fires—and there is only enough sea lift now and in the future for 2.5 MEBs [Marine Expeditionary Brigades] of lift, then it could be said, 'why not cut the Marine Corps to the size they have to be to

⁵⁷ Williams interview.

conduct OMFTS as it is defined.’ Force structure limitations alone would have painted us into a box by standing by OMFTS.⁵⁸

There was an obviously mismatch between perceptions and realities. Despite the statement in the first implementation study of 1996, many deficiencies identified had been ignored in subsequent POM developments, indicating that priorities were not properly aligned or understood from the start.⁵⁹ Money, and the priority of where it is spent, ruled the day.

Any lasting future vision or concept must begin and end with the Joint Community in mind. If it does not, it risks extinction before any lasting effect can be felt. OMFTS made little mention of its importance to, impact on, contribution to, or reliance on the Joint community. The approach was more one of conflict up front; if we build it, they will come. There is little doubt that the Joint world was less than enthusiastic about what the Corps was doing when the Marines had a hard time articulating the intent of OMFTS. The Corps seemingly took the approach of trust me and you will see how great we will be. “The OMFTS concept paper never mentions other Services (other than the Navy) or coalition partners. It never mentions a CinC or joint task force under whose command a major operation would generally be conducted...The days are long gone when the Navy-Marine Corps team conducted operations in isolation.”⁶⁰ Beyond lip service, the Marine Corps ignored the importance of including joint considerations at the level required by today’s expectations. Instead, challenges were issued for Marines to

⁵⁸ Williams interview.

⁵⁹ Implementation Study Executive Summary, 2-1.

⁶⁰ Cancian, Mark F., Col., USMCR, *Where is OMFTS Going?* Marine Corps Gazette, June 1999, 24.

get the word out about how great OMFTS truly was. The Marine Corps was having a difficult time figuring out OMFTS itself. How were the other services, the joint world, and the CinCs supposed to understand it? Understandably, there were some reservations in the joint world about the Marine Corps direction. A concept that guides the Marine Corps into the future must be easily understood, clearly articulated, based on joint doctrine, and have obvious and stated application to the Geographic Combatant Commanders and any joint task force commander.

Today and in the future, the Nation will employ its military might through Joint and Combined operations. The Nation's plans and operations are owned and operated by the Geographic Combatant Commanders. Those regional CinCs play a large part in determining a service's relevance. They determine that simply by making the decision to plan for and employ that service in their standing and contingency plans. If a CinC does not need someone, then the Nation questions the utility of paying for that service, and, the argument follows, the service has lost its relevance and will wither on the vine. The Marine Corps, in conjunction with the Navy, currently provides the Geographic Combatant Commanders with a flexible, inexpensive, scalable response option. Any future concept must continue that theme. Future concepts must clearly fit the CinCs needs and desires or they will be ignored.

In any competent and highly skilled organization, there is a strong desire to identify problems, make recommendations for improvement and then rapidly implement those recommendations. The Marine Corps is no different. This is particularly true when an exciting, new, and innovative concept is on the street. Anything seen as a roadblock or hindrance is considered old fashioned or non-supportive. In reality, the program,

requirements, and budgetary programs serve as a “governor” for too rapid of change. These programs force a time factor that often times allows cooler heads or passage of time to point out the reality of the situation. OMFTS was no different. The concept came out quickly, built a head of steam, and was ready to transform the Corps. In spite of the enthusiasm and drive, the budgetary restrictions and the need to support current requirements and missions slowed the process long enough to let others have a second look. As a result and before irreversible decisions were made that would have impacted across the Corps, the process of checks and balances identified problems and readdressed the situation. Additionally, changes, such as the MROC, were put in place to ensure the Corps was not sidetracked in the future. General Williams described it this way,

It is a slow process of yearly shaping the Marine Corps to make it into what we want for the future. This is why it is important to have a broad understanding of where we want to go so that year in and year out we can continue to chip away at modernizing, improving and changing that which will get us where we want to be.”

A slow, deliberate system is good. A clearly defined vision and focus is necessary to ensure that those yearly shaping activities are synchronized to support the desired end state.

In a perfect world, a service would be able to identify the concepts that will make it a viable, relevant future asset to the nation, determine which innovation and technological advances are required to make it a reality, and set the wheels in motion for a target date of concept inception. Put another way, doctrine should drive the development of technology and innovation, unencumbered by budgetary constraints. Unfortunately, that is simply not the reality of the situation. The budget is tight, it takes money to operate daily—particularly if your intent is to be ready when the nation is least

ready—and it takes more money to pay for expensive technological advances that improve future operating capabilities. Stubbornly holding to the moral high ground of a concept that cannot be paid for is very noble, but it will also lead to extinction if current credibility or capability is sacrificed. Willing it to happen does not cut it!

Generally, the Marine Corps traded an operational concept—OMFTS—for a strategic vision—Marine Corps Strategy 21. This strategy encompasses the vision statement formulated by the General Officer Future Group, validated through the General Officer Symposium and the Executive Off-Site, and approved by the Commandant. Nothing in that process discounted the validity, soundness, and need for Operational Maneuver from the Sea. The heart of the issue was merely a matter of perspective. Was OMFTS a broad enough concept to encompass all that the Marine Corps is about? The evidence says no. The Marine Corps needed an overarching operational concept, but that concept must be built around a strategic perspective with a vision that “articulates in fundamental terms ‘who’ we are, ‘what’ we will be, and, most importantly, ‘how’ we will achieve our desired endstate.”⁶¹ OMFTS started the ball rolling. Strategy 21 is intended to carry the Corps to the next level.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Only the benefit of hindsight will provide the true measure of success of any concept or vision for the future. Without a crystal ball, it is impossible to determine if the

⁶¹ Commandant of the Marine Corps, message to all Marines, “The Vision Statement of the U.S. Marine Corps,” ALMAR 042/00, 16 November 2000, 1.

Marine Corps or any other service has it right. Conditions can be set, risks measured, and assumptions made all in hope of identifying the key components that will define a path for the future that leads to success. Quite clearly, success will be tied directly to establishing and maintaining relevance. A service that does not make significant and unique contributions to the national defense strategy as a whole will not survive. Mortgaging present capabilities, however, will not attain future relevance. The lessons of Marine Corps concept development, as they relate to OMFTS, provide some very basic foundational considerations for future concepts, vision, and direction.

As unsavory as it may seem, money will drive the fight. Concepts must be measured realistically against the fiscal restrictions placed on the service and the Department of Defense. Those that develop concepts must understand that the priorities for attaining the assets needed to achieve success in any one concept will compete against other assets that are not always visible to the Combat Development System. As wonderful as a concept may seem, it cannot break the bank, therefore, there must be detailed linkage and coordination between concept developers and program developers in order for both to understand the requirements and restrictions that are placed on each other.

Because of the fiscal restraints placed on the Marine Corps, it must be prepared to execute new concepts and emerging doctrine with the high-end equipment now being purchased. If it cannot be done with the V-22, JSF, AAV, DD-21, to name a few, the concept must change. Most of these high cost items will not be fully implemented into operational use until the 2005 to 2010 time frame, if not later. This implies they will just be hitting stride in the 2015 to 2020 time frame. There will be no time, inclination, or

money to produce a different piece of equipment to replace those items if they are found not to support existing doctrine. It costs too much. In a sense, this technology will drive the doctrine of the future. It is key to get it correct the first time. The budget will not allow failure.

A slow system is a good thing. The POM cycle forces slow, incremental adjustments to priorities. Small adjustments made each year bring about the changes required to adjust for future requirements. While this system seems rather frustrating at times—particularly to those hard-chargers excited about implementing a new, exciting, and revolutionary idea—it governs the speed of change and development to ensure that the correct course is taken. This slow deliberate process ensures that more people have visibility and input as new individuals assume different levels of responsibility each year. The POM process prevents a service from becoming a victim of its own enthusiasm by heading down a path, unchecked, that leads to failure. This process cannot be short circuited or circumvented under the guise of expedience, or there is a risk of breaking the bank.

This link between programming and concepts ensures that concepts are not developed in a vacuum. This demands that a broad spectrum of people be involved in the dialogue and coordination of a concept. While there are specific activities responsible for the development and implementation of concepts, a large cross section of Marine activities must not only see the plan but also have equity in its development. There often times is hesitation to show too many people a plan out of fear of being told it will not work or that there are holes in it. That, however, is exactly why it must be done. The current vision and future strategy for the Corps was developed by a group trusted by and

representative of a broad cross section of the Corps and then presented to the Commandant. This group felt they had equity in and responsibility for the enduring capability of the Marine Corps. This will ensure broad understanding, commitment, and ownership of the vision for the future. As new concepts are developed, this is a lesson that should not be lost. The Corps must: maintain open doors for new ideas, avoid force-feeding the system, listen to the masses, give everyone equity in the concept, and ensure links exist between every function affected or influenced by the implications of the concept.

While much of the work in developing concepts is done internally to a service, it will ultimately be executed in a joint environment. Because of that, every concept must work in a joint environment, must support joint operations, and must be designed to rely on joint operations for areas of weakness within the concept itself. One of the first questions a new Marine Corps concept must face is, "what do the CinCs want, expect and need from their Marines in the future?" Developing concepts that have not been thought out and coordinated with the joint community will lead to failure. The nation's people, Congress, and the National Command Authority expect their military to exercise as a team.

There are legitimate opportunities presented when functioning with a joint team that brings synergistic effects that cannot be achieved individually. In order to have that success in the future, however, joint thinking must drive initial concept development and implementation. It cannot be an afterthought. It should not be a stretch for Marines to think more jointly in their future concept development. The Marine Corps has a long history of innovations and unique capabilities that have contributed to the Nation's

defense in ways in which no other is capable. Marines, by the very nature of the Marine Air Ground Task Force organization, tend to think in joint terms. The Marine Corps' relationship with the Navy provides insight into cooperation and coordination that others do not have the innate capability to understand. Because of its small size, Marines have always worked hand in hand with sister and allied services. Joint is nothing new to Marines. It is time to embrace the reality that joint considerations are more than a thorn in the side of progress.

Finally, many in the national defense community believe that if a service is not in transformation it is not keeping up with the times. While many services have initiated huge shifts in doctrinal thinking and created new structure under the guise of transformation for the future, the Marine Corps has had some criticism for not showing the same enthusiasm. Marines have never succumbed to peer pressure in the past and this is no time to start. Transformations, revolutions, and upheavals imply stagnation, loss of credibility, and no relevance without a rapid change in the way of doing business. This goes against the very core and nature of Marine Corps thinking. Marines historically have sought continuous growth, change, and improvement in order to avoid the circumstances that would require revolution or transformation. "We are a transformational organization – by design. We do not do it in spurts – we do it all the time! We just are not currently getting credit for it."⁶²

While the Marine Corps needs to aggressively avoid making changes or steps towards the future under a misperceived requirement to transform, it must also never forsake the heritage of constant innovation and improvement that has maintained its

relevance so far. As the ACMC expressed it, “Frankly, our track record for picking where the next war will be is poor, but our track record in being prepared for the next war is very good. We are preparing now and still maintaining our competence across a broad spectrum as is our mandate from congress.”⁶³ A constant, seemingly plodding approach to change and innovation may not seem sexy, but it has led the Marines for centuries. The key is to avoid complacency and always look for the little changes that will improve the whole for the future. The Marine Corps’ transformation started in 1776 and is nowhere near its expected completion!

The Marine Corps, like all of the other services, faces extreme pressure to be prepared for the changing future. The comforts of history have seemingly been knocked loose from their very foundations. This has lead to many new threats, challenges and unknowns. No one can know what the future will truly hold. This new era demands new approaches and concepts that will render many ways of military thinking irrelevant. In light of this, Marine Corps future concepts must be based on a broad vision for the future while balanced against the requirements of today. The nature of economic realities, broad prosperity, and long-term peace has made this balancing act a challenging undertaking. Success requires focused leadership with equity in the solution, coordinated and thoughtful application of resource prioritization, and an understanding of the broad challenges faced internally and externally. No single individual or group will have the monopoly on successful future ideas. It must be done as a team.

⁶² Williams interview.

⁶³ Williams interview.

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