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**FRAGO 01/2016: Advance to Contact**

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**United States Marine Corps**

**General Robert B. Neller  
37th Commandant of the Marine Corps**

Effective: 19 January 2016

*The sole justification for the United States Marine Corps is to secure or protect national policy objectives by military force when peaceful means alone cannot.*

*MCDP-1 Warfighting*

## **ORIENTATION:**

On 24 September 2015 I had the honor and privilege of assuming the Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In communicating to the Marine Corps that day, I stated that the Planning Guidance of our 36th Commandant, General Dunford, remained in effect, and that after the New Year, I would publish a Frag Order to refine that guidance. The following is that Frag Order. Since September I have traveled around our Corps and spoken to thousands of Marines, Sailors and Civilian Marines. I have heard your questions, concerns, and opinions, and believe the path we are on is a good one. I can state that the cardinal direction we have charted is a clear and well thought out course. Who we are as a Corps, and as Marines remains as laid out in General Dunford's Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG), which set the conditions for us to innovate, adapt and win in the future.

This Frag Order will ensure we maintain the momentum we have gained as an institution over the past year. It provides a refined course that accounts for our current operational tempo and the ever changing security environment, and sets near term goals necessary to meet our obligations. This document is an axis of advance to create balance across the Corps so we remain "most ready when the Nation is least ready," both now and in the future. The focus of the following guidance is to describe the institutional objectives we will reach over the next four years and to set the conditions for the success of our Corps for generations to come. In short, we have a way ahead – now we need to "cross the Line of Departure and Advance to Contact."

*"FRAGO:"*

*...an abbreviated form of an operation order (verbal, written or digital) that eliminates the need for restating information contained in a basic operation order. It may be issued in sections. It is issued after an operation order to change or modify that order or to execute a branch or sequel to that order.*

*JP 5-0 Joint Operation Planning*

## *FRAGO #1, Advance to Contact*

### **SITUATION:**

Over the last 15 years, we have fought the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and continued to respond to crises around the globe, during which Marines and Sailors have preserved and enhanced the professional warfighting legacy of our Corps. Yet, this is not an 'inter-war period.' We remain forward deployed, at high operational tempo, and in harm's way today. As we have remained engaged in the current fight and operationally committed, our enemies and potential adversaries have not stood idle. During these years, they have developed new capabilities which now equal or exceed our own. Threats to our Nation's interests have evolved, and instability around the globe has steadily increased. This unstable and increasingly dangerous world situation is further complicated by a constrained resource environment from which we must continue current operations, reset our equipment, and maintain our warfighting readiness, and at the same time, modernize the force. Therefore, it is imperative that we continually balance our available resources between current commitments and future readiness requirements. This will require pragmatic institutional choices and a clear-eyed vision of where we intend to be in 10-20 years.

Fundamental to our character as a Marine Corps is our role as the Nation's force-in-readiness. We must continue to be ready for operations across the range of military operations (ROMO). At the same time, we recognize the current and future fight may not be what we experienced in the past. It will encompass not just the domains of land, air and sea, but also space and the cyber domain. It will include information operations and operations across the electromagnetic spectrum. It will involve rapidly changing and evolving technologies and concepts, which will force us to be more agile, flexible and adaptable. Most importantly, it will require Marines who are smart, fit, disciplined, resilient, and able to adapt to uncertainty and to the unknown. This future vision represents our starting position to cross the line of departure into the next four years. We will move out and implement actions to achieve our objectives. We will make the force ready for today, but also prepared for tomorrow by maintaining the institutional agility necessary to address the range of challenges across steady state, crisis, contingencies and major theater combat operations.

## **MISSION:**

The U.S. Marine Corps will:

- Remain the Nation’s Crisis Response force;
- Maintain our forward posture and ability to operate in a Joint/Coalition environment;
- Serve as a maritime-based expeditionary force that operates across the ROMO in a five domain battlespace (sea, air, land, cyber, and space);
- Project combat power from a variety of naval platforms and land bases;
- Consist of a highly trained and educated force operating the most modern and technologically advanced equipment available;

**...in order to be the most ready force when the Nation is the least ready.**

## **EXECUTION:**

We will focus our near term efforts in five areas that are vital to achieving our future success:

- PEOPLE
- READINESS
- TRAINING / SIMULATION / EXPERIMENTATION
- INTEGRATION WITH THE NAVAL AND JOINT FORCE
- MODERNIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Across these five interrelated areas, three major themes run throughout and form the tenets of my guidance:

- Maintaining and improving the high quality people that make up today’s Corps;
- Decentralizing the training and preparation for war, while adhering to Maneuver Warfare principles in the conduct of training and operations;
- Modernizing the force, especially by leveraging new and evolving technologies.

*Human will, instilled through leadership, is the driving force of all action in war.*  
*MCDP-1 Warfighting*

**1. People:** Marines have historically possessed an innate drive to succeed, to excel in all that they do, including winning in combat. We will sustain this trait and ensure this drive to succeed, excel, and win continues to define our Corps by maintaining **a force of the highest quality, which is smart, resilient, fit, disciplined, and able to overcome adversity. Recruiting and retaining quality men and women of character in today's Corps is our friendly center of gravity and our highest priority.** To achieve this end, we must continue to recruit and retain the best men and women, across the changing demographic of the Nation, who are ready and willing to step up and accept the challenge of becoming Marines. Among those that earn the title "Marine," we must ensure we recognize, promote and retain those who are the most competent, mature and capable leaders, and who are innovative and willing to implement change. At the same time, we will continue to take care of and support our families, our wounded and injured, and keep faith with all Marines who have left our active ranks. To do all this, we will:

**a. Conduct a comprehensive review of our force structure and organization no later than the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 17 – OPR CD&I; M&RA in support**

We will evaluate our force structure based on available resources, current commitments and an ever changing global threat environment. We will look at the total force, both the Active and Reserve Components, but will focus initially on the organization of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Command Element, the Division, the Air Wing, the Logistics Group, and the Supporting Establishment, in order to: 1) validate the structure and task/skill profiles we require to increase our breadth and depth of expertise; 2) pay our manpower bills; 3) make structure changes necessary to meet future force requirements. We will be willing to accept risk in the size and organization of our units in order to create the capabilities we need for the future.

**b. Grow Information Operations (IO), Cyber, and Electronic Warfare (EW) capability at Marine Forces (MARFOR) and Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) levels to enhance the capabilities of forward deployed forces no later than the end of FY17. – OPR CD&I; M&RA and all HQMC agencies in support**

We will engage in deliberate, holistic, total force planning to shape the Marine Corps of 2020-2025 and beyond based on our future operating concepts and capabilities. We will look at advances in technology that create opportunities to adjust table of organization (T/O) structure spaces that more appropriately meet current and future force operational requirements.

**c. Review manpower personnel assignment and promotion processes and First/Subsequent Term Alignment Plan (FTAP/STAP) retention, in order to reward high performing Marines by April 2016. – OPR M&RA**

In order to ensure that deploying units are ready, we will review our assignment policies to ensure leaders and Marines arrive with adequate time to participate in their unit's pre-deployment training. We will review our existing Service-level promotion process, as well as the First and Subsequent Term Alignment Plan processes to ensure we are recognizing and retaining those who possess and exhibit the leadership, talent and skills for the future force. As part of this process, we will implement a time in grade (TIG) promotion review process at the unit level (Battalion/Squadron) for Lance Corporal to Corporal and Corporal to Sergeant.

**d. We will reenergize "Marine For Life," as a cradle to grave program with appropriate unity of effort/unity of command by the end of FY16. – OPR M&RA; CD&I in support**

This program will support our Marines and families while on active duty and once they leave our active ranks. Additionally, when Marines decide to leave active service, we will ensure we know why they leave and concurrently provide them the direction and the tools needed for success in the next chapter of their lives. As part of the process, we will reach out to all who have left our active ranks to engage them in supporting all Marines and their families.

**e. Beginning 1 April 2016, we will implement the assignment of all qualified Marines into previously restricted MOSs and units – OPR M&RA; MCCDC, TECOM and PP&O in support**

This process will be done in a responsible, measured, deliberate, and standards-based manner, in order to ensure both the combat readiness of the units involved and the success of the Marines assigned to them. We will continue to collect data on all aspects of the process in order to

further our understanding of the impacts of our actions, both to units and to individual Marines.

**End State:** The Marines of our Corps represent the American people who we have sworn to defend and protect. Through our recruiting, training, education, and retention of superb, talented, and committed men and women, we will enhance the quality and diversity of our Corps, and ensure that we maintain our ability to remain the Nation's pre-eminent force-in-readiness. We will achieve the right balance across our Operating Forces, headquarters structures, key enablers, external assignments, and supporting establishment to generate a force capable of warfighting across all five domains. Finally, we will ensure that all Marines and their families: active, reserve, and those who have left our ranks, are part of the Marine Family for life, and that the support structure is there for their success, both in and out of uniform.

*As the Nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps must maintain itself for immediate employment in "any clime and place" and in any type of conflict. All peacetime activities should focus on achieving combat readiness.*

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**2. Readiness:** Americans expect their Marine Corps to be most ready when the Nation is least ready. Readiness is not defined by just our equipment, supply, and maintenance. Readiness also accounts for the quality and challenging nature of our training, and the mental, spiritual and physical preparedness of Marines and Sailors across the force. Readiness does not just happen. It is the result of a variety of actions: commitment by leadership, standards-based inspections, evaluated drills, and training exercises. Finally, readiness requires an understanding by all Marines and Sailors that the call can come any time. We must be ready and able to answer. To achieve this end we will:

- a. Expand readiness efforts across the Corps to reflect a “culture of standards and readiness,” encompassing the readiness of our Marines, Sailors, Civilians and Families, our facilities, and our equipment. – OPR PP&O; I&L, MARFORCOM in support**

We will continue to complete the equipment reset of the Force, and to **review quarterly (up to and including the CMC level)** our overall readiness, **across all applicable areas.** We must stay focused on aviation readiness due to its current state and execute our plan to recapitalize this element of the MAGTF. We will maintain and man our

bases and stations to enable deployment for contingencies, provide realistic training, and provide the support to Marines and families that is essential to their preparedness and resilience to live successfully in our high operational tempo culture.

**b. Increase the number of deployable and ready Marines across the Force. – All Commands and HQMC Agencies**

We will immediately and aggressively reduce the number of non-deployable Marines and Sailors, especially those injured during training. Part of this effort must address destructive behaviors. Abuse of alcohol, abuse of illegal and prescription drugs, sexual assault, hazing and other high risk behaviors all negatively impact the readiness of the team. Initiatives like Protect What You've Earned (PWYE) will be part of this effort.

**c. Establish a Force Fitness Instructor program no later than the end of FY17. – OPR CD&I, M&RA in support**

To ensure we are both physically fit and mentally tough, we will build a cadre of Force Fitness Instructors, assigned at the Company/Battery/Squadron level, who will be responsible to the commander for the development of the unit's physical training program.

**End State:** A Marine Corps that is able to rapidly deploy and operate with agility and flexibility in a five domain battlespace across the range of military operations...and win. On a daily basis our objective is to have the maximum number of Marines present and effective for duty that are trained and equipped with operationally functional equipment, and ready for immediate deployment worldwide. All Marines and Sailors will understand they are part of a team that needs them to be at their very best every day.

*As the hardware of war improves through technological development, so must the tactical, operational, and strategic usage adapt to its improved capabilities both to maximize our own capabilities and to counteract our enemy's.*

*MCDP-1 Warfighting*

**3. Training, Simulation, and Experimentation:** Organizing and executing high quality training is a difficult task. It takes time, deliberate thought, and effort. Our approach to training must evolve. It will emphasize the basics: combined arms, competency in the use of our weapons and systems, and expeditionary



operations; but it must reemphasize operations in a degraded command, control, communications, computers and intelligence (C4I) environment, camouflage/deception, operations at night, operations in a nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) environment, and decision-making in rapidly unfolding and uncertain situations. We must provide opportunities to experiment and work with the latest technological advances. In all training, as in actual operations, we will emphasize decentralizing authority and placing accountability down to the lowest level of leadership—to train as we will fight. In order to learn and improve, we will aggressively experiment, testing new concepts and capabilities, within existing training venues, and developing emerging venues where appropriate. We will:

**a. Establish an experimentation roadmap to capitalize on existing and emerging technology and MAGTF level exercises to provide virtual training opportunities at Squad, Company, Battalion, Squadron, and MAGTF levels to be implemented no later than the end of FY 17. – OPR CD&I; MARFORCOM in support**

We must capture what is being done now across the force and training establishment, integrate those actions today, and incorporate a path forward that will capitalize on emerging technologies and future opportunities. Concurrently, we will work to leverage a virtual and constructive training environment and tools to train our major subordinate command (MSC) and major subordinate element (MSE) headquarters (HQ), focusing on our leaders. Enabled by technology, we will increase the amount of training each unit can accomplish—to “increase the reps” in mentally and physically stressing environments for all elements of the MAGTF before they do so on the battlefield.

**b. Reinvigorate a Maneuver Warfare mindset for the 21st Century. – OPR CD&I; M&RA in support**

Our current training schedule of major events - amphibious exercises such as Bold Alligator, Dawn Blitz, Freedom Banner; Large Scale Exercises (LSEs); Integrated Training Exercises (ITX); Mountain Warfare Training Center (MWTC) rotations; Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One/Weapons and Tactics Instructor (MAWTS-1/WTI) courses, and others, will all focus on building our maritime based operational capability while also providing venues for experimentation.

We will continue efforts to decrease centralized proscribed training requirements to accomplish mission essential tasks (METs). We will emphasize and increase opportunities to conduct force-on-force evolutions and operations within degraded environments in our training

in order to challenge our Marines against a “thinking enemy” and maximize realism.

We will re-emphasize that Marines and Sailors of all ranks have the responsibility to educate themselves. Commanders will enable educational opportunities and will conduct unit level PME for all ranks.

**End State:** A 21st Century training and education continuum from ‘Squad Leader equivalent to MAGTF commander’ that incorporates the best tenets of live and virtual “reps and sets” in a parallel and complementary manner. The Marine Corps will be better trained, better educated, physically and mentally fit, and ready to prevail in the uncertain and volatile environments that will characterize future battlefields and contingencies.

*Our current naval doctrine is based on the tenets of maneuver warfare  
MCDP-1 Warfighting*

**4. Integration with the Naval and Joint Force:** We are first and foremost a naval combined arms expeditionary force. We will reinforce our role as a naval expeditionary force to create decision space for national leaders and assure access for the Joint Force as part of a naval campaign. Furthermore, we will shape our force explicitly to operate as part of the Joint Force, understanding where we will both leverage and enable the capabilities of the Navy, Army, Air Force, and Special Operations Forces (SOF). We will:

**a. Establish a Naval Operating Concept in conjunction with the Navy to be completed in FY16. – OPR CD&I; MARFORCOM and all HQMC agencies in support**

Framed by Cooperative Strategy 21 (CS-21), we will collaborate with the Navy on a Naval Operating Concept (NOC) revision in order to shape our concept of naval campaigning and naval expeditionary operations. This concept will include a greater Marine Corps contribution to Sea Control operations through interoperability with the Navy Composite Warfare Commander (CWC) structure in order to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) threats and optimize the single naval battle success on and from the sea. We will immediately frame exercise and experimentation of MEF and Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) warfighting as a part of a naval campaign in a crisis, and as a part of an A2AD environment in the 2025 timeframe.

We will realign our waterfront and staff assignments by end of FY16

to ensure they meet the needs of our evolving relationship with the Navy.

We will continue our efforts to determine the best use of alternate maritime platforms and look at different maritime force packaging options to better meet Combatant Command (CCMD) requirements.

We will seek the economy and expediency of logistics support to our ground and aviation forces by fully realizing the naval logistics integration (NLI) and MAGTF logistics integration (MLI) constructs in FY16.

**b. Consistent with the NOC and Expeditionary Force-21, we will establish a concept of employment, including prioritization of employment and utilization, for forward deployed Crisis Response forces and an integration model with SOF by the end of FY16. – OPR PP&O; CD&I and MARFORCOM in support**

Critical to understanding this guidance is that "a MEB is separable but not separate from a MEF." As our MEF command element priorities are different, so also are our MEB priorities within the MEFs. To be clear, after sourcing of our Global Force Management (GFM) requirements: 1) I MEF will prioritize command element warfighting proficiency and capability in major operations over MEB CE warfighting capability; 2) within its secondary priority, I MEF will prioritize MEB sourcing and capability to 5th MEB over 1st MEB; 3) II MEF will prioritize CE sourcing and warfighting capability to 2d MEB over the MEF command element; 4) III MEF guidance remains unchanged.

The Marine Corps' investment in forward deployed Crisis Response forces is significant. We should reduce unnecessary redundancy while at the same time ensuring we support Combatant Commander requirements.

The ability to aggregate SOF afloat and ashore with conventional forces (CF) from the sea retains an unobtrusive profile while offering significant support to SOF from a CF that does not disturb the battlespace. Since Marines and SOF will remain forward deployed, we must create **true integration models** to maximize the capabilities of the full sea-based MAGTF, including command and control (C2), alongside our SOF partners.

**End State:** A fully integrated and ready Navy/Marine Corps team, trained and resourced to support our joint operating concept.

*Any military activities that do not contribute to the conduct of a present war are justifiable only if they contribute to preparedness for a possible future one.*

*MCDP-1 Warfighting*

**5. Modernization and Technology:** We will continue striving to do what we do today better, but also be willing to consider how these same tasks might be done differently. We will continue to develop and evolve the MAGTF, ensuring it is able to operate in all five domains. We will invigorate experimentation of new concepts and capabilities during scheduled training events in order to test, fail, adjust, learn, and advance our capabilities. The Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) and the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab (MCWL) will be the lead for both our modernization and experimental efforts.

**a. Commanding General MCCDC will drive our capability development process to ensure all materiel and non-materiel solutions will be “born MAGTF,” optimizing the MAGTF as a whole. – OPR CD&I; all HQMC agencies in support**

We will continue to develop our concepts to take advantage of the capabilities of the F-35 and all of our emerging aviation platforms, particularly in regard to sensor fusion and electronic warfare.

We will continue to experiment with and exercise new ways to get the most out of the MV-22, and challenge previous paradigms in order to provide the most effective MAGTFs to Combatant Commanders.

We will establish and define in doctrine a Distributed Operations capability in our MAGTFs, at the MEU level and below, by the end of FY16. With distributed capabilities, we must also ensure our forces are not constrained at the littoral seams between Combatant Command Areas of Responsibility.

We will pursue technologies that enhance our warfighting capabilities such as unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and robotics, artificial intelligence and autonomous technologies that provide tactical and operational advantage.

**End State:** Field and operationalize ongoing programs and continue to develop solutions that will enhance institutional capabilities and retain our tactical advantages across the ROMO with today’s and tomorrow’s systems.

## CONCLUSION:

This guidance does not touch on everything we will eventually do, but it does address those things on which we will immediately begin to focus. We must continue to meet the high standards the American people have set for us. We will therefore continue to produce highly trained Marines, formed into combat-ready forces, and able to provide the capabilities the Joint Force requires. In short, we will continue to be the U.S. Marine Corps the American people want and expect, with all that is and all that it represents.

At the same time, we must continue to advance and adapt at a pace as fast as the world around us. Doing what we do better, or adapting, takes today's tools (and those arriving in the next few years) and combines them with new operating concepts and methods to produce increased competitive advantage for the MAGTF. Doing what we do differently will require adaptation which can only result from fresh thinking that follows a disciplined concept-wargame-experiment-exercise path.

Innovation necessitates making hypotheses about the future operating environment that are then tested for validity, just as Marines did in the 1920s and 1930s. We may not find initial successes in all of our experimentation efforts, but our continued focus and persistence will lead to solutions that will enable our future force. This "disruptive" mindset must be pursued and fostered when found, or it will not sustain itself within our bureaucracy. We need creative leaders who think!

Achieving success in the tasks set forth above will require total commitment by all Marines, Sailors and Civilians in our Corps. The expectations we have of all Marines must and should be high. But they must be exceeded by the expectation our Marines should rightfully have of their leadership, and that we, the leadership, should have of ourselves. The Marine Corps is a team. The MAGTF is a team of teams. Each of us must commit all we have to not just keep the Marine Corps strong today, but to make it a better, more effective and efficient organization tomorrow. As we move forward, we will no doubt make mistakes. This is to be expected from aggressive but calculated actions. As long as we do so with resolve and learn from our actions, we will make progress. Marines have a bias for action. We will set measures of effectiveness and conduct continual assessment in order to adjust our course. We have a way ahead, and now we need to Advance to Contact.

**Let's go!**