WARFIGHTING B130876 STUDENT HANDOUT

Warfighting

Introduction	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*, describes the Marine Corps' philosophy on warfighting. It provides the authoritative basis for how the Marine Corps fights and prepares to fight. MCDP 1 does not provide techniques or procedures. Rather, it sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application. While authoritative, it is not prescriptive.

Importance   The concepts discussed in this lesson serve as the foundation for all future tactical and leadership training.

In This Lesson   This lesson covers the following topics:

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Learning Objectives   Terminal Learning Objectives
TBS-OFF-2102 Given a mission, implement Marine Corps warfighting concepts to accomplish the mission.

Enabling Learning Objectives
TBS-OFF-2102e Without the aid of references, define war without error.

TBS-OFF-2102f Without the aid of references, describe the nature of war without error.

TBS-OFF-2102g Without the aid of references, describe the spectrum of conflict without error.

TBS-OFF-2102h Without the aid of references, describe the levels of war without error.

TBS-OFF-2102j Without the aid of references, describe the maneuver warfare concepts without error.

The Nature of War

War Defined

"Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war."

— Carl von Clausewitz

War is a violent clash of interests between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force. Traditionally, these organized groups consisted of regular armed forces from nation-states, but they may include non-state armed groups, such as sectarian militias, insurgents, or terrorist organizations. The essence of war is a violent struggle between two hostile, independent, and irreconcilable wills, each trying to impose itself on the other. War is a continuous interactive process of mutual adaptation, move and countermove. The object in war is to impose our will on our enemy. The means to this end is the organized application or threat of violence by military force.

Battlefield Dynamics

War is both timeless and ever changing. The advancement of technology and evolution of tactics over time do not change the nature of war. The nature of war and battlefield dynamics remain constant through the changes. Leaders must understand the battlefield dynamics and how to mitigate their effects on success. Fear, uncertainty, chaos, and disorder are battlefield dynamics as natural as war itself. Collectively referred to as friction, these dynamics are part of the very essence of war and what makes the simple difficult and the difficult seemingly impossible. Leaders must thrive on the friction-filled battlefield.

Friction   Friction makes the simple difficult and the difficult seemingly impossible. The very essence of war creates friction. Friction may be described by four causal factors.

Mental – Sources could be indecision by leaders and decision-makers at various levels. Conflicting battlefield reports about the enemy, terrain, and friendly forces may lead to hesitation in decision making.

Physical – Sources include effective enemy fire or a terrain obstacle that must be overcome. Being aware of and planning for these circumstances allows leaders to exercise flexibility in an uncertain environment.

External – Factors imposed by enemy action, terrain, weather, and simple chance.

Self-Induced (Internal) – Caused by such factors as lack of a clearly defined goal, lack of coordination, unclear or complicated plans, complex task organizations or command relationships, or complicated technologies.

The Nature of War (Continued)

Uncertainty	All actions in war take place in an atmosphere of uncertainty, the "fog of war." Unknowns about the enemy, environment, and friendly situation contribute to the uncertainty on the battlefield. Actions will be based on incomplete, inaccurate, or contradictory information. Uncertainty cannot be eliminated from the battlefield. Leaders must learn to fight effectively despite it. This can be done by developing simple, flexible plans; planning for likely contingencies; developing standing operating procedures; and fostering initiative.
Fluidity	Each action in war cannot be viewed in isolation. Each one is shaped by the action that preceded it and shapes the action that follows it. This creates a continuous, fluctuating flow of activity filled with fleeting opportunities and unforeseen events.
Disorder	War gravitates naturally toward disorder. Plans will change. Orders will be unclear and misinterpreted. Communications will go down/fail. This natural disorder creates the conditions ready for exploitation by an opportunistic will. Leaders must not only be able to fight effectively in the face of disorder, they should seek to generate disorder and use it as a weapon against our opponent.
Complexity	Each side in a conflict is not a single, homogeneous entity/unit guided by a single individual. Rather, each side is a complex system consisting of numerous individual elements. Each element is part of a larger whole and must cooperate with other elements to accomplish a common goal. At the same time, each has its own mission and must adapt to its own situation.
The Human Dimension	Because war is a clash between opposing human wills, the human dimension is central in war. It is the human dimension which infuses war with its intangible moral factors. War is shaped by human nature and is subject to the complexities, inconsistencies, and peculiarities which characterize human behavior. Human will, instilled through leadership, is the driving force of all action in war.
Violence and Danger	The means of war is force, applied in the form of organized violence. Since war is a violent enterprise, danger is ever present. Fear, the human reaction to danger, contributes to the corrosion of will. Courage is the strength to overcome fear.

The Theory of War

War as an Act of Policy

"The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes."

– Carl von Clausewitz

The theory of war provides the foundation for the way we prepare for and conduct war. The single most important thought to understand about the theory is that war must serve policy. Policy aims of war may vary from resistance against aggression to the unconditional surrender of an enemy government. The application of violence will vary in accordance with those aims. When the policy motive of war is extreme, such as the destruction of an enemy government, there will tend to be few political restrictions on the military conduct of war. On the other hand, the more limited the policy motive, the more likely political considerations will restrict the application of military force. These political restrictions on military action may be correct. However, military leaders have a responsibility to advise the political (civilian) leadership when the limitations imposed on military action jeopardize the military's ability to accomplish its assigned mission.

The Spectrum of Conflict

Conflict can take a wide range of forms constituting a spectrum which reflects the magnitude of violence involved. At the one end of the spectrum are those actions referred to as military operations other than war (MOOTW). At the other end of the spectrum is general war. Many political groups do not possess the military means to wage war at the high end of the spectrum. Those who fight a technologically or numerically superior enemy may choose to fight in a way that does not justify the enemy's full use of that superiority. Unless their survival is at stake, political groups are generally unwilling to accept the risks associated with general war.As the nation's force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps must possess the versatility and flexibility to operate across the entire spectrum of conflict.

MOOTW	Application of military power is usually restrained and selective. Encompass the use of a broad range of military capabilities to deter war, resolve conflict, promote peace, and support civil authorities. MOOTW and small wars are more probable than a major regional conflict or general war.
General War	Large-scale, sustained combat operation such as global conflict between major powers.

The Theory of War (Continued)

Levels of War

Activities in war take place at several interrelated levels which form a hierarchy. The distinctions between levels of war are rarely clearly delineated in practice. Usually there is some amount of overlap as a single commander may have responsibilities at more than one level. For example, in MOOTW, a single commander may operate at two or three levels simultaneously.

Strategic	Highest level. Focus directly on policy objectives. Strategy involves establishing goals, assigning forces, providing assets, and imposing conditions on the use of force in theaters of war. Strategy derived from political and policy objectives must be clearly understood to be the sole authoritative basis for all operations. Strategy deals with winning wars.
Operational	Links the strategic and tactical levels. It is the use of tactical results to attain strategic objectives. The operational level includes deciding when, where, and under what conditions to engage the enemy in battle. The operational level of war is the art and science of winning campaigns. Its means are tactical results, and its ends are the established strategic objectives.
Tactical	Lowest level. Tactics refers to the concepts and methods used to accomplish a particular mission in either combat or other military operations. In war, tactics focuses on the application of combat power to defeat an enemy force in combat at a particular time and place. Tactics can be thought of as the art and science of winning engagements and battles.

Actions in War – Initiative and Response

All actions in war are based upon either taking the initiative or reacting in response to the enemy. By taking the initiative, a unit dictates the terms of the conflict/fight. It is through the initiative that they seek to impose their will on the enemy. If they cannot take the initiative, they must respond to counter the enemy's actions. The object of the response is to seize the initiative from the enemy. This leads to a discussion on three related concepts: offense, defense, and culminating point. The offense and defense exist simultaneously as necessary components of each other. The transition from one to the other is fluid and continuous. A discussion on the relationship between offense and defense would not be complete without considering the impact of the culminating point.

The Theory of War (Continued)

Offense   Contributes striking power. It is normally associated
                               with initiative. The most obvious way to seize and
                               maintain the initiative is to strike first and keep striking.
                               The offense cannot sustain itself indefinitely. At some
                               point, it becomes necessary to halt the offense, and the
                               defense takes over.

Defense   Contributes resisting power. It is the ability to preserve
                               and protect. The defense cannot be purely passive
                               resistance. An effective defense must assume an
                               offensive character, striking at the moment of the
                               enemy's greatest vulnerability. The truly decisive
                               element of the defense is the counterattack.

Culminating Point   As discussed above, the offense cannot sustain itself
                               indefinitely. It also generally grows weaker as it
                               advances. Eventually, the offense reaches its
                               culminating point where it can no longer sustain the
                               attack and must transition to the defense. It is at this
                               point where the defensive element of the offense is most
                               vulnerable to the offensive element of the defense, the
                               counterattack.

Styles of Warfare

Styles in warfare can be described by their place on a spectrum between attrition and
maneuver. Neither attrition warfare nor maneuver warfare exist in "pure form." All
warfare involves both maneuver and attrition in some mix. The predominant style
depends on a variety of factors, such as unit capabilities and the nature of the enemy.

Attrition   Warfare by attrition pursues victory through the
                               cumulative destruction of the enemy's material assets
                               by superior firepower. An enemy is seen as a collection
                               of targets to be engaged and destroyed systematically.
                               The logical conclusion of attrition warfare is the eventual
                               physical destruction of the enemy's entire arsenal. The
                               focus is on the efficient application of fires. Technical
                               proficiency matters more than cunning and creativity.

Maneuver   Warfare by maneuver stems from a desire to circumvent a
                               problem and attack it from a position of advantage rather
                               than meet it straight on. The goal is to attack the enemy
                               "system" – to incapacitate the enemy systematically. The
                               goal is the application of our strength against selected
                               enemy weakness in order to maximize advantage.

The Theory of War (Continued)

Relationship	Attrition warfare may recognize maneuver as an important component but sees its purpose as to bring fires more efficiently to bear on the enemy. Firepower and attrition are essential elements of warfare by maneuver. At the critical point, where strength has been focused against enemy vulnerability, attrition may be extreme and may involve the outright annihilation of enemy elements.

Combat Power
Combat power is the total destructive force we bring to bear on our enemy at a given time. It is the situationally dependent and unique product of a variety of physical, moral, and mental factors. Speed, focus, surprise, and boldness contribute to generating combat power.

Speed	Rapidity of action. It applies to both time and space. Speed over time is tempo – the consistent ability to operate quickly. Speed over distance, or space, is the ability to move rapidly. Speed is a weapon. In war, it is relative speed that matters rather than absolute speed. Speed is a prerequisite for maneuver and for surprise. It is necessary to concentrate superior strength at the decisive time and place.
Focus	The convergence of effects in time and space on some objective. It is the generation of superior combat power at a particular time and place. Focus may achieve decisive local superiority for a numerically inferior force.
Surprise	A state of disorientation resulting from an unexpected event that degrades the enemy's ability to resist. Striking the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which the enemy is unprepared achieves surprise. It is a genuine source of combat power in its own right because of its psychological effect. Surprise can decisively affect the outcome of combat far beyond the physical means at hand. It is based on speed, stealth, ambiguity, and deception.
Boldness	The characteristic of unhesitatingly exploiting the natural uncertainty of war to pursue major results rather than marginal ones.

The Theory of War (Continued)

It is not enough to generate superior combat power. It must be focused toward a decisive aim. The complementary concepts of centers of gravity (CG) and critical vulnerabilities (CV) help leaders determine how and where to focus their combat power. The CG looks at the problem of how to attack the enemy system from the perspective of seeking a source of strength. The CV looks from the perspective of seeking weakness. A CV is a pathway to attacking a CG.

Center of Gravity	Important sources of strength – Which factors are critical to the enemy? Which can the enemy not do without? Which, if eliminated, will bend him most quickly to our will? They may be intangible characteristics such as resolve or morale. They may be capabilities such as armor or aviation.
Critical Vulnerability	A vulnerability that, if exploited, will do the most significant damage to the enemy's ability to resist us.

Preparing for War

Professionalism
There are two basic military functions: waging war and preparing for war. The Marine Corps' peacetime activities must be focused on preparation for the next conflict or crisis. Marine Corps doctrine demands professional competence among its leaders. Marine leaders must be true experts in the conduct of war. The Marine Corps' style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a bias for boldness and initiative. Seniors must encourage both traits in their subordinates in spite of mistakes. This requires trust between senior and subordinate.

Boldness	An essential moral trait in a leader for it generates combat power beyond physical means at hand.
Initiative	The willingness to act on one's own judgment. Initiative is a prerequisite for boldness. It is each Marine's duty to take initiative as the situation demands.
Trust	Trust by seniors in the abilities of their subordinates and by juniors in the competence and support of their seniors. Trust must be earned. It is a product of confidence and familiarity.

Training
The purpose of training is to develop forces that can win in combat. Training is the key to combat effectiveness. It is the main effort of a peacetime military. Training follows doctrine and develops the tactical and technical proficiency that underlies all successful military action. Training prepares Marines for the known. Training must be standards-based, challenging, and realistic. The conduct of training should be decentralized. Senior commanders influence training by establishing goals and standards, communicating the intent of training, and establishing a main effort for training. A training exercise is not complete until a critique (assessment) of the training is conducted. Critiques are an important part of training because critical self-analysis is essential to improvement. Their purpose is to draw out the lessons of training. As a result, critiques should be conducted immediately upon completion of training, before memory of the events has faded. Critiques should be held in an atmosphere of open and frank dialogue in which all hands are encouraged to contribute. They should focus on the "why" behind actions and the results they achieved.

Preparing for War (Continued)

Professional Military Education

The purpose of professional military education (PME) is to develop creative, thinking leaders. Education develops the understanding, creativity, military judgment, and the background essential for effective battlefield leadership. It prepares Marines for the unknown. PME must be continuous and progressive. It must focus on the development of military judgment and decision making. The responsibility for implementing PME in the Marine Corps is three tiered. It resides with the education establishment (schools), commanders, and the individual.

Schools	Schools – administered by the Marine Corps, subordinate commands, or outside agencies – established to provide formal education in the art and science of war. All professional schools, particularly officer schools, should focus on developing a talent for military judgment, not on imparting knowledge through rote learning. The education establishment builds upon the base provided by commanders and individual study.
Commanders	All commanders should consider the professional development of their subordinates a principal responsibility of command. Commanders should foster a personal teacher-student relationship with their subordinates. They should see the development of their subordinates as a direct reflection on themselves.
Individual	Every Marine has an individual responsibility to study the profession of arms. A leader without either interest in or knowledge of the history and theory of warfare is a leader in appearance only. Self-directed study in the art and science of war is at least equal in importance to maintaining physical condition and should receive at least equal time. This is particularly true among officers. The mind is an officer's principal weapon.

The Conduct of War

Maneuver Warfare

"Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope."
— MCDP 1, *Warfighting*

The aim of maneuver warfare is to render the enemy incapable of resisting effectively by shattering his moral, mental, and physical cohesion rather than to destroy him physically through the incremental attrition of each of his components. The immediate object to that end is to create a situation in which the enemy cannot function. The ultimate goal is panic and paralysis, an enemy who has lost the ability to resist. Maneuver warfare is a philosophy for generating the greatest decisive effect against the enemy at the least possible cost to friendly forces. Maneuver warfare uses a number of tools/concepts that promote initiative, unity, and ruthless opportunism.

Mission Tactics	Assigning a subordinate mission without specifying how the mission must be accomplished. Mission tactics relies on a subordinate's exercise of initiative framed by proper guidance and understanding. Mission tactics benefits the senior commander by freeing time to focus on higher-level concerns rather than the details of subordinate execution. Uninhibited by excessive restrictions from above, subordinates can adapt their actions to the changing situation. It is the principal means for implementing decentralized command and control. Mission tactics serves as one key to the practice/application of maneuver warfare.
Commander's Intent	The purpose of providing intent is to allow subordinates to exercise judgment and initiative in a way that is consistent with higher commanders' aims. The intent describes the *purpose* of the action. The intent explains *why*. The top-down flow of intent provides consistency and continuity to actions on the battlefield. It establishes the context for initiative by subordinates. A clear expression and understanding of intent is essential to unity of effort. The burden of understanding falls on senior and subordinates alike. The seniors must make their purposes perfectly clear but in a way that does not inhibit initiative. Subordinates must have a clear understanding of what their commander expects. They should understand the intent of the commander at least two levels up.

The Conduct of War (Continued)

Main Effort	The main effort is another tool for providing unity. It is the unit assigned responsibility for accomplishing the command's most critical/key mission. The main effort is the commander's bid for success/victory. It is the focal point upon which converges the combat power of the force. Similar to commander's intent, the main effort becomes a harmonizing force for subordinate initiative.
Surfaces	Hard spots – enemy strengths. A surface may be an actual strongpoint or any strength (weapon system or capability).
Gaps	Soft spots – enemy weaknesses. Efforts must be focused against enemy weakness with the object of penetrating the enemy system. Gaps may be physical gaps in the enemy's dispositions or any weakness in time, space, or capability. Gaps will not be permanent. They will be fleeting.
Combined Arms	Combined arms is the full integration of arms in such a way that to counteract one, the enemy must become more vulnerable to another. It poses the enemy not just with a problem, but with a dilemma. Combined arms is accomplished through the tactics and techniques used at the lower levels and task organization at higher levels.

Summary

MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, describes the philosophy which distinguishes the Marine Corps from its sister Services – maneuver warfare. Maneuver warfare is more than a style of warfare. It is a mindset and way of thinking about war. It should shape how Marines prepare for and conduct war.

References

Reference	Title
MCDP 1	*Warfighting*

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term or Acronym	Definition or Identification
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
CG	Center of Gravity
CV	Critical Vulnerability
PME	Professional Military Education

Notes