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The Application of Doctrinal Language to Mission Statements
in Low Intensity Environments

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"Conduct a presence patrol in order to maintain stability in the area" may say a great many things to your average squad leader, but it does not tell him his mission. Maneuver warfare requires decentralized command¹, and hence mission tactics are central from the practical perspective of considering how to apply doctrine to action. While certainly this means commanders should avoid specifying some details of "how the mission must be accomplished"² and requires "a subordinate's exercise of initiative framed by proper guidance and understanding,"³ in a sense of real-world execution it also means the subordinate must be tasked with a mission. Difficulties in effectively assigning tasks in less than high-intensity environments arise from ineffective application of doctrinal language, not a lack of applicable doctrine.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

Differences among individuals, echelons, and unique specific and general situations suggest not all mission statements need look the same. At a level where organic operational capabilities are significant and over-sight is not entirely absent vague mission statements may make more sense than they would for the lowest tactical echelons. A

regimental commander, for example, with some autonomy but as part of a larger echelon's enduring effort, might welcome a mission statement that says little more than to conduct a certain type of operation in zone in support of a well developed commander's intent due to the flexibility it would allow him, his staff, and potentially his subordinate commanders. But at about the platoon level and below such vagaries are at best worthless. It does nothing for a squad leader to tell him 'conduct patrolling operations in zone IOT support the battalion's overall mission.'

There are significant differences between tasking a Regimental Combat Team (RCT) to conduct a certain type of operations in accordance with the commander's intent and some coordinating instructions and tasking a squad leader the same way. The differences are obvious: the experience and education of the commander and even more importantly the capabilities of the echelon. At about the platoon level and below a task to conduct a certain type of operations (conduct offensive operations in zone, for example) does not function to provide the leader a mission.⁴ The difference is that the RCT can conduct a certain type of operations - the subordinate commands can operate under the RCT commander's intent to work and fight together

towards a common goal - but at about the platoon level the tasked echelon can *not* conduct a specified type of operations - they must conduct a task, or a limited number of tasks. To use 'conduct a presence patrol' as an example of an ineffective mission tasking, if a squad or platoon is on patrol, whether a doctrinal type or otherwise, that is the method, not the task.

A simple task and purpose (T/P) structure for a mission statement, even if it correctly contains when, who, what, where, and why, is not always appropriate and not always practical. To maximize the effectiveness of fires and avoid fratricide indirect firing agencies, at a relevant level of execution, must have much of the 'how' specified as control measures and coordinating instructions. To ensure unity of effort and support perception management non-kinetic activities must similarly be dictated much of their method.

While the focus here is the Ground Combat Element (GCE), likely this same argument could be made for the Aviation Combat Element (ACE) and Logistics Combat Element (LCE) as well. Mission statements such as "ACE in general support (GS) to the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF)

conducts the six functions of Marine aviation IOT..." or "LCE in GS to the MAGTF conducts combat service support..." may be appropriate and sufficient for battalion or regimental echelons, but not so much for sections and platoons.

THE APPLICATION OF DOCTRINAL TASKING WORDS

The doctrinal tactical tasks in Appendix C of MCDP 1-0 are very appropriate for GCE units in high intensity environments; however, an argument that these tasks are only suitable for high intensity environments is a misunderstanding based on intellectual laziness. While MCDP 1-0 organizes these as they are oriented on the enemy or terrain or friendly forces, they could also be organized by warfighting function. Most are maneuver tasks, with some basic fires and collection tasks as well. The weakness of this list in less than high-intensity environments is that while "orienting on the enemy is fundamental to"⁵ Marine doctrine and the way Marines operate, in less kinetic environments operations, missions, and tasks do not necessarily focus on the enemy as much as, or in the same way as, they do in more conventional combat situations.⁶

The solution to the problem of difficulties issuing tasking statements begins with an analysis of the basic tasking words from MCDP 1-0. Some of these are more likely than others to be appropriate to lower intensity environments. In other words, the solution begins with learning and teaching subordinates so that these doctrinal words can be used doctrinally.

The following table is an attempt to categorize the tasking words from MCDP 1-0 as they may severally be likely to be suitable to lower intensity operations. If these doctrinal words are commonly understood throughout a unit, relatively simple analysis like the following may facilitate common understanding of how that unit will apply them in lower intensity environments.

Fig. 1 Table of tactical tasks appropriate to low-intensity operations.⁷

Orientation	Likely	Unlikely
On Enemy	Ambush Defeat Feint	Attack by Fire Canalize Penetrate

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	Interdict Neutralize Reconnoiter	Rupture
On Terrain	Reconnoiter Retain Secure	
On Friendly	Relief in Place Passage of Lines Displace Screen	Breach Disengage Exfiltrate Guard

To continue the analysis of MCDP 1-0 tasking words by considering a few of the more common collective tasks for small units in low intensity environments, the following table suggests some doctrinal tasking words as they may fit to these common operations.

Fig. 2 Table of doctrinal tasking words matched to common operations.

Type of Operation	Doctrinal tasking words likely to be appropriate. ⁸
Cordon and	Search, Defeat, Interdict, Neutralize,

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Search	Reconnoiter, Clear
Patrolling	Ambush, Interdict, Reconnoiter, Screen
Checkpoint Ops	Control, Search, Interdict, Reconnoiter, Screen, Block, Contain

Simply put: doctrinal tasks, used doctrinally, can be appropriate to many low intensity situations if the commander or leader issuing the task and his subordinate commander or leader understand the doctrine. Therefore, the method to accomplish this first part of the solution is in developing subordinate leaders. Basic leadership, daily habits of careful communication, and any number of techniques for professional military education, from staff planning exercises to tactical decision games to classes, will develop the mutual understanding necessary to use doctrine correctly.

APPLICATION OF TASK PURPOSE METHOD EFFECT (TPME) STRUCTURE

The second part of the solution to facilitate effectively issuing tasking statements is to consider Task Purpose Method Effect (TPME) structure rather than T/P structure to reinforce commander's intent and simplify paragraph three. This structure is especially appropriate

if the maneuver element's primary task is not a maneuver task. In other words, if the maneuver element (a rifle squad, for example) has a primary task of conducting non-kinetic activities or collecting information, trying to force a TPME mission into a T/P mission statement will only contribute to ineffective communication.

Mastery of MCDP 1-0 tasking words is a requisite first step that should not be overlooked, but this should not be held as the standard in infantry battalions or in any but the most entry-level training and education environments. Rather, the general structure of an Essential Fire Support Task (EFST), combining the mission statement with commander's intent and coordinating instructions⁹ has the following strengths and advantages:

The structure of the task facilitates a clear commander's intent;

Provides requisite instruction with regard to how the mission is to be done; and,

Defines non-doctrinal tasking statements when they can not be avoided.

MULTIPLE MISSIONS

Once the first two parts of the solution are accomplished - using doctrinal words correctly and reinforcing tasking statements with TPME structure where appropriate - we will see a tendency to assign multiple missions to relatively low echelons. Again, this will simplify orders at the lower tactical echelons by, for example, addressing non-kinetic activities and collections as tasks rather than addressing them separately.

In a low intensity environment, maneuver elements may often have multiple tasks even at the squad level. Generally, it will make more sense to organize these by warfighting functions rather than by orientation (enemy, terrain, or friendly). For example, a squad could be tasked with conducting non-kinetic activities (method: talking points), collection (method: observation and talking to civilians), maneuver (interdiction of enemy activity, method: combined security patrol), and force protection (training of host nation security forces [HNSF], method: combined security patrol).

As an example to apply this solution, returning to the example above of an ineffective tasking statement 'conduct

presence patrol,' to effectively communicate the desired mission:

First, recognize that while there is a maneuver task (likely reconnoiter, interdict, or screen from Fig 2 above) this is not the primary task.

Second, assign multiple tasking statements to address the multiple tasks required (patrol, non-kinetic activities, and collection, for example).

Third, structure and communicate all assigned tasks effectively. The maneuver task can likely be structured as a simple T/P mission with a doctrinal MCDP 1-0 task. Non-kinetic activities and likely collections will be more effectively tasked with a TPME structure, whether a doctrinal tasking word fits or not.

While it is not my purpose to discuss the human element of combat, and while the problem that 'conduct presence patrol' for example is not a mission is a sufficient problem, it is also relevant to note that in the absence of a mission, the Marines may consider themselves more targets than warfighters.

CONCLUSION

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Mission statements should be doctrinally based, but not necessarily doctrinally bound. For examples of non-doctrinal tasking words that might be effective as part of a complete mission statement, consider: 'train HNSF' or 'recover downed UAS'. Squad leaders, properly led and trained, have the ability and the capabilities to execute multiple tasks simultaneously in a complex and uncertain environment, across warfighting functions and the spectrum of conflict, but an ineffective mission statement can reduce the effectiveness of the mission. A poorly tasked presence patrol, for example, will make the Marines a presence, meaning a target, and suggesting the least favorable possibilities of the strategic corporal.

Word count: 1703.

NOTES:

¹United States Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1: Warfighting*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1997), 78. Cited hereafter as USMC, *MCDP 1*.

²USMC, *MCDP 1*, 87.

³USMC, *MCDP 1*, 87.

⁴This is illustrative and not meant to imply an absolute echelon boundary. Depending on the situation (enemy, terrain and weather, time, space, logistics) a rifle platoon may be able to operate with a task to 'conduct patrolling operations in zone' far more effectively than a rifle company may be able to 'conduct defensive operations in zone.' Also consider the specified tasks for a rifle squad partnered with a host nation security force platoon - precedent is not doctrine, but reference Bing West, *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972).

⁵USMC, *MCDP 1*, 76.

⁶United States Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2006) and United States Marine Corps. *Small Wars Manual*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1940).

⁷All tactical tasks in the table are from: United States Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-0: Marine Corps Operations*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2001), Appendix C. Cited hereafter as USMC, *MCDP 1-0*. This is meant to be illustrative and not meant to be an exhaustive list of all doctrinal tasking words. More recent publications offer other likely tasking words for lower intensity environments; e.g. "search" from Air Land Sea Application Center. *Cordon and Search: Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Cordon and Search Operations*, MCRP 3-31.4B. (Quantico, VA: Headquarters Marine Corps Combat Development Center, 2006), I-9.

⁸Again, USMC, *MCDP 1-0*. except 'search' from USMC, MCRP 3-31.4B. as above in note 6.

⁹The general structure of an EFST is meant, not necessarily the details required by United States Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-16: Fire Support Coordination in the Ground Combat Element*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2001), Appendix D. For example, the T is meant to refer to the task and not necessarily to objective, formation, and function.