

Commander's Intent Defined

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with your intent. It must be the first creation in your order.

Step 3: Write your intent using the following guidelines:

- Make the statement oriented on the enemy, not on friendly action.
- Make clear what you intend to do to the enemy.
- Consider strongly how what you intend to do will cause the enemy to behave in a particular way. Remember that you want to "out OODA-loop" your foe, so plan how to influence his behavior to your advantage.
- Keep your intent broad; do not specify or guide particular actions to be taken or the intensity of these actions.

Step 4: Zoom in, back to your mission. Double check your intent against your mission, the intent statements of the commanders two levels up, and all other METT-TSL elements. Your statement should be clear enough that even if your subordinates have no contact with you, they will still know how to serve the overall command most effectively.

Step 5: Zoom in. Develop your scheme of maneuver and fire support plan to support your intent, given the current METT-TSL. If your superiors have remained maneuver warfare minded, you should have nearly free rein to create

this plan in the way that you feel you can best support their intent.

Step 6: Zoom in. Develop task statements for the execution of the scheme of maneuver. Be mindful of providing the same freedom of action to your subordinates that was given to you. From this point, your subordinate commanders should follow the same process you did as they develop their orders.

There is nothing magic about the steps shown here. In order for the methodology to work well, it is essential that commanders up and down the chain follow it; otherwise, more junior commanders will have to develop statements of intent that only support their best guess about what higher commands really want. Maneuver warfare suffers due to weak links in the chain of operations orders—those where subordinates are told what to do, without being told the intent that should drive their initiative.

For our doctrine to become a reality, we actually need to change more than just the way we write orders. We also need to more fully define the term "mission-type order" by subsequently redefining our objective from a maneuver warfare perspective. Most offi-

cers, when asked, would describe mission-type orders as ones that state what will be done, without specifying how. While this is a good start, commanders are again likely to focus only on mission accomplishment unless they have a fuller understanding of mission-type orders. Commander's intent is crucial.

If we continue to teach our Marines that mission accomplishment is the most important objective of leadership, and in the chaos of the fight that mission loses its viability, then only those smart enough to disobey the order and lucky enough to find an alternate way to win on their own will prevail. When we have a clear statement of the commander's intent, it seems archaic to continue to call mission accomplishment our objective. The most important objective on the battlefield in the age of maneuver warfare is the *support of commander's intent*, not the accomplishment of the mission. If we can grasp that concept as a Corps, then we will finally realize the benefits that maneuver warfare and thinking Marines can provide.



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by Capt Michael L. Ettore

In a move to standardize and clarify a key concept of maneuver warfare, the Marine Corps University has issued guidelines on commander's intent.

Several years ago the U.S. Marine Corps adopted maneuver warfare as its primary warfighting philosophy. The general concepts of this philosophy were outlined in *FMFM I Warfighting*, a publication intended to provide broad guidance on how the Marine Corps prepares for and conducts combat operations. While most of the content of *FMFM I* can legitimately be labeled as purely common sense, there are several concepts which at the time of publication were new, unfamiliar ideas.

One of these new concepts was that of commander's intent. While most Marines have heard of this concept, it

is extremely rare to find two individuals with the same perspective as to what commander's intent really is. Any student of maneuver doctrine will agree that to be successful in this style of warfighting, subordinate leaders must be encouraged to use initiative during the execution of any mission. Commander's intent is designed to provide these leaders with the ability to deviate from a specific plan of attack if necessary, yet still accomplish the ultimate desires of their commander. This initiative is properly focused by a crystal-clear expression and understanding of the commander's intent.

Recently, the Marine Corps University conducted a Quarterly Curriculum Review Board which was attended by representatives of the various schools within the University system, as well as from other commands. One of the topics discussed was the concept of commander's intent and the need for a standard definition of the subject as well as specific guidance for its use during the conduct of Marine Corps operations worldwide. The following definition of commander's intent was forwarded to the President of the Marine Corps University and has subsequently been approved:

- The commander's intent statement will be depicted in a formal operations order in paragraph 3a (1) followed by the concept of operations in paragraph 3a (2). The higher unit commander's intent will be depicted in paragraph 1b.
- The commander's intent statement *must* include a statement of the end state of the battlefield as it relates to his force, the enemy force, and the

terrain. Additionally, this statement may include:

- The purpose of the operations.
- The enemy's actions and intentions.
- An identification of the enemy's critical vulnerability or center of gravity.*

Currently, the entire Marine Corps University is adopting this definition of commander's intent. Once implemented, these changes will result in the substantial enhancement of the orders process and will reduce confusion as units and individuals are reassigned. Graduates of the staff noncommissioned officer academies, The Basic School, Infantry Officers Course, Amphibious Warfare School, Command and Control Systems Course, Command and Staff College, School of Advanced Warfighting, and the Marine Corps War College will have the same understanding and will utilize the same techniques.

Some important points to remember:

- Every Marine must know the commander's intent two levels up.
- During most infantry battalion operations order briefs, the battalion S-

**Center of Gravity.* The characteristic, capability, or locality from which a military force derives its freedom of action, military power, or will to fight. (FMFM 2-1 Draft)

Critical Vulnerability. A weakness in an opposing military force's assets, tactics, or strategy that can result in that force's defeat if that weakness is exploited. (FMFM 2-1 Draft)

3 actually issues the majority of the order. It is highly encouraged that the battalion commander issue his intent statement for clarity and emphasis.

- The commander's intent statement is intended to be written in narrative form, not by listing elements 1 through 5. It is a statement, not a format.
- During the preparation of the vast majority of operations orders, whether formal or fragmentary, the shortage of time usually will result in the commander's intent statement being

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limited to the statement of the end state of the battlefield as it relates to friendly forces, the enemy forces, and the terrain.

- A technique used to describe the end state of the battlefield is to begin the statement with, "Final result desired is." The following are some examples:

- Final result desired is to block the enemy north of Route 1 in order to allow the unimpeded movement of Company C to BLT Objective Alpha.

- Final result desired is to destroy the enemy radar equipment at Ob-

jective Bravo in order to prevent early detection of subsequent coalition air attacks.

- The commander's intent statement is not a duplication of the scheme of maneuver paragraph; not where missions or tasks are assigned to subordinate units; and not the place for useless statements such as "we will attack vigorously," "we will utilize supporting arms to stun the enemy," or "try not to get bogged down."
- A short, concise commander's intent statement is easier to send via radio or messenger and is more easily remembered by subordinates once they come under extreme stress.

The most important thing for a young lieutenant to remember if he must suddenly assume command of a rifle company in a rapidly changing combat situation is the concept of commander's intent.

Finally, it is incumbent upon every leader to adopt and enforce these changes with enthusiasm. The result will be the standard interpretation and usage of this key concept throughout the Marine Corps. Additionally, it will put an end to the friction and confusion that happens all too often today.

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The Initiative and Warfighting

by Maj Stephen K. Bollinger, USMCR

The successful commander is usually one who is keenly aware of the role that initiative plays on the battlefield.

An important element in warfighting is gaining and maintaining the initiative. It is a force maximizer that should not be underestimated.

It is helpful to summarize some of the terminology that appears in this article:

- Simple initiative is employing forces in a manner that has the potential of compelling the enemy commander to react.
- Seizing the initiative is employing forces in a manner that compels the

enemy commander to respond with significant forces or significantly alter his plans.

- Maintaining the initiative is employing forces in a manner that continually compels the enemy to react to that employment over a significant period of time.

By seizing or maintaining the initiative, a commander systematically forces the enemy to respond in a manner that exposes his vulnerabilities and forces him to fight with his weakest as-

sets. Obviously this provides a distinct advantage. Often the constant stressing of the enemy's weaknesses will eventually expose a critical vulnerability that can be exploited to deliver a fatal blow or a series of blows that are cumulatively fatal.

Using the initiative, then, means doing something that compels the commander's enemy to respond. It follows that the more a commander's course of action threatens his enemy's critical vulnerability, the more likely it is to compel his response. Simply attacking does not guarantee that the initiative will be gained.

In the face of an action that seeks to compel a response, a commander may parry the thrust by choosing to suffer some loss rather than surrender the initiative. For example, if a force preparing to conduct an offensive is hit