

Sustaining the Transformation

By Gen Charles C. Krulak, USMC, Commandant of the Marine Corps



The next century will likely be characterized by crisis and conflict. It will place heavy demands on our nation's military services: demands that will require deep reservoirs of military skill, intellect and innovation. This uncertain horizon creates an even more pressing imperative for a military force that can remain versatile yet act decisively in the face of such uncertainty. The Marine Corps has always been that versatile, decisive force—and we will continue to be that force.

—The Commandant's Planning Guidance

Those words, direction that was articulated in our planning guidance more than three years ago, have set our course and speed. They have also served as the catalyst for numerous changes in how we make and train Marines, and they carry tremendous implications for our Corps' leadership, particularly our junior leaders.

The 21st century will be a time of incredible chaos and complexity. By 2020, 70 percent of the world's population will migrate to urban areas within 300 miles of a coastline. As people flood the cities, they will eventually overtax the existing infrastructure. The residents of these urban sprawls will be dependent upon limited supplies of natural resources and fuel, the depletion of which will serve as tinder for conflict. Additionally, the stability of these areas will be precarious as different cultural, ethnic and religious groups clash in these overpopulated and under-resourced mega-cities.

While Marines will still be called upon to fight traditional battles, we will increasingly be relied upon to maintain stability in these volatile urban areas and to respond with credible force if the situation warrants. This is where Marines will be fighting the "three-block" war. On this battlefield, tactical decisions by junior leaders will likely have strategic impact as each move is carried by global television and is scrutinized, analyzed and debated by those far from the scene. It is going to require a special kind of Marine to be able to shoulder this responsibility—a Marine of character; trained to the highest standards. It is going to take a warrior with a tactical sense second to none—possessing a rock-solid foundation of core values and warfighting skills.

The realization that tomorrow's battles will be radically different than those of the past poses many challenges, the most basic of which is how do you make Marines who can fight and win the three-block war?

At the institutional level, we raised our recruiting standards and enhanced the training future recruits receive while in the delayed-entry pool. We lengthened and toughened recruit training, gave valuable time back to the drill instructor and added the "Crucible" to instill in each recruit the importance of subordination of self to the team. We enhanced the School of Infantry and Marine Combat Training to make them more rigorous and challenging, and we are building unit cohesion by forming Marines into MOS teams, sending those teams to their occupational school and then on to their first unit. This is where the "Transformation" of America's youth into Marines begins.

We also established the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory to serve as the Corps' test-bed for the development of enhanced operational concepts, tactics, techniques, procedures and doctrine. Through the lab we are experimenting with emerging technologies and techniques and evaluating their collective impact on how we organize, train and equip to fight in the future.

In the end, however, it is not the institutional changes that will ensure we win the battle. The revised training, better equipment and improved doctrine will all play an important role, but it will be the actions of the Marines themselves which will decide the outcome. And it will be their leaders who ultimately determine how they will respond long before the execution order is issued. The NCO, SNCO and junior officer will bear the greatest leadership burden in combat and, therefore, must bear the greatest leadership burden in peace.

Leaders must ensure their Marines can fight and win the three-block war. To do this, they not only need to ensure that the professional and personal standards instilled at the institutional level are maintained, but that their Marines build on those qualities to continue the Transformation. These young Marines must be challenged, and they must be afforded the opportunity to grow. They must be allowed to make mistakes—to expand their own individual capabilities—and yet they must be held accountable for actions of moral turpitude. That is the job of our junior leaders.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C.C. Krulak".