

# Offense Wins Games, Defense Wins Championships

Installations in a contested environment

by MajGen David W. Maxwell & Col Joseph C. Novario

***“Recognizing growing kinetic and non-kinetic threats to the United States’ homeland from our strategic competitors, the Department will take necessary actions to increase resilience—our ability to withstand, fight through, and recover quickly from disruption.”  
—National Defense Strategy 2022***

Soccer is often referred to as “the beautiful game.” As the most recent World Cup Champions, Argentina demonstrated in Qatar, the only way to win the championship trophy was by fielding a combination of a lethal offense and a resilient and impenetrable defense that blends seamlessly together. The path to being able to raise the cup is by scoring more goals on your opponents than they score on you over a series of matches. It is unique in that for 90 minutes of the game, the play is generally fluid and continuous—there is no play calling from the sidelines or television commercial breaks. For 45 minutes in each half, it is two teams locked in competition with each other, one side leveraging the strength of their team to generate and attack while the other team is posturing to defend their goal and, more importantly, seize the ball from the adversary to generate their own attack and strike a goal. It is a constant battle for position to create a window of temporary advantage to

allow an attack to develop or to seize a strategic opening to strike quickly and unexpectedly. This is the nature of championship tournaments—it is also the nature of great power competition. Today in this era of great power competition, the Marine Corps is part of a similar contest, fighting for positional advantage that will lead to decision advantage and result in “net” effects.

In many respects, the mutually supporting and reinforcing nature required in the relationship between the installations and the operating forces we support is much like the relationship between the eleven players who take to the pitch. For the Marine Corps, hold-

ing the defensive line are the Marines and civilians operating and protecting installations around the globe while simultaneously providing the foundation from which the FMF can generate an attacking offense. It is this mutually supporting relationship that allows the Marine Corps to gain the advantage and deliver the necessary effects.

If the Marine Corps Installations team is the defensive line, the foremost priority is to defend the goal—to ensure installations are secure and there is a resilient defense, capable of shifting to counter diverse points of attack, whether securing our installation perimeters, protecting the installations communications network, or ensuring the resiliency of the installation from climate and energy effects. Without a strong defense, a team will be under constant pressure, and midfielders and forwards will be forced back just to help defend the goal. For the last twenty years, we have been able to accept risk in the defense. Our adversary was not able to generate an attacking threat that could get out of their back half and cross the midfield line. This is no longer the case today.

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The global nature of warfare has changed. Modern technology allows command and control from anywhere to anywhere. Drones can be piloted from around the world. The cyber domain is actively contested today—with attacks coming through virtual private networks that complicate tracing and attribution. Numerous recent examples have illustrated the ways our enemies can attack our installations. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has dramatically changed the traditional calculus. Meanwhile at home, 11 September is perhaps the most striking example, but there are also smaller examples: Oldsmar Florida water treatment plant hack in 2021 and the Colonial Pipeline attack against our fuel infrastructure. Regular cyberattacks on airlines and healthcare systems all expose potential vulnerabilities and risks to the installations, which provide many similar services. Add to this disruptions caused by climate events

like hurricanes and droughts or economic impacts of COVID-19, and it is apparent the contested environment is a today problem. Worse yet are the opportunities for our adversaries to put us in a dilemma by pressing their attack when we may be distracted by these events. Much like one player might make a deep run past a defender while another looks to exploit the space it creates, our enemies will look to be aggressive when we are dealing with another problem.

Thus the role of installations must also change. There was a time when we relied on our installations primarily for force generation and to a lesser degree force projection. It was a place to rest and refit before returning forward. Now, a defender must be able to repel an attack while providing the opportunity for a counter—potentially fighting through a contest without assistance from the midfielders or strikers. Perhaps those attacks are small UAS intrusions or swarm attacks or long-range missile

attacks. Perhaps they are attacks against the communications network or the utilities infrastructure. Installations must be able to sense and make sense of those attacks and defeat the threat using both kinetic and non-kinetic responses without unduly reducing the capacity of our offense. Consistent with the themes in *Talent Management 2030*, we must build a team that strikes an appropriate balance of the offense and defense as well as develop players, both Marines and civilians, who can take to the field, fight, and win.

A strong defense will not only secure and protect the goal but will create opportunities to generate and sustain the attack. It is out of the defense that the ball is projected forward and the beginnings of the attack are generated. If our opponent is pressing us, it may take time—we will have to distribute the ball quickly, moving it around, often back and forth between the defense and the midfielders, looking for the opening

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**Soldiers with the 3rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment move the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-ballistic missile defense system in into a Hangar on Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, Guam. (Photo by Cpl Andrew King.)**

to be able to move forward and press into the opponent's final third. Our FMFs are the offense. They move forward, operating out of expeditionary advanced bases, constantly exercising, training, deploying, redeploying—always sensing, probing, and conducting reconnaissance to understand where the opponent's weaknesses and vulnerabilities are. At the point of the attack, forces like the Marine Littoral Regiment are ready, waiting for the moment, and sensing the opportunity to find the opening to strike or to lay the ball off and create an opening to attack elsewhere. They are supported and sustained by MEF units transitioning between the installations and advanced naval bases forward into the opponent's side to initiate, reinforce, or sustain attacks while at the same time always being prepared to support and reinforce the defense if under attack.

But increasingly, our operating forces can attack from anywhere and we can support from anywhere. Joint, all-domain command and control, robotics, and autonomous vehicles will only increase this global connection of our installations with our strikers. In a sense, we have big legs that can put shots on goal from around the globe. As we demonstrate the ability to fight from

our installations, we must be prepared to defend them.

Just like the eleven players on the field, the installations and FMF players connect. We cooperate. We are inseparable and mutually dependent. We can project power and hold our enemies at bay. If we are resilient and prevent our opponents from penetrating our defense, our strikers can stay on offense. If the defense is brittle or weak, we may be unable to generate the offense against an effective opposing force firing on our goal. We should recognize the accumulated debt of under-investment in our installations is akin to the yellow card that can haunt a player for multiple matches, restraining play to avoid a second yellow card and ejection, or a red card that forces a club to play a man down the rest of the game.

Defeating the threats presented by today's adversaries ensures installations can continue to support the attack but also preserve our offensive forces' capacity if we can defend the installations with limited FMF augmentation. Resilience through disruptions will also provide continued installation support to our offensive forces. The dilemmas described above can be overcome if installations are resilient. The ability to mitigate or recover from the effects

of hurricanes or power outages allows the continuation of power projection. When our enemies know we not only can survive but can adapt and respond in a contested environment, they will know our resilience is a source of strength and give them pause.

Though our homeland is no longer a sanctuary, and our goal can be shot upon at any time, the same is true for our opponents. The offense and defense are mutually integral to our strength. One must complement the other to achieve a synergistic effect. If our strikers keep the pressure on the opponent, the ability of our adversary to truly put pressure on our defenders will be limited. If our defenders can prevent or quickly repel penetrations, this allows the continuation of the attack. We must maintain pressure on the opponent's goal. Keeping their players collapsed on their goal prevents sustained and effective pressure on our goal. On the field of competition today, this is very challenging. The game of soccer depends on two teams accepting the rules of the game. As we respect the international rules of order, the principles of national sovereignty, and the freedom and democratic values that form the foundation of this Nation, we will be constrained in what offensive strategies we can employ. Meanwhile, our adversaries do not appear to be constrained by these same values. We must assume they will have the opportunity and ability to generate an offense that can strike at our goal.

Marine Corps installations must be ready today while we make ready to meet the emerging challenges and support the future force design requirements as we provide the core of our Corps' defense. If we want to continue to raise the champion's trophy, we must have both an offense that can strike and score and an installations team with the capability and capacity to generate the attack and defend our critical goals.



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