

US Navy Fighting Instructions Emphasize EMSO

By John Knowles

Last month, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) ADM Daryl Caudle issued a new set of Fighting Instructions that describes important roles for electromagnetic warfare (EW) capabilities.

The Fighting Instructions describe a new hedge strategy that postures the main battle force to “deter and win” and also develops hedge forces that will comprise “modular, scalable tailored offsets.” While the concept of a hedge force has previously been discussed by Navy leaders and described by think tanks (notably the Hudson Institute), the CNO’s Fighting Instructions enshrine the hedge strategy in Navy doctrine. An important aspect of the Fighting Instructions is the implicit needs to sense, communicate and deny enemy use of the EMS.

One of the principles behind the hedge strategy is to create “tailored forces,” that utilize rapidly scalable hedge capabilities, such as unmanned air systems (UAS), unmanned surface vessels (USVs) and unmanned undersea vessels (UUVs), which will “augment the main battle force by solving specific shortfalls, improving lethality and enhancing resiliency.” These hedge capabilities will help the Navy gain advantages in four specific areas: Counter-C5ISR (counter-command, control, communications, computers, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting); directed energy (DE) for terminal defense; robotic and autonomous systems (RAS); and artificial intelligence and advanced manufacturing.

In its description of C-C5ISR, the Fighting Instructions state, “The Navy excels at striking, and through new investments like robotic and autonomous systems (RAS) and

high-end precision munitions, we are fielding more new and novel long-range strike capabilities. Where we must redouble our investments is in how the Fleet evades detection... C-C5ISRT is a whole of Navy (and whole of Joint Force) cross-domain challenge, from seabed to cyber to space." It adds, "Confusing, obfuscating, or eluding the adversary is an absolute necessity in modern warfare, and C-C5ISRT is how we enable expanded maneuver to ensure we strike first and effectively against the adversary. We must develop a standard model for C-C5ISRT to build a general operating system with common interfaces, a resilient command and control architecture, and a responsive industrial base to deliver and integrate these advanced capabilities at pace."

The Fighting Instructions also address DE, something that Caudle has been a strong advocate for since his days as a commander of US Fleet Forces Command. The document states, "Fielding directed energy (DE) for line-of-sight applications, such as air and missile defense, would usher in a paradigm shift in war at sea. Currently, ships must reserve significant portions of dual-use missiles and magazine space for defense, reducing available fires for offense and increasing the cost and complexity of missiles that must optimize to both tasks. DE systems that can assume the terminal defense mission currently dominated by kinetic interceptors would dramatically expand offensive magazine depth. This shift will fundamentally alter the cost and logistics equation, providing deep, low-cost shots per engagement while freeing surface combatants to carry more long-range strike and theater defense weapons. The Navy will develop a comprehensive DE strategy that clearly defines priorities, capability thresholds, and timelines, ensuring investments are aligned across platforms, mission areas, and Future Years Defense Programs (FYDPs). Such a strategy will enable deliberate, sustained investment in the power, thermal, and integration upgrades necessary to transition DE from experimentation to Fleet capability. A coherent DE strategy will also accelerate industrial base

maturation, reduce fielding risk, and establish common standards for sensors, command and control, targeting, and supply chains. Doing so must start with a DE champion that leverages the standard model.”

In the section on “Building Readiness,” the Fighting Instructions discuss another area where EW is likely to play a role: contested logistics. “For decades,” the document explains, “the Navy has enjoyed a permissive environment and uncontested sea lanes resulting in a just-in-time Navy logistics enterprise. As exhibited by operations in the Red Sea, those conditions no longer hold. Sustaining forward-deployed forces will require resilient, distributed, AI-enabled, just-in-case logistics networks and concepts that can adapt under fire. This means investing in smaller, mobile replenishment platforms; leveraging autonomous vessels and unmanned systems for resupply; expanding pre-positioned stockpiles and dispersed fuel storage; leveraging the C-C5ISR umbrella that supports combat ships; improving organic self-sufficiency at sea; and hardening logistics command and control systems to operate through electronic warfare and cyber disruption.”

The Fighting Instructions also introduce the Enhanced Mission Command Framework (EMCF) which will “formally define and strengthen mission command by distributing authority through clearly defined roles, domains, and accountabilities, ensuring that delegated autonomy is matched to demonstrated situational competency across the assigned battlespace. This framework connects the Navy’s operational concepts with the organizational mechanisms required to execute them under speed, pressure, and contested conditions.” The EMCF essentially acknowledges the Navy’s dependence on network-enabled operations and offers a way to help mitigate the potential impact of enemy jamming and kinetic strikes against communications nodes. The document states, “The EMCF provides the organizational operating system that meshes mission

command and the network architecture, making DMO actionable at scale across all platforms, from an AI-enabled unmanned drone to the Carrier Strike Group. It does so by codifying how decision rights are delegated, how they adapt during a campaign, and how units are empowered to act under degraded or denied communications in order to achieve the mission tasking.”

In *JED*’s analysis, Admiral Caudle’s Fighting Instructions represent a significant step forward for Navy EMSO. While the Fighting Instructions don’t spend a lot of time addressing EMSO by name, they do communicate an appreciation that the EMS is a critical maneuver space in modern naval operations.