Decoding Red Teaming: Using Purpose, Clarity, History, and Common Themes to Shape the Future

Similar to lack of clarity that undermined operational design implementation, Red Teaming confusion increased along with its popularity. Amidst the confusion, the Marine Corps injected Red Teaming into the operating forces without an adequate understanding of its purpose, history, or utility. Despite the challenges associated with creating a conceptual framework for employing future Red Teams, the Marine Corps can effectively implement Red Teaming by gaining a better understanding of the purpose for Red Teaming, eliminating root causes of confusion, leveraging historical examples, and identifying themes common to each Red Teaming method.
FUTURE WAR PAPER

DECODING RED TEAMING: USING PURPOSE, CLARITY, HISTORY, AND COMMON THEMES TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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Executive Summary

Title: Decoding Red Teaming: Using Purpose, Clarity, History, and Common Themes to Shape the Future

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Thesis: Creating a conceptual framework for employing future Marine Corps Red Teams requires gaining a better understanding of the purpose for Red Teaming, eliminating root causes of confusion, leveraging historical examples, and identifying themes common to each Red Teaming method.

Discussion: The 9/11 Commission, along with the temporarily constituted Joint Intelligence Committees of the U.S. House and Senate, recommended and passed legislation which implemented Red Teaming as one solution for preventing the kinds of lapses of imagination and critical thinking that were evident in the wake of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. Similar to the lack of clarity that undermined operational design implementation, Red Teaming confusion increased along with its popularity. Amidst this confusion, the Marine Corps injected Red Teaming into the operating forces without an adequate understanding of its purpose, history, or utility.

Conclusion: Despite the challenges associated with creating a conceptual framework for employing future Red Teams, the Marine Corps can effectively implement Red Teaming by gaining a better understanding of the purpose for Red Teaming, eliminating root causes of confusion, leveraging historical examples, and identifying themes common to each Red Teaming method.
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Introduction

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the debacle regarding alleged Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction, United States policymakers and the American public demanded to know the causes that led to systemic intelligence failures.\(^1\) The 9/11 Commission, along with the temporarily constituted Joint Intelligence Committees of the U.S. House and Senate, recommended and passed legislation which identified Red Teaming as one solution for preventing the kinds of lapses of imagination and critical thinking that were evident in the wake of 9/11 and after the invasion of Iraq.\(^2\) Red Teaming is the art of applying independent, critical, and culturally sensitive alternative thinking to challenge assumptions, explore alternative outcomes, and facilitate risk reduction while increasing opportunities.\(^3\)

Similar to the lack of clarity that undermined operational design implementation, Red Teaming confusion increased along with the concept’s popularity. Amidst this confusion, the Marine Corps injected Red Teaming into the operating forces without an adequate understanding of its purpose, history, or utility. Creating a conceptual framework for employing future Marine Corps Red Teams requires gaining a better understanding of the purpose for Red Teaming, eliminating root causes of confusion, leveraging historical examples, and identifying themes common to each Red Teaming method.

Red Teaming Purpose

The purpose of Red Teaming is to challenge conventional thinking within an organization. The aftermath of 9/11 and the war in Iraq introduced and validated the notion that America’s current adversaries pose greater challenges for the intelligence enterprise than did the United State’s former Cold War adversaries. Decision makers require tools that minimize obstacles associated with group-think, mirror imaging, and cultural misunderstandings. Red Teaming is critical to improving a decision maker’s ability to visualize relevant aspects of the
operating environment. Regrettably, Red Teaming has fallen victim to considerable confusion, which impedes the Marine Corps' ability to implement the concept.

**Root Causes of Confusion**

Military use of formalized alternative analysis and wargaming began in the 19th century when the German Army developed the “Kriegspiel,” a rule-based map simulation that provided the German General Staff an opportunity to challenge operational concepts and plans. The word “Kriegspiel” is German and literally means war game. In 1879, U.S. Army Captain W. R. Livermore established a similar set of rules for wargaming called the American Kriegspiel.

The Cold War revitalized interest in Kriegspiel-like wargaming. During this period, the term Red Cell emerged to describe the intelligence processes designed to predict enemy reactions to friendly courses of action. U.S. intelligence officers dedicated hours to memorizing Soviet Union military doctrine required to conduct Red Cell wargaming.

After the Cold War, wargaming and alternative analysis gained popularity in multiple sectors, despite divergent understandings of its implementation and utility. Today in the private sector, Red Teaming usually means a peer review of a concept or proposal. In non-defense governmental circles, Red Teaming is typically associated with system vulnerability assessments. Within the U.S. military, it is not uncommon to observe both terms, Red Cell and Red Teaming, used interchangeably. Mixing the terms Red Teaming and Red Cell is incorrect.

Red Cell and Red Teaming have different meanings. In fact, Red Cell is now a component of the broader concept of Red Teaming. Feeling the pressure to incorporate Red Teaming into the military services, leaders increased confusion by demanding more Red Teaming activity without understanding its associated terminology or offering adequate implementation guidance regarding desired Red Teaming outcomes.
Much of the confusion surrounding Red Teaming is attributed to conflicting senior leader guidance, incongruent service doctrine, and imprecise word choice. Conflicting guidance from decision makers leads to wasted time and resources. Incongruent doctrine between service components causes communication problems during joint planning. Imprecise word choice confounds an already perplexing concept. Successful Red Teaming implementation requires mitigation strategies to overcome these barriers.

In his 2011 Planning Guidance, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Amos, identified Red Teaming implementation as one of his top priorities. Unfortunately, the Commandant actually increased confusion by issuing conflicting guidance, misusing the terms Red Cell and Red Teaming interchangeably, and failing to offer a clear vision:

Institute Red Cell CG MCCDC & CG TECOM - develop a plan for instituting a Red Cell at each MEF and in each deploying MEB. CG TECOM and President MCU will further develop the curriculum to institutionalize Red Teaming within resident SNCO and Officer PME courses. The purpose of this cell is to challenge prevailing notions, rigorously test current TTPs and counter group-think.

While the Commandant’s Planning Guidance clearly signaled his intent to increase the Marine Corps’ analytic acuity, the guidance failed to specify how the Commandant intended to implement this analytical approach. Subordinate commanders struggled to understand whether the Commandant was calling for increased adversary role playing, or signaling his desire for greater alternative analysis. Confusing guidance left Marines guessing about the Commandant’s true intentions.

Incongruent doctrine is also complicit in Red Teaming confusion. U.S. Joint doctrine, U.S. Army doctrine, and U.S. Marine Corps doctrine each offer different definitions for Red Teaming. Joint doctrine defines Red Teaming as an organizational element comprised of trained and educated planners that provide an independent capability to fully explore alternatives in plans and operations in the context of the operational environment and from the perspective of
adversaries. The Army preferred a slightly different approach and defined Red Teaming as a structured, iterative process executed by trained team members that provides commanders an independent capability to challenge plans, operations, concepts, organizations, and capabilities in the context of the operational environment and from partners’ and adversaries’ perspectives.

Opting for a completely different approach, the Marine Corps chose not to use the term Red Teaming; instead the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP) described the Marine Corps’ analytic efforts as Red and Green Cells. According to the MSTP, Red Cell is a commander’s tool to better understand the environment with respect to the enemy, to better understand the nature of the problem, and to make more informed decisions. MSTP defined Green Cell as a commander’s planning tool to better understand the environment with respect to the indigenous population of a particular environment.

The Marine Corps’ decision to characterize alternative analysis in terms of Red Cell and Green Cell represents a narrow approach to Red Teaming. By defining Red and Green Cells, instead of the broader term Red Teaming, the Marine Corps ceded its opportunity to use the entire gamut of Red Teaming methods, in favor of more limited options with which Marine commanders are more familiar. From a joint planning perspective, multiple Red Teaming definitions and incongruent doctrine cause extreme confusion. In multi-national environments with numerous planners, the confusion can reach dysfunctional levels. A common definition and operating approach for Red Teaming will minimize confusion while increasing effectiveness.

Imprecise word choice contributes to Red Teaming confusion. Since both terms share the word “red,” Red Teaming and Red Cell are mistakenly used interchangeably. The terms are different in scope and function. Experienced Red Teamers lament that the concept would benefit
from being relabeled alternative analysis, thereby eliminating confusion caused by association with the term “red.”

Relabeling Red Teaming lessens the opportunity for service members to mistake Red Teaming functions for intelligence community functions. In the U.S. military, the term “red” commonly refers to the enemy, which is functionally the responsibility of the intelligence community. While there is some overlap between Red Teaming and intelligence analysis, there are also key distinctions. For example, intelligence analysis is based on evidence and reporting, whereas Red Teaming is based on educated hypothesis. Intelligence analysis is primarily focused on enemy capabilities, while Red Teaming considers the effects of enemy capabilities on the operational environment. Fortunately, the Department of Defense provided clarification.

In 2003, the Department of Defense Science Board Task Force (DSBTF) released The Role and Status of DoD Red Teaming Activities, which while widely ignored, provided the first step toward subject clarity. The DSBTF explained the Department’s position regarding Red Teaming. Although there is little evidence to suggest this report had significant impact on the military services, the report provided a necessary framework and helpful definitions that offer a basis to understanding Red Teaming. The DSBTF stressed that the term Red Teaming was an overarching concept. Interestingly, the DSBTF never once mentioned Green Cell, the Red Teaming method used exclusively by the Marine Corps to represent the independent will of an indigenous population. Most importantly, DSBTF stressed that Surrogate Adversaries, Devil’s Advocate, Sources of Independent Judgment, and Red Cell were subordinate methods of the overarching Red Teaming concept.

Despite the challenges presented by the root causes of Red Teaming confusion, each can be mitigated. First, to eliminate doctrinal confusion, the Joint community should produce Red
Teaming doctrine, which includes a single definition for the concept, as did the U.K. military. Secondly, to mitigate unclear policy guidance, senior leaders must become familiar with the concept before issuing guidance on implementation. Finally, to eliminate the confusion regarding the term red, the Joint community should consider relabeling Red Teaming as “Alternative Analysis.” Although there is no panacea that will totally eliminate all Red Teaming confusion, the proposed recommendations will reduce misapplication of this concept.

**Historical Examples of Red Teaming**

An effective way to visualize difficult concepts is through the lens of history. Historical examples validate the effectiveness of Red Teaming. This section provides definitions and historical examples for each of the previously mentioned Red Teaming methods: Surrogate Adversaries, Devil’s Advocate, Sources of Independent Judgment, Red Cell, and Green Cell. These examples provide insights into future Red Teaming employment and concept implementation.

The Surrogate Adversaries method, more commonly referred to as Opposing Force, seeks to emulate an adversary or competitor. This Red Teaming method leverages known adversary tactics, techniques, procedures, and occasionally equipment to imitate the opposing force. The purpose of the Surrogate Adversaries approach is to sharpen friendly force skills, expose friendly vulnerabilities that adversaries might exploit, and ultimately increase the friendly force’s understanding of options and responses available to adversaries and competitors.

The Marine Corps has several organizations that specialize in employing the Surrogate Adversaries methodology. The Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-1, the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Staff Training Program, the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group, and the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group all use the Surrogate
Adversaries method to simulate realistic depictions of how the enemy may act or react towards friendly forces. Mojave Viper, a 30-day Combined Arms and Security/Stability exercise, hosted by the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, is an example of how an organization can effectively leverage the Surrogate Adversaries method to prepare Marines for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.18 Mojave Viper’s realistic combat portrayal provides Marines an opportunity to train and prepare for future combat within a controlled laboratory-like training environment.

Operation POST MORTEM of 1945 offers an insightful example of how the military can use the Surrogate Adversaries method to plan for an adversary. During the course of World War II, the British had great difficulty assessing the effectiveness of their Electronic Counter Measures (ECM), which were designed to trick or deceive radar, sonar, or other detection systems.19 In 1945, the British captured the German air defense command in Denmark intact. As a result of this intelligence windfall, the Royal Air Force was able to run a full scale mock raid against the German system to test the effectiveness of the British ECM. The British gained valuable insights into the effectiveness of their system.

An equally effective Red Teaming method, Devil’s Advocate, explores a position not as a committed opponent, but simply for the sake of argument to determine the validity of the reasoning. The purpose of the Devil’s Advocate method is to test the quality of the original planning assumptions, to identify weaknesses in its structure, and to use such information to either improve or abandon the original opposing position.20 The Devil’s Advocate method provides a critique of, and alternatives to, an organization’s assumptions, plans, and concepts.

The Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, often referred to as the Rumsfeld Commission, used the Devil’s Advocate method of Red Teaming. This independent commission was formed by Congress to evaluate the ballistic missile threat posed to
the United States and to challenge the 1995 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which stated that no country, other than the five major nuclear powers was capable within the next 15 years of acquiring missiles that could reach the contiguous U.S. 21

The Commission’s findings differed from the NIE and generated mixed reactions among lawmakers, intelligence officers, and security experts. Not surprising, the harsh language used in the report angered the intelligence community. The Commission’s final report warned of a growing threat of ballistic missiles and the inability of U.S. intelligence agencies to track the proliferation of missile technology. The use of an independent commission to challenge the NIE and identify possible weaknesses was a clear example of employing the Devil’s Advocate method of Red Teaming to improve decision making.

The Sources of Independent Judgment method leverages a team of outside specialists to conduct an independent examination of findings, facts, and assumptions. Unlike the Devil’s Advocate method, the goal for the Sources of Independent Judgment method is to use existing information to reach an entirely alternative answer, concept, or plan. 22 One of the most famous Sources of Independent Judgment experiments was called Team B and occurred in 1976 under the Ford Administration.

Team B was a competitive analysis experiment that stemmed from a controversial report by the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). This report claimed that the Central Intelligence Agency had underestimated the Soviet Union’s strategic weapons progress. 23 After conducting an independent analysis, Team B’s findings supported the PFIAB claim and concluded that the CIA had underestimated Soviet military power and misinterpreted Soviet strategic intentions. While history proved Team B’s findings and conclusions wrong,
Team B validated the process of competitive analysis for challenging findings, facts, and assumptions.

A more recent example of the Sources of Independent Judgment method was brought to light by *The Washington Post*. A group of students from Georgetown University, using open source intelligence, uncovered a vast network of Chinese tunnels designed to hide China’s increasingly sophisticated missile and nuclear arsenals. The students challenged the intelligence community’s analysis and reached an entirely different conclusion. The results from the Georgetown Team B experiment produced the largest body of public information describing thousands of miles of tunnels dug by the Second Artillery Corps, a secretive branch of the Chinese military responsible for protecting and deploying its ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.

Prior to the Georgetown experiment, U.S. intelligence officials believed for years that the Chinese arsenal was relatively small, ranging from 80 to 400 warheads. China encouraged that perception. As the only nation of the five original nuclear-armed states with a no-first use policy, China insists that it keeps a small stockpile of warheads for minimum deterrence. As a result of the Georgetown experiment, the Department of Defense’s annual report on China was updated to reflect the students’ contribution.

The Red Cell, unlike most methods of Red Teaming, is not independent and typically works for the sponsoring organization. The purpose of the Red Cell is to assist the commander by assessing courses of action (COAs) against a thinking enemy, using one or all of the techniques of Red Teaming. During the COA War Game step of the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP), the role of the Red Cell is to accurately portray enemy actions and reactions, while the friendly commander executes his COAs. The Red Cell strives to ensure that enemy
actions are realistic, operationally sound, and indicative of the enemy's perceived thought process. Marines used Red Cell to plan for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The ultimate goal for Marines using Red Cell was to produce a concept of operations that allowed the commander to accomplish his mission successfully and not for the Red Cell to win. 28

While the Red Cell is an enemy focused Red Teaming method, the Green Cell is a commander's planning tool used to gain a greater appreciation for the environment with respect to the indigenous non-combatant population. 29 The purpose of the Green Cell is to represent the independent will of the population. Because the Green Cell is principally focused on social and behavioral systems, it requires a holistic approach and a structured set of analytical tools. During the COA Development step of the MCPP, the Green Cell models dynamic aspects of the environment to include cultural, political, and ecological considerations. 30 Like Red Cells, Green Cells are mainstays of the MCPP. Marines used Green Cell to plan for Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. Marine Green Cells represented the independent wills of the Afghan and Iraqi populations.

**Common Themes**

Historical examples highlight Red Teaming differences; however, similarities are equally important when designing a concept for future employment. Red Teaming's intrinsic characteristics make the concept well-suited to integrate alternative perspectives. Understanding which characteristics and themes are most important is critical for selecting personnel, conducting training, and gaining support for the concept. These common themes represent the foundational components necessary for effective implementation of the Red Teaming concept.

Analysis of the five Red Teaming methods revealed ten common themes critical for successful Red Teaming, depicted in Table 1. All Red Teaming methods require the following:
Implementing a Red Team capability that is highly flexible and adaptive, while remaining true to its purpose, requires a concept that embraces these ten themes and characteristics. The commander is responsible for ensuring his staff understands how each characteristic influences successful concept implementation. Red Teams require access to the commander and his primary staff to build professional trust and concept credibility.

Understanding the themes and characteristics listed in Table 1 is paramount to building this trust.

**Future Concept**

One of the most important aspects of this analysis is proposing a conceptual framework for future employment of Red Teams in the Marine Corps. Retired Marine Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper insisted that the Marine Corps could position itself well by training select officers in the basic techniques of Red Teaming to include understanding how and when to use one of the five methods of Red Teaming. Van Riper stressed that the decision maker must first
decide whether or not any of the Red Teaming methods are appropriate for the given problem set before choosing a specific Red Teaming method. When asked about staffing the options, Van Riper struck a similarly cautious tone and warned that while there are clear advantages to having a standing Red Team within a command, there are also disadvantages. Specifically, Red Teaming can improve planning, analysis, and intelligence. However, if the concept is not properly understood or implemented, Red Teaming has the potential to become disruptive, confusing, and counterproductive. Therefore, employment, staffing, and training are critical to implementing this concept.

**Recommended Lines of Operation**

Four lines of operation (LOO) should be considered for Marine Corps Red Teaming employment: Enemy and Actor Emulation; Support to Planning and Operations; Achieving a Different Mental Model; and Building Red Team Capability and Capacity. The Enemy and Actor Emulation LOO involves tasks associated with thinking like the enemy and accounting for enemy culture. The Support to Planning LOO includes tasks associated with challenging assumptions of operational plans, contingency plans, and exercise plans. The Achieving a Different Mental Model LOO consists of critical review, analysis tools, and war games to focus on correctly identifying concepts and potential solutions. The Building Capability and Capacity LOO requires educating and training the staff on the Red Teaming concept. Table 2 depicts these potential lines of operation.

**Table 2. Proposed Red Team Lines of Operation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enemy and Actor Emulation</th>
<th>Support to Planning and Operations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thinking like the enemy/actor</td>
<td>1. OPLANS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accounting for culture</td>
<td>2. CONPLANS</td>
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3. Exercise plans
4. Ad Hoc plans

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<tr>
<th>Achieving a Different Mental Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Independent study/research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discuss/ debate with SMEs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Red Team Capability and Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Coordinate with HQMC/ MCU Red Team leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Educate MEF Staff/MSCs on Red Team concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Educate and train Provisional Red Team members</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

When considering Red Teaming employment options, commanders must protect Red Teams from becoming co-opted by the advocates and managers of current policies, plans, and programs. Concurrently, commanders must also prevent the Red Team from becoming merely a sideline critic. Skilled Red Team Leaders (RTL) are key. Effective RTLs must sponsor ideas for change without demeaning past progress; challenge myths, but preserve their truths; and demand new facts, while reining in analytical chaos.34

Training

Currently, the Marine Corps offers no formal Red Teaming course. However, the Army’s University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFCMS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas conducts courses Marines can attend. The UFCMS presents four courses designed to train potential Red Teamers. Course lengths range from two to 18 weeks. The Red Team Leader Course (18 weeks) is the most comprehensive course offered, while the Critical Thinking for Red Team Practitioner Course (two weeks) is the least comprehensive. Table 3 contains descriptions for each of the four courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Red Team Leader</td>
<td>18 Weeks</td>
<td>Non-western theory, world cultures and religions, and critical thinking systems. Students explore TTPs, diverse theories, and coalition doctrine. They also research case studies, interact with deployed</td>
<td>O-4 and above</td>
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Some Marines familiar with the four courses think the Stop Gap Red Team Leader and the Red Team Member Courses are best suited to satisfy the Marine Corps’ Red Team requirements.36

Staffing

Deciding how to staff Marine Red Teams presents a challenge for the Marine manpower system. The Commandant directed each Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Expeditionary Brigade to establish a Red Teaming capability. However, given current resource limitations, staffing additional force structure requirements is highly unlikely. In the interim, to establish Red Teaming, each MEF and MEB should allocate qualified officers and SNCOs to support this emerging requirement. The following staffing options are recommended:

- **Standing:** All members are UFMCS trained and permanently assigned.
- **Provisional:** All members are UFMCS trained, used as required, and returned to their full time jobs once Red Teaming responsibilities are satisfied.
- **Ad hoc:** No UFMCS trained participants. Members are randomly assigned for Red Teaming responsibilities as required.
- **Hybrid:** Only the Red Team leader (RTL) is UFMCS trained and permanently assigned. The RTL conducts local training to build a participant pool from which to draw.
In the interim, the Hybrid option may be the most flexible COA available to satisfy the Commandant’s guidance while minimizing training costs. The Standing option is the most resource intensive COA and therefore a less attractive option. The Ad hoc and Provisional options, although less resource intensive when compared to the Standing option could be perceived as commitment lacking, considering both methods represent part-time approaches.

Conclusion

The Commandant injected Red Teaming into the Marine Corps without an adequate understanding of its history, purpose, or utility. Creating a conceptual framework for employing future Red Teams in the Marine Corps requires gaining a better understanding of the purpose for Red Teaming, eliminating root causes of confusion, leveraging historical examples, and identifying themes common to each Red Teaming method. Red Teaming has the potential to challenge conventional thought, but only if the Marine Corps mitigates root causes for confusion, which undermine the concept. Much of the confusion that undermines the term Red Teaming is attributed to incongruent doctrine, weak guidance from senior leaders, and imprecise word selection—all of which can be mitigated. Historical examples are an effective way to understand and visualize the Red Teaming concept, while common themes provide insight into intrinsic characteristics necessary to gain commander and primary staff support. Correcting inconsistencies in doctrine and providing focused senior leadership guidance are also keys to success. Most importantly, selecting and training top notch Marines in all five methods of Red Teaming positions the Marine Corps well to implement this concept.37
Endnotes


5 Gregory Fontenot, 4


11 Ibid., 1-G

12 Lieutenant Colonel Randall Hoffman, USMC, email message to author.


16 Headquarters, United Kingdom Defense Staff, 15

17 Department of Defense, Defense Science Board Task Force, *The Role and Status of DoD Red Teaming Activities*, 4


25 Wan.
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27 Green Cell is the only other method that is not independent.
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