Marines inside the kill web: fight immediately, anywhere, with little

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In December 2025, the Steel Knight 25 exercise was followed as a real **laboratory** to understand if **dispersed forces**, **rapid operations**, and a network of connected sensors and weapons (**kill web**) work under realistic conditions. It was observed that **one can no longer rely on secure bases and long times to "gather strength"**: in a modern clash, **communications** and **supplies** can be hit immediately, so one must know how to **operate from the start** with **distributed** and **connected** units.

Enter and stay: Survival, supplies, time (S^2D)

To insert a force into a contested area, three questions must be asked: **how long can you survive**, **how long can you sustain**, **how long can you last**. This scheme (**S^2D: Survivability, Sustainability, Duration**) matters because it must be assumed that **logistics will be disrupted** and that **supplies will not be guaranteed**.

The **hub–spoke–node** model was also discussed: it is necessary to better define **what a hub can offer and what it cannot**, how fixed it should be, and what a node should do. A very practical idea was reinforced: nodes must be assigned an **“expiration date”**. If you stay too long in the same place, especially after fire or transmissions, you are identified and hit. Therefore, you must **operate for short windows** (hours or a few days) and then **move**, while already preparing the next node.

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The most difficult node: logistics

It was confirmed that **supplying dispersed forces is the toughest problem**. No “miraculous solutions” were found: only ways to **reduce** and **manage** the risk were identified. The value of platforms like the **CH-53K** for moving heavy loads was emphasized, and the potential of **autonomous maritime systems** to support distant nodes was noted.

It was also seen that the support of the **Air Force C-130** was decisive: without it, the exercise would have been much more limited. This highlighted a limitation: **there are still not enough numbers** of some platforms (KC-130J, MV-22, CH-53K, F-35) to apply the distributed model without strong joint support. In summary, it was reiterated that **“it is not done with magic”**: **means**, **numbers**, and **realistic plans** are needed.

Command, communications, and adaptation: how to make the kill web truly effective

It was observed that distributed operations require **more delegation**. Today, small teams can be given very advanced observation and engagement capabilities, but if **tasks** and **authority** are not clarified, the advantage is reduced. Moreover, in a contested electromagnetic environment, even brief transmissions can expose you to enemy fire: therefore, one must focus on **intent-based orders**, **local initiative**, and a better balance between central control and decisions on the ground.

Digital interoperability was indicated as the main breakthrough: information must circulate between platforms and units, using assets like the **F-35** also as a **sensor and data node**, not just as an “attack aircraft.” A simple principle was repeated: **redundancy = survival**. There must be **multiple communication paths** (satellite, commercial networks, cellular, fiber, etc.) because it must be expected that the network will be disrupted.

Finally, the lesson from Ukraine was recalled: one must **adapt faster** than the adversary. One must be ready to change tactics and combine different tools when reality on the ground demands it. In conclusion, it was identified that work must focus on three main priorities: **command and control more suited to the speed of operations**, **more robust logistics**, and **clearer strategic guidance** on **what nodes should do**, **for how long**, and **for what campaign objective**.

News link: https://www.marines.mil/News/News-Display/Article/4358483/steel-knight-25-support-within-striking-distance/