

A Response to Maneuverist #19

EABO is Maneuver Warfare

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The Maneuverist Papers continue to promote a healthy and vigorous discourse about Marine Corps doctrine, using *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, as the central point of departure. Written by the pseudonymous author “Marinus,” this series of articles has proven to be a valuable mechanism for discussing the current and future state of the Marine Corps.

Marinus’ latest contribution directly confronts Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), contending that force design efforts that support EABO are over-preparing the Marine Corps for a single fight while hobbling the Marine Corps’ ability to conduct other missions. More fundamentally, Marinus argues that EABO is contradictory to maneuver warfare and is rooted in a faulty strategic framework, even suggesting that EABO contradicts the nature of war itself.¹

The value of this latest paper is that Marinus gives voice to concerns that have been raised by many other critics of EABO.² That said, Marinus’ evaluation of EABO is off the mark. Marinus’ conclusions are not supported by a framing of EABO within the strategic context or the operational approaches that EABO endeavors to support. Additionally, Marinus’ claims are hyper-focused on maneuver warfare within the limited—albeit important—frame of tactical movement for tactical advantage. The criticisms of Marinus do not flow from maneuver warfare as a warfighting philosophy, the essential elements of which include: the prioritization of mental or moral defeat mechanisms over physical defeat mechanisms;

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the exploitation of the element of time; a fundamental orientation on the enemy predicated on understanding him; and the employment of asymmetry.

More to the point: *EABO is maneuverist to the core.* The goal of this article is to contextualize EABO within maneuver warfare. To do this, the authors will address the concerns raised by Marinus and more clearly articulate the connections between EABO and maneuver warfare. Ideally, this will drive the conversation forward and position those with a hand in refining, wargaming, and executing EABO to do so in the spirit of the Marine Corps’ warfighting philosophy.

Island Chains and Maneuver

Marinus begins by identifying apparent shortfalls in the Island Chain Strategy, which is the strategic concept against which EABO is applied. Marinus describes this strategy as inherently attritionist, in contrast with a maneuverist approach. Later, Marinus ties this claim to a description of EABs as inanimate nodes used in a clash of technologies that contradicts the nature of war described in *MCDP 1*.³

The reading of EABs as inanimate nodes seems to conflate the term “base” with “installation.” A base is merely a locality from which operations are projected and supported, no matter how small or temporal. The recent article by LtCol John Berry (Ret), “What’s in a Name?” tackles this common misconception and highlights instead the operational agility of the EAB.⁴

Regarding attrition, should the threshold of conflict be crossed, the role of EABO in missile-salvo combat certainly has a strong attritionist element. However, a deliberate application of attrition is not foreign to maneuver warfare. Yes, maneuver warfare prioritizes moral and mental defeat mechanisms over physical defeat mechanisms.⁵ However, *MCDP 1* insists that violence or its threat remain critical to defeating the enemy system: “Firepower and attrition are essential elements of warfare by maneuver.”⁶

Does a rifle company commander’s call for artillery fire on an enemy position mean he has abandoned maneuver warfare? Of course not. And should munitions be fired from EABs, the launching system will likely be static at the

moment of firing. The same is true for a howitzer. Is the employment of cannon artillery a refutation of maneuver warfare? Certainly not. The notion of *shoot, move, communicate* is as applicable to EABO as it is to artillery, though EABO and stand-in forces (SIF) conducting such operations might also emphasize *detect, move, communicate*.

More than that, the role of EABO is a deliberate effort to attack the enemy's plan and undermine the utility of his anti-access area-denial/counter-intervention strategy. The threat inherent in EABO, and its role in facilitating the entry of more decisive naval and joint forces, is a combination of direct and indirect approaches that avoid the enemy's surface and exploit the gap in his battle network.⁷ Additionally, the role of SIF conducting constant reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance builds the commander's understanding of the enemy's disposition, capability, and intent.⁸ These are direct applications of the fundamental orientation on the enemy called for in *MCDP 1*: "We should try to 'get inside' the enemy's thought processes and see the enemy as he sees himself so that we can set him up for defeat."⁹

In doing this, EABO aims to invalidate the enemy's plan below the threshold of conflict, leading to a mental or moral defeat if the enemy is deterred from fighting in the first place. All of these attributes align lock-step with maneuver warfare doctrine.

EABO Provides Deterrence

This point is only reinforced by Marinus' reference to the Cold War in an attempt to describe EABO as Maginot Line-like in function. Marinus observes that the Army committed multiple corps to Europe because of the expectation that the major conflict with the Soviet Union was expected to occur in central Europe. But since no such conflict occurred there, Marinus suggests that this was a waste of force structure as other conflicts occurred in the periphery, simply bypassing these forces.¹⁰

This logic completely ignores the deterrent effect of those multiple U.S. Army corps had on the Soviet Union.

The very presence of these and other NATO conventional forces was a key element in deterring the conflict that everyone wished to avoid.¹¹ Similarly, the presence of EABO in the littorals of an adversary will have a deterrent effect and reduce the risk of conflict. Reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance executed by SIF inside an adversary's weapons engagement zone are inherently disruptive to enemy planning, rob them of the initiative of surprise, and contribute to deterrence by detection.¹² Once more, it bears emphasizing that EABO attacks the enemy's very plan—a highwater mark for applied maneuver warfare.

The Problem of Access Is Perennial

Marinus goes on to note that making the arrangements with individual states to permit access of forces performing EABO would be difficult and that, "In the event of conflict, the United States could never be sure that host countries would be willing to risk the immense dangers of confronting China."¹³ This logic is hollow, as this risk exists with all allies and partners in all wars. The constant existence of this risk does not mean alliances and partnerships should not be pursued. The design of military concepts like EABO and force structure like SIF offers the Department of State something of military value that can be offered to allies and partners, and something that allies and partners will find acceptable and worthwhile.

The risk assessed by Marinus is overblown as well. Marinus claims that "any U.S. deployment [to Taiwan] would trigger a ferocious Chinese response since the Chinese Communist Party considers Taiwan to be Chinese national territory."¹⁴ And yet, the revelation that U.S. Marines had been deployed to Taiwan for over a year resulted in no such response.¹⁵ U.S.-Taiwan bilateral security preparation is only growing and the United States continues to send more troops to Taiwan.¹⁶ Part of China's strategic approach is an application of Lenin's adage, "You probe with bayonets: if you find mush, you push. If you find steel, you withdraw." The commitment of SIF is the presence of steel, and while physical in nature, they

support a mental defeat mechanism that cuts directly at the enemy's plan.

EABO Is Theater Agnostic

Marinus then engages the argument that compares EABO to War Plan Orange and the development of amphibious capabilities in the interwar period.

The critical difference, however, is that those amphibious capabilities found utility in nearly every theater of the Second World War and in numerous instances since, while EABO appears to be applicable to one very specific feature of maritime terrain in the western Pacific.¹⁷

This interpretation is not borne out by the TM-EABO, which is theater agnostic. Additionally, it fails to account for the plethora of writing and wargames on EABO that take place in theaters outside the South China Sea. One such example is Exercise NEW HORIZON, in which the School of Advanced Warfighting applied EABO to a scenario occurring in the vicinity of the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The Commandant of the Marine Corps recently discussed the potential for EABO to support anti-submarine warfare in the northern Atlantic.¹⁸ Indeed, the China scenario gets the most attention as it connects directly with the priorities set forth in the 2019 *National Defense Strategy*. But just as interwar amphibious operations were designed with Japan in mind but were applicable across the globe, so too are EABO applicable across the globe. EABO is theater and scenario agnostic, and to interpret it otherwise is an artificially narrow reading of the concept.

The Corps Retains Traditional Forces

Another thread running through Marinus' article is the contention that the Marine Corps is changing in its entirety and that the development of Marine Littoral Regiments will tie the entire Service to a narrow mission in a specific theater.

It bears repeating that EABO is applicable outside the South China Sea. More than that, while the creation of MLRs will be a transformational change for 3d MarDiv, the vast majority of the Marine Corps will maintain the

composition and capabilities possessed prior to *Force Design 2030*. These forces will remain capable of performing the missions required of the Nation's force in readiness.

EABO Involves Combined-Arms

The next argument from Marinus is the claim that EABO completely discounts combined-arms maneuver, as it is allegedly a “firepower-based concept premised on defeating the enemy’s advance at a long distance. Under such a concept, tactical maneuver becomes irrelevant.” In this same vein, Marinus later argues that the capability of maneuvering against the enemy and engaging in close combat will be lost and that, “Movement generally will consist of local repositioning to avoid detection or counterbattery fire.”¹⁹

As previously noted, maneuver does not preclude firepower, and the use of firepower at the moment of firing does not negate maneuver or the ability to conduct tactical movement. This claim also discounts the combinations of robust combined arms available to support EABO that reside in the entirety of a naval expeditionary force, as well as the ability to move from ship-to-shore, shore-to-ship, and shore-to-shore.²⁰ Combined arms are abundant in EABO, and tactical movement over the water is still tactical movement. Here, Marinus appears to conflate maneuver warfare with maneuver as a *function* and takes what might be considered a land army-centric interpretation of maneuver vice a naval or expeditionary interpretation.

EABO, Competition, and Maneuver Warfare

Finally, Marinus’ concerns focus predominantly on EABO in conflict. While EABO absolutely has a role when the shooting starts and must be optimized as such, the preponderance of EABO will be conducted in the cooperation and competition phases of the competition continuum to support the nation’s strategy of deterrence. More than that, providing a force that can provide deterrent value against the enemy’s gray zone activities—applying a theory of success that shatters the

enemy’s plan—exemplifies maneuver warfare. The connections between competition and maneuver warfare are discussed at length in *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, which in turn is nested within *MCDP 1*.²¹

Conclusion

Maneuver warfare seeks to shatter the enemy’s cohesion via focused, unexpected actions that create a situation with which the adversary cannot cope.²² In application, it demands asymmetry, an orientation on the enemy, the exploitation of time, and mental or moral defeat mechanisms. EABO includes all of these elements and is fundamentally a means to attack the enemy’s plan. While it is applicable in conflict, it generates deterrent value in cooperation and competition, ideally defeating the enemy without fighting him.

The fears about EABO raised by Marinus are not uncommon, but they are based on an incorrect application of maneuver warfare and a misunderstanding of EABO. We implore readers to closely read the following documents to develop their understanding of the issues discussed above: *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, *MCDP 1-4, Competing, A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, and *The Tentative Manual for EABO*. These essential documents will facilitate the ability of leaders, planners, and executioners of EABO to apply it with clarity. Rather than requiring the Marine Corps to abandon maneuver warfare, EABO will allow the Marine Corps to manifest maneuver warfare constantly through campaigning in peace, competition, and, if necessary, in conflict.

Notes

1. Marinus, “Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2022).
2. Brian Kerg, “Force Design’s Information Campaign,” *The Landing*, (September 2020), available at <https://unum.nsin.us>.
3. “Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.”
4. LtCol John Berry, USMC(Ret), “What’s in a Name?” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: February 2020).

5. John Boyd, “Patterns of Conflict,” Video Lecture, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Archives, Boyd Collection).

6. *MCDP 1, Warfighting*.

7. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Samuel B. Griffith, trans, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963).

8. Gen David H. Berger, “A Concept for Stand-in Forces,” *Proceedings*, (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2021).

9. *MCDP 1, Warfighting*.

10. “Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.”

11. Vojtech Mastny, “Did NATO Win the Cold War” *Foreign Affairs*, (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999).

12. Thomas G. Mahnken et. al., “Implementing Deterrence by Detection: Innovative Capabilities, Processes, and Organizations for Situational Awareness in the Indo-Pacific Region,” (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2021).

13. “Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.”

14. *Ibid.*

15. Gordon Lubold, “U.S. Troops Have Been Deployed in Taiwan for at Least a Year,” *The Wall Street Journal*, (October 2021), available at <https://www.wsj.com>.

16. Keoni Everington, “Pentagon Doubles Number of US Troops in Taiwan under Biden,” *Taiwan News*, (November 2021), available at <https://www.taiwannews.com>.

17. “Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.”

18. Gen David H. Berger, “Marines Will Help Fight Submarines,” *Proceedings*, (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2020).

19. *Ibid.*

20. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Naval Doctrine Publication 1: Naval Warfare*, (Washington, DC: OPNAV, 2020).

21. *MCDP 1-4, Competing*.

22. *MCDP 1, Warfighting*.

