

2020 MajGen Harold W. Chase Prize Essay Contest: Honorable Mention

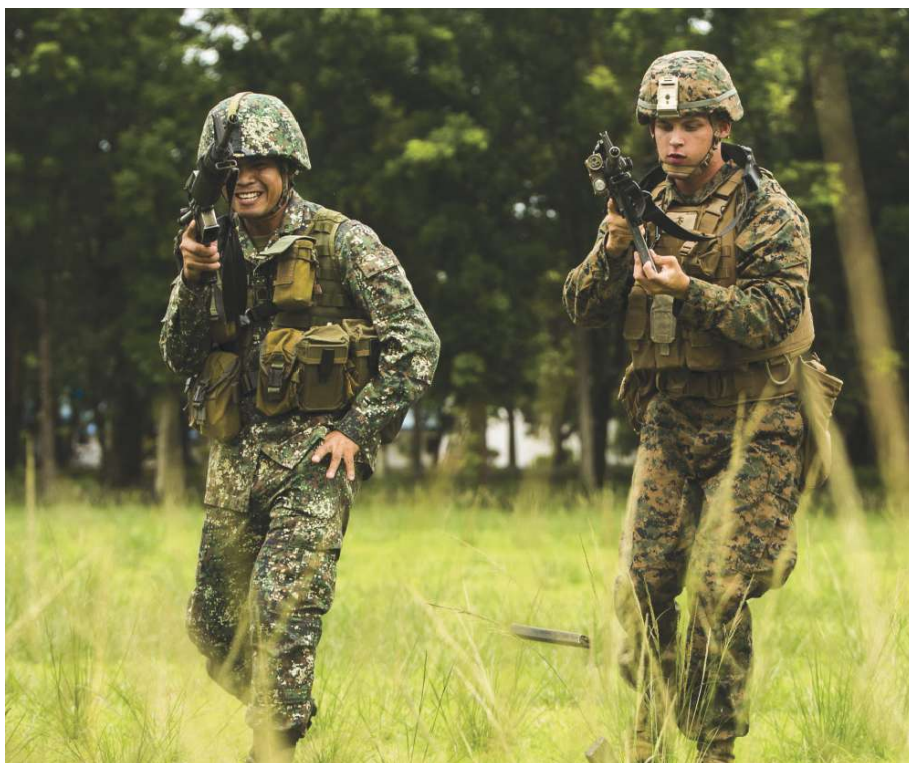
Making it Work

Force Design 2030 and access

by Col George J. David

The concepts against which the Marine Corps is designing its force for 2030 require the Service to intensify international affairs programs in order to properly execute them, especially in the competition stage short of war. *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (EABO) and *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* (LOCE) both discuss land-sea concepts employing territorial waters and on-shore means of exerting maritime influence to gain advantage and possibly dominance, preferably before or without fighting. Conceptually, the Commandant envisions the “stand-in force”¹ inside the umbrella of the Chinese pacing threat in order to buy time to develop adequate responses. None of these concepts, however, adequately explain how to obtain such access to other country’s territorial waters and territory without coercive force. The concepts seem to view the Pacific as it was in 1939: an area of barely governed spaces emerging from the recent umbrella of European colonial control and, consequently, accessible. State Department Foreign Service professionals might have been able to contribute something to assessing the difficulty of obtaining the type of coordinated, acceptable intrusion required (manpower, weapons, equipment, for either temporary or permanent basing and use against another power) in the countries of the Pacific Rim, the Indian Ocean, and the first and second island chains. These concepts require a supporting international affairs operations concept for the fundamental political problem that they pose: access.

LOCE as a concept arose from the recognition that “the luxury of pre-



Bilateral training exercises are one means of access produced by comprehensive theater security cooperation programs. (Photo by Cpl Tyler S. Giguere.)

>Col David is the Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Cyberspace Warfare Group and is also a Foreign Area Officer, Regional Affairs Officer, and a graduate of Spanish Staff College and Inter American Defense College.

sumptive maritime superiority”² had dissolved, especially since the turn of the 21st century and that “large overseas bases”³ are distinctly vulnerable. As a result, the Navy and Marine Corps designed a concept for operations in “all five dimensions of the littorals for

the duration required.”⁴ LOCE expects operations in the sea, land, air, cyber, and electro-magnetic spectrum but does not have much to say about how to coordinate with domestic U.S. authorities for cyber and electronic warfare—much less how all this will be done in someone else’s air, sea, land, and cyber space. How naval forces, operating both inside and outside the territorial waters of nations, achieve “sufficient freedom of action to accomplish likely objectives”⁵ without the nation’s complicity aside from forced entry is not explained.

EABO strays even further into unexplained access under foreign sovereignty

but does so at least with a premise predicated on the problem of permanent basing forward. Because large permanent bases amount to “a self-optimized target set,”⁶ bases must become more transitory and circumstance-oriented to avoid targeting. EABO recognizes the “mass versus persistency dilemma,” which in effect modernizes Mahanian maritime mass by recognizing that mass of fire is more important than mass of force at the decisive point for sea control. This must be juxtaposed against statements that would seem to argue that the nature of maritime warfare has changed (to “upend Mahon and Corbett”⁷), when in fact, in keeping with *MCDP I*, only the characteristics of warfare have changed. EABO directly reflects Mahan and Corbett’s strategic thinking, postulating that a nation achieves maritime dominance over adversaries through multi-dimensional capability to mass at the appropriate point “to persist and operate forward within the range

of adversary long-range precision fires in order to contest, control or deny sea space.”⁸ EABO recognizes that “the inside force provides persistent presence to assure partners of our strategic commitment, and leverages partner proximity, forces, and local logistical means to deter aggression or support the combined campaign.”⁹ Internally, this thinking is strategically sound in accordance with Mahan and Corbett. Externally, however, it tells us nothing about how we convince these partners to accept a temporary, shifting, and tactically flexible maritime force presence option. What the partner gets out of it is not explained.

While LOCE and EABO address a specific pacing threat, they offer a key geostrategic flaw—assumed international acquiescence—to their intent and design. The tactical problems, integrating the Navy and Marine Corps assets, and likely Army support, are the simplest issues. The logistics of supporting

EABO and LOCE with unmanned systems are a science problem. EABO repeatedly deals with the cost-construct of the forward presence issue coupled with repeated mention of the information issues surrounding forward presence. None of this, however, deals with the central flaw: access to land and littoral space. It would certainly be physically possible to ignore international norms and do it anyway because the United States has been both the originator and sustainer of these international norms and regulations since their inception following the Second World War; however, doing so would probably carry consequences, diminishing the prospects for the success of EABO.

The Corps could attempt recourse to existing international affairs and security cooperation programs to attempt to address the political access shortfall. The former, however, has seen decreasing investment by the Service and the latter, in Marine Corps Security Co-



WE DON'T HAVE TO HAVE A BALL TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY!

It's the USMC's 245th Birthday, and this year we're all celebrating a little differently. The **MARINE SHOP** is here to help you do it right, no matter the size of your gathering.

www.marineshop.net/usmc-birthday-ball



operation Group, the Special Operations Foreign Military Training Unit, and Reserve Marine Corps Advisor Companies, are a tentative effort at a counter-insurgency oriented capability. Although the Service implemented a “cultural region” requirement for NCOs, enforcement and utilization has been weak, and no concept has emerged for how to employ this training.¹⁰ The

itime outposts have governments and security forces.¹⁶ If the Service wants partners in EABO and not a series of contested forcible entry options, then it will need Phase 0 advanced preparation—especially as the concept will invite reaction from the “aggressor” to this stand-in force.¹⁷ As Iraq and Afghanistan have shown, however, it is unwise to sign another agency up for a

als sent away to the Supporting Establishment to temporarily specialize. As the MEU program has long recognized, the deployed unit best knows what it needs and sends liaison to the embassy. If there is to be an area specialist program, then that program should apply not to an individual but to a deploying unit. As foreign area officers recognize, just the act of investigating foreign culture and language prepares a Marine to deal with those challenges more than if they never studied at all. Unit specialization, however, could also afford the opportunity to establish foreign military relationships in accordance with strategy. Although those partner relationships must change to match today’s political landscape, it is the act of habituating to partner operations that matters more than the specifics. Also, if the Service requires it, then a security cooperation command should be constructed not in one place but under each MEF in order to support deploying units with the necessary talent to execute LOCE and EABO just as other battalions send detachments out with the MAGTF. Finally, every Marine knows that the Corps only pays for what it values. If the Service cares about international affairs, then it ought to pay any Marine who can make the grade for as many languages as they can, and track and use that talent rather than ignoring it as unnecessary while paying contractors to translate.

Secondly, the supporting concept requires an ability to coordinate with EABO host-nation militaries or security forces in advance and a fully committed investment strategy with the State Department. Access like that described will be politically delicate; as China has demonstrated, the adversary or aggressor will employ every pillar of power to incentivize rejecting partnering with the United States.¹⁹ Operations in the information environment will be contested by a thinking, maneuvering adversary, and the scope of required diplomacy will extend beyond the purview of the service. While actual seizure of advanced naval bases should remain an option, that expenditure will significantly decrease the value of EABO and increase the required security in-

The Corps could attempt recourse to existing international affairs and security cooperation programs to attempt to address the political access shortfall.

Service trimmed foreign language proficiency pay, eliminating it for all but foreign area officers and specialists in that specific role.¹¹ Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group, initially caught up in training those who would train security forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, has admirably branched out to address more broad global concerns. The unit, though, remains a very small investment by the Service whose ability to coordinate with fleet units depends on personalities rather than any inherent authority.¹² The Service’s investments reflect the value to the institution and it is clear that the institution has not placed value on international affairs and security cooperation. Who in the Marine littoral regiment,¹³ tasked with setting up EABO in “islands, archipelagos, and key terrain in proximity to close and confined seas to support JFMCC sea control and sea denial,”¹⁴ works with the State Department to see whether or not the country would be willing to host that capability is not explained.

Gaining political access requires review of roles and missions across *Title 50, U.S. Code* (War and the National Defense) and then coordination with the agency that addresses diplomatic concerns—the State Department.¹⁵ While a glance at Pacific and Indian Ocean maps shows a profusion of islands that fit the geographic descriptions of EABO, a glance at the *CIA World Factbook* will show that all of those mar-

task in a concept without ensuring that it has the will, resources, and supporting processes necessary to execute. Nonetheless, *Title 50* recognizes that warfare and conflict involve the full range of competition from diplomacy through to tactical military forces.

To solve the problem of political access that will enable the EABO, LOCE, and Commandant’s force redesign concepts, the Marine Corps needs a supporting concept for international affairs operations. That supporting concept must address what the Service will do internally to prepare its forces for working with foreign militaries as partners in their own countries and beyond. It must also explain how diplomatic and military coordination will function by, with, and through a State Department resourced and conceptually oriented to assist. Finally, across the constantly shifting atmosphere of nations, it must identify the characteristics of the most likely partners in conflict (not a list of nations because that changes frequently). Each of these features must be explored in competition prior to conflict through Phase III.¹⁸ These are not easy problems, but they are not insoluble. Although one article cannot comprehensively develop a supporting concept, this article will offer some observations as a starting point.

Within the Service, the existing application of international affairs programs must shift toward units and the Fleet Marine Force instead of individu-

vestment if the host nation chooses to resist. The Service cannot simply make an approach that “reassures” or vaguely “empowers” but must offer EABO host nations something tangible. They have to get something out of it in material, prestige, information, or security that counteracts the targeting that will inevitably follow the force presence. Furthermore, for EABO to work well, the Marine Corps must have an investment in, and keen knowledge of, the State Department with whom the concept must be executed. Fortunately, the Marine Corps enjoys both a unique relationship with other soldiers of the sea and the State Department from long service together.

Finally, the supporting concept needs a methodology for assessing partners, allies, and likely EABO recipient nations. That methodology must grow beyond the traditional set of NATO, five eyes, or past conflict alliances like Japan and South Korea. Small countries with close-in access might be willing to strike temporary agreements if there were incentives with exercises, facilities construction, or support for local initiatives. As China has constructed bases atop the claims of multiple countries and then invented a narrative to justify it,²⁰ South China Sea countries might seek positive, demonstrable measures that could be taken to counter it if the incentives were there and the political conditions acceptable. Further afield and outside the stand-in force area, the west coast of the Americas has twelve Pacific countries including the second largest Marine Corps in the world: Colombia. A member of the Alliance of the Pacific (Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru) and poised to become a “net exporter of security,”²¹ Colombia could potentially contribute to EABO as a demonstration of power projection and deterrence. Regardless, the likelihood of acceptance of EABO or participation by a potential partner must be assessed as part of a methodology in the supporting concept for international affairs operations. That review in the lead-in to execution of EABO will reveal what key terrain is politically accessible and what partners and allies might contribute at what cost. Otherwise, the alternative

is to seize and build on reefs like the Chinese or to try to project power from existing bases.

If the Marine Corps spends the time and energy to produce the force of 2030 that possesses the capabilities and organization to execute EABO and LOCE, then it also requires a way to work with the populated, governed spaces in which those operations will occur. The blue-water Pacific is not the issue; the littoral, territorial waters, and land are. While uninhabited islands still exist, their possession and governance often remain fraught—witness the Senkaku islands at the southern end of the Ryukyus.²² To exercise EABO even for practice, the Corps will have to prepare politically and diplomatically as well as militarily for access to anything other than existing large, targeted bases. Now that force redesign is entering its execution phase, the Corps quickly needs a supporting concept to address the key parameter of the problem. Otherwise, these advanced warfighting concepts cannot succeed in the real world.

Notes

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
2. Gen Robert B. Neller and ADM John M. Richardson, “LOCE Full Size Edition,” *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Arthur Corbett, “Expeditionary-Advanced-Base-Operations-EABO-Handbook-1.1,” (Quantico, VA: June 2018).
7. Gen David H. Berger, “Notes on Designing the Marine Corps of the Future,” (Washington, DC: December 2019).
8. “Expeditionary-Advanced-Base-Operations-EABO-Handbook-1.1.”
9. Ibid.

10. Headquarters Marine Corps, “Implementation of The Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization Program,” (Washington, DC: October 2012).

11. Headquarters Marine Corps, “FY 2020 Marine Corps Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus Eligibility Requirements,” (Washington, DC: July 2019).

12. U.S. Marine Corps, “Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group,” information available at <https://www.mcscg.marines.mil>.

13. Gen David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030*, (Washington, DC: March 2020).

14. Ibid.

15. Cornell University Law School, *U.S. Code: Title 50-War and National Defense | US Law | LII/Legal Information Institute*, available at <https://www.lawschool.cornell.edu>.

16. Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook 2020*, (Langley, MD: 2020).

17. *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*.

18. This paragraph is a conceptual modification of the “3-D Approach to Foreign Policy” Diplomacy, Defense and Development, substituting a methodology for viewing allies and partners rather than “development” and isolating this to the service and the State Department. For a brief overview of 3D, albeit in political context see: Nafees Syed, “The 3 Ds of Foreign Affairs,” *Harvard Political Review*, (September 2010), available at <https://harvardpolitics.com>.

19. Jonathan Stromseth, “The Testing Ground,” *Brookings*, (November 2019), available at <https://www.brookings.edu>.

20. Kinling Lo, “Beijing Moves to Strengthen Grip on Disputed South China Sea Islands,” *Business Insider*, (April 2020), available at <https://www.businessinsider.com>.

21. Andres Shipani, “Colombian Security Industry Exports Its Expertise,” *Financial Times*, (June 2013), available at <https://www.ft.com>.

22. Staff, “How Uninhabited Islands Soured China-Japan Ties,” *BBC*, (November 2014), available at <https://www.bbc.com>.



This contest is sponsored by:

Observer
Media Group Inc.