

The Adverse Impact of Force Design 2030 and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations

Weakening the combined arms MAGTF

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The *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO)* is an operational concept that is incompatible with Marine Corps culture and tradition to answer our Nation's call to serve *in any clime and place*. It compromises and seriously impairs Marine Corps capabilities to rapidly form, deploy, and fight scalable self-contained combined-arms teams across the spectrum of conflict. It introduces a dichotomy for the operating forces by imposing two mutually exclusive approaches to warfighting. One focused on integrated operations in *EABO*. The other focused on combined-arms operations for contingency operations. Since *Force Design 2030 (FD 2030)* has retooled the Marine Corps to support *EABO*, combined arms will necessarily take a backseat to integrated operations.

Combined arms have long been a hallmark of Marine Corps operations and are a core warfighting competency. Employing combined arms is vital to generating superior combat power to gain an advantage over our enemies by imposing on them a no-win dilemma through the synergistic application of supplemental and complementary warfighting functions. The combined effects of maneuver and supporting fires (lethal and nonlethal) are magnified when they are applied simultaneously, vice sequentially, and can lead to paralysis of the en-

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emy. Combined arms remain an essential component of Marine Corps tactics and organizational structure.

Tactically, commanders use the organic capabilities of their units and supplement them with specialized func-

tionary, aviation, engineer, logistics, and information operations as the situation warranted. The strengths of each arm complement and supplement each other while the weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and risks are protected or offset by the

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tional capabilities from other combat, combat support, and combat service support organizations to magnify the total combat power of their force. Historically, this has included adapting combinations of infantry, armor, artil-

lery, aviation, engineer, logistics, and information operations as the situation warranted. The strengths of each arm complement and supplement each other while the weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and risks are protected or offset by the



Marines with Bravo Battery, 1/10 Mar, 2d MarDiv, fire high explosive rounds out of the M777 155 mm Towed Howitzer aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. (Photo by LCpl Preston McDonald.)

ties combine different weapon systems or functions to provide a more complex threat or dilemma that the enemy must contend with. For example, engineer-emplaced obstacles can limit the enemy's mobility and, while the enemy attempts to clear the obstacle, he is brought under simultaneous and devastating fire from direct and indirect fire systems, and attack aviation.

Organizationally, combined arms enable units with different weapons, specialized training, and unique maintenance capabilities inherent in their tables of equipment and organization to come together as combined-arms teams. The MAGTF epitomizes this approach by uniting scalable air, ground, information, and logistics capabilities under a single headquarters to meet global commitments, tactical and operational, across the spectrum of conflict.

Marine Corps combined-arms doctrine is codified in various publications ranging from *MCDP 1-0, Marine Corps Operations* to *MCDP 1-3, Tactics*. Both doctrinal publications reinforce the requirement for complementary and supplementary combined arms under a common commander. In contrast and antithetical to these tenets, *EABO* views combined arms through the tapered lens of the Littoral Force Commander (LFC)

and Naval Composite Warfare Functional Commanders. Rather than providing surface and aviation-based fires to a MAGTF or subordinate MAGTF element, fires functions are directed to and controlled by the LFC subordinate functional elements. For example, instead of providing deep and close support to a MAGTF commander, *EABO* tenta-

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tive doctrine envisions Marine Aviation conducting sea denial and supporting sea-control operations under the LFC. Similarly, Marine surface-based fires are envisioned to facilitate fleet operations. *EABO* centers on functional integration of Marine Corps capabilities under the LFC rather than employing them as a combined-arms team under a MAGTF commander in support of a Joint Force Commander's campaign plan. The *Tentative Manual for EABO* reveals only a single reference to combined arms; a quote of the Title X, U.S. Code mandates that the Marine Corps provide combined-arms forces in support of a naval campaign.

Proponents of *FD 2030* argue that functional integration is a new way to contemplate combined arms. Correct or not, *EABO's* warfighting methodology has significantly impacted Marine Corps abilities and readiness to conduct combat operations outside the narrow confines of the Western Pacific's First Island Chain. *FD 2030* proclaims that although there are some units designed primarily for *EABO*, all operating forces are capable of *EABO*, not just those designed exclusively for it—that units optimized for *EABO* retain the flexibility to conduct conventional missions.

The emerging *EABO* doctrine proposes a fundamentally different way of organizing and employing forces. This new approach calls into question if units organized, trained, and equipped for *EABO* are in fact capable of successfully answering the bell for worldwide contingencies in support of other combatant commanders. Doctrinally, the Marine Corps is seeking to simultaneously support two different approaches to warfighting. One is focused on functional integration in the Western Pacific and the other is focused on traditional combined-arms operations for all other contingencies. This dual-track approach to warfighting is mutually exclusive and the equivalent of

asking a Marine to function as an artilleryman when supporting *EABO* but as an infantryman when supporting other operations, thereby creating jacks of all trades and masters of none. There are simply insufficient resources for units to become proficient in the divergent demands of *EABO* and those required by conventional operations.

To date, the CMC's guidance in the *FD 2021 Annual Update* to review sourcing mechanisms for the Stand-in Force (SIF) to balance commitments across the force has not been met. 20th-century rotational models and deployed-to-dwell (DTD) models continue to drive overall force size and organization. The total SIF

requirement on projected warfighting requirements is subordinated to meeting existing DTD models. This dichotomy results in a total force structure heavily biased toward supporting SIF at the expense of supporting a MAGTF for other contingencies. These MAGTFs will lack the necessary combined arms capabilities to fight and win because of the unwise and unnecessary divestitures of cannon artillery, tanks, engineers, attack helicopters, transport helicopters, and fixed-wing attack aircraft to self-fund SIFs and maintain an acceptable DTD.

FD 2030's proponents also argue that the risk in the reduction of combined-arms capabilities is mitigated by reliance on joint capabilities to fill gaps created by *FD 2030* divestitures and the focus on SIF, and by selective engagement in worldwide contingencies. Both risk mitigation measures are questionable as demonstrated by just two historical examples. Entering Operation IRAQI FREEDOM I (OIF I), the Marine Corps maintained a Marine Corps-Army Service-level Memorandum of Agreement for the Army to provide rocket artillery support from Army Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) battalions to the Marine Corps. The MLRS battalion designated to support 1st Marine Division arrived at the fight after Baghdad was occupied and artillery fires were complete. While it's convenient to assume Joint Forces are seamless, the fact remains that each Service will satisfy its own needs before filling external requirements, regardless of agreements. After the OIF I experience, the Marine Corps recognized the need to field its own organic rocket artillery units. This was done through the Marine Corps' full combat development process, not through an abridged version.

Following OIF I, the Marine Corps prioritized redeploying units to reset the force for other contingencies, leaving the Army to conduct post-combat stability operations, a mission not viewed as a Marine Corps core competency. By late 2003, all Marine Corps battalions were out of Iraq. The Army was unable to generate the necessary forces to cover all of Iraq, and in early 2004, the Marine Corps was directed back into Iraq to fill a six-infantry battalion require-



Marines demonstrate the use of a HIMARS mobile rocket-launch system at the Combined Arms Training Center, Camp Fuji, Japan. (Photo by Cpl Savannah Mesimer.)

ment anticipated to last approximately one year. The one-year deployment stretched into a rotational commitment that lasted until late 2009. The Marine Corps represents a significant portion of the nation's total combat capabilities and is too large to develop an organizational mindset that only the CMC can

Reserve. Second, DTD should not be used to drive structure for the total force. I and II MEF's combined-arms capabilities and structure should be focused on responding to worldwide contingencies, not primarily as a rotational base to satisfy *EABO* DTD. Dedicated and permanently assigned SIF based in the

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decide which boutique contingencies best meet the Corps' capabilities. As the Nation's congressionally viewed force-in-readiness, most ready when the Nation is least ready, the Marine Corps must "do windows" or it will be quickly relegated to institutional irrelevance.

We encourage Marine Corps leadership to immediately implement measures to mitigate the risks that the current *FD 2030* roadmap imposes. First, the total SIF requirement, which we view as a flawed concept, must be identified and capped at that number. Any additional SIF required external to III MEF for combat replacement or augmentation should be in the Marine Corps

Western Pacific should be examined for III MEF if ongoing experimentation and budgeting support the SIF concept. Finally, the Marine Corps must recognize that *EABO* is a niche capability suited for a narrow range of flashpoints and applications. The total force must remain structured, equipped, and trained with combined arms capabilities ready to be deployed under scalable MAGTFs to ensure long-term institutional relevance by answering our Nation's 911 calls.

