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Expeditionary advanced base operations present a complex problem and complicate China's decision-making calculus. This complexity enables the Marine Corps to contribute to the Navy and Joint Force's ability to maintain assured access to the region. However, stand-in forces within the weapons engagement zone will be challenged to remain undetected and targeted. The Joint Force lacks a responsive and viable deterrence option to prevent a China-Taiwan forceful reunification.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

ACHIEVING DETERRENCE THROUGH EXPEDITIONARY ADVANCED BASE
OPERATIONS IN THE USINDOPACOM AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Achieving Deterrence Through Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations in the USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility

Author: Major John Critz, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The Marine Corps' future employment of expeditionary advanced based operations will likely be viewed by China as an escalation in hostilities and targeted preparation for the defense of Taiwan should China seek to militarily reunify Taiwan under its One China policy. As a result, the Marine Corps and the United States should strategically message and carefully execute EABO activities.

Discussion: The Marine Corps is coming out of two decades of the global war on terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. The recent shift to great power competition, as echoed in the *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy*, is the driving factors for change in the Marine Corps and is reflected in the *Commandants Planning Guidance, Force Design 2030*, and the *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*. Based on the current Chinese anti-access areal denial capabilities, especially within the first and second island chains, the Marine Corps cannot rely on historical methods of deterrence that consisted of sustained, static, forward deployed forces. These bases and historical methods of deterrence do not complicate China's decision-making calculus, are easily targeted and neutralized, and are a strategic deterrence anachronism.

Conclusion: It is difficult to anticipate which countries future conflict involves and how the United States should plan accordingly. Historically, most countries prepare for the last war that they fought and the United States is no different. What General Berger is attempting to accomplish with *CPG, Force Design 2030*, and *TM EABO* is to effectively man, train, and equip the Marine Corps for great power competition rather than the continuing to prepare for counter-insurgency and low-end conflicts. The Marine Corps set about conducting force design by identifying current force capabilities, analyzing guiding documents for change, conducting an intelligence preparation of the environment, identifying the threat within the first and second island chain, studying historical and regional tensions that contribute to irrational responses, and identifying a logical way forward that has a reasonable chance of ensuring success and deterring the United States' enemies. The Marine Corps believes that *FD 2030*, and *TM EABO* represent the best method of addressing these challenges. This thesis endeavored to provide the reader is a closer inspection of the problem, the proposed solution, and the likely perception of these actions by United States adversaries. purpose of this thesis is to provide an alternative viewpoint that illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of Marine Corps future operational concepts, and to encourage the readers to take an objective view rather than wholly accepting or rejecting future Marine Corps' operational concepts. There are scenarios where these concepts could be successful and there are scenarios where these concepts might not be successful. Understanding the different situations that challenge future operational concepts is a vital step in improving these concepts, and in the end military professionals are obligated to seek improvement and ensure that service members are never put in a fair fight with an adversary.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Preface

As an infantry Marine, the future employment of the Marine Corps in great power competition is a topic in which I have a vested interest. The Marine Corps is making drastic changes in force design and employment, which makes it an interesting time to be in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is at a crossroad and is trying to determine its future and the best way in which it can contribute to multi-domain operations in the joint environment across the competition continuum against a pacing threat. The Marine Corps is undergoing massive changes in force design, equipment, and employment in order to provide a force that is relevant to this fight.

One of the most important things that my time at Marine Corps Command and Staff College has taught me is that studying the past can assist in providing insight for the present and the future. As the Marine Corps looks at expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO), it is vital that we study China's understanding of deterrence, and the importance that it places on historical Chinese territories. Having an introspective view of ourselves allows us to realize that patriotic zeal and national hubris can blind us to how other countries perceive the United States' actions around the globe. I call this the "because we are the good guys" mentality. If we do not take all of these factors into account as the Marine Corps changes its force, weapons systems, and methods of employment, the Marine Corps and the United States run the risk of getting it wrong and making costly strategic miscalculations.

I would like to thank my wife Sarah for her love and constant support during this process that is not my strong suit. I would also like to thank my three daughters Eva, Elena, and Olivia for their love and support and for being understanding when daddy has to "do daddy school" instead of playing and jumping on the trampoline.

Introduction

The contingency we have not considered seriously looks strange; what looks strange is thought improbable; what is improbable need not be considered seriously...Rarely has a government been more expectant. We just expected wrong.

~ Thomas Schelling¹

Thomas Shelling's ominous words summarizing the strategic surprise of the Pearl Harbor attack, remind the United States of the importance of anticipating potential Chinese strategic surprise. The United States, along with the majority of other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, is coming out of approximately twenty years of counter-insurgency warfare and is refocusing its core military competencies and national strategies on great power competition and conflict. The United States made this shift abundantly clear in the *National Security Strategy (NSS)* released in 2017 by the Trump administration, and the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* released in 2018 by Secretary of Defense James Mattis. Both of these documents define the "four plus one" national security threats that highlighted China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations (VEO) as the front runner threats to the United States. This shifted prior focus of the United States' national security from global terrorism to great power competition with the pacing threats of China and Russia. Cynics argue focusing on great power competition and conflict makes sense from a budgetary justification perspective. Obtaining funding for expensive budget items like submarines, aircraft carriers, and fifth generation fighter aircraft is easier to justify if the country is preparing for great power competition or conflict. The opposite is true if the Department of Defense communicates that it is focusing on irregular warfare or counter-insurgency. However, even the most cynical of critics agree that Russia and China achieved parity or near parity in crucial defense areas over the past two decades. Understanding the historical and contextual information surrounding the changes

¹ Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor; Warning and Decision*. Stanford, Calif: (Stanford University Press, 1962).

the United States and the Marine Corps are making in force design and employment is required to comprehend these sweeping changes.

Without being mired in a global war on terrorism, China and Russia had the luxury of focusing their military development to support their national strategic objectives. Both countries operate across the competition continuum in order to achieve their strategic objectives, but China continues to aggressively expand its ability and sphere of influence. The RAND Corporation's assessment of China's operational concepts states that "Chinese professional military education materials make clear that China has absorbed lessons learned from U.S. performance in contemporary conflicts and harnessed those insights to shape its development of a joint reconnaissance-strike capability"² This illustrates China's exploitation of the United States' involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria in order to develop capabilities to negate the United States' military advantages.

With the shift in focus becoming great power competition and potential conflict, the Marine Corps is reevaluating its relevancy and capability set that it provides the Joint Force. As a result, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David Berger has implemented significant changes through *Force Design 2030 (FD 2030)* and future operational concepts in an effort to facilitate this refocus to great power competition. A key issue to consider, as the Marine Corps retools itself for great power competition and conflict, is will China view *FD 2030* and fundamental changes in Marine Corps tactics and operations as a deterrence or as an escalation in hostilities in China's sphere of influence. Flipping the map and understanding China's defense policy and the way that it views the world and its role in the global arena, is critical in order for the United States to avoid mirror imaging deterrence and military capabilities. The following

² Edmund J. Burke, Kristen Gunness, Cortez A. Cooper III, and Mark Cozad, *People's Liberation Army Operational Concepts*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA394-1.html, 5.

sections outline the guiding documents for the current direction the Marine Corps is pursuing with respect to force design and future employment concepts, the threat faced from China within the first and second island chains, China's strategic doctrines and historical context, and provide recommendations for future Marine Corps operational concepts. Flipping the map in order to understand the environment and China's strategic perspective will assist the Marine Corps in achieving deterrence rather than escalating hostilities.

Key Issues: A Reason for Change

If you don't like change, you are going to like irrelevance even less.

~ General Eric Shinseki³

The Marine Corps recognizes the truth in General Shinseki's quote and is determined to adapt to the strategic environment and contribute to the Joint Force, other than as an additional land army. Great power competition and conflict pose significant implications for future warfare, and the United States' focus on terrorism and counter-insurgency over the last two decades, allowed China and Russia to outpace or gain parity across key military capabilities. China and Russia made advances in precision guided munitions, naval vessels and technology, and fourth and fifth generation fighters that removed the competitive edge that the United States once enjoyed. Mark Cancian, writing for the Center for Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS) International Security Program, warns that United States has become vulnerable to strategic surprise across three distinct areas with respect to Chinese and Russian capabilities:

- The rise of China and Russia as competing great powers capable of challenging the United States military in all warfighting domains, especially those close to their shores, after a generation of United States global military dominance.
- The long peace between great powers has induced a sense of perpetual security.
- The changes in warfighting technology have transformed the conduct of battle since the last great power conflict.⁴

³ Jeffrey D. McCausland, *Preparing for the Future; Brcko, Kabul, Baghdad, and Beyond*: Strategic Studies Institute, (US Army War College, 2014). <http://www.jstor.org.lomc.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep12128.10>. 26.

The key point in this analysis is that the United States faces an unprecedented level of risk from strategic surprise, since the end of the Cold War. The United States enjoyed a position of global military supremacy and this military and technological advantage over “peer” adversaries has created a false sense of security and an exaggerated belief in the capability of its military.⁵ This hubris is illustrated in claims made by senior officials that the United States military obtained global and historical military supremacy; however, like the dominant Prussian military in 1806 the United States should beware of losing a century of military dominance overnight.⁶

In addition to military capability threats, there are also doctrinal threats that the enemy can employ in order to subvert United States military dominance.⁷ Doctrinal surprises significantly threaten stability, because they can appear anywhere and in countless number of combinations.⁸ Mark Cancian states that examples of doctrinal surprise include, but are not limited to:

- Combination of new missile technology with precise targeting attack concepts to neutralize U.S. bases.
- Steal operational secrets and use the information against the United States.
- Assassination of U.S. leadership or employ nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.
- Subvert an ally’s political stability before launching an overt attack.⁹

The world witnessed examples of some of these doctrinal surprises in recent and current events. China is consistently conducting industrial technology theft against the United States and other countries and Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine are examples of subversion and information warfare prior to launching Russian “little green men.” The threat that Chinese and

⁴ Mark F Cancian. *Avoiding Coping with Surprise in Great Power Conflicts*: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2018. doi:10.2307/resrep22428. <http://www.jstor.org.lomc.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep22428>., VII.

⁵ Mark Cancian, VII.

⁶ Mark Cancian, VII-VIII.

⁷ Mark Cancian, XIII.

⁸ Mark Cancian, XIII.

⁹ Mark Cancian, XIII.

Russian aggressive military expansionism presents to U.S. military dominance are captured in the *NSS* and *NDS*, and the Marine Corps' potential solution is proffered in the recently published *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (TM EABO)*. The following sections outline these documents in order to provide the reader a baseline understanding of the reasoning associated with the Marine Corps' changes in *FD 2030*.

The Trump administration released the *NSS* in July, 2017 and began the refocus on great power competition by stating, "The United States will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world."¹⁰ Pillar III of the *NSS* is titled Preserve Peace Through Strength this chapter describes how the United States views China and its expanding influence in the Pacific region.¹¹ The *NSS* classifies China as a revisionist power, which means they actively compete against the United States and its allies.¹² It is important to note the strength of the language that the *NSS* uses to describe the incompatibility between the United States and China. The *NSS* states that:

China and Russia want to shape a world that is antithetical to US values and interest.¹³ China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence."¹⁴

Additionally, the *NSS* lays out past US policy toward China and how it failed to accomplish the desired end state:

For decades, US policy was rooted in the belief that support for China's rise and for its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China. Contrary to our hopes, China expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others. China gathers and exploits data on an unrivaled scale and spreads features of its authoritarian

¹⁰ The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 2.

¹¹ *National Security Strategy*, 25.

¹² *National Security Strategy*, 25.

¹³ *National Security Strategy*, 25.

¹⁴ *National Security Strategy*, 2.

system, including corruption and the use of surveillance. It is building the most capable and well-funded military in the world, after our own. Its nuclear arsenal is growing and diversifying. Part of China's military modernization and economic expansion is due to its access to the U.S. innovation economy, including America's world-class universities.¹⁵

This failure in US policy is important to consider when looking at how the Department of Defense (DOD) and National Security Council look at shaping future US policy toward China. China is reasserting itself regionally and globally in an effort to deny the United States access during times of crisis, contest our geopolitical advantage, and rewrite international order in their favor.¹⁶ China exploits the United States' binary view of either being at war or at peace, and is very comfortable operating in the competition space beneath the threshold of armed conflict.¹⁷ The United States and the Joint Force recognize the advantage that this affords China and is the driving force behind DOD doctrine and concept revisions.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis signed and released the 2018 *NDS*, which echoes the strategic concerns and focus of the *NSS*. Due to the fact that the *NDS* is a classified document, this overview will reference the unclassified summary of the *NDS* provided by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). The *NDS* summarizes the current state of the DOD and military environment in the following way:

Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.¹⁸

¹⁵ *National Security Strategy*, 25.

¹⁶ *National Security Strategy*, 27.

¹⁷ *National Security Strategy*, 28.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C., January 2018. As of April 1, 2020: <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-NationalDefense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, 1.

The *NDS* clearly outlines the DOD's refocus from counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations to great power competition and it identifies long term strategic competition with China and Russia as its priorities.¹⁹ To accomplish this end the *NDS* lays out specific guidance on "Building a More Lethal Force."²⁰ In this section, the *NDS* lays out specific areas where modernization of current capabilities needs to occur. This section is crucial to the analysis of future MAGTF operations, since the modernization that General Berger describes in his *CPG* directly correlates to the *NDS*'s tenets. EABO concepts presented in the *CPG*, *LOCE*, and the *Tentative Manual for EABO (TM EABO)* are deduced from the following *NDS* excerpts:

- ***Joint lethality in contested environments.*** The Joint Force must be able to strike diverse targets inside adversary air and missile defense networks to destroy mobile power-projection platforms. This will include capabilities to enhance close combat lethality in complex terrain.
- ***Forward force maneuver and posture resilience.*** Investments will prioritize ground, air, sea, and space forces that can deploy, survive, operate, maneuver, and regenerate in all domains while under attack. Transitioning from large, centralized, unhardened infrastructure to smaller, dispersed, resilient, adaptive basing that include active and passive defenses will also be prioritized.²¹

Both of the above bullet points, directly reference the capabilities that the Marine Corps seeks to achieve in *TM EABO*. The integrated sensor-shooter network references the Marine Corps and Navy's desire to integrate command and control of naval and littoral forces into the composite warfare construct that the United States Navy currently employs. Maneuverable and posture resilient forward forces operating within the enemy's engagement zone speak to the recognized vulnerability of static forward basing and the need to complicate China's decision-making calculus through maneuverable and unpredictable forces. The impetus for change and adaptation in future MAGTF operations is clearly evident from the *NSS*, *NDS* and the logic trace of the *CPG* is apparent. Additionally, the *NDS* calls upon the DOD and Joint Force to strengthen the

¹⁹ *National Defense Strategy Summary*, 4.

²⁰ *National Defense Strategy Summary*, 5.

²¹ *National Defense Strategy Summary*, 6.

interoperability and relationships between our partners and allies both in NATO and the Indo-Pacific AOR.

The *CPG, FD 2030*, and the *Tentative Manual for EABO (TM EABO)* outline how the Marine Corps will incorporate itself into the Navy's composite warfare construct (CWC) and sow doubt in our adversary's mind through a mobile persistent forward presence that possesses lethal capabilities that impose significant cost on the enemy. Essentially, these forces complicate the enemy's decision-making calculus by presenting them low payoff small targets that potentially impose significant threat to their own high payoff targets. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) describes this as "mosaic warfare" where you piece together capabilities across a larger number of platforms, similar to the tiles in a mosaic picture, that complicate an enemy's ability to respond (See Figure 1).²² Rather than buying a small number of large, expensive, and non-expendable capabilities, Christian Brose, author of *The Kill Chain*, and DARPA, recommend investing in small, low cost, expendable assets that create an "asymmetrical advantage through complexity" by introducing a myriad of sensor-shooters into the environment (See Figure 1).²³ This will require significant adjustments to the way in which the DOD acquires and manages the procurement process and interoperability.

Despite numerous attempts to create interservice interoperability, the DOD still suffers from service technological silos. For example, the two fifth generation fighters, F-35 and F-22, that cost billions of dollars to manufacture are incapable of sharing targeting data except by voice over radio.²⁴ This inability to directly communicate between lethal systems lengthen the kill chain and is the antithesis of creating this mosaic capability of platforms that directly and

²² Defense Advanced Research Agency, "DARPA Tiles Together a Vision of Mosaic Warfare," Accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/darpa-tiles-together-a-vision-of-mosaic-warfare>.

²³ Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare*, (New York: Hachette Books, 2020), 73.

²⁴ Christian Brose, 37.

autonomously share information and adapt to the ever-changing environment that exists in great power competition and conflict.²⁵



Figure 1: DARPA Mosaic Warfare Concept

Source: Defense Advanced Research Agency, "DARPA Tiles Together a Vision of Mosaic Warfare," Accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/darpa-tiles-together-a-vision-of-mosaic-warfare>

When compared to China, the United States is lagging in this capability. According to China's own concept of operations and defense documents, which will be discussed in the "Flipping the Map" section of this thesis, it is pursuing a "system-of-systems" approach to warfare that heavily leverages artificial intelligence and integrated command and control and targeting systems.²⁶ The United States must make crucial developments in this environment; otherwise, in a high tempo fight, against a global competitor, relaying unencrypted targeting data via voice over radio from a F-22 pilot to a F-35 pilot will be slow, targeted, and easily outpaced.

TM EABO is a pre-doctrinal document and compares itself to the 1921 *Operational Plan 712: Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, which described broad strategies for how the

²⁵ DARPA Tiles Together a Vision of Mosaic Warfare.

²⁶ Edmund J. Burke et al., 5.

Marine Corps would conduct offensive operations in the Pacific, should hostilities ensue.²⁷ The Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard comprise the United States Naval Service and perform four critical functions:

- Ensures the safe seaborne movement of friendly commerce and military forces
- Influences events, to include projecting military power, overseas
- Prevents an adversary's seaborne movement of commerce and military forces
- Prevents an adversary from influencing events, to include projecting military power, on United States or other friendly shores²⁸

China's anti-access area denial (A2AD) capabilities significantly challenge these four enduring Naval Service functions and are drivers of change in how the Navy and Marine Corps must adapt future integration and operations. A key reason for change in how the United States and the Marine Corps must achieve deterrence and assured access in the littoral spaces of contested environments is identified in the following excerpt from the *TM EABO*:

The United States has long maintained forward-postured forces afloat and ashore to reassure friends, deter aggression, respond to crises, maintain alliances, and enforce international norms. For over 75 years the naval services have subscribed to a paradigm of expeditionary operations to secure the ends of assured peace and security of the nation and its allies and partners. Contemporary force structures and capabilities within this paradigm are built upon three assumptions: presumptive or readily achieved sea control, air superiority, and assured communications. Potential adversaries have recently acted to challenge these fundamental assumptions, thus weakening the foundation upon which United States naval forces were built to contribute to joint warfighting capabilities. Global competitors are fielding stand-off engagement capabilities—long-range systems designed to keep United States forces out of key operating areas and push them farther from overseas allies and partners while minimizing risk to their own forces. The impending challenge is significant and cannot be met by merely refining current methods and capabilities.²⁹

It is important to highlight the critical aspects from this passage. Specifically, the critical assumptions that current Marine Corps and Navy force structure rely on to fight and win the

²⁷ Headquarters Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, (Washington, DC: US Marine Corps, 2021), 1-1.

²⁸ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Naval Warfare*, NDP 1 (Washington, DC: US Navy, 2020), iii and 4.

²⁹ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-2.

nation's wars. In order for current Naval and Marine Corps operations to be lethal and effective, they rely upon the following three critical assumptions: 1) presumptive or readily achieved sea control, 2) air superiority, and 3) assured communications.³⁰ According to *TM EABO*, these assumptions are not valid against a pacing threat. China learned from participating with the United States in combat operations during The Cold War and from watching the United States during the Gulf War and the Global War on Terrorism.³¹ China quickly realized the importance of A2AD and developed a robust menu of options that extends its sphere of influence well beyond the first and second island chain. If the United States chooses to counter these capabilities by developing its own capabilities greater than China's capabilities, China achieves its goal of pushing the United States outside of its sphere of influence and away from regional allies and "forfeiting the proximity needed to influence events across the competition continuum" in the INDOPACOM AOR.³²

Additionally, by forfeiting proximity and the ability to influence the United States loses the capacity to present an adversary other options besides armed conflict on the escalation ladder.³³ The core of the issue that faces the United States' Naval Service in the littoral regions and within the enemy's weapons engagement zone is described below:

While United States naval forces remain dominant in open oceans, the A2AD systems credibly threaten vessels in close and confined seas relatively near to adversary territory. The crux of the challenge for naval forces is fighting an enemy that seeks to avoid direct fleet engagement while offering battle under a mixed umbrella of land-based and airborne long-range precision fires. Further, expanded range and magazine depth of land-based rocket forces and bomber-borne anti-ship missiles generate a disproportionate threat to surface naval forces.³⁴

³⁰ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-2.

³¹ Edmund J. Burke et al., 7.

³² *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-2.

³³ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-2.

³⁴ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-3.

As this thesis will discuss in detail in the “Chinese Threat in the First and Second Island Chain,” China has invested heavily in the “expanded range and magazine depth of land-based anti-ship missiles.” Figure 2 illustrates how the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) “contribute to a modular, scalable, and integrated naval network of seaward and landward sensors, weapons, information-related capabilities, and sustainment capabilities.”³⁵

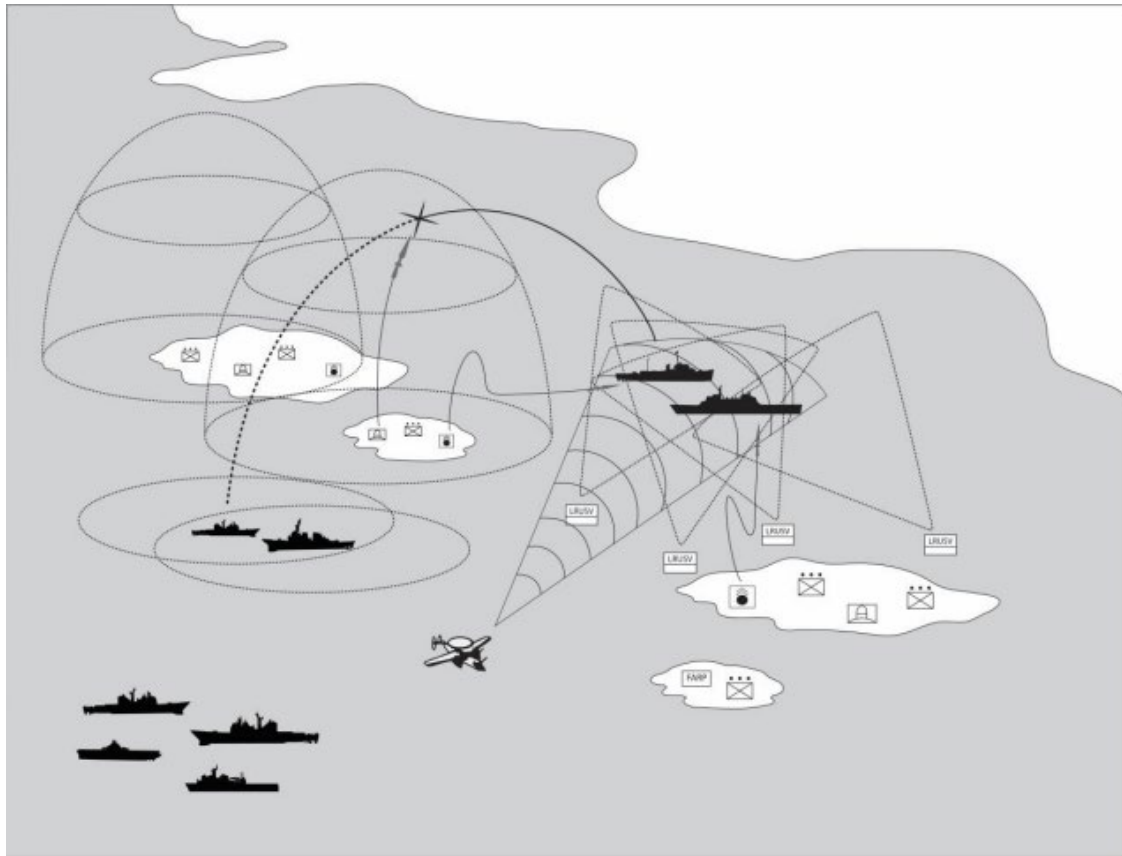


Figure 2: EABO Notional Surface Fires Concept

Source: Headquarters Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, (Washington, DC: US Marine Corps, 2021).

The goal of the *CPG* and *FD 2030* is to have some units designed strictly for EABO, while making the entire FMF capable of conducting EABO and maintaining conventional war fighting functions and capabilities.³⁶ In short, EABO will enable naval maritime operations to be successful in a competitive maritime environment, across the Navy’s critical capabilities of

³⁵ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-3.

³⁶ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-3.

assured command and control, battlespace awareness, and integrated fires despite the vulnerabilities these capabilities present to a pacing threat.³⁷ Per the *TM EABO*, the mission set of EABO includes:

- Support sea control operations
- Conduct sea denial operations within the littorals
- Contribute to maritime domain awareness
- Provide forward command, control, communications, computers, combat systems, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, targeting (C5ISRT), and counter-C5ISRT capability
- Provide forward sustainment³⁸

EABO tasks include the following:

- Conduct surveillance and reconnaissance
- Conduct operations in the information environment
- Conduct screen/guard/cover
- Deny or control key maritime terrain
- Conduct surface warfare operations
- Conduct air and missile defense
- Conduct strike operations
- Conduct antisubmarine warfare
- Conduct sustainment operations
- Conduct forward arming and refueling point (FARP) operations³⁹

The goal of *CPG* and *FD 2030* is to have the entire FMF capable of conducting the above missions and tasks across the competition continuum both above and below the threshold of violent conflict.⁴⁰

The documents listed above and the strategic shift in focus to great power competition highlight the importance and key drivers of change behind the changes that the Marine Corps and the Joint Force as a whole are pursuing. China has aggressively pursued capabilities aimed at creating strategic depth and standoff within its sphere of influence. As the Marine Corps and the

³⁷ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-3.

³⁸ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-4.

³⁹ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-4.

⁴⁰ *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 1-4.

Navy continue to work on closure integration of their operational concepts, an analysis of the Chinese threat that poses the largest threat to the United States and Joint Force's assured access to the region must be conducted.

The Chinese Threat in the First and Second Island Chain

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

~ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁴¹

China's self-proclaimed goal is to become a "world class" military by the middle of the 21st century, and they are on pace to accomplish this objective.⁴² China doesn't define the term "world class" military, however, the United States must assume that China defines this as a military on par or outpacing the United States military. China's military modernization is part of its strategic goal of achieving political and social modernity with the overarching objective of expanding their national power, and rewriting an international order that achieves those objectives.⁴³ In fact, China is outpacing the United States in several key military areas of development to include: shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, and integrated air defense systems.⁴⁴ According to [CSIS: China Power Team](#), China built more than 350 ships and submarines and surpassed the United States as the country with the largest navy in the world, and while quantity does not equate to capability or lethality, it is important to recognize its aggressive military expansion.⁴⁵ China still lags behind the United States in its number of aircraft carriers, destroyers, and cruisers, but has heavily invested in and built its fleet of corvettes and frigates.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Sunzi et al., *Sun-Tzu: The Art of War*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

⁴² Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020. i.

⁴³ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, ii.

⁴⁴ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, ii.

⁴⁵ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, ii.

⁴⁶ China Power Team, "How is China Modernizing its Navy?" China Power, December 17, 2018, Updated August 25, 2020, Accessed March 11, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-naval-modernization>.

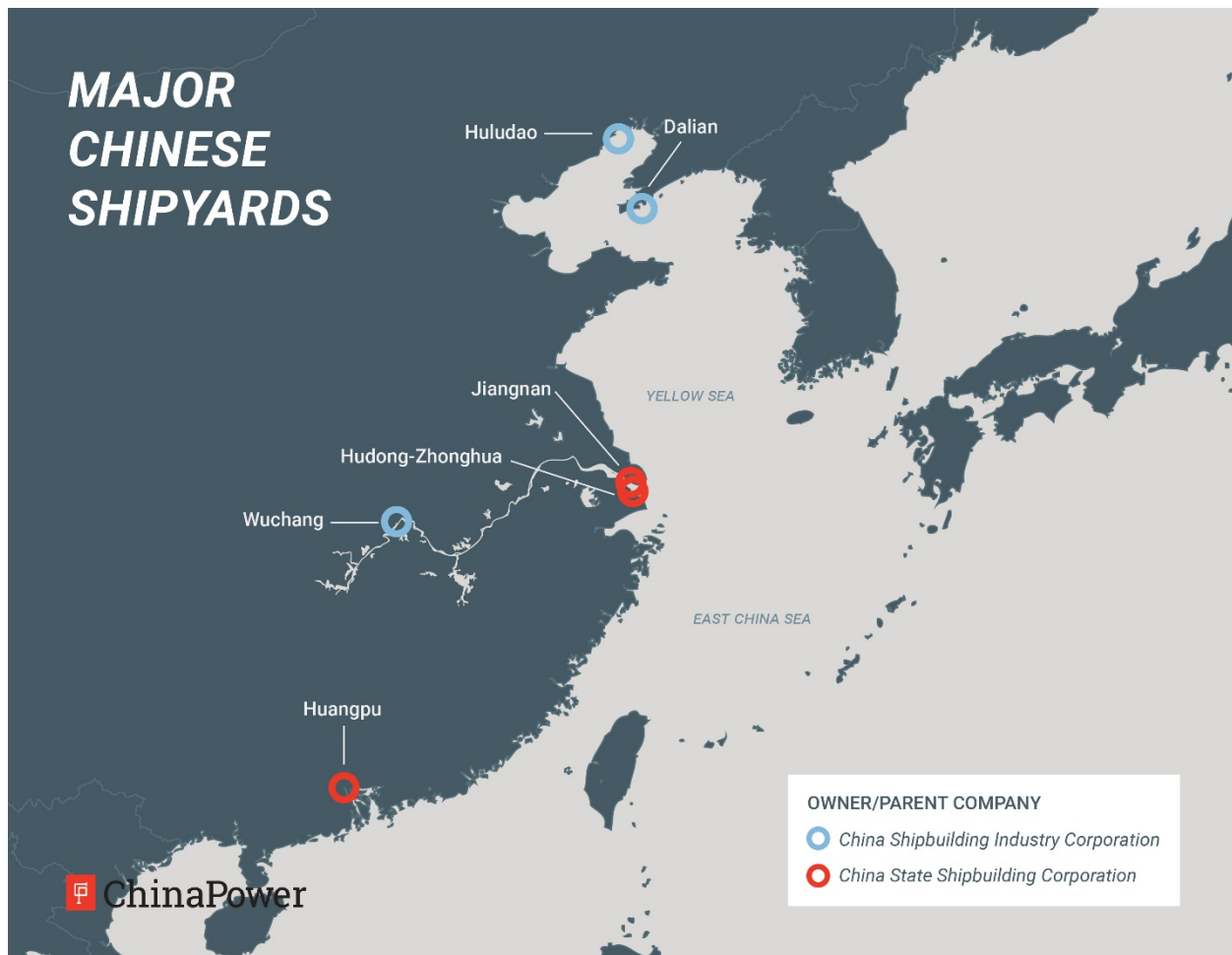


Figure 3: Major Chinese Shipyards

Source: China Power Team, "How is China Modernizing its Navy?" China Power, December 17, 2018, Updated August 25, 2020, Accessed March 11, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-naval-modernization>.

The proximity of these shipyards to the Taiwan Strait further reinforces the strategic value of Taiwan and provides further evidence of China's inability to cede control of Taiwan.

China's development of ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) surpassed those of the United States in quantity, type, and range. In comparison, the United States fields a single GLBMs with a range of 70 to 300 kilometers and does not have a GLCM program, while China fields GLBMs and GLCMs with a range of 50 to 5,500 kilometers.⁴⁷ The fielding of these GLBMs and GLCMs complicates the United States' traditional model of deterrence with fixed persistent presence at forward bases

⁴⁷ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, ii.

around the world and specifically in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Figures 3, 4, and 5 graphically depict the problem facing current United States strategists, due to the fact that China possesses numerous capabilities that threaten fixed forward bases. Additionally, the number of capabilities China possesses would overwhelm the United States' ability to counter all incoming threats. China developed these robust capabilities to complicate United States' decision-making ability in the area and complicate its ability to influence partners and allies in the region.

The Marine Corps' answer to this conundrum is to place mobile low payoff capabilities inside the weapons engagement zone (WEZ) that create disproportionate risk to reward for China. Based on the current Chinese anti-access areal denial capabilities, especially within the first and second island chains, the Marine Corps cannot rely on historical methods of deterrence that consisted of sustained, static, forward deployed forces. These bases and historical methods of deterrence do not complicate China's decision-making calculus, are easily targeted and neutralized, and are a strategic deterrence anachronism of the past. Even with robust defense capabilities in South Korea, Japan, Okinawa, and Guam, these forward deployed and persistent capabilities would suffer heavy attrition and be temporarily rendered useless if China decided to attack these known bases, assets, and infrastructure. The inability to achieve deterrence through static forward basing is the driving factor behind EABO. EABO will circumvent China's robust A2AD threat by placing small low payoff-high risk capabilities at known and unknown locations all throughout the environment and complicate Chinese decision-making and achieve deterrence.

Conventional Strike Capabilities

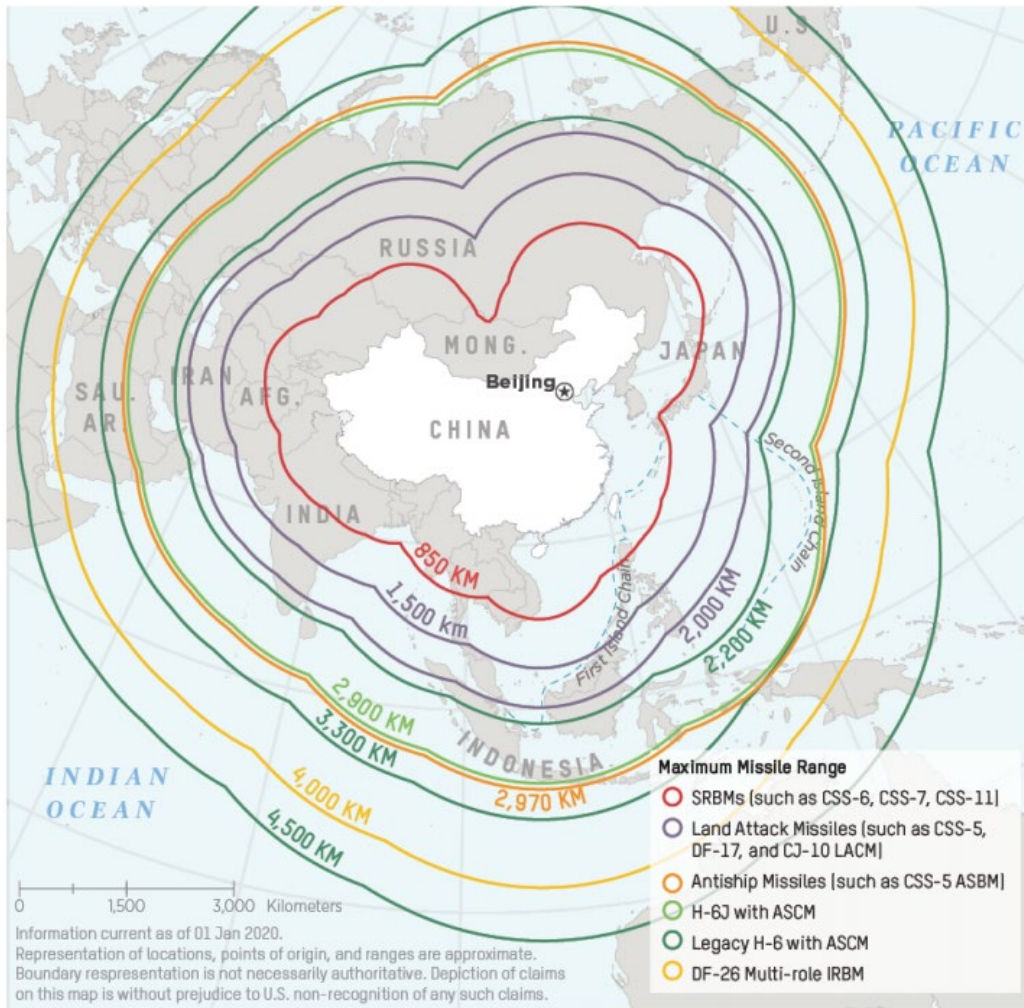


Figure 4: Chinese Conventional Strike Capabilities

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*, (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020).

These capabilities not only threaten United States forward bases in the INDOPACOM AOR, but the United States' carrier strike groups as well, since China developed "carrier killer" ICBM capabilities.⁴⁸ The United States' floating armada moving across the oceans to wage war would be severely attrited in a great power conflict with China.⁴⁹ In a pacing threat competition or conflict, the United States will not have the ability to transit the sea unopposed and operate from adjacent surrounding countries with impunity, as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan.

⁴⁸ Missile Defense Project, "Missiles of China," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 14, 2018, last modified July 16, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/>.

⁴⁹ Christian Brose, 28.



Figure 5: China's Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat

Source: Missile Defense Project, "Missiles of China," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 14, 2018, last modified July 16, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/>.

China's aggressive ICBM and cruise missile development program is an area that has paced or out-paced western development in these programs and is in direct response to United States involvement in Taiwan and the humiliation China suffered during the Taiwan Strait Crisis.

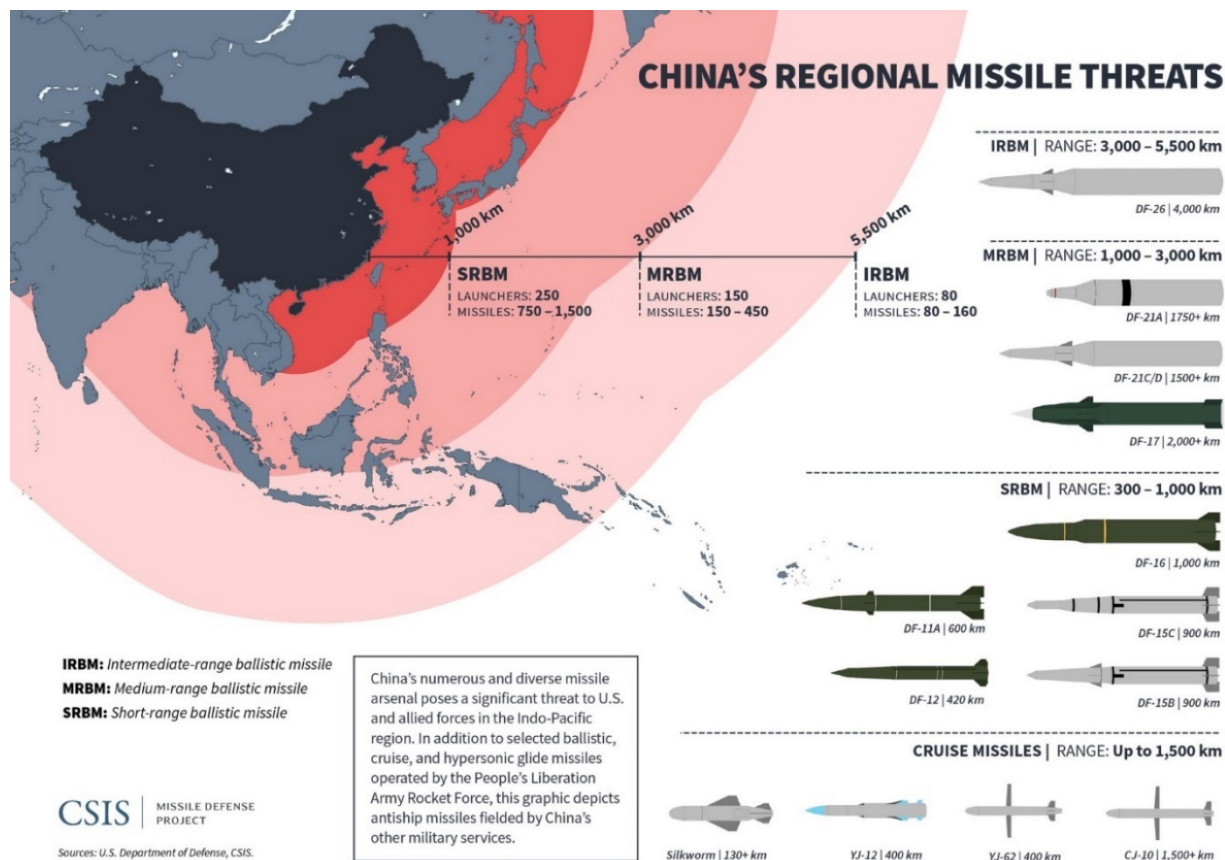


Figure 6: Chinese Regional Missile Threats

Source: Missile Defense Project, "Missiles of China," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 14, 2018, last modified July 16, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/>.

As the figures above illustrate, China achieved its goal of presenting complexity to the United States' decision-making calculus, due to its robust investment in A2AD assets.

This section highlighted the strategic threat to static forces operating within the WEZ and how the United States plans on countering this threat without escalating hostilities and absorbing heavy losses. It is important to examine the concept of deterrence in order to understand the various methods of deterrence as well as the adversary's perception of these deterrent actions in order to avoid escalation versus deterrence. This next section will take a brief look at these theories of deterrence and the value of future Marine Corps and Navy operational concepts as deterrence options.

Strategic Deterrence

The only way to deter wars is to be so clearly capable of winning them that no rival power ever seeks to get its way through violence.

~ Christian Brose⁵⁰

“The Chinese Communist Party aims to become the dominant power in Asia and in the world, and it believes that for China to win, America must lose.”⁵¹ The Marine Corps is developing this future MAGTF concept to provide the Joint Force a viable deterrence force to counter China and Russia in great power competition. Michael Mazarr provides a definition of deterrence in the RAND study titled Understanding Deterrence:

Deterrence is the practice of discouraging or restraining someone— in world politics, usually a nation-state—from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack. It involves an effort to stop or prevent an action, as opposed to the closely related but distinct concept of “compellence,” which is an effort to force an actor to do something.⁵²

There are two deterrence strategies that countries employ, 1) deterrence by denial, and 2) deterrence by punishment.⁵³ Deterrence by denial achieves its objective by causing the adversary to question their ability to succeed, while deterrence by punishment deters an adversary through the threat of force, economic penalties, or in the case of the Cold War mutually assured destruction.⁵⁴ Future MAGTF employment, such as EABO, fall into the former category and achieve deterrence through denial. In a recent lecture provided by Doctor Andrew Scobell at Marine Corps University a student asked if EABO would effectively deter China from continuing their aggression in the South China Sea. In his response, Doctor Scobell stated that China isn’t concerned with large/fixed US bases inside of their WEZ, since this is a known

⁵⁰ Christian Brose, 16.

⁵¹ Christian Brose, 21.

⁵² Michael Mazarr, Understanding Deterrence, 2.

⁵³ Michael Mazarr, Understanding Deterrence, 2.

⁵⁴ Michael Mazarr, Understanding Deterrence, 2.

quantity for them.⁵⁵ EABO inside the WEZ adds a layer of complexity to China's decision-making cycle, but deterrence is in the eye of the beholder.⁵⁶ Will China view this as US escalatory aggression or as an actual deterrent?⁵⁷ Michael Mazarr talks about this aspect of deterrence and describes perception as the dominant variable in deterrence.⁵⁸ According to Michael Mazarr, perceptions of the enemy outweighs the actual prospect of deterrence by denial or punishment.⁵⁹ These questions must be asked when considering the future direction of MAGTF employment. Will China's perception of EABO and future MAGTF employment deter them from aggression or does the Marine Corps and United States risk miscalculation, due to placing A2AD assets in such close proximity to China? The *TM EABO* formalizes how to place reduced-footprint and low-signature forces inside the WEZ, which will result in China's inability to conduct precision targeting on an asset that knowingly possesses a capability that imposes strategic cost on Chinese military operations. This question will be examined further and answered in the following section titled, Flipping the Map. Understanding deterrence and perception as the dominant variable in deterrence is crucial to ensure that the Marine Corps gets future operational concepts and *FD 2030* correct.

Flipping the Map

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.
~ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁶⁰

Like Sun Tzu states in the maxim above, it is important to “flip the map” and attempt to look at the INDOPACOM AOR from China's perspective in order to gain a better understanding

⁵⁵ Andrew Scobell, *China's Grand Strategy*.

⁵⁶ Andrew Scobell, *China's Grand Strategy*.

⁵⁷ Andrew Scobell, *China's Grand Strategy*.

⁵⁸ Michael Mazarr, 7.

⁵⁹ Michael Mazarr, 7.

⁶⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

of how the United States and the Marine Corps can achieve deterrence and pose complex problems for China. China's National Defense in the New Era provides the necessary perspective to accomplish this goal. It is important to note the differences between how the United States views China and how the Chinese view themselves. In his book *The Kill Chain*, Christian Ambrose says that "China's strategic goal is to achieve Asian hegemony, and that the only way it can accomplish this strategic goal is for the United States to lose."⁶¹ China states in its National Defense document that it is pursuing the "path of peaceful development" and that it considers "peace and harmony fundamental" to its pursuit of a "national defense policy that is defensive in nature."⁶² China's self-assessment stands in stark contrast to others' assessments. Christian Brose states that "as the balance of power continues to shift out of America's favor, the Chinese Communist Party will likely become more expansive in its ambitions, more assertive in its pursuit of them, and more capable of getting its way, no matter how much that harms Americans."⁶³ As if in retort to these allegations of aggressive expansionism, China lists its defense policy objectives in the following order:

- To deter and resist aggression
- To safeguard national political security, the people's security and social stability
- To oppose and contain "Taiwan independence"
- To crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as "Tibet independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan"
- To safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security
- To safeguard China's maritime rights and interests
- To safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyberspace

⁶¹ Christian Brose, 21.

⁶² Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, *The 2019 Defense White Paper*, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), <http://www.jstor.org/lomc.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep22586.7>. 6.

⁶³ Christian Brose, 21.

- To safeguard China’s overseas interests
- To support the sustainable development of the country⁶⁴

There are key items of this list that stand out when analyzing China’s view of the world and its place in it. First, to deter and resist aggression. How does China define aggression? China openly condemns United States Navy freedom of navigation operations in the Taiwan Strait and accuses the United States of undermining regional stability. Second, to oppose and contain “Taiwan independence.” China’s staunch opposition to Taiwan independence poses a complex problem for the United States and its tenuous relationship with Taiwan. Lastly, China’s assertion that it will safeguard its maritime rights and interests, overseas interests, and interests in outer space pose additional problems for the global community, given China’s propensity to not abide by international law in these arenas and despite their assertion of peaceful pursuit of the development of their country.

China states that its conduct in the South China sea is based on historical rights, in accordance with international law, and that these reefs and islands are “inalienable” portions of their territory.⁶⁵ Additionally, China assures the world that it will continue to work in concert with countries who contest these maritime claims in order to maintain regional peace and stability.⁶⁶ With respect to Taiwan, China adamantly maintains it is committed to “peaceful reunification,” while in the same breath stating that it is unequivocally opposed to outside interference that seeks to divide China’s territory and historical claims.⁶⁷ China’s unambiguous commitment to this reunification is reflected in the following excerpt:

We make no promise to renounce the use of force, and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures. This is by no means targeted at our compatriots in Taiwan, but at the

⁶⁴ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 6-7.

⁶⁵ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁶⁶ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁶⁷ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

interference of external forces and the very small number of “Taiwan independence” separatists and their activities. The PLA will resolutely defeat anyone attempting to separate Taiwan from China and safeguard national unity at all costs.⁶⁸

China is clearly writing these targeted words to the United States, and this must be accounted for as the United States develops concepts like EABO in an effort to achieve strategic deterrence rather than escalating hostilities.

It is important to understand China’s historical perspective and its past mistreatment by western powers, since China opened its borders in the 19th century.⁶⁹ China clearly states that the mistreatment of the past is the driving factor behind its peaceful pursuit of national development and why it will “never seek hegemony, expansion or spheres of influence.”⁷⁰ The country asserts that since modern times the Chinese people have suffered from aggression and war and that it detests such aggression and will never inflict this level of suffering on any other country.⁷¹ The Chinese National Defense document goes on to say that China hopes that all countries “choose the path of peaceful development and jointly avoid wars and conflicts” and “China is committed to developing friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.”⁷²

It respects the rights of all peoples to independently choose their own development path, and stands for the settlement of international disputes through equal dialogue, negotiation and consultation. China is opposed to interference in the internal affairs of others, abuse of the weak by the strong, and any attempt to impose one’s will on others. China advocates partnerships rather than alliances and does not join any military bloc. It stands against aggression and expansion, and opposes arbitrary use or threat of arms. The development of China’s national defense aims to meet its rightful security needs and contribute to the growth of the world’s peaceful forces. History proves and will continue to prove that China will never follow the beaten track of big powers in seeking

⁶⁸ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁶⁹ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁷⁰ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁷¹ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 7.

⁷² Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 8.

hegemony. No matter how it might develop, China will never threaten any other country or seek any sphere of influence.⁷³

A key phrase extracted from this excerpt is, “it [China] stands against aggression and expansion, and opposes arbitrary use or threat of arms.” The Marine Corps and the United States must account for China’s historical perspective of mistreatment and “abuse of the weak by the strong,” or risk escalating hostilities. It is vital to recognize that a key goal of China’s military is to develop its A2AD and maritime capabilities in order to deny an advanced naval power, like the United States, the ability to gain and sustain access to operational areas that threaten national Chinese interests at risk.⁷⁴

The United States and the Marine Corps cannot fully comprehend China’s standpoint without a thorough understanding and analysis of the strategic tensions and patriotic fervor that United States-Taiwan-China relations exhume. In her book *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China*, Nancy Tucker gives a thorough history of the relationships between these two countries that offers valuable insight into how China may interpret EABO. Additionally, a recent *Marine Corps Gazette* article, written by Major Franz Gayl USMC(Ret), in the January 2021 edition provides historical context for the Taiwan crisis and offers additional insights into Chinese perceptions.

⁷³ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 8.

⁷⁴ Edmund F. Burke et al., 5.



Figure 7: Taiwan Strait Area

Source: Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

The Chinese Civil War began in 1927 when the communist Peoples Republic of China (PRC) challenged the existing Republic of China (ROC) for political control of the country.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Franz J. Gayl, "Channeling Realism to Avert a War Over Taiwan," *Marine Corps Gazette* (January 2021), 11.

The United States allied with Chiang Ki-shek during World War II; however, the relationship on both sides was wrought with distrust and the United States accused Chiang Ki-shek of prioritizing his civil war and not wholly committing to assisting the United States in defeating the Japanese.⁷⁶ World War II frustrations were the beginning of a long history of mistrust and ambiguity between the United States and China's relationship. Despite these reservations, once Japan was defeated and expelled in 1945, all prior Quin-Dynasty regions were returned to the still civil war entangled ROC.⁷⁷ However, in 1949 Chiang Ki-shek was defeated and withdrew from mainland China to Taiwan, and the United States was split over the actual strategic importance of Taiwan, but it was clear that President Truman did not want to create "two Chinas" or contend for an independent Taiwan.⁷⁸ Nancy Tucker refers to the period that follows from 1949 to 1971 as the "origins of strategic ambiguity," which witnessed subsequent United States' administrations increase or decrease enthusiasm for providing support to Taiwan.⁷⁹ The United States-Taiwan issue came to a crossroads when the United Nations recognized the PRC as the legitimate government of China.⁸⁰ The United States was forced to recognize the PRC, which it had for decades ignored, resulting in international relief as China was opened to the world.⁸¹ Despite the United States political partiality for the ROC, it capitulated with the United Nations' decision and rescinded all former security treaties with Taiwan and severed formal diplomatic relations.⁸²

Despite the severing of diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the United States enacted the Taiwan Relations Act 9 (TRA) in 1979, due to growing concerns of potential PRC violent

⁷⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 12.

⁷⁷ Franz J. Gayl, 14.

⁷⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 13.

⁷⁹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 11-26.

⁸⁰ Franz J. Gayl, 10.

⁸¹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 29.

⁸² Franz J. Gayl, 10.

reunification of Taiwan under its One China policy.⁸³ The United States had recognized the PRC's One China policy via formal diplomatic relations; however, Beijing viewed the TRA as "United States backsliding," and Taiwan wanted to intensify the PRC's apprehensions over the TRA to expand its sphere of influence.⁸⁴ Under the provisions of the TRA, the United States provided military support for the defense of Taiwan, and was prepared to intervene militarily if China attempted to unite Taiwan through force.⁸⁵ The aftermath of the TRA, was what Nancy Tucker describes as Taiwan showing up to the United States with a shopping list of desired military capabilities and being told what they can and cannot buy.⁸⁶ A particularly inflammatory Taiwan weapons sale was the F-16 fighter aircraft that President George H. W. Bush approved amid his political fight and campaign against Bill Clinton.⁸⁷ In an alarming statement to a Fort Worth crowd, President Bush declared "that peace in the Taiwan strait and stability in the region had been the result of past arms sales and that the F-16 transfers would sustain the confidence in Taiwan to reduce tensions."⁸⁸ Enraged by these and other actions taken by the United States under the provisions of the TRA in concert with Taiwan's continued rhetoric and quest for independence and international recognition, tensions between the two countries continued to grow.

These tensions came to a boiling point in the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. Nancy Tucker states this about the attitude of the three leaders leading up to the Taiwan Strait Crisis: "their depth of mutual ignorance and mistrust, their cynical maneuvering, and their competing political and cultural imperatives virtually guaranteed misfortune."⁸⁹ The tipping point came

⁸³ Franz J. Gayl, 10.

⁸⁴ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 117, 126.

⁸⁵ Franz J. Gayl, 12.

⁸⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 228.

⁸⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 188.

⁸⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 188.

⁸⁹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 188.

when President Bill Clinton authorized the current ROC President Lee Teng-hui to travel to the United States and give a presentation at Cornell University.⁹⁰ In concert with the Bush F-16 sale and President Clinton's Taiwan Policy review, President Lee's visit signaled a breach in the United States' pledge to never support Taiwan independence.⁹¹ This perceived breach of trust required China to restore credibility in its threats made to Taiwan.⁹² Following Lee's visit China removed its ambassador from Washington and refused to accept the United States' new ambassador, leaving both countries without diplomatic representation in each of their capitols.⁹³ Sentiments of the level of commitment that China was willing to make to prevent Taiwan independence were evident in comments made between Chinese and United States' senior military officials. In October of 1995, Lieutenant General Xiong Guangkai reminded former assistant secretary of defense, Chas Freeman, of the United States' nuclear threats that were used to back down China during the Eisenhower years and assured him that now China would act in kind.⁹⁴ And ominously adding, "you will not sacrifice Los Angeles to protect Taiwan."⁹⁵ The situation was a tinder box just waiting for a spark. The spark would come in the form of massive Chinese military exercises and the firing of M-9 missiles into international shipping lanes near Taiwan's two largest ports.⁹⁶ To illustrate United States' resolve the President ordered two carrier strike groups, the *USS Nimitz* and the *USS Independence*, to the Taiwan Strait.⁹⁷ China's inadequate intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance abilities were unable to detect the mass of ships sailing toward them, and it only learned the location of these strike groups through the

⁹⁰ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 213.

⁹¹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 214.

⁹² Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 214.

⁹³ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 216.

⁹⁴ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 218.

⁹⁵ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 218.

⁹⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 219.

⁹⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 220.

public media.⁹⁸ The dispatch of two carrier strike groups made a strong statement to China and effectively deescalated the previously increasing hostilities.⁹⁹ As a direct result of the Taiwan Strait Crisis, China fast-tracked its military modernization program, prioritized the Taiwan contingency, shifted from a deterrent to a coercive strategy, exponentially increased its ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, purchased Russian fighter planes, surface and subsurface naval vessels, and prioritized information warfare capabilities.¹⁰⁰ It is not a stretch to say that the Taiwan Strait Crisis started the Chinese military down the path that the United States military seeks to counter today.

Since the Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan has steadily risen to power, ousting the Kuomintang party in 2000, which led to renewed tensions between the United States, Taiwan, and China, to the DPP's separatist views.¹⁰¹ The DPP present a revisionist history that Taiwanese people are not Chinese; however, Taiwanese people are ethnic Han with familial and economic ties across the strait and into mainland China.¹⁰² The DPP anchor their enthusiasm for independence on the TRA and mistakenly view the historical agreement as guaranteed use of United States military members in defense of Taiwan, regardless of the circumstances.¹⁰³ It is crucial that the United States and Taiwan obtain an understanding of the resolve that China has on the topic Taiwan, and recognize that Taiwan is the PRC's core national security priority, since it is still China's major ongoing civil war.¹⁰⁴ The words spoken in 1995 by Lieutenant General Xiong Guangkai, concerning the United States' unwillingness to sacrifice American lives for Taiwan, still ring true today. The United States and the United

⁹⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 220.

⁹⁹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 221.

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 223.

¹⁰¹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 275, 276.

¹⁰² Franz J. Gayl, 14.

¹⁰³ Franz J. Gayl, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Franz J. Gayl, 14 & 15.

Kingdom refused to get involved with the PRC aggression in Hong Kong, due to the disproportionate risk to reward.¹⁰⁵ Nor should the United States think it prudent to station military members on the island of Taiwan as a deterrence or as an assured response measure should China attack and kill United States military members.¹⁰⁶

Since 11 September 2001, the United States and much of the world has been focused on combating terrorism, and fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it is important to remember, as the United States and these countries shift from global war on terrorism and sustained counter-insurgency combat operations to great power competition, that the Taiwan Strait remains one of a few locations in the world that could spark nuclear exchange between two global powers.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, it is important for the United States to be reminded that this is the level of resolve that China has in maintaining Taiwan as a Chinese territory, and that “ideological support for Taiwan’s democracy cannot come at the expense of undermining the politics of war and peace between the United States and China.”¹⁰⁸ Nor should the United States abandon Taiwan; however, the United States should not be the dominant interlocutor, but rather remain ready to intervene on behalf of Taiwan should the PRC attempt to exploit Taiwan’s weakness and threaten an equitable reunification.¹⁰⁹ Per China’s own strategic defense document from 2019, its primary goal is protecting national unity, and since the Taiwan Strait Crisis, China has prioritized maritime development and capabilities.¹¹⁰ And China sends

¹⁰⁵ Franz J. Gayl, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Walker Mills, "Deterring the Dragon: Returning U.S. Forces to Taiwan," *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army* (October 2020), <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/September-October-2020/Mills-Deterring-Dragon/>.

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 277.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 279.

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 279.

¹¹⁰ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 11-12.

strong signals to separatists and advocates of Taiwan independence by conducting aerial and maritime patrols in and around the island.¹¹¹

EABO Recommendations

In recent years it has become apparent that we are living in a world characterized by the reality of great power competition and the growing possibility of great power war.

~ Thomas Mahnken¹¹²

Based on historical context, it is likely that China will view the Marine Corps' acquisition of anti-ship cruise missiles and EABO as offensive posturing to counter a Chinese forceful reunification with Taiwan. China's self-proclaimed century of shame makes it bristle at the thought of the United States or any western power interfering with a territory that is historically and rightfully theirs. Right, wrong, or indifferent the United States military and policy makers must understand that China's perception of United States' actions, within its sphere of influence, will be viewed as aggression and escalatory in nature. Historically, the United States does not effectively understand the negative perception of its own actions and how it would respond if a hostile country responded in kind. For example, Cold War hostilities escalated to unprecedented levels when the United States discovered that the Russians were attempting to place nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba in 1962, despite the fact that United States backed a failed invasion of Cuba and placed nuclear missiles in Turkey.¹¹³ Consider the scenario of China conducting a freedom of navigation (FON) operation with the equivalent of a carrier strike group near the coast of California. The United States would likely respond with a much more openly

¹¹¹ Anthony H Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, 11-12.

¹¹² Thomas Mahnken, "Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Recommendations for Future National Defense Strategy," 115th Cong., 1st sess., (November 2017), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/17-11-30-testimony-from-outside-experts-on-recommendations-for-a-future-national-defense-strategy>.

¹¹³ Johnathon Renshon, "Mirroring Risk: The Cuban Missile Estimation," *Intelligence and National Security*, (June 2009), 23.

hostile action than China does when the United States conducts FON operations in the Taiwan Strait. A recommendation of this paper is that a more comprehensive understanding of China's strategic viewpoint, and its perception of United States' military actions within its sphere of influence is required in order to effectively achieve deterrence rather than triggering an unwanted response in China's escalation ladder.

The research and analysis of China's strategic viewpoint and capabilities within the first and second island chain illustrate the deterrence value of EABO and future Marine Corps and Navy operational concepts, along with their limitations. If the purpose of EABO and future operational concepts is to deter China from a hostile re-unification or a fait accompli Taiwan scenario, it will fall short of that astronomical task. China's aggressive expansion of its A2AD capabilities and the proximity of Taiwan to mainland China significantly complicates the defense of Taiwan. The DOD openly reports the bleak outcomes of wargames centered around a Taiwan and China conflict, and admit that the United States fails more often than it succeeds at preventing a hostile re-unification of Taiwan.¹¹⁴ The RAND Corporation's wargames and analysis of China's modernization of its air forces illustrate that achieving air superiority in the early stages of a conflict is becoming increasingly more difficult.¹¹⁵ When the RAND Corporation incorporates China's challenge to the United States' maritime superiority, the Navy is required to increase standoff in order to maintain survivability, which decreases the loiter time and quantity of aircraft introduced to the fight.¹¹⁶ This increased standoff requires Air Force and Naval aircraft to rely heavily on aerial refueling; however, tankers themselves are easily targeted

¹¹⁴ Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "US 'Gets Its Ass Handed to It' in Wargames: Here's a \$24 Billion Fix," *Breaking Defense*, (March 2019), <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/03/us-gets-its-ass-handed-to-it-inwargames-heres-a-24-billion-fi>.

¹¹⁵ U.S. and Chinese Air Superiority Capabilities: An Assessment of Relative Advantage, 1996–2017, RB-9858/3-AF (available at www.rand.org/t/RB9858z3).

¹¹⁶ Chinese Threats to U.S. Surface Ships: An Assessment of Relative Capabilities, 1996–2017, RB-9858/4-AF (available at www.rand.org/t/RB9858z4)

and require airstrips in the USINDOPACOM AOR that China will most assuredly attack in the early stages of a conflict.¹¹⁷ In summation, the United States faces difficulty achieving military superiority in the early stages of any conflict close to mainland China within an “operationally or politically effective timeline,” and for EABO to be a viable concept of operation or deterrent it will require greater standoff than a Taiwan conflict allows.¹¹⁸

The DOD mandated that the Marine Corps provide the Navy and the Joint Force a capability and mission set that addresses the China problem in the USINDOPACOM AOR. The analysis of the Marine Corps’ response to that mandate, conducted in this thesis, illustrates that EABO is a valid deterrent option in certain scenarios. The key variable among these viable scenarios is standoff from mainland China that deny it the ability to operate the majority of its forces under the umbrella of its A2AD assets, which include GLBM/GLCMs, air defenses, aircraft, cyber, and electronic warfare capabilities. The other viable scenario is making EABO forces small and mobile enough to avoid rapid detection and targeting by geospatial intelligence AI change detection technology, or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities; however, given current pacing threat capabilities this is difficult at present and trending toward improbable in the future. The final viable scenario possesses its own political, civilian, and tactical challenges. This scenario comprises placing large numbers of EABs across the USINDOPACOM AOR as risk worthy platforms that prevent China from being able to detect and target all of them. Risk worthy platforms require the United States government, DOD, and the American people to lose their infatuation with outwitting the enemy in the cognitive domain

¹¹⁷ Christian Brose, 13.

¹¹⁸ U.S. and Chinese Air Superiority Capabilities.

and get comfortable with attrition.¹¹⁹ Michael Kofman points out, in his article for Modern War Institute at West Point, that future operational concepts need to avoid the “intellectual alibi” of thinking concepts will achieve complete cognitive defeat rather than realizing that a war with China will likely be a war where attrition matters.¹²⁰ Whatever method of employment the Marine Corps adopts, the United States must avoid Chinese detection of any EABs capable of influencing Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait or risk strategic miscalculation between two nuclear powers.

If the goal of EABO and Marine Corps-Naval integration of operational concepts is to deter a forceful China-Taiwan reunification, then the Marine Corps and the Joint Force need to return to the drawing board. The deterrence value of these operational concepts, with respect to Taiwan, fail to incorporate historical context and the strategic value Taiwan possesses for China and its incapacity to allow Taiwan independence. Based on the strategic importance of Taiwan to China, the only viable deterrence option capable of preventing a forceful reunification is a political one. United States formal recognition of the DPP as the governing body of Taiwan, rather than the PRC, would signal China that it would use whatever means necessary to defend Taiwan in an attempted forceful reunification. Formal recognition of Taiwan possesses its own challenges, risks, and uncertainties, and would be a historic change in United States policy; however, formal recognition of Taiwan is potentially the only viable solution to prevent a forceful and inequitable reunification with China.

An additional observation is that the Marine Corps and the United States need to carefully message and conduct EABO in order to achieve deterrence rather than escalate

¹¹⁹ Michael Kofman, *A Bad Romance: Us Operational Concepts Need to Ditch Their Love Affair with Cognitive Paralysis and Make Peace with Attrition*, <https://mwi.usma.edu/a-bad-romance-us-operational-concepts-need-to-ditch-their-love-affair-with-cognitive-paralysis-and-make-peace-with-attrition/>, (March 2021).

¹²⁰ Michael Kofman.

hostilities. China will see these capabilities and operations as rehearsals and preparation for defending Taiwan from a Chinese attack. The unclassified *TM EABO*, released by the Marine Corps in February of 2021, looks and reads like a Taiwan Strait defense playbook. The illustrations of conceptual employment of EABO (see Figure 2 above) appear eerily similar to the Taiwan Strait, a similarity that will not go unnoticed by Chinese analysts. The Taiwan Strait Crisis was the driving factor behind China's development of its robust A2AD capabilities in an attempt to prevent the United States from ever being able to intimidate China from forcefully reunifying Taiwan. China tolerates the United States Navy's freedom of navigation operations that it conducts in the Taiwan Strait; however, if China commits to reunifying Taiwan via military force in spite of international outcries, the United States Navy would be threatened in such a confined maneuver space.

Conclusions

It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future.

~ Yogi Berra¹²¹

As the above quotation alludes to, it is difficult to anticipate which countries future conflict involves and how the United States should plan accordingly. Historically, most countries prepare for the last war that they fought and the United States is no different. What General Berger is attempting to accomplish with *CPG*, *Force Design 2030*, and *TM EABO* is to effectively man, train, and equip the Marine Corps for great power competition rather than the continuing to prepare for counter-insurgency and low-end conflicts. The United States, while presently entangled in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, is exiting a period that prioritized counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency warfare and entering a period of great power competition, as outlined in the *NSS* and *NDS*. As illustrated in this thesis, the Marine Corps set about conducting

¹²¹ Christian Brose, 215.

force design by identifying current force capabilities, analyzing guiding documents for change, conducting an intelligence preparation of the environment, identifying the threat within the first and second island chain, studying historical and regional tensions that contribute to irrational responses, and identifying a logical way forward that has a reasonable chance of ensuring success and deterring the United States' enemies. The Marine Corps believes that *FD 2030*, and *TM EABO* represent the best method of addressing these challenges.

Organizational change is difficult and most organizations are resistant to change, and the Marine Corps is not insulated from critics and individuals who cling to legacy systems and concepts. It is not surprising that *FD 2030* and *TM EABO* has its proponents and critics and they have valid points or concerns regarding the viability of force restructuring and future operational concepts. What this thesis endeavored to provide the reader is a closer inspection of the problem, the proposed solution, and the likely perception of these actions by United States adversaries. The purpose of this thesis is not a wholesale discount of *FD 2030* and *TM EABO*. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an alternative viewpoint that illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of Marine Corps future operational concepts, and to encourage the readers to take an objective view rather than wholly accepting or rejecting future Marine Corps' operational concepts. There are scenarios where these concepts could be successful and there are scenarios where these concepts might not be successful. Understanding the different situations that challenge future operational concepts is a vital step in improving these concepts, and in the end military professionals are obligated to seek improvement and ensure that service members are never put in a fair fight with an adversary.

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