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The Marine Corps must possess an available, persistent, multi-domain reconnaissance capability focused on key maritime terrain that can collect, compete, and transition to conflict to support Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander's (JFMCC) fight for sea control and sea denial. To accomplish this, the Marine Corps must establish a standing Fleet Marine Force reconnaissance unit with multi-domain intelligence collection capabilities to support the Marine Corps' ability to conduct limited Title 10 Preparation of the Environment activities designed to shape the operational environment for the JFMCC.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Marine Corps Multi-Domain Reconnaissance in Great Power Competition

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

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AY 2020-21

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Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Multi-Domain Reconnaissance in Great Power Competition

Author: Major Matthew R. Hart, US Marine Corps

Thesis: The Marine Corps must possess an available, persistent, multi-domain reconnaissance capability focused on key maritime terrain that can collect, compete, and transition to conflict to support Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) and the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander's (JFMCC) fight for sea control and sea denial.

Discussion: The National Defense Strategy of the United States (US) makes it clear that great power competition has returned. In the Indo-Pacific, an ascendant China poses the most serious threat to US national security. China's ability to conduct predatory actions below the level of armed conflict while simultaneously modernizing warfighting capabilities with increased range, sophistication, and lethality have eroded the traditional military advantages of the US. The proliferation of this technology has enabled China to link its data networks, sensors, platforms, and operators to create a multi-domain kill chain through which it seeks to deny the US the ability to gain access to the operational environment during conflict. To gain access to the operational environment, the JFMCC must have sea control and sea denial to support contested operations in the close and confined seas. The Marine Corps developed EABO as an enabling concept to support the JFMCC. EABO is predicated on persistent forward presence and the ability to win the reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance fight. While the capabilities exist across the reconnaissance and intelligence communities to achieve these objectives, they are not employed as a cohesive, task organized unit. As a result, the Marine Corps has become solely reliant on Special Operations Forces to answer critical information requirements in theaters outside of armed conflict to support contingency planning for the JFMCC and Marine Corps. In great power competition, the inability to shape the operating environment and answer information requirements will severely degrade the ability to get to the fight in the first place. The Marine Corps must establish a standing Fleet Marine Force reconnaissance unit with multi-domain intelligence collection capabilities to support the Marine Corps' ability to conduct limited Title 10 Preparation of the Environment activities designed to shape the operational environment and enable the transition from competition to conflict. Marine Corps Reconnaissance Battalions are uniquely suited to provide the base intelligence maneuver capability of this unit due to its the specialized skills already resident within the organization. By acting as the intelligence maneuver element integrated into the larger Marine Corps Intelligence and Surveillance Enterprise it will enable the JFMCC to shape the operational environment by maintaining a joint sensor-shooter capability to distribute lethality and resources from competition through conflict.

Conclusion: Without a multi-domain reconnaissance capability, the Marine Corps puts the naval force at unnecessary risk due to its inability to confirm or deny planning assumptions, provide increased situational awareness, and maintain the sensor to shooter link that provides operational flexibility to the JFMCC.

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

This project was based on my personal observations and experiences over twelve years working within the reconnaissance community. The intent of the research was to develop a deeper understanding of why reconnaissance forces have been employed as a maneuver element vice an intelligence collection asset nested within the larger Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise. Like the Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance Officers that came before me, I found it unacceptable that the highly trained and skilled Marines making up the Marine Corps reconnaissance community were not being employed to their full potential. It is my belief that the Marine Corps has become over reliant on other services and commands to answer their information requirements, putting the service at tremendous risk. As a result, the Marine Corps has failed to develop a cohesive concept for the employment of intelligence collection capabilities outside theaters of armed conflict. You cannot surge intelligence collection post-conflict. Great power competition will require the Marine Corps to shape its operational environment and answer the information requirements of the Naval Expeditionary Force during competition if it wants to make it to the fight during conflict.

My sincere appreciation to Dr. Eric Shibuya, LtCol John Nash, LtCol Joern Qviller, and Dr. Lon Strauss for their support during this process and motivating me to keep pushing forward with my research. To all the Marines I have served with within the Reconnaissance Community, thank you. Your indispensable knowledge and insight during this process was instrumental in putting pen to paper many of the concepts we have spoken about. To Ann Marie, Connor, and Landen, your unwavering support and love during this project made this all possible. I could never put into words what that means to me, thank you.

Introduction

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) of the United States (US) identified "the reemergence of long-term strategic competition" as the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security.[1] The Commandant of the Marine Corps released his planning guidance to build a more lethal and modern force in accordance with the strategic approaches identified in the NDS. With force design as the number one priority, the Commandant realigned the Marine Corps with the naval force and identified Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) as the key concept that "will inform how we approach missions against peer adversaries."[2] To enable EABO and answer the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander's (JFMCC) Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs) from competition through conflict, the Marine Corps must possess an available, persistent, multi-domain capability to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance of key maritime terrain. An available force is organic to the Marine Corps, appropriately trained, and possesses the correct command relationships to gain the requisite authorities and permissions to conduct operational preparation of the environment. A persistent force must employ operating concepts, such as security force assistance, to gain access to the operating environment, operate within the weapons engagement zone, and contribute to the joint kill chain that underpins the JFMCC's sea control and sea denial capabilities. Lastly, a multi-domain reconnaissance force enables the JFMCC to shape the operational environment by maintaining a joint sensor-shooter capability to distribute lethality and resources from competition through conflict. While these multi-domain capabilities are already resident in disparate battalions within the Marine Information Groups, these units lack the requisite fieldcraft, command and control, and

[1] Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.) 4.
[2] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Commandants Planning Guidance* (Washington, D.C., July 2019) 11.

specialized skills training to survive and persist as the inside force in a conflict with China. Therefore, a multi-domain Reconnaissance Regiment must be created to synchronize the synergistic effects of these capabilities. Without a multi-domain reconnaissance capability, the Marine Corps puts the naval force at unnecessary risk due to its inability to confirm or deny planning assumptions, provide increased situational awareness required by the inside force, and maintain the sensor to shooter link that provides operational flexibility to the JFMCC.

This paper describes how the Marine Corps should develop a multi-domain reconnaissance and surveillance capability to align with the new joint competition continuum. It will examine the role EABO plays in a conflict with China. It will demonstrate how the current organization and employment of expeditionary ground reconnaissance forces puts both the naval expeditionary and joint force at risk. Finally, it will recommend a concept of employment that will enable joint lethality to support the JFMCC's fight for sea control and sea denial in the South China Sea from competition through conflict. Recommended changes will be provided utilizing the Doctrine, Organizational, Training/Readiness, Material, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy (DOTMLPF-P) framework.

Future Operating Environment in the South China Sea

China's Strategic Aim

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) grand strategy to achieve regional dominance in the Western Pacific has serious security implications for the US. China views the US as the primary competitor and seeks to reverse US dominance in the Indo-Pacific region regardless of the debate over grand strategy. A 2020 RAND report on China defines grand strategy as "the process by which a state relates long-term ends to match under the rubric of an overarching and

enduring vision to advance national interests."[3] Whether China has a grand strategy or not is debated by scholars. Scobell notes that, "while Beijing may not possess a formal coherent master plan explicitly identified as China's grand strategy, the accumulated set of plans and strategies combined with the overall vision statements and national goals articulated by successive PRC leaders suggests otherwise."[4] The key takeaway is that perception matters. China perceives that the US is the central threat to the PRC and has aligned its national resources to counter that threat.

The US has been the central threat to the PRC, Chinese Communist Party, and People's Liberation Army elites since 1949. The 1989 pro-democracy crackdowns in Beijing, followed by the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1991, solidified the US as the primary threat, despite thawing tensions and US support for China's rise in the 1970s. PRC leaders were convinced that the US was, and would continue to be, the principal threat with which it is engaged in long-term competition.[5] China's National Strategy aims to strengthen and modernize its military in addition to utilizing its other instruments of national power to enhance power projection capabilities to address the threat of the US. These actions will allow China to create a buffer zone to counter perceived US threats and expand its sphere of influence within the Indo-Pacific region.[6]

China has focused its military modernization, economic progress, and information campaigns on defeating America's long-standing critical capability: power projection. *U.S.*

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[3] Andrew Scobell et al. *China's Grand Strategy, Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 5.
[4] Andrew Scobell et al. *China's Grand Strategy, Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 10.
[5] Andrew Scobell et al. *China's Grand Strategy, Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 8-9.
[6] Andrew J. Nation and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America, The Sum of Beijing's Fears," *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 2012. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2012-08-16/how-china-sees-america

Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China summarized the effects of China's efforts and noted that Beijing has engaged in "provocative and coercive military and paramilitary activities in the Yellow Sea, the East and South China Seas, the Taiwan Strait, and the Sino-Indian border areas" and that "Beijing's military buildup threatens US and allied national security interests."[7] The synchronization of China's elements of national power have allowed China to degrade the US' ability to project power into China's area of perceived vital interests through fait accompli tactics and the development of long-range precision strike capabilities.

Fait Accompli

China's declarations of air defense identification zones and territorial expansion in the East and South China Seas exemplify fait accompli tactics to deny US forces forward basing and infrastructure essential to a networked security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Physical distance matters to achieve critical objectives in a conflict over Taiwan or the Spratly Islands, two of the most likely areas of conflict between the US and China. A 2015 study, *The U.S.-CHINA Military Scorecard*, analyzed a conflict with China taking place in the past, present, and future. The study assessed that in a future conflict, "the Taiwan and Spratly Islands scenarios suggest that Chinese power diminishes rapidly across even modest distances."[8] Therefore it is imperative that China controls key maritime terrain that allows them to extend the range of their cruise and ballistic missile forces while providing the basing and infrastructure required to extend their operational reach. Additionally, the control of key maritime terrain and associated sea and air exclusion zones, is China's attempt to slowly erode US credibility with allies and partners in the region. Without allies and partners, the US will lose access to forward basing

[7] The White House, *United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC, May 5, 2020), 2.
[8] Eric Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-CHINA Military Scorecard, Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996-2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 326.

infrastructure to sustain expeditionary capabilities such as large runways and deep-water ports. Large runways and deep-water ports are both a critical requirement and a critical vulnerability, and the trend lines are moving in a negative direction for the US.[9]

Anti-Access Area-Denial

The other strategy pursued by China is to create a capabilities or capacity mismatch in long range precision strike capabilities. This mismatch allows China to protect its territorial sovereignty by creating an anti-access area-denial (A2AD) infrastructure and threaten US forward basing and freedom of navigation in the South and East China Seas. By negating the US military's technological competitive advantage, China places the US in a dilemma as identified in the *EABO Handbook*. "The US can continue to risk our most valuable military assets in increasingly vulnerable forward locations, or we can step back from our forward basing posture and risk losing credibility among treaty allies."[10] The US has been unmatched in its ability to project power while maintaining forward-based infrastructure through treaties and alliances. This asymmetric advantage has allowed the US military to deploy and sustain expeditionary capabilities to accomplish policy objectives. However, the central assumptions underpinning the American way of war of the 20th century, which enabled the joint force to exploit its operational reach, will be challenged, and has led the Department of Defense to generate new operating concepts and completely rethink the central assumptions underpinning war in the 21st century.

Future Operating Concepts

Achieving Sea Control, Sea Denial

[9] Eric Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-CHINA Military Scorecard, Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996-2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 326.
[10] Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Handbook Version 1.1* (Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018) 13.

The US military must take drastic action to compete with China and counter China's threat to national security in conflict. The NDS has recognized that the US is now contested in every domain and can no longer assume that it will enter into conflict with a significant military advantage against our adversaries. The US military must not only build a more lethal force by modernizing capabilities but must re-evaluate assumptions and develop new operating concepts.[11] The Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) is the cornerstone concept for great power competition. JAM-GC outlines how the joint force will maintain access to, and maneuver through, the global commons against a pacing threat that can contest its ability to project power through A2AD capabilities. The concept requires a persistent, low-signature inside force that can leverage decisive capabilities of maneuver and mass of an outside force.[12] For the Naval Expeditionary Force, this concept means conducting operations in close and confined seas inside China's weapons engagement zone (WEZ). For the Marine Corps, support to this concept means operations in the littorals.

To persist forward within China's weapons engagement zone, the Navy must have sea control and sea denial, and the Marine Corps plays a pivotal role in securing these objectives. The Navy and Marine Corps drafted *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* (LOCE) in recognition of the integration required between the services to be successful. This document emphasizes the need for a joint approach to addressing China's A2AD capabilities in the close and confined seas to allow the naval force to operate with freedom of action in the littorals. Central to this concept is the ability of the JFMCC to distribute lethality and "seek to impose

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[11] Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.) 6.

[12] Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Handbook Version 1.1* (Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018) 24-26.

increased battlespace complexity on the adversary and confound his decision calculus by forcing him to allocate sensors and shooters against a wider-and more dispersed-set of threats."[13] This strategy allows for a force that is able to persist forward, providing the joint force a credible fighting formation in case of conflict while countering China's actions by reassuring partners and allies in the region with its presence.

Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations

The US Marine Corps developed the EABO concept to meet the challenges put forth in the National Security Strategy and inform Congress about how the Marine Corps will approach missions against peer adversaries.[14] While it is still a concept in development, the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL) published a handbook in 2017 that discusses and elaborates on some of the central tenets of EABO. It states, "The EABO concept is designed to defeat adversary attempts to execute counter intervention and fait accompli strategies that might otherwise inhibit a credible US response to aggression against treaty allies and economic partners."[15] EABO is an enabling capability to the JAM-GC and LOCE. It expands upon the Navy's ability to distribute lethality by "providing land-based options for increasing the number of sensors and shooters beyond the upper limit of seagoing platforms available."[16] This concept allows the Navy to persist forward and maintain the vital sensor to shooter link. According to MCWL "EABO advances, sustains, and maintains naval and joint sensor, shooter, and sustainment capabilities of the inside force to leverage the decisive massed capabilities of the

[13] United States Navy, and United States Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested* Environment (Washington, DC, 2017), 14.
[14] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Commandants Planning Guidance* (Washington, D.C., July 2019) 11.
[15] Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Handbook Version 1.1* (Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018) 5.
[16] United States Navy, and United States Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested* Environment (Washington, DC, 2017), 14.

outside force with enhanced situational awareness, augmented fires, and logistical support."[17] A Marine Corps postured as the inside force provides the joint force several key capabilities. First, an inside force can act as the sensor that enables joint lethality in a contested environment. The inside force provides the JFMCC operational flexibility to shape the operating environment and secure key maritime terrain in the fight for sea control and sea denial. Second, it allows the JFMCC the opportunity to seize the strategic initiative to strike high value and high payoff targets. An inside force also serves as a deterrent to increased aggression and use of force by China by inserting the cost of American life into its decision-making calculus. Third, the inside force can counter China's fait accompli strategy by working with partners and allies to enforce established international norms like freedom of navigation, rebuilding US credibility in the region.

Implications for Marine Corps Reconnaissance Community

Expeditionary operations against China in the competition space will require the JFMCC to understand the operating environment within the contact and blunt layers. The Marine Corps must possess the critical capability to persist forward and act as an extension of the naval force and enable the joint kill chain during expeditionary operations. The new challenges associated with maintaining persistent naval forward presence to enable sea control and sea denial means that the forces inside the contact and blunt layers must be combat credible and ready to rapidly transition from competition to conflict.[18] The old assumption that the JFMCC will be able to freely maneuver forces in and out of these layers is no longer valid. As the Commandant stated, "Navy-Marine forces must be able to transition from competition to crisis. We will not be able

[17] Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Handbook Version 1.1* (Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018) 5.
[18] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Commandants Planning Guidance* (Washington, D.C., July 2019) 2.

to pull out our force and put another in. Those forward forces must be able to respond immediately to create sea denial, sea control somewhere or respond to crisis."[19] The Marine Corps must be able to operate in the contact layer designed to enable the joint force to compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict while maintaining the ability to act as the blunt layer to delay, degrade, or deny adversary aggression to support EABO within this national operating model for the joint force.[20] China's A2AD capability and capacity means that Marine Corps units acting as the inside force in the contact and blunt layers will have to conduct distributed operations across a wide operational area to negate China's ability to disrupt and break apart its kill chain. To be effective, each unit executing distributed operations must possess the ability to execute the full kill chain. The full kill chain includes achieving understanding through intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, deciding based on that information, and finally taking lethal or non-lethal action with the assets assigned. Marine Corps Reconnaissance Battalions are currently the only conventional Marine Corps unit that possess this capability, making them ideally suited to form the base intelligence maneuver element within a multi-domain reconnaissance unit.

Current State of Marine Corps Reconnaissance

Marine Corps Reconnaissance Battalion Mission Essential Tasks

Marine Corps Reconnaissance Battalion's unique training and assigned missions make it ideally suited to support EABO. The primary mission-essential tasks of a reconnaissance battalion are to provide task-organized forces; conduct specialized limited scale raids; conduct

[19] General David Berger, "Commandant on Marines Fighting Subs," *United States Naval Institute*, podcast audio, December 8, 2020, https://www.usni.org/the-proceedings-podcast/episode-198-marine-corps-commandant.
[20] Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.) 7.

specialized insertion and extraction; conduct amphibious reconnaissance and surveillance; conduct ground reconnaissance and surveillance; conduct battlespace shaping; and establish means for command and control. Reconnaissance battalions achieve this task by employing three Reconnaissance Companies under operational control of the Division and one Force Reconnaissance Company under operational control of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) (Figure 1).[21] Marine Corps reconnaissance units can act as tactical and operational scouts for the JFMCC by gaining access to key maritime terrain and developing battlespace awareness in the littoral operating environment. Marine reconnaissance units can gain access via specialized insertion and extraction methods. These range from high-altitude high-opening military freefall operations to over-the-horizon clandestine landings via subsurface methods. These non-standard insertions can be either overt or clandestine, and give the operational commander flexibility in employment based on the specific adversary situation and threat levels. To disrupt the adversary commander's decision-making once access to the operating environment is achieved, these units can conduct both lethal and non-lethal shaping actions to attack an enemy capability or force.[22] The ability to limit the adversary's freedom of action and deny the concentration of its combat power against the naval force contribute to both sea control and sea denial. Marine Corps reconnaissance units can also support the JFMMC's fight for sea control and sea denial through reconnaissance maneuver and target operations. These operations allow the commander to conduct manned and persistent surveillance of an objective area, collect intelligence, and set the conditions for movement and maneuver of the force.[23] Reconnaissance units also possess the

[21] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, NAVMC 3500.55C W/Ch 1-3, *Reconnaissance Training and Readiness Manual* (Washington, D.C., 8 Nov 2017). 2-2.
[22] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reference Publication 1-10A.6, *Ground Reconnaissance Operations* (Washington, D.C., 25 Nov 2015). 1-7.
[23] Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reference Publication 1-10A.6, *Ground Reconnaissance Operations* (Washington, D.C., 25 Nov 2015). 1-7.

ability to take lethal action through specialized limited scale raids or the coordination and control of fires. These inherent capabilities of reconnaissance units to gain access to an operational area, achieve understanding through persistent human observation, make decisions, and act, makes Marine Corps reconnaissance units uniquely suited for EABO.

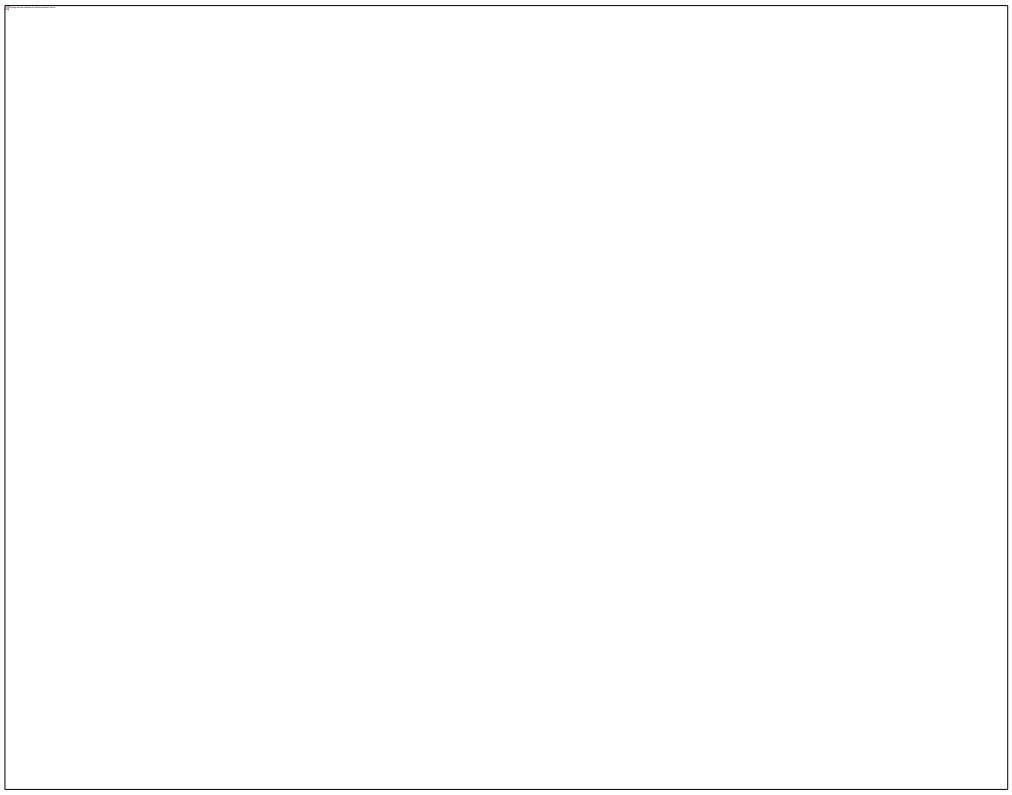

Figure 1: Reconnaissance Battalion with ADCON FORECON Company
Source: Headquarters, US Marine Corps, *Ground Reconnaissance Operations*, MCRP 1-10A.6. (Washington, DC: Headquarters, US Marine Corps, April 4, 2018), 2-10.

Changing Roles and Responsibilities for Reconnaissance Battalions

The changing responsibilities and employment of Marine Corps reconnaissance has created a capability gap in amphibious reconnaissance in support of the JFMCC. Amphibious reconnaissance in support of the JFMCC can be traced back to the Observer Group established

shortly after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. [24] The Observer Group and the infancy of Marine Corps reconnaissance was the culmination of doctrinal innovation and experimentation from 1906 through the 1930s. Major Dion Williams' *Naval Reconnaissance, Instructions for the Reconnaissance of Bays, Harbors, and Adjacent Country* in 1906, Lieutenant Colonel Pete Ellis' *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia* in 1921, and the Publication of FTP 167, *Landing Operations Doctrine* in 1938 enabled experimentation with task-organized reconnaissance forces and demonstrated their importance in supporting amphibious landings.

The doctrinal role of Marine reconnaissance forces has changed since the initial vision for employment in 1906 due to the changing character of warfare during conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and Operations DESERT SHIELD, DESERT STORM, IRAQI FREEDOM, AND ENDURING FREEDOM. A mission analysis of expeditionary ground reconnaissance conducted by RAND in 2016 correctly identified the impacts of September 11, 2001 on the reconnaissance community. "Since 9/11, many reconnaissance (Recon) units have been employed as light infantry battalions and companies controlling battlespace in Iraq and Afghanistan, rather than small teams charged to collect information on the enemy and the environment as in the past."[25] The divergence in the employment of reconnaissance forces from their doctrinal role has led to stagnation in the development of future employment concepts. Without a unified vision of employment, any further questions that arise about employment, organization, training, manning, and equipping cannot be answered.

The activation of Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) on February 26th, 2006, compounded the effects of changing responsibilities for the reconnaissance community by

[24] Col Bruce F. Meyers (USMC Ret), Swift, Silent, and Deadly: Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance in the Pacific, 1942-1945 (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 4-5.
[25] Michael H. Decker et al. *Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance, A Mission Analysis* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, October 2016),1.

restructuring Marine Corps Reconnaissance Battalions. The creation of MARSOC was the result of the successful proof of concept conducted by MARSOC Detachment (DET ONE). DET ONE was formed around a Force Reconnaissance Platoon reinforced by intelligence, fires, and a command headquarters (See Figure 2).[26] The successful performance of the Force Reconnaissance Platoon led to 1st and 2nd Force Reconnaissance Companies, O-5 level commands, to be transferred to (MARSOC) to meet the emergent manpower requirements of the War on Terror.[27] The respective MEFs lost their ability to conduct special operations and deep reconnaissance as a result. An effort was made by Headquarters Marine Corps to address this shortfall by establishing Company D at 1st and 2nd Reconnaissance Battalions, and a Deep Reconnaissance Company at 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion to give the MEFs a "Force like" capability.[28] However, the loss of one force reconnaissance company to MARSOC resulted in the loss of twenty-five percent of the most experienced and trained Marines overnight. The loss of personnel created a manpower shortfall that is still impacting the reconnaissance community. The manpower shortfall prevents the depth required to train and equip forces designed to operate during competition because major combat operations and crisis response requirements consume the preponderance of forces. The inability to generate depth within the battalions does not leave any excess capacity to focus on future activities in competition with China.

The cumulative impacts of the establishment of MARSOC and the organizational restructuring and changing responsibilities following the attacks on September 11th, 2001 have resulted in a reconnaissance community not able to meet the requirements of great power

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[26] Lieutenant Colonel John P. Piedmont USMCR, DET ONE, U.S. Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment, 2003-2006, (Washington, DC: March 2010), 95.
[27] Michael H. Decker et al. *Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance, A Mission Analysis* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, October 2016),1.
[28] Michael H. Decker et al. *Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance, A Mission Analysis* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, October 2016),1.

competition. Reconnaissance battalions are manned, trained and equipped for legacy requirements and thus are not prepared to meet the demands of great power competition and conflict. The lack of doctrinal employment puts the Naval Expeditionary Force and Fleet Marine Force at risk due to the inability to reduce uncertainty, confirm or deny assumptions and provide the JFMCC with answers to CCIRs necessary for operational and tactical level decision making. A new threat informed concept of employment must be envisioned and reinforced by changes across the DOTMLPF spectrum to reduce risk.

Figure 2: Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment (DET ONE)
Source: Lieutenant Colonel John P. Piedmont USMCR, DET ONE, U.S. Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment, 2003-2006, (Washington, DC: March 2010), 95.

Solution

A New Threat Informed Concept of Employment

Great power conflict demands that the Marine Corps possesses operational control (OPCON) of multi-domain reconnaissance forces to support limited preparation of the operational environment during competition and support amphibious advanced force operations (AAFO) during conflict. Operational preparation of the environment (OPE) is defined as "the conduct of activities in likely or potential operational areas to set conditions for mission

execution. Combatant Commanders conduct OPE to develop knowledge of the operational environment; OPE activities may include, but are not limited to, active and passive observation, area and network familiarization, site surveys, and mapping the information environment."[29] OPE has been historically conducted by Special Operation Forces (SOF) due to US Special Operations Command's statutory Title 10 responsibilities to conduct strategic reconnaissance (SR).[30] SR is defined as reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces."[31] OPE is broader in application than AAFO. AAFO are designed to "shape the battlespace in preparation for the main assault of an amphibious or joint force by providing battlespace awareness and conducting such operations as reconnaissance, seizure of supporting positions minesweeping, preliminary bombardment, underwater demolitions, and air support"[32] AAFO can be conducted by SOF or conventional forces assigned to the Amphibious Task Force. To enable EABO the Marine Corps must possess an available, persistent, multi-domain reconnaissance capability to conduct limited OPE on key maritime terrain and AAFO. This capability must be organic to the Marine Corps and employed by the JFMCC because SOF is not reliable to answer the JFMCC's information requirements

[29] U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-05 Joint Special Operations Doctrine (*Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011) IV-8.
[30] U.S. Code, Title 10, Subtitle A, Part I, Chapter 6, Section 167. "Unified combatant command for special operations forces." Legal Information Institute, Cornell University. Available from http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/10/167.html. Accessed on 11 Feb 2021.
[31] U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-05 Joint Special Operations Doctrine (*Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011) GL-10.
[32] Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Common Task List (MCTL),* https://www.mccdc.usmc.mil/ accessed 31 January 2021.

during OPE and/or AAFO due to a capacity and capability gap.[33] When allocated, Combatant Commanders exercise OPCON of SOF through the Commander, Theater Special Operations Command (CDRTSOC) or subordinate Special Operations Component of the Joint Task Force. Unless further delegated, SOF forces will not fall under the OPCON of the JFMCC. This is supported by Title 10 wargames and reinforced by joint doctrine.

Expeditionary Warrior 2012 (EW12) was a Marine Corps Title 10 wargame that correctly identified the requirement for organic amphibious reconnaissance capability during advance force operations as early as 2012. EW12 was "intended to identify potential gaps and opportunities for enabling joint force access and entry against capable adversaries in an anti-access, area-denial environment."[34] One of the key findings of the report was that " CTF [Combined Joint Operations Task Force] taskings would likely preoccupy SOF that were already operating in theater…underscoring the need for an organic amphibious reconnaissance capability within ARG/MEUs [Amphibious Ready Groups/Marine Expeditionary Units] – as reconnaissance Marines were utilized to fill the ranks of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command."[35] SOF forces would be preoccupied by CTF taskings because SOF is focused on operational and strategic requirements, not tactical requirements. Additionally, this capability gap will remain because SOF core activities are designed to "achieve a broad range of strategic and operational objectives" and "SOF are not dedicated to conduct reconnaissance for conventional forces".[36] The fact that SOF cannot be relied upon to support the tactical

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[33] Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, *Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century, Strategic Opportunity and a Vision for Change, Report of the Amphibious Capabilities Working Group* (Washington, D.C.,27 April, 2012). S-4.
[34] Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "Expeditionary Warrior 2012 (EW12) Final Report." i.
[35] Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "Expeditionary Warrior 2012 (EW12) Final Report." 16.
[36] U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-05 Joint Special Operations Doctrine (*Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011) II-4-5.

requirements of EABO is further reinforced by *Joint Publication 3-02, Amphibious Operations*. SOF is identified as a temporary supporting organization that *may* be employed *if* requested by the JFMCC and will usually remain under OPCON of the CDRTSOC. It further reinforces that SOF cannot be solely relied upon to support Marine Corps EABO when it states "LF [Landing Force] CONOPS [Concept of Operations], however it should not assume the amphibious advance force will be available for tasking".[37] While neither publication explicitly states that SOF lacks the capacity and capability to support the Marine Corps tactical information requirements, it should make the service's current reliance on SOF to fulfill information gaps in competition and conflict uneasy. Since it is possible that not all Marine Corps and JFMCC requirements will be fulfilled by SOF, the Marines Corps needs to develop a complementary capability to fill critical collection gaps.

China's ability to contest US air and maritime superiority and assured communications demands a force that can survive and persist forward within China's weapons engagement zone with operationally relevant capabilities. The critical requirement to achieve forward presence will be the ability to conduct security force assistance with partner and allies to contest key maritime terrain. Security force assistance operations will improve allied and partner nations' reconnaissance capability, enable access to the competition space, and provide interoperability with both US and foreign SOF. Operating with SOF prior to conflict will offer a more nuanced understanding of the operating environment. It will also enable SOF to focus on operational and strategic targets while Marine reconnaissance units bring joint forces ashore in the transition from competition to conflict.

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[37] U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-02, Amphibious Operations (*Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011) VI-4-5.

Marine reconnaissance units must be survivable and possess operationally relevant capabilities. They must win the hider/finder competition with the adversary as alluded to in the *EABO Handbook*. "The hider finder competition will be the most pervasive and salient requirement…the ability to see first enables the ability to shoot first, and in naval warfare there is significant advantage to shooting first."[38] The ability to remain undetected while possessing the manned and unmanned sensors required to complete the joint kill will be the critical enabling activity required of multi-domain reconnaissance units. Through persistent human observation by trained decision-makers, multi-domain reconnaissance units can achieve an understanding of their operating environment that cannot be replicated by an automated system. With this understanding, these units can make a decision and take action.

To disrupt China's robust Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) network and capabilities, Marine reconnaissance units must possess multi-domain capabilities to maximize survivability through counter-reconnaissance and close collection gaps by developing a complete picture of the geographical, information, and human elements of the operating environment. Lieutenant Colonels Sean Barnes and Ladd Shepard describe the potential use of Reconnaissance Marines and unmanned technologies.[39] Leveraging emerging unmanned technology like unmanned aerial and submersible, electronic decoys, and unattended ground sensors it will allow reconnaissance teams to lower their electronic signature and obfuscate their physical signature from adversary detection. This extends the operational reach of the JFMCC by increasing friendly sensor and shooter capacity while disrupting adversary command and control and ISR capabilities through lethal and non-lethal effects. It also complicates the

[38] Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Handbook Version 1.1* (Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018) 25.
[39] LtCols Sean Barnes and Ladd W. Sheppard, "Manned and Unmanned Teaming: The Future of Marine Reconnaissance Units," *Marine Corps Gazette* (May 2018) 47.

adversary's decision-making cycle. It is a less complicated decision to target a robot vice a human-being. Placing a human in the targeting equation has the potential to hold decision making at risk. These multi-domain capabilities are already resident within the Marine Information Group, specifically Radio Battalion and the Battlefield Surveillance Company within Intelligence Battalion. However, these units lack the requisite fieldcraft, command and control, and specialized skills training to survive and persist within the WEZ in a conflict with China. Therefore, a Reconnaissance Regiment must be created to maximize the synergistic effects of Reconnaissance, Intelligence, and Radio Battalions. The creation of a Reconnaissance Regiment is a joint solution to a joint problem and therefore requires a DOTMLPF-P solution to align joint doctrine with new employment concepts that will drive the organization, training, and equipping of this force.

DOTMLPF-P Recommendations

Doctrine: The Marine Corps must advocate for the revision of joint/service doctrine to define the requirement for the Marine Corps to conduct its own limited OPE and AAFO activities. Currently, the Marine Corps only has a task to conduct AAFO. AAFO is separate and distinct from OPE and tied to forcible entry operations. Thus, it is too narrow and does not capture the broader requirement to conduct limited clandestine OPE activities to support EABO in competition through conflict.

Organization. Employment of a multi-domain reconnaissance units will require detailed synchronizations and coordination with the joint force, to include the TSOC or designated SOF Task Force. Current command relationships do not posture the reconnaissance community to collect on information requirements in competition. The Marine Corps must make three changes to employ a multi-domain reconnaissance capability. First, it must create regionally aligned

multi-domain Reconnaissance Regiments aligned with their respective Marine Component Commands. These regiments need to be built around a reconnaissance battalion reinforced with a battlefield surveillance company of manned and unmanned sensors, a radio reconnaissance platoon, human intelligence collectors, all source and geospatial analysts, and a mobility company to meet the enhanced maritime mobility requirements of operating in the littorals. As identified by Major Nate Willis and Lieutenant Colonel Sean Barnes, the combined effects of these units could "collect, spoof, jam, attack, kinetically and non-kinetically shape."[40] Second, this unit must be integrated into the Marine Corps Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Enterprise to ensure an enterprise solution. This integration would enable reconnaissance forces to be tasked by collection managers and have the command relationships to think and plan for operations in support of the JFMCC, not the needs of MEF or Division. While the exact command relationships are outside the scope of this paper due to the ambiguity of current force design efforts, the Marine Component Commands are probably best suited for Operational Control of this capability due to its unique position with the Combatant, Fleet, and TSOC. This relationship would allow the Marine Corps to possess its own authorities to plan and conduct OPE activities in support of the JFMCC. Third, the Marine Corps must create structure to place reconnaissance planners at the Combatant, Fleet, and Theater Special Operations Command to ensure unity of effort and deconfliction.

Training/Readiness. The overreliance on SOF has resulted in a training and certification shortfall for Marine Reconnaissance Units. The Marine Corps must add Security Force

[40] LtCol Sean Barnes and Maj William Willis, "Future Reconnaissance, Reducing Human Sensors", Marine *Corps Gazette*, (May 2019) 29.

Assistance to the Reconnaissance Battalion's Mission Essential Task List.[41] This will allow the battalions to devote time and resources to training and employing this capability. The Reconnaissance Regiment must train to Special Operations Baseline Interoperability Standards. This will allow Marines access to tradecraft training that is required in more politically and physically challenging environments. The Marine Corps must advocate for Special Operations Command accreditation of all courses taught by each MEF's Expeditionary Operations Training Group. These courses directly support the collective training requirements of the Reconnaissance Regiment to conduct clandestine preparatory activities in support for the JFMCC.

Material. The current acquisition system employed by the Marine Corps is not conducive to the rapid procurement of equipment required to maintain a competitive advantage against adversaries. The Marine Corps must pursue other avenues of funding and acquisition to enable operations. The multi-domain Reconnaissance Regiment must invest heavily in littoral mobility platforms, unmanned and autonomous platforms, and exquisite communication technology to ensure they can communicate in a denied or degraded environment.

Leadership. Senior leadership needs to posture the Marine Corps to conduct limited preparation of key maritime terrain during great power competition. This will allow the alignment of authorities and permissions to conduct these activities. The Marine Corps must educate its junior and mid-level leadership on the clandestine shaping actions that are required to support EABO. Information requirements required by the JFMCC must be identified in detail within operational and contingency plans and be tasked for collection by the Component's

[41] While the Reconnaissance Regiment must maintain its ability to conduct inshore maritime raids, it is recommended that the capability to conduct Maritime Interdiction Operations, specifically Visit, Board, Search and Seizure, be tasked to another unit.

Collection Manager. The Marine Corps will not be able to surge collection capability forward post conflict. A concerted effort must be made by Marine Corps leadership to be proactive and utilize reconnaissance pull to identify and exploit weakness in the adversary's system from competition to conflict.

Personnel. The Marine Corps must adopt an objective baseline screening assessment for personnel assigned to the Reconnaissance Regiment. Psychological screenings must be performed to ensure personnel have mental acumen and stamina to conduct isolated, clandestine activities with little to no support or reinforcements. Personnel must be eligible for a TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE COMPARTMENTALIZED INFORMATION (TS/SCI) clearance.

Facilities: Current facilities have limited access to classified workspaces up to the SECRET level with little to no capability to access TS/SCI. Reconnaissance Regiments and forward-deployed units must work out of Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities to ensure access to collection requirements and conduct processing, exploitation, and dissemination of the information collected.

Policy: The Marine Corps must work with the joint force and Department of Defense to establish a policy that mirrors the Defense Intelligence Analysis Program Intelligence Function Codes. This framework establishes "lanes in the road" to ensure limited resources are properly aligned to answer the requirements identified in the National Intelligence Priority Framework. A similar policy can be created by the joint force to ensure unity of effort and synchronize each services' unique collection capabilities. Once that policy is established, the Marine Corps can then generate subsequent policies to codify certification requirements for OPE activities.

Conclusion

The employment of a multi-domain reconnaissance force to sense, make sense, and act in a future conflict in the South China Sea will be critical for the Marine Corps to achieve EABO in a future South China Sea scenario. In this scenario, China will seek to leverage its distinct numerical and technological advantage in precision fire capabilities to conduct a mass surprise fires attack against high payoff targets. Due to China's strategic culture of risk aversion and application of Jominian principles, China will seek to confirm the effects of its fires before it commits to introducing offensive ground forces. A multi-domain reconnaissance team, forward postured, can achieve maritime domain awareness for the JFMCC. In this scenario, a multi-domain reconnaissance team has been postured on key maritime terrain building maritime domain awareness for nearly six months. The team has gained access to the area of operations by working by and with a host nation force to develop maritime domain awareness for the JFMCC by passively collecting on the electromagnetic spectrum and reporting on key terrain. The hyper-local context the team has gained has allowed it to identify key adversary command and control networks, detect vulnerabilities in the A2AD network, and identify key terrain to employ unmanned sensors and decoys that simultaneously increases the team's survivability and degrades the adversary's firepower system. The ongoing sensing activities have enabled the team to identify and report an escalatory deviation from the baseline.[42] These indications and warnings of an attack have provided the JFMCC both time and space to make decisions. The team immediately deploys its suite of unmanned and autonomous sensors and decoys. These sensors and decoys disrupt, deny, and degrade the adversary's decision making by jamming targeted communication nodes and obfuscate the adversary's targeting picture by flooding the

[42] Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual For Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (Washington, D.C., February 2021). 4-1.

area with potential high payoff targets. The vulnerabilities in the adversary's A2AD system detected months ago, has allowed Marine Forces Cyber Command to build a cyber weapon designed to defeat the A2AD system. The team requests permission to employ the cyber weapon from the JFMCC. The JFMCC, working within his established authorities, coordinates with Marine Forces Cyber Command to introduce a cyber weapon to degrade the network. As trained human decision-makers nested within the JFMCC's collection plan and as part of the larger MCISRE, the team then transitions to selectively distributing lethality and resources. This gives the JFMCC operational flexibility in the employment of both kinetic and non-kinetic fires to achieve sea control and sea denial to impose cost on the adversary high value targets and introduce decisive combat forces into the area of operations.

Reconnaissance employed late is worthless and will prevent the Marine Corps from gaining access to key maritime terrain to support EABO and the JFMCC's fight for sea control and sea denial. The Marine Corps must preemptively emplace its reconnaissance assets to conduct limited OPE and AAFO if it wants to continue to live up to its mantra of being the "first to fight". The Marine Corps does not currently possess the doctrine, organization, and employment concepts to conduct limited OPE activities in support of EABO and the JFMCC's fight for sea control and sea denial in a conflict with China and will continue to falsely believe SOF will be there when we need them the most unless it makes bold changes now. A Multi-Domain Reconnaissance Regiment enabled with the training, resources, and authorities to persist forward is the only way for the Marine Corps to support the larger naval campaign in the contested seas. The ability to "see" and strike first is a critical capability that the Marine Corps can't afford to get wrong.

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