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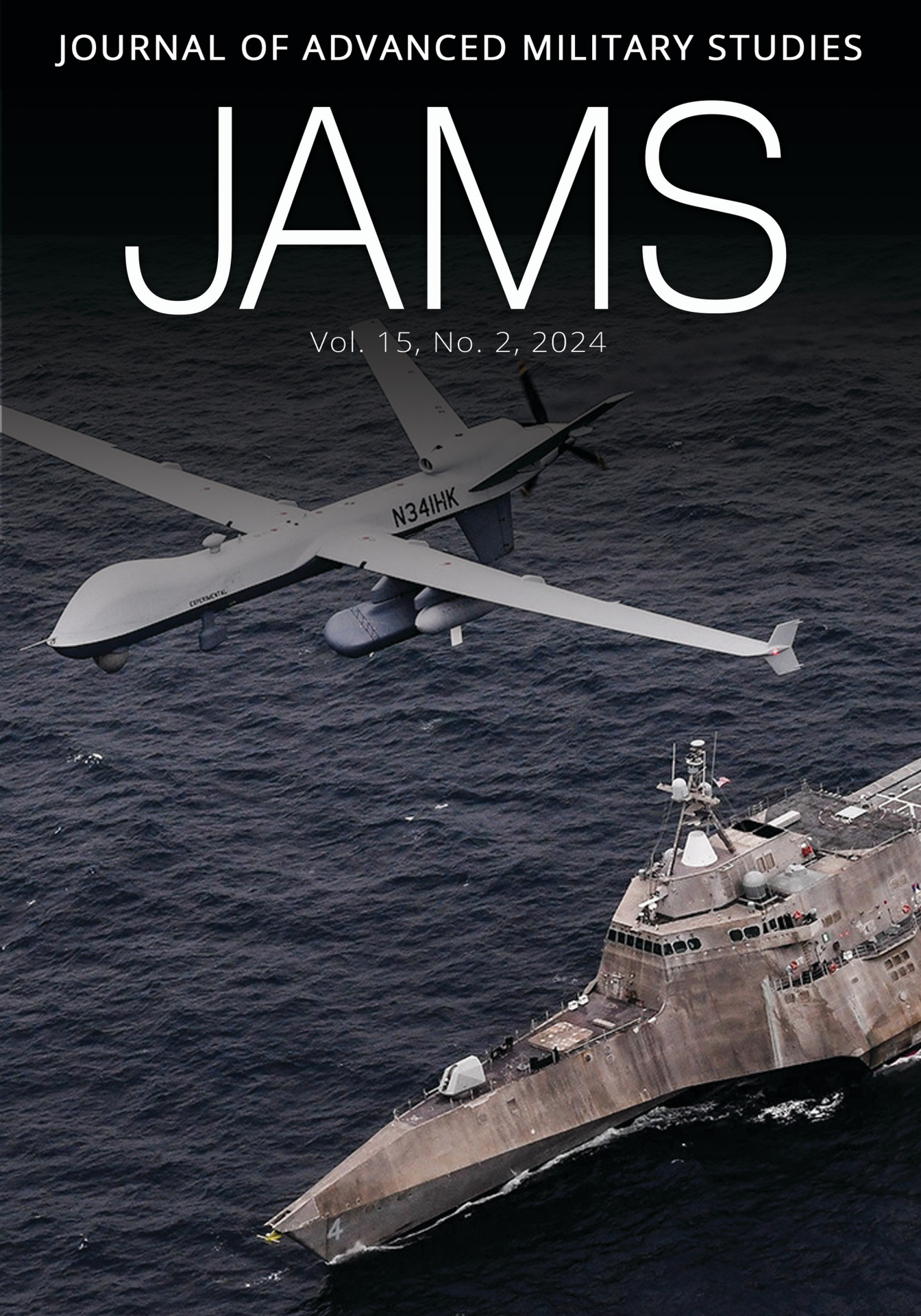

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Bringing Clarity to Stand-in Forces

How Operational Art and Science Provide the Linkage between Stand-in Forces, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and Reconnaissance/ Counterreconnaissance Operations

Major Pat Hassett, USMC

Abstract: The U.S. Marine Corps' 2021 *Concept for Stand-in Forces* (SIF) "describes how forward-postured, steady-state forces operating in contested areas—capable of transitioning rapidly from competition to crisis to conflict and back again—can create a strategic advantage. This concept explains how Marines can operate effectively with allies and partners from within a contested area."[1] Yet confusion pervades because the Marine Corps organized to perform sustained ground combat operations at the expense of core Title X requirements. The new concepts called SIF—expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO), and reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance operations (RXR)—articulate potential employment options for Joint force commanders to accomplish regional and threat-focused responsibilities. Doctrinal components of operational art provide linkage between SIF, EABO, and RXR. This framework illuminates the links required to operationalize these novel maritime concepts and to succeed in projecting maritime power in support of Joint and coalition forces.

Keywords: stand-in forces, SIF, expeditionary advanced base operations, EABO, reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance, RXR, operational art

A constellation of new concepts called stand-in forces (SIF), expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO), and reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance (RXR) articulate novel employment options for Joint

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force commanders. These concepts were created to address the challenges of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) mature precision strike regime and the PLA Navy's substantial naval power.[2] A Marine Corps, optimized for sustained ground combat operations resulting from the Global War on Terrorism, compounds this confusion in effectively organizing and executing these constellation of concepts.[3]

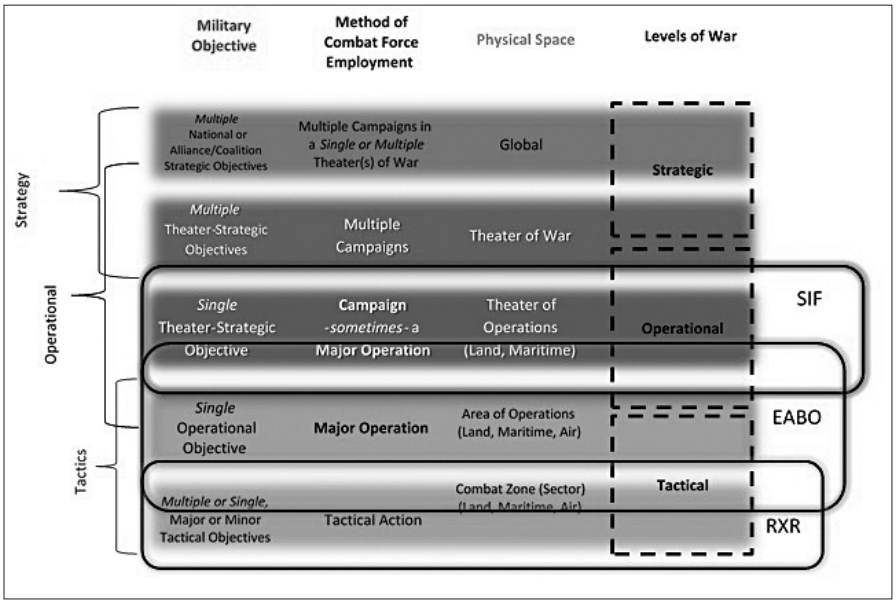
The Marine Corps is transitioning back to its U.S. Code Title X purpose to "provide fleet Marine forces . . . for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign."[4] The novel maritime concepts of SIF, EABO, and RXR support this Title X responsibility. However, the connective linkage for these concepts remains amorphous and unclear. The muddying of orientation, context, and purpose challenges Joint force commands and planner's ability to organize and employ these new maritime concepts, at the scale and speed required to achieve victory. The concept of stand-in forces (SIF) is best viewed as the overarching operational concept under which EABO and RXR actions nest. Doctrinal components of operational art, specifically objective analysis, theater geometry, and methods of combat force employment provide illustrative guidelines for the effective employment of these novel maritime concepts. Greater clarity, built on a widely informed doctrinal operational art foundation and inductive reasoning, enables the employment of these maritime concepts and enhances the opportunity for the United States and partnered nations to achieve victory in future combat operations against the PLA.

This article examines the art and science of organizing and employing operational combat forces in the maritime domain at the conceptual and operational levels. The detailed tactical and technical employment of weapons and systems is a continuously researched and assessed dimension of this topic but is beyond the scope of this article. This article provides clarity by defining the orientation and context to employ the constellation of new concepts in practice for the Joint force commander. What is needed is an overarching operational concept to create a more complete and practical vision linking SIF, EABO, and RXR, and by extension, a more valid model to deter PLA actions or win in conflict.

Hypothetical Vignette

The central adversary challenge is the trinity of three key aspects. The PLA retains the first-mover advantage. The PLA enjoys an 86-nautical mile distance between mainland China and its strategic objective of Taiwan.[5] The PLA, at present, possesses a significant relative combat power advantage in the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war with surface vessels, subsurface vessels, mature precision strike regime, and air power that collectively tip the scales in favor of the PLA.[6]

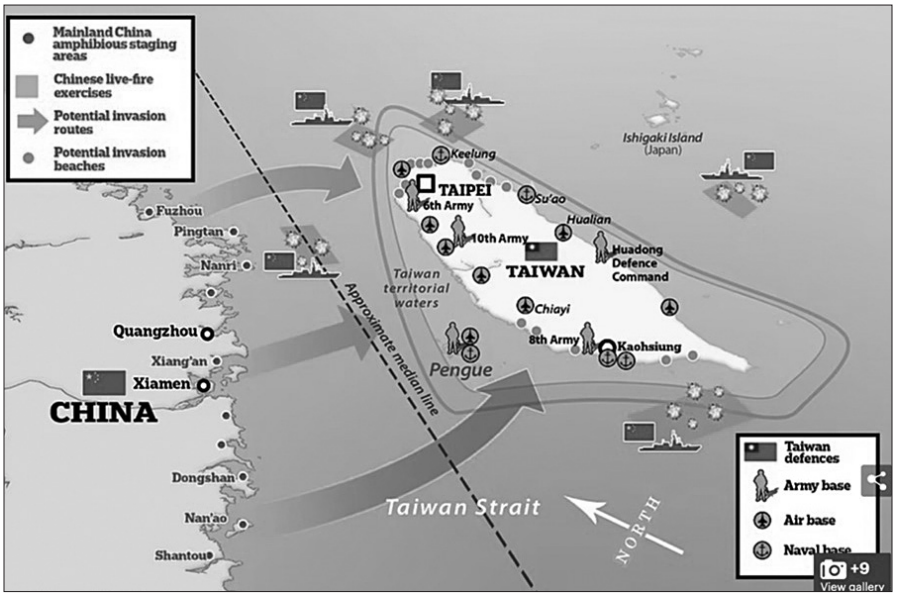
Figure 1. Arrays SIF, EABO, and RXR along an operational art framework



Source: the Maritime Advanced Warfighting Course course, modified by the author.

To provide helpful context to understand the SIF concept relating to EABO and RXR, a hypothetical vignette is offered. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) directs the PLA to execute the reunification invasion of Taiwan. Numerous strategic warnings are likely, though the time between the CCP decision to execute a reunification and the operational maneuver of combat forces remains uncertain.[7] PLA rocket forces execute a Joint firepower strike at key strategic and operational targets in and around Taiwan.[8] Nearly simultaneous to this strike, the PLA Navy (PLAN) maneuvers to establish a naval blockade around Taiwan. Multiple Renhai surface action groups depart from naval bases in mainland China, cross the 86-nautical mile Taiwan Strait, and effectively establish working sea control around their objective, isolating Taiwan. Figure 2 depicts this hypothetical naval blockade closing around Taiwan in preparation for amphibious connectors to transit the strait and land in Taiwan. PLAN forces isolate Taiwan from external influence by positioning naval forces between Taiwan and the Senkaku, the Ryuku, and the Babuyan Island chains.[9] U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) becomes the Joint task force headquarters and leads the Joint and coalition response. The commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet is assigned the responsibilities as the combined Joint force maritime component commander. As an expeditionary task force, III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) provides forces to establish EABs in Miyako (Ryuku

Figure 2. This map illustrates conceptual PLAN force deployment from mainland China and the blockade of Taiwan



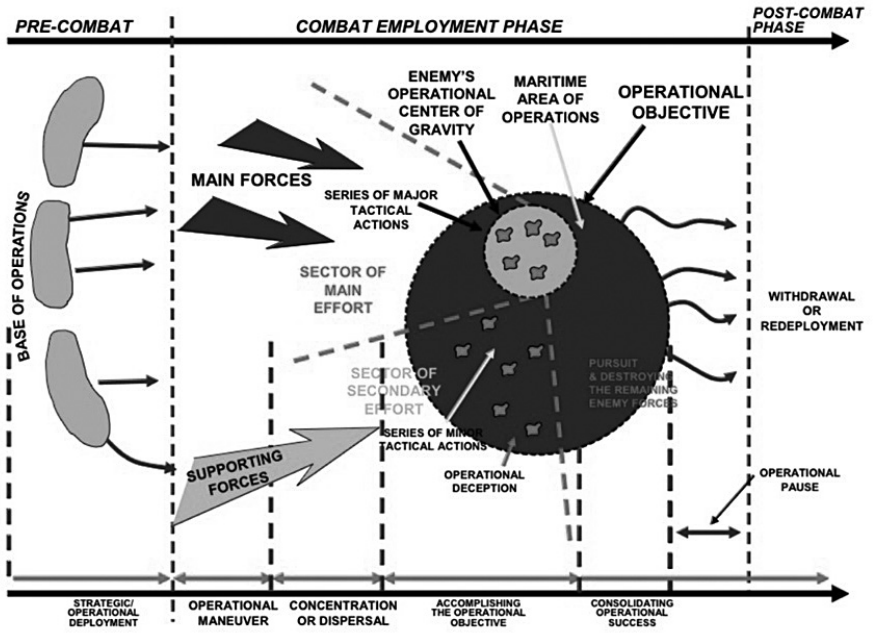
Source: courtesy of author, adapted by MCUP.

island) and Batanes (Northern Philippine archipelago) and conduct sea denial to prevent the total closure of the PLAN naval blockade and buy time and space for the Combined Force Maritime Component Commander (CFMCC) to counterattack the PLAN in key locations throughout the first island chain.[10]

However, as III MEF activates the alert contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force (ACM) formation tethered to a short-notice strip alert in Okinawa, critical challenges emerge.[11] To airlift the required EAB forces, weapons, and command and control architecture into positions of operational significance, III MEF must rely on theater mobility from across the Joint force. Regrettably, the demand for intratheater lift exceeds the Joint force capacity as the crisis develops.

To maneuver 250 miles into the southern Ryukus and 500 miles into the Batanes Island group from Okinawa, III MEF dedicates all operational Lockheed Martin F-35Cs to execute offensive and defensive counter-air missions. All available III MEF-assigned Lockheed C-130s Hercules launch to establish refueling tracks for the waves of Bell Boeing MV-22 and Sikorsky CH-53 Sea Stallion flights of EAB forces, as well as the F-35C flights attempting to penetrate the maritime operations area around Taiwan. Shortfalls arise as tasking to concurrently support deploying the large Maritime Strike Tomahawks and Naval Strike Missiles, required for the EABs to function, overwhelms the available capacity of C-130s. Reconnaissance and special operations forces are unable to

Figure 3. This image depicts a conceptual model of naval operational movement and geometries relative to a notional objective



Source: Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College), adapted by MCUP.

execute operational preparation of the environment in support of III MEF and CFMCC within the maritime area of operations because of the parallel challenge of gaining access once the combat phase has begun. No Joint enabling fires and command and control systems exist precrisis to enable expedient prosecution of adversary targets. Little focus is given to how these forces will sustain in geographically isolated positions throughout the first island chain following the initial break-out from Okinawa.

Ultimately, III MEF is unable to pulse combat power in the form of EABs into the maritime area of operations around Taiwan due to the offensive combat power of the Renhai surface action group surface and air defense systems, as well as the layered mature precision strike regime network arrayed across the Chinese coast, and the unmitigated and persistent subsurface threat. The time, space, and force challenges to pulse combat power into this area prove to be a Joint forcible entry operation, beyond III MEF's combat power projection capability and capacity. The tyranny of distance associated with deploying from Okinawa and mainland Japan's exterior position into interior positions of operational significance proves insurmountable.

The conceptual model depicted in figure 3 is a legacy framework in which

planners typically envision EABOs. This model illustrates a naval power projection wherein EAB forces, as supporting forces (light gray arrow), conduct operational maneuver, forcible entry, and dispersal, and then enable main effort forces (dark gray arrow) to act on the adversary's center of gravity. Unfortunately, this framework to employ Marine EABs and RXR forces has critical deployment and employment limitations in the future fight. This model is predicated on EAB forces *forcibly entering* positions of operational significance after the combat employment phase has begun.[12] The PLA's mature precision strike regime, air, surface, and surface assets collectively impede III MEF and Joint aviation connectors from delivering the requisite number of Marines, fires systems, command and control structures, and sustainment into the first island chain's positions of operational significance, during combat. The preponderance of open-source analysis of PLA combat potential makes this legacy model for projecting naval power invalid for the future fight. JFCs and planners require an alternative but doctrinally based approach to organize and employ novel maritime concepts against the PLA in the future. If EABs and RXR forces did not need to forcibly deploy into positions, they could support the main forces (dark gray arrow) from prepositioned locations of operational significance. In this manner, SIF as an overarching operational concept links tactical EAB and RXR forces and provides the model to deter the PLA and to win in combat.

Defining Concepts

Understanding new concepts as part of a larger maritime domain fight and using approved definitions and tasks is essential to gain a vision of their applicability in an operational art framework. SIF, EABO, and RXR are complex and poorly understood, particularly due to their novel and emergent nature. A clarified understanding of each concept's definition and its potential tasks enables planners to visualize a valid model for employment. To this end, refined descriptions of SIF, EABO, and RXR operations are provided.

Stand-in forces are "lethal, low signature, mobile, relatively simple to sustain forces designed to operate across the competition continuum within a contested area as the leading edge of a maritime defense-in-depth and as a proactive offensive combat potential enabling naval power projection."[13] SIF seeks to disrupt the plans and operations of an adversary by establishing well before crisis events occur. Depending on the situation, SIF is composed of novel or conventional formations of Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, special operations forces, interagency, and allies and partners.[14] *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* articulates 10 specified tasks for SIF, the most important of which are: deterring adversaries, completing fleet and Joint kill webs, denying adversary freedom of movement at key maritime chokepoints, and seizing and controlling key maritime terrain in support of sea denial operations.[15]

Expeditionary advanced base operations are a form of expeditionary warfare that involves the employment of mobile, persistent, and relatively easy-to-maintain naval expeditionary forces.[16] EABOs operate from a series of austere positions ashore within a contested maritime area to execute or facilitate sea denial efforts.[17] *The Tentative Manual for EABO* pronounces 12 key tasks EABs can perform, with the most important being denying key maritime terrain, executing surface warfare operations, executing air and missile defense operations, and executing strike operations.[18]

RXR operations use the full range of collection methods to gain information about the activities, composition, and disposition of an adversary to support commander decision-making.[19] Counter-reconnaissance seeks to prevent adversaries from doing the same to friendly forces and includes all deliberate efforts taken to disrupt the adversary's ability to observe a force, area, or place.[20] In emerging maritime concept vernacular, RXR is a single activity to gain an informational advantage over the adversary.[21] RXR uses sensors across domains, enabling subsequent analysis and exploitation for maritime and Joint formations, as well as enabling targeting and the execution of operations while simultaneously degrading the ability of the adversary to do the same.[22] Naval scholars may equate RXR to the concepts articulated by Captain Wayne Hughes in the seminal work *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, as scouting and antiscouting operations.[23]

Given these definitions of SIF, EABO, and RXR, inductive analysis using select elements of operational art illustrates how SIF emerges as the overarching concept that unites the constellation of new concepts.

Operational Art Framework Applied to Novel Maritime Concepts

Operational art provides valuable insight into understanding how to best organize and employ military forces. *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0, describes operational art as the "cognitive approach by commanders and staffs supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment, to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means."[24] Key elements of operational art used here are objective analysis, theater geometry, and methods of combat force deployment and employment.

Objective Analysis. Objective analysis is an informative method to add structural linkage to SIF, EABO, and RXR. Tactical, operational, and strategic objectives are distinguishable by the scale and significance of the objective.[25] Major tactical objectives include destroying an adversary surface group or seizing and holding a large naval base, port, or airfield complex.[26] Major tactical operations achieve operational objectives.[27] In maritime warfare, an operational

objective is often to obtain sea control at a position of operational significance, to destroy or neutralize a portion of the adversary maritime fleet, or to seize and hold a large island or strait. [28] Operational-level actions achieve theater strategic objectives.[29] Accomplishing theater strategic objectives drives a significant change across the theater of war.[30] A theater strategic objective in a maritime theater of war may be to defend a nation or state or to sever adversary control of a strategic objective. A national objective requires multiple intermediate steps typically expressed as military strategic or theater-strategic objectives.[31]

Using these characteristics of tactical and operational objectives, a useful scaffolding of SIF, EABO, and RXR emerges. EABOs generally seek to achieve tactical objectives through tasks such as sea denial of specific maritime terrain or supporting air and missile defense in a localized area. These objectives rank EABs as major or minor tactical-level operations that can achieve tactical and potentially operational objectives depending on the physical size and significance of the sea denial area and the adversary formation.

RXR requires similar narrow geographical spaces and orients friendly scouting against tactical-level adversary formations. Tasks of gaining an informational advantage over adversary surface vessels through the use of sensors, enabling targeting through off-boarded collections, and degrading the scouting or collections of the adversary highlight RXR as tactical-level action. RXR actions by themselves are tactical and accomplish tactical objectives. Linked together across time and space, RXR actions can seek to contribute to operational-level effects depending on the significance and scope of collections.

SIF tasks are broader spatially than RXR and EABO, across theaters of operation or a theater of war, and orient on adversary operational formations. Tasks such as completing fleet and Joint kill webs, denying adversary operational formations the freedom of movement around multiple maritime chokepoints, and securing multiple key contested maritime objectives in support of broader sea denial and/or sea control are operational-level actions. This then implies that employing SIF is an operational-level action and illustrates the hierarchy of SIF as the overarching concept orchestrating the tactical actions of EABO and RXR.

Theater Geometry. A similar analysis using the operational art element of theater geometry is instructive for SIF, EABO, and RXR. Theater geometry refers to the principle geographic and spatial elements of a military area relative to friendly and adversary positions, bases of operations, the distances between, the decisive points contained therein, and lines of operations and communications that connect and sustain forces between bases and their objectives.[32] Key to evaluating these elements are not only their characteristics, but also their relative positions and distances from each other expressed by operational factors of time, space, and force.[33] Theater geometries are critical in articulating the operational idea and are central to effective campaign design.[34]

Applying theater geometry analysis to SIF, EABs, and RXR further clarifies the relationship between these concepts. EABs require the ability to establish a formation in an advanced or forward position relative to the adversary. EABs are predicated on a formation, organized for the tasks described above, establishing at an intermediate base of operation or forward position where it can threaten or hold adversary vessels at risk. The critical challenge of EABO is how an EAB establishes in forward positions, given the challenge of physically deploying the formation, establishing the requisite line of communication for command and control and fires architecture, and sustaining the formation once deployed in an advanced area separated through long geographic lines of sustainment.

RXR presents similar challenges in theater geometries. Tactical-level RXR formations must exist in advanced or forward geographic positions to accomplish their critical tasks to scout, sense, and make sense of the environment. Gaining placement and access to these areas from an exterior position through the spatially distant lines of operations is often characterized by the *tyranny of distance,* inherent to the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility. Gaining requisite geometries is an unparalleled challenge during a crisis, as illustrated by the earlier vignette.

SIF presents a creative solution to answer the physical and spatial theater geometry challenges of EABO and RXR. SIF forces execute operations *within* a contested forward area as a leading edge of a maritime defense-in-depth and with the credible combat potential to transition into offensive naval operations. Inherent to SIF is the requirement to physically position at forward intermediate bases of operation or areas and distribute throughout key maritime terrain before and throughout a crisis. Much like Houthi forces operating in the vicinity of the Red Sea, once an SIF has gained favorable theater geometry, with prepositioned weapons, command and control, and sustainment, it is incredibly challenging to dislodge.[35]

SIF cannot rely on gaining placement and access during the crisis; SIF forces must establish within central or interior positions during the precrisis phase. SIF reduces the immense challenge III MEF encounters when, during crisis, forces attempt to break out from Okinawa and maneuver to positions of operational significance. With this perspective, SIFs obviate the challenges of EABs deploying to intermediate bases across long lines of operation, because SIFs inherently preposition in these locations. In the same manner as Houthis, SIF forces can organize formations to perform key tasks at expeditionary advanced bases, as the military situation requires. It is fair to identify that, in addition to forces existing at these locations, the requisite weapons systems and command and control architecture must also exist at these locations, under the blanket of SIF. As SIF forces operate in central positions relative to the adversary, they innately sustain the placement and access required for RXR scouting,

collections, and counter-reconnaissance operations. This is not to imply that gaining these positions in precrisis is easy or simple. Gaining a physical position is always complex and nonlinear, particularly in the challenging political and security environment of USINDOPACOM. Ultimately, prepositioning EAB and RXR forces as SIF reduces the challenges of theater geometry during conflict. Therefore, SIF is best envisioned as the overarching linkage over EAB and RXR forces.

Methods of Combat Force Employment. Another helpful element of operational art to understand the association between SIF, EABO, and RXR are methods of combat force employment. The root of this element is that the larger the scale of the military objective and the larger and more diverse the force requires more time and more complex methods of combat force employment.[36]

Methods of combat force employment distinguish SIF, EABO, and RXR. Along the sliding scale of scope, complexity, and force diversity, RXR is the simplest form of combat force employment, as compared to EABOs and SIF. RXR formations might be a small team of signals intelligence collection professionals who use technical systems to passively detect adversary formations in congested maritime spaces. RXR forces may be human intelligence teams that develop and cultivate operational preparation of the environment in critical port or littoral spaces essential for subsequent phases of combat operations. RXR forces may also be larger, more overt forces that employ actively emitting radar systems to gain and maintain custody of adversary naval formations in support of naval or Joint targeting, or simply generate deliberate deception effects. Regardless, the actions of an RXR force principally fall within the tactical level of war.

EABO forces are generally larger formations than RXR forces. EABO formations seize and hold austere, temporary locations ashore and execute or facilitate sea denial. Sea denial in these combat zones or areas of operation entails a sufficient number of mobile, long-range antiship cruise missiles capable of holding adversary surface forces at risk. These formations likely involve Marine infantry companies and/or batteries, organized to maneuver through assigned littoral and land zones locally, while avoiding detection and adversary targeting. The tactical actions of an EABO are more complicated than those of RXR formations, yet EABOs lack the large-scale complexity, the size (in number), and the diversity of force capabilities required of SIF to effectively target, strike, and degrade adversary maritime formations wholesale. Though the effects of EABO weapons systems may influence spaces between 500–1,000 nautical miles, the execution of EABs as tactical operations is likely confined by their organic mobility to combat zones or areas of operation of 10s or 100s of miles. This again articulates EABO as a tactical level of war action.

SIFs are characterized by a much higher degree of complexity, diversity, and size than EABs and RXR. SIFs again are composed of Marine, Navy,

Coast Guard, special operations forces, interagency, and allied and partner forces. These forces are organized operationally across vast geographic distances, throughout the FIC, and imply integration with and reliance on CFMCC and the Joint/coalition force sustainment and command and control. SIF can organizationally provide the command and control of EABs and RXR formations, however, the inverse is inapplicable. The operational factor of time further distinguishes SIF, as SIF requires time, much more so than the execution of EAB and RXR tasks. SIF conventional formations persist in time far beyond tactical-level EABs and RXR forces and endure regardless of whether EABOs and RXR tasks are being executed. EABO and RXR formations execute minor and major tactical operations, in pursuit of tactical and sometimes operational objectives during phases of major operations, likely in weeks or months. SIF operations are better expressed as major operations, executed by naval and combined forces for the duration of a conflict, across months or years, in pursuit of operational objectives and sometimes theater strategic objectives. This analysis places SIF into the operational level of war.

Referring back to the hypothetical vignette provided, based on this revised clarity of SIF, an alternate scenario can be envisioned. Far before the strategic warning of a Taiwan invasion, maritime combat forces (SIF) array throughout the first island chain in critical positions such as Miyako (Ryukyu Islands) and Batanes (Northern Philippine Island Chain). These forces preposition antiship cruise missile weapon systems, Joint-integrated command and control networks, and diverse and resilient sustainment to persist across noncontiguous zones for a long duration. The physical personnel rotationally cycle through these locations, but the SIF persists organizationally. Unfortunately, the PLA is undeterred and their strategic goal of invading Taiwan begins, as PLAN surface forces depart mainland China. Their theater strategic objective becomes clear: isolate Taiwan from external support. However, in this alternate scenario, RXR forces contribute to operational and strategic indications and warnings via robust multidisciplined collections networks and systems throughout the first island chain. CFMCC assigns SIF elements in Batanes the major tactical objective of neutralizing adversary surface vessels entering the key maritime chokepoints between Batanes and Taiwan. Other SIF elements form EABs in Miyako to seize and hold this key terrain, execute sea denial actions, and prevent adversary surface vessels from establishing a total blockade around Eastern Taiwan. These major tactical operations achieve CFMCC's initial operational objective of sea denial east and south of Taiwan. As SIF operations persist, CFMCC gains time and space to pulse combat power into the first island chain and, together with the SIF, begins to neutralize the adversary fleet, accomplishing CFMCC's theater strategic objective to prevent the isolation of Taiwan by a naval blockade.

Analysis using an operational art framework reveals RXR and EAB operations achieve tactical objectives and can enable operational objectives that nest within SIF operational and theater strategic objectives. SIF inherently exploits advantageous theater geometry precrisis, versus a reactive Joint forcible entry operation to deploy EABs. RXR and EABO are best explained as task-organized formations, seeking to accomplish minor or major tactical actions (battles, engagements, or strikes), nested within the SIF, during a major operation. Combat force employment explains SIF as a major operation undertaken by Joint or coalition forces at the operational level of war.

The layering of SIF, EABO, and RXR, through the framework displayed in figure 1, enables Joint force commanders and planners to envision, organize, and employ maritime combat formations to accomplish CFMCC objectives. This framework illuminates the connective linkage required to operationalize these novel maritime concepts, and given the hypothetical vignette described earlier, to succeed in projecting maritime power in support of the Joint and coalition force.

Alternate Perspective

One could say that the Service-oriented writers of these concepts disagree with this operational art-based linkage and point to the versatility and synergistic effects that SIF, EAB, and RXR propose. This perspective may offer that, when employed simultaneously as *equal and parallel* concepts, like strands of DNA, SIF/EABO/RXR are intrinsically and mutually reinforcing to each other. This parity of concepts may then cumulatively generate tempo, shock, and surprise to put the enemy off-balance and wrest decision advantage from the adversary, creating time and space to decisively employ the Joint force.

Conflicting tentative manuals and service articles have muddied the very clarity required for JFCs to plan and employ these maritime concepts. The tentative manual for EABO states that "*A Concept for Stand-In Forces* and *A Functional Concept for Maritime Reconnaissance and Counter-reconnaissance* . . . describe how Marines will be positioned forward at expeditionary advanced bases (EABs), shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies and partners, leveraging all-domain tools as the eyes and ears of the fleet and Joint force."[37] This evinces an amorphous role of RXR and SIF as synonymous concepts while conflating the level of war in which each concept is executed. One could deduce from the tentative manual for EABO that EABs are simply the capabilities at a location, while SIF is the force employed for these actions, both being equal in level of war and in objective orientation.

This blending of concepts has created the very confusion that inhibits Joint force commanders and planners from envisioning the utility of SIF, EABO, and RXR. The Marine Corps has yet to codify how these concepts would simulta-

neously exist as peer-level or parallel actions. Yet, the rationale for this opacity is reasonable. Service-oriented concept writers seek to articulate the maximum potential utility of these new concepts and enable continued fleet experimentation, as well as future employment options. Unfortunately, massing these novel maritime concepts into an ill-defined amalgamation has created confusion that obstructs the viability of these concepts' employment today.

Military Services can articulate these novel concepts in any vernacular they choose. But, as with any assigned or operationally controlled forces, the Service-articulated employment concept is simply a starting point. Geographic combatant commanders and Joint force commanders always retain the authority and the obligation to employ assigned or operationally controlled forces in the method they deem most appropriate and practicable within their geographic areas. Within USINDOPACOM and relative to a Taiwan-based scenario, the aforementioned operational art framework illustrates the most feasible, acceptable, complete, and suitable vision for organizing and employing SIF, EABO, and RXR concepts. At this juncture, Joint force commanders and planners must organize formations and employ forces for specified objectives within their geographic areas. To best achieve this end, the doctrinal components of operational art, specifically objective analysis, theater geometry, and methods of combat force employment illustrate *valid* models to organize and employ the novel maritime concepts of SIF, EABO, and RXR.

The SIF concept is best viewed as the overarching operational linkage within which EABO and RXR actions nest. Through the doctrinal components of operational art, illustrative guidelines for the effective employment of these novel maritime concepts become clear. Stand-in forces, employed precrisis, with advantageous theater geometry, and aligned to appropriate objectives, can execute tactical RXR and EABs actions before and during a crisis and propel maritime forces to win in combat.

Endnotes

1. "Marine Corps Publishes New Document Titled 'A Concept for Stand-in Forces'," Marines.mil, 1 December 2021.
2. Gen David H. Berger, "The Case for Change: Meeting the Principal Challenges Facing the Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2020, 8; *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2023), asserts that EABO is not purpose built as a USINDOPACOM concept and is equally applicable in various other theaters and against numerous other adversaries. However, for the purposes of this article, specific focus and analysis of these concepts are scoped to the strategic pacing challenge of the People's Liberation Army and to the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility.
3. Berger, "The Case for Change," 9.
4. 10 U.S.C. § 8063.
5. Max Stewart, "Island Blitz: A Campaign Analysis of a Taiwan Takeover by the PLA," CIMSEC, 13 June 2023.

6. Berger, "The Case for Change," 9.
7. John Culver, "How We Would Know When China Is Preparing to Invade Taiwan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 October 2022; and Piers M. Ferguson and Charles D. Wood, "How China Might Invade Taiwan," *Naval War College Review* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2001).
8. Stewart, "Island Blitz."
9. Stewart, "Island Blitz."
10. Samuel Barge, "A Ready Marine Corps in the Western Pacific: The Stand-in Force Emerges in III Marine Expeditionary Force," Marines.mil, 26 July 2023; and Conor M. Kennedy and Col Scott E. Stephan, USMC, "The PLA Is Contemplating the Meaning of Force Design," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 149, no. 4 (April 2023).
11. Oscar Castro, "Alert Contingency MAGTF: 'Our Most Ready Force'," Marines.mil, 22 May 2023.
12. Gabriel D. Sanchez, "Expeditionary Advance Base Operations in the Pacific: Supporting the Establishment of Sea Control and Sea Denial in Preparation for Sustained Operations along the Littorals and Ashore in a Contested Environment" (master's thesis, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2020).
13. Gen David H. Berger, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2021).
14. Berger, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*.
15. The 10 SIF tasks are 1) Improve fleet, Joint, and coalition situation awareness in contested areas to improve decision-making, 2) Maintain U.S. security guarantees through persistent, forward-deployed posture that helps defend allies and partners, 3) Deter potential adversaries, 4) Gain and maintain custody of potential targets, 5) Develop understanding of potential adversary operations methods and baseline of adversary regular activities, 6) Deny adversary ability to gain advantage in any domain through passive and active counter-reconnaissance, 7) Complete fleet and Joint kill webs, 8) Deny adversary freedom of movement around maritime chokepoints, 9) Secure, seize, and control contested key maritime terrain in support of sea denial, and 10) Disrupt the plans of adversaries below the threshold of armed conflict and extend the battlespace as the forward element of maritime defense-in-depth in support of naval maneuver and Joint force access. Conor M. Kennedy and Col Scott E. Stephan, USMC, "The PLA Is Contemplating the Meaning of Force Design," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (April 2023).
16. *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*.
17. *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*.
18. The 12 EAB tasks are 1) Conducting surveillance and reconnaissance, 2) Generate, preserve, deny, and/or project information, 3) Conduct screen/guard/cover operations, 4) Deny or control key maritime terrain, 5) Conduct surface warfare operations, 6) Conduct air and missile defense (AMD), 7) Conduct strike operations, 8) Conduct antisubmarine warfare (ASW), 9) Conduct sustainment operations, 10) Conduct forward arming and refueling point (FARP) operations, 11) Conduct security cooperation, and 12) Conduct Irregular Warfare (IW).
19. *Joint Intelligence*, Joint Publication 2-0 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2023), GL-10.
20. Berger, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, 4.
21. LtCol Chuck Miller and Capt Bob Qu, "2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion's Recon Counter Recon," *Marine Corps Gazette* (2024): 66–70.
22. Miller and Qu, "2nd LAR Battalion's Recon Counter Recon," 66–70.
23. Wayne P. Hughes and Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, 3d ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
24. *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), GL-14.
25. Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College), II-3.
26. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-5.

27. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-3.
28. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-5.
29. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-3.
30. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-4.
31. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, II-5.
32. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, IV-49.
33. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, chap. 6.
34. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, IX-103.
35. Berger, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, 19.
36. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, V-3.
37. *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*.