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Evaluation and Application of the Field Ordering Officer and Pay Agent Program Within the Marine Corps Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations Concept

December 2024

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943

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ABSTRACT

The Marine Corps' transition to Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) as outlined in *Force Design 2030* (FD2030) necessitates innovative approaches to sustainment and logistics, particularly for small, dispersed units operating in contested environments. The Field Ordering Officer (FOO) and Pay Agent (PA) program is a critical micro-purchase tool that can address sustainment gaps through local procurement. However, the program currently faces challenges in personnel readiness, system integration and restrictive protocols that limit its effectiveness in austere and distributed environments. This study evaluates the FOO/PA program within the context of EABO using the Yoder Three Integrated Pillars of Success model to analyze its personnel, platforms and protocols. Data collected from after-action reports, interviews and exercises highlight issues such as inadequate training, high personnel turnover, reliance on electronic systems and outdated administrative procedures. The findings reveal a need for dedicated billets, expanded training, improved interoperability of procurement systems, and modernized policies to enhance flexibility and responsiveness. Recommendations aim to optimize the FOO/PA program for EABO by addressing identified gaps, ensuring it becomes a reliable and adaptable tool for sustaining Marine Corps forces in contested environments. This research contributes to the broader effort to modernize Marine Corps logistics and sustainment capabilities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Captain Kendal Good is a Marine Financial Management Officer who has served in disbursing positions in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. She served as the Operations and Systems Officer-in-Charge for the Regional Disbursing Office–Pacific during the preparation for Balikatan 2022 and the financial office turnover of Marine Rotational Forces Darwin from Regional Disbursing Office–Pacific to Regional Disbursing Office-West. Additionally, she served as the Disbursing Officer for the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit for three consecutive patrols, providing disbursing support for several bilateral exercises including KAMANDAG 6 and King Reef. During one of the patrols, Capt Good supported several payments in support of the exercises utilizing Field Ordering Officer/ Pay Agent programs and Field Ordering Officer–Disbursing Agent capabilities.

Captain Joel Stark is a Marine Corps Ground Supply Officer who has served in various managerial supply and logistics positions under II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) in garrison, operational and deployment environments. More specific to this study, Captain Stark is a plank holder for the Command Task Force 61.2/Reconnaissance-Counter Reconnaissance deployment, where he served as Supply Officer and Assistant Logistics Officer in the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa area of responsibility. This deployment and its subsequent iterations serve as proofs of concept for the conduct of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, Stand-in Forces and Reconnaissance–Counter Reconnaissance operations in a maritime littoral environment.

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Ad mejorem Dei gloriam! This thesis would not have been possible without our thesis advisors, Ryan Sullivan and Cory Yoder, who provided expertise, correction, and encouragement throughout the process. Thank you, gents! To the faculty and staff who supported me on my good adventure and quest to achieve graduate-level thinking and writing here at NPS, thank you. To my friends and family who made sure I had fun and enjoyed my time here in Monterey, CA, thank you. Your love and support from near and far was felt and it is appreciated. – **Kendal**

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my beautiful wife, Amber, for your unwavering love and support while I was away from you and our son, Abel, pursuing my studies. Your constant encouragement and sacrifices from afar gave me the strength and motivation to see this work through. I am also deeply thankful to my family, friends and colleagues for their steadfast encouragement and unwavering belief in me throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to thank our thesis advisors, Ryan "Sully" Sullivan and Cory "Yoda" Yoder, for their invaluable guidance, patience and expertise. Semper Fidelis. – **Joel**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	After-Action Report
ACSA	Acquisition Cross-Service Agreement
AGATRS	Acquisition Cross-Service Agreements Global Automated Tracking and Reporting System
AOR	Area of Responsibility
cASM	Contingency Acquisition Support Model
CBE	Contingency Business Environment
CCF	Contingency Contracting Force
CCO	Contingency Contracting Officer
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
D&S	Dollars and Sense
DDS	Deployed Disbursing System
DFAS	Defense Finance and Accounting Services
DoD	Department of Defense
DON	Department of the Navy
EABO	Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations
ECP	Expeditionary Contracting Platoon
EFT	Electronic Funds Transfer
EPT	Electronic Payment Tracker
FD2030	Force Design 2030
FMR	Financial Management Regulation
FOO/PA	Field Ordering Officer / Pay Agent
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commander
HQMC	Headquarters – Marine Corps
I&L2030	Installations and Logistics 2030
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
IPE	Integrated Planner and Executor/trix
J-4	Joint Logistics Section
JCASO	Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office
JCCS	Joint Contingency Contracting System
JP	Joint Publication

KO	Contracting Officer
LCO	Leveraging Contracting Officer
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MARFOR	Marine (Corps) Forces
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MCO	Marine Corps Order
MCRP	Marine Corps Reference Publication
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MLR	Marine Littoral Regiment
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NPS	The Naval Postgraduate School
NSS	National Security Strategy
OCONUS	Outside the Continental United States
OCS	Operational Contract Support
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PA	Pay Agent
PRC	People's Republic of China
PZCO	Phase-Zero Contracting Operations
SIF	Stand-in Forces
TBC	Theater Business Clearance
TIPS	Three Integrated Pillars of Success
TM EABO	Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations
YTTM	Yoder Three-Tier Model

I. INTRODUCTION

Inherent to the Marine Corps' conduct of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) is the necessity of logistical support. While some aspects of logistical support to EABO units have already been academically examined, and this area of study is continuously evaluated and refined, a study of logistically supporting EABO forces from the open market—that is, the local economies in which they will be operating, specifically via the Field Ordering Officer and Pay Agent (FOO/PA) financial mechanism—appears necessary given recognized gaps in logistical support (Lamm, 2023; Weaver, 2023). The general concern is that current military supply chains present too great a risk and level of inefficiency to completely sustain dispersed EABO units, and we believe the open market can supplement these capability gaps by providing more readily available, efficient and convenient means to furnish certain supplies and services utilizing, in part, the FOO/PA financial mechanism. This concern becomes especially prevalent when considering supporting relatively small and physically detached units whose circumstances present greater difficulties in receiving resupply from traditional logistical nodes or supply distribution points.

There currently exists a limited amount of research regarding the FOO/PA financial mechanism, which research in almost all cases is specific to military operations that were conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan supporting the Global War on Terrorism campaign. Not surprisingly, therefore, there exists little to no published research or studies concerning the utilization of the FOO/PA financial mechanism within EABO environments. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study seeks to apply the knowledge, observations and lessons learned from FOO/PA programs in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the more applicable and recent exercises and deployments in Indo-Pacific and Euro-Africa regions. The latter deployments have in many cases served as "proofs of concept" to EABO, as the Marine Corps experiments to refine its force structure in support of recent organizational and structural initiatives.

This study examines and analyzes the FOO/PA program in the context of Marine Corps EABO concepts and Force Design initiatives and evaluates the programs

feasibility to effectively support and sustain units in an EABO environment. To accomplish this, we use the Yoder Three Integrated Pillars of Success (Yoder's TIPS Model) as a framework to analyze the FOO/PA program's platforms, protocols, and personnel (Yoder, 2004). In addition to evaluating the program using the TIPS model, information and expert knowledge regarding FOO/PA program planning and execution was collected through interviews with subject matter experts (SMEs) and after-action reports (AARs) from operational units.

The study identified several key challenges, including staffing and training shortfalls, system inefficiencies and lack of system interoperability, and restrictive policies and regulations that hinder flexibility and responsiveness. The findings emphasized concerns regarding FOO and PA being collateral positions, gaps in current training program, system interoperability, and administrative burdens. Recommendations emphasize enhancing personnel readiness, equipping platforms for EABO environments, and modernizing protocols to reflect the operational realities alluded to in EABO concepts. These recommendations aim to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the FOO/PA program, ensuring it is a reliable and adaptable tool for sustaining Marine Corps forces in future operations.

II. BACKGROUND

This chapter provides information that will provide the reader with sufficient background on topics relevant to this study so there is common understanding regarding the broader issues with the logistical sustainment of Marine Corps units in an EABO environment. This chapter includes a review of Marine Corps *Force Design 2030* which was originally released in March 2020, and thereafter received subsequent updates. Following the most recent update in May 2024, *Force Design 2030* is now referred to as simply *Force Design* to more accurately reflect a "comprehensive and iterative change" (Headquarters Marine Corps [HQMC], 2024) that is not bound to a specific date or timeline. Additionally, this chapter reviews the strategic documents: *Installations and Logistics 2030* (I&L2030), *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, and the *Tentative Manual for EABO*. Finally, this chapter provides information about current policies and procedures for Marine Corps procurement and disbursing, contracting, and acquisition policies, including the identification of key organizational roles and responsibilities among the contracting, supply and finance communities.

A. CONTEXT

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and its subsequent editions recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation as existential threats to the United States, its allies and interests (Mattis, 2018; White House, 2017, 2022). The National Defense Strategy (NDS), which is developed and derived from the NSS, subsequently outlines the imperative of the Armed Forces to shift its principal military focus towards the possibility of conflict with either or both of these two superpowers. In accordance with this NDS and previous iterations, the Marine Corps (2020) released strategic guidance to its total force, *Force Design 2030* (FD2030), in March 2020 and complementarily, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*. These two strategic documents outline changes and innovative approaches in the missions of fleet Marine Corps forces to align with higher-level strategic goals and intents (Marine Corps, 2020, 2021a). FD2030 and *A Concept for Stand-In Forces* serve as the Marine Corps' baseline proactive solution to prepare for and wage a potential war with the PRC and/or the Russian Federation in and around their maritime littorals. More specifically, these two strategic documents dictate

the imperative of preparing Marine Corps forces to combat within maritime littorals, a traditional role that has not been fully implemented within the Marine Corps force structure in decades (Kozloski, 2013). In addition to focusing on becoming an effective "naval expeditionary force in readiness," *A Concept for Stand-In Forces* outlines an operational strategy called "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations" (EABO)—Marine units that are dispersedly and covertly positioned within the enemy's littorals and threat rings in order to facilitate Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), striking, and operations in the information environment, among others (Marine Corps, 2021a, 2023a).

Since the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, the NSS and NDS propagated by the various presidential administrations have had a strong focus on the Global War on Terror and the countries, peoples and theaters therein involved. The principal campaigns, formally known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), both served as operational campaigns in support of the strategies outlined in these documents, again with a focus on the War on Terror. Concurrently, these documents also outlined the pacing threats and rising prevalence of both Russia and China, though the preponderance of military resources to deter and pace against Russia and China were primarily diverted towards contemporary military conflict during the Global War on Terror. With the conclusion of both campaigns in 2010 and 2021 respectively, a renewed focus has been placed on addressing the possibility of future armed conflict with these two military superpowers (although the Global War on Terror technically continues today, the operations and resources allocated and conducted at the time of this writing pale in comparison to the OIF and OEF campaigns). Influenced by the 2018 NDS, the Marine Corps has sought to restructure its own military strategy and the means by which it will wage war in future battlespaces against near-peer adversaries.

Having fought principally as a land-based force during OEF and OIF for the last two decades, the 2018 NDS outlined the imperative of the Marine Corps returning to its role as a maritime military force and specifically a force that operates in expeditionary maritime environments, especially within the littorals and more especially as a joint force in conjunction, primarily, with the Navy. In accordance with the NDS, the Marine Corps developed and released *Force Design* in 2020. This document outlines an immense

paradigm shift, which has required redesign and reshaping of the force as a whole—from, for example, the divestment of land-specific military capabilities such as tank battalions to the investment in modern maritime capabilities such as cyber warfare and unmanned air and seacraft, among many others.

During the years since, the Marine Corps has undergone a period of significant and relatively rapid redesign. The redesign and modernization were initiated by the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) General David H. Berger's planning guidance in 2019 and has been further developed and implemented through *Force Design*, I&L2030 and *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*. The aforementioned documents provide the foundational blocks for the Marine Corps to develop, train and execute its mission in a manner that supports its overarching goal to meet and overcome the challenges imposed by pacing threats in future operating environments as identified and outlined by the 2018 NDS and its subsequent iterations. Moreover, the initiative draws particular attention to the importance of logistics as a pacing function for future operations, especially in militarily contested environments. This emphasizes the need to identify shortfalls and develop solutions to enable sustainment at the operational and tactical levels of warfare.

This study also builds on previous Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) theses and studies that evaluate Marine Corps sustainment capabilities. The majority of the aforementioned studies analyzed current mechanisms that provide sustainment and logistical support at the operational and tactical levels (Lamm, 2023; Weaver, 2023), with emphasis on identifying contracting systems and processes that are designed to support overseas contingency operations. In his thesis, Lamm (2023) proposed solutions for last-tactical-mile logistics supporting Marine Corps forces conducting EABO. Lamm's analysis and findings led him to recommend that EABO is best supported by using advanced contracts and pre-established agreements that are effectively planned for during "phase zero" of the planning process, or prior to force deployment (Lamm, 2023). He further recommended that the Marine Corps invest in creating a network of EABO locations with capabilities to "rapidly activate" pre-established support packages at predetermined locations throughout expected AORs (Lamm, 2023).

Similarly, Weaver analyzed and evaluated the role of operational contract support (OCS) and contingency contracting in the context of stand-in forces such as 3d Marine Littoral Regiment (3d MLR). He used the Three Integrated Pillars of Success (TIPS) model to identify key aspects of contracting's personnel, platforms, and protocols that are designed to support Marine Corps stand-in forces (Weaver, 2023). Since Weaver used the TIPS model to frame his analysis and evaluation, his recommendations are appropriately categorized into the personnel, platforms and protocols categories. His recommendations mainly focused on and emphasized the need for effective planning and integration of contracting during phase zero and the importance of thorough contracting training for all logistics staff and planners of units supporting EABO (Weaver, 2023).

Both Lamm and Weaver drew attention to the need for intentional planning to identify logistics requirements and potential shortfalls and effectively increase capabilities through integration and prepositioning of key capabilities in physical form (such as sustainment nodes) or in platforms and protocols (such as training and coordinating planning). However, the issue remains that there lacks in-depth evaluation of the specific programs and tools in place to facilitate the implementation of providing sustainment at the tactical level in an austere, contested EABO environment.

B. MARINE CORPS INITIATIVES

Force Design is one of the most notable initiatives that, since its release, has propelled the Marine Corps to concentrate efforts to modernize and shift its focus and capabilities to an operational environment significantly different from recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since its first release, *Force Design* has been supplemented by supporting documents such as I&L2030 and *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*. While the modernization efforts focus on technological advancements, changes in organizational structure, and concepts for EABO environments, it is important to realize the direct implications and impact the initiatives have on the execution of procurement and sustainment. Sustainment processes and procedures must be adapted to effectively support the needs and demands of forces operating in EABO environments.

1. Force Design

Force Design was the catalyst and remains the primary guiding document for current institutional change and modernization of the Marine Corps. Originally published in March 2020, the document has been updated annually since, providing guidance and feedback regarding implementation efforts to modernize the force in preparation for future challenges in contested, austere environments. Overall, the purpose of *Force Design* is to ensure the Marine Corps modernizes to meet future challenges and remain as the premier fighting force capable of engaging in activities from conventional competition and deterrence to crisis response and humanitarian assistance (Marine Corps, 2020).

In *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century*, a precursory document to *Force Design*, logistics is identified as the "pacing function" in future operations (Marine Corps, 2019). *Force Design* echoes the acknowledgement and reemphasizes the critical role of logistics as both a requirement and a vulnerability to forces operating in a contested environment (Marine Corps, 2020). This concern has been restated in subsequent updates and reviews calling for action to modernize logistics and the sustainment of forces in a distributed environment with competing requirements (Marine Corps, 2021a). Moreover, *Force Design* emphasizes the need for logistic mechanisms to be flexible and adaptable so as to be responsive during competition, crisis or conflict (Marine Corps, 2020). The rhetoric found in *Force Design* alludes to future operations necessitating logistic systems and processes that support units operating in a contested, disaggregated and distributed (over substantially longer distances than current operations) environment.

2. Installation and Logistics 2030

As mentioned previously, *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century* was a precursor to FD2030. In February 2023, I&L2030 was published concurrently with an update to the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication for logistics (MCDP-4). I&L2030 is an initiative to specifically address current challenges of logistic capabilities in the Marine Corps. It also provides a framework for describing the nature and role of logistics in a contested environment and acknowledges the need to better integrate logistic solutions with other FD2030 initiatives and experimentation (Marine Corps, 2023b).

I&L2030 is presented as a report and provides five objectives for change throughout the Marine Corps installation and logistics enterprise. The five objectives are as follows: "create global logistics awareness, diversify distribution, improve sustainment, make the installations ready for a contested environment, and develop logistics professionals for the 21st Century" (Marine Corps, 2023b, p. 1). Each objective is linked to an associated imperative that calls attention to the need to reevaluate and address current and future challenges of Marine Corps logistical effectiveness in a distributed and contested environment. This research focuses on a specific tool that supports the third I&L2030 objective of improving sustainment. The research has a relatively narrow scope that dives into an analysis of sustainment mechanisms at the tactical level.

C. OPERATING CONCEPTS

Broadly speaking, *operating concepts* refers to how an organization will physically conduct itself (i.e., act) in an environment to achieve some goal or task. For the Marine Corps specifically, operating concepts guide the organization in its actions to ensure effective design and development of capabilities that provide means of achieving success with whatever mission or task is assigned. In addition to the overarching concepts presented in *Force Design* and I&L2030, the Marine Corps has provided several other supplemental documents that amplify the intentions and provide constructive means to achieving the vision presented in *Force Design* and I&L2030.

1. Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations

In May 2023, the Marine Corps published *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations 2nd Edition* (TM EABO). The manual is an updated and declassified version of a previously signed version developed and signed by both the CMC and the Chief of Naval Operations in 2019. The TM EABO is intended to be understood considering *Force Design*. One of the main purposes of the TM EABO is to provide foundational knowledge and understanding to stimulate action for future force development that can be executed, refined and expanded upon (HQMC, 2023). EABO is formally defined as

> a form of expeditionary warfare that involve the employment of mobile, low-signature, persistent, and relatively easy to maintain and sustain naval

expeditionary forces for a series of austere, temporary locations ashore or inshore within a contested or potentially contested maritime area in order to conduct sea denial, support sea control, or enable fleet sustainment. (HQMC, 2023)

Figure 1 depicts the EABO concept within a joint force structure.

Figure 1. EABO Overview. Source: Qviller et al. (2022).

A key assumption of the EABO concept is that the adversary will be a peer-competitor with sensing and long-range fires assets (HQMC, 2023). This in turn informs another key aspect of EABO: that units conducting EABO be dispersed and disaggregated to mitigate being sensed and targeted, therein forcing more limited capability and opportunity to receive supply and logistics support. Various initiatives are underway to enable operational capability to support EABO. One notable initiative is the formation of the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR).

The MLR is a Marine Corps naval formation designed to operate as a stand-in force and operate across the competition continuum, enabling operations and maneuver within the maritime domain across the joint force. Its capabilities are designed to include "conducting EABO, conducting strikes, coordinating air and missile defense actions, supporting maritime domain awareness and supporting surface warfare and operations in the information environment" (Marine Corps, 2023a, para. 3). The MLR's final structure

is currently a work in progress as *Force Design* initiatives and experimentation continue to be conducted (Marine Corps, 2023a). Figure 2 depicts a vignette of the construct of III MEF's 3rd and 12th Marine Littoral Regiments.

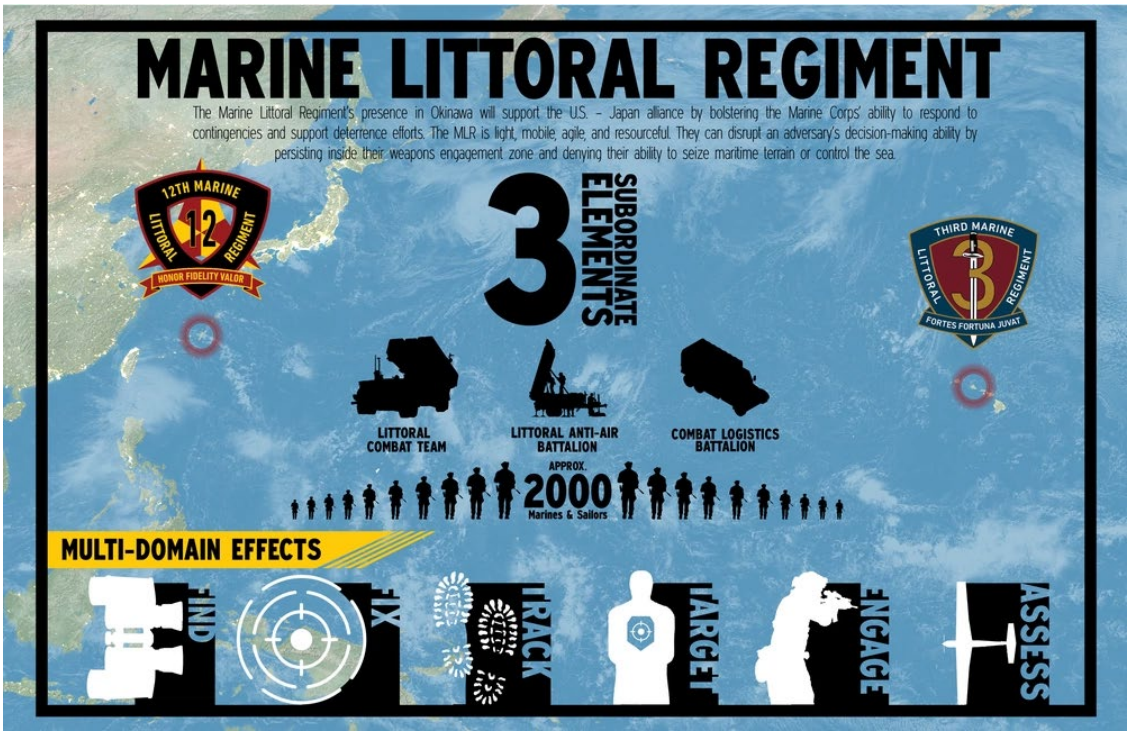

Figure 2. 3rd and 12th Marine Littoral Regiment Vignette. Source: Taylor (2023).

The TM EABO, like *Force Design*, emphasizes that a unit's ability to persist requires logistics that are responsive and adaptive and that the Marine Corps can no longer rely on the previous "iron mountain" model for logistical sustainment (HQMC, 2023). The manual specifically addresses the need for planners to consider the "spectrum of forward provisioning techniques" and options available for units conducting EABO (HQMC, 2023). On the spectrum (Figure 3), it outlines survival, supplemental and sustainment methods and mechanisms for commanders and planners to leverage responsive and adaptive logistic support. Straddling between the supplemental and sustainment levels is the FOO/PA program and its supporting mechanisms, such as contracting officers (KOs) and Expeditionary Contracting Platoons (ECPs; HQMC, 2023).

Figure 3. Spectrum of Forward Provisioning. Source: HQMC (2023).

2. A Concept for Stand-In Forces

In December 2021, the Marine Corps published *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* as part of its FD2030 initiatives in alignment with the Joint Warfighting Concept (Marine Corps, 2021a). The document proposes that stand-in forces be

> small but lethal, low signature, mobile, relatively simple to maintain and sustain forces designed to operate across the competition continuum within a contested area as the leading edge of a maritime defense-in-depth in order to intentionally disrupt the plans of a potential or actual adversary. (Marine Corps, 2021a, p. 4)

Additionally, Stand-in Forces (SIF) may be composed of elements from various service branches, agencies, or other militaries depending on the operational circumstances (Marine Corps, 2021a). The purpose of *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* is to provide an "aim point for force design and force development" (Marine Corps, 2021a, p. 1); that is, the document more clearly presents the means by which the Marine Corps will execute EABO in a distributed and contested environment. Sustaining small, widely dispersed units in a contested environment is much different than supporting centrally located forces which bring to bear relative combat and logistic superiority. FD2030, I&L2030, and *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* call for innovation in support and sustainment as these initiatives push the Marine Corps to develop and operate in innovative ways. Contracting has been essential in providing support and sustainment to Marine Corps forces in numerous conflicts, peacetime operations and contingency operations. However, as the Marine Corps seeks to redesign and reorganize its force, it needs to ensure its logistical mechanisms are able to support this redesign and reorganization. Current contracting programs, systems and processes need to be reevaluated, and new ones need to be developed, experimented on, and integrated as stand-in forces experiment their execution of EABO before the Marine Corps finds itself executing EABO in response to a crisis or contingency operation.

D. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE MARINE CORPS FOO/PA PROGRAM

The Marine Corps' FOO/PA program is governed by several orders and regulations due to its nature of being a specific tool that creates a capability for contracting via micro-purchases at the tactical level. Moreover, the FOO/PA program

synthesizes capabilities across three different specialties: contracting, supply and finance (fiscal and disbursing). The overarching document governing the organizational structure of the FOO/PA program is Marine Corps Order (MCO) 4200.34, *Contingency Contracting Force (CCF) Program* (Department of the Navy [DON], 2016) which prescribes under Chapter 5: "Other CCF Considerations" that ECPs, Fiscal and Disbursing provide and have a responsibility to provide resources and support to CCF operations (DON, 2016). Each of these entities also has other administrative policies, orders and regulations that govern how they are organized, employ their capabilities, and provide support.

1. Expeditionary Contracting Platoon

The ECP supports the MEF by providing contracting capabilities for all operational mission requirements (DON, 2016, p. 2-2). The concept of employment of the ECP is to "provide comprehensive contracting support to any sized Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) or augmentation to a joint contracting agency" and to be "task organized to support MAGTF missions throughout the full range of military operations" (DON, 2016, p. 2-2). ECP KOs deploy in support of various sized MAGTFs with limited contracting authority (compared to the larger military contracting community) to execute contracts in support of deployments and exercises occurring outside the continental United States (OCONUS; DON, 2016, p. 1-4, 2–2). ECPs are generally staffed with 28 Marine Corps contracting personnel, only a handful of which are commissioned officers (Hoover, 2021).

2. Consumer-Level Supply

Marine Corps consumer-level supply enables the management and distribution of supplies, equipment and services to Marine Corps units at the lowest level. This also includes managing the procurement of goods and services via financial mechanisms such as the FOO/PA program. A functional asset to this program, supply's relative function includes the determination of the FOO/PA program financial mechanism as a required capability for deployment, the commitment of funds for use, certifying funds for expenditure and reconciling financial documentation.

3. Finance (Fiscal and Disbursing)

Finance principally encompasses two parts: fiscal and disbursing. *Fiscal*, for the purposes of this study and in the context of the FOO/PA program, refers to the command-level budget office, denoted "G-8," that has the authority to legally approve the expenditure of appropriated funds (DON, 2016, p. 5-1). *Disbursing* refers to the office that has legal authority to maintain funds (cash or electronic) and disburse funds in the form of payments to vendors, provided that the requirements for a purchase are fulfilled by an ECP and Fiscal in their respective roles (DON, 2016, p. 5-1). Figure 4 depicts the FOO/PA diamond, or the four integrated functional areas that are required for the proper employment of the FOO/PA financial mechanism.

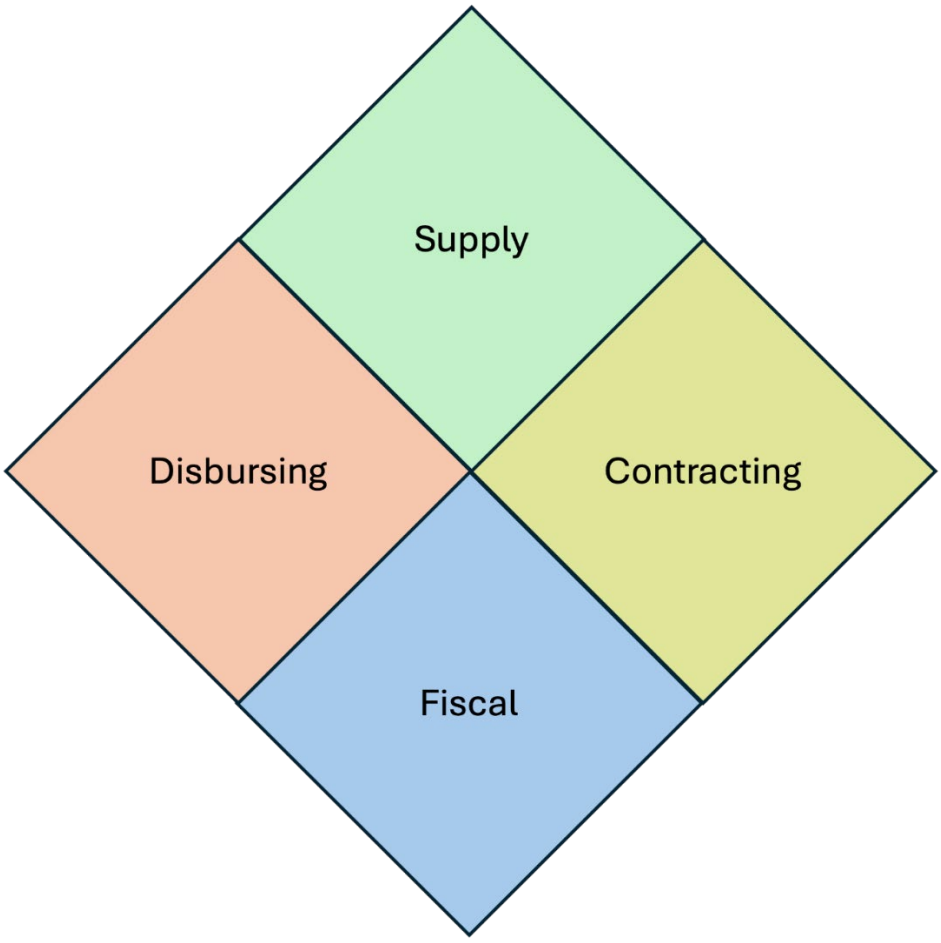

Figure 4. FOO/PA Diamond

E. SUMMARY

This chapter provided necessary information and context to understand the problem identified so it may be analyzed thoroughly by this study. The subsequent chapter is a literature review centered on current contracting and contracting support programs, policies, and procedures using Yoder's TIPS Model to frame the current use and functionality of the FOO/PA program in an EABO environment. Furthermore, the research questions and analyses must be addressed and approached with a common baseline of understanding *Force Design* and its associated publications. Familiarity of the Marine Corps' initiative for modernizing the force and FOO/PA organization and operations is essential for a more detailed discussion of the challenges discussed throughout the rest of this study.

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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The FOO/PA program is a specific purchasing tool available to the Department of Defense (DoD) to execute contingency contracting. Contingency contracting "encompasses all the contracting performed in a contingency environment, including military operations" (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Acquisition], n.d.), which can occur during formally declared or non-declared contingency environments (Defense Pricing and Contracting, n.d.). The following literature review highlights key observations, findings and recommendations relating to the FOO/PA program. Additionally, influencing focus of this literature review is the current Marine Corps force design initiatives and expectant future operational environments. Moreover, there are several theoretical frameworks that are commonly used in the academic field of OCS and contingency contracting. One widely accepted and used integrative success model is the TIPS model, which delineates an integrated framework to enable strategic contracting through the categories of "personnel, platforms and protocols" (Yoder et al., 2013, p. 364). This literature review is organized by these same three pillars to effectively present and synthesize the literature.

A. PILLAR I: PERSONNEL

Pillar I of the TIPS model is personnel, in terms of individuals within an organization and their training, but also includes the structures that personnel operate within such as the J-4 (joint logistics section) or Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office (JCASO; Yoder et al., 2013). Additionally, the Yoder Three-Tier Model (YTTM) for Optimal Planning and Execution of Contingency Contracting provides a model for effectively categorizing and presenting the roles and capabilities of Contingency Contracting Officers (CCOs) to facilitate effective planning and coordination for operations, especially contingency operations. Finally, studies concerning personnel within the contracting context and scope are addressed, specifically noting gaps or shortfalls in past studies addressing tactical-level contracting and the use of the FOO/PA program.

1. Yoder Three-Tier Model for Optimal Planning and Execution of Contingency Contracting

The YTTM is a contingency contracting structure that facilitates more effective planning and implementing of contracting to support contingency operations (Yoder et al., 2012). The model was developed as a response to the ongoing scrutiny and concern regarding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and how forces were being sustained over an extended duration. The YTTM is foundational to establishing the personnel pillar of the TIPS model because it presents an in-depth breakdown of contingency contracting models (Yoder, 2004). As the title suggests, the model consists of three tiers of CCO employment, each of which provides specific functions and capabilities and has corresponding requirements to provide the same. Corresponding requirements are tied to "specific education, developed skill sets, and unique personnel and manpower characteristics" (Yoder, 2004, p. 439).

The first tier within the YTTM is that of "Ordering Officer," which is the most basic in terms of functions and required education and training for employment. An Ordering Officer provides the most basic form of contracting support by placing orders in an already established theater with existing theater contracts (Yoder, 2004). Due to the simplistic and basic nature of Ordering Officer functions, and the fact that they are used under a pre-established network of contracts, the education and training requirements are minimal and can be satisfied rather quickly through single or multiple instructional periods. While the simplistic and expedient nature of training and employing an Ordering Officer is one of the strengths of this capability, there are key limitations that exist and affect the range of contracting support that can be provided. Ordering Officers are limited to simple purchases that are usually performed one-time or are limited in scope. Additionally, an Ordering Officer does not have the training or expertise to provide value to an operational planning team nor do they have a broad liaison function in the context of contracting because of the simple nature of purchasing capabilities (Yoder, 2004).

The second tier expands on the functions and capabilities of the first tier. The Leveraging Contracting Officer (LCO) tier includes utilizing the basic functions of the Ordering Officer but increases the capacities and capabilities of the former by further leveraging the local or regional economy (Yoder, 2004). Leveraging the local or regional

economy entails more complex planning considerations, coordination and requires expertise in understanding what requirements can or should be supported by organic versus nonorganic services and material support, amongst others. Therefore, the LCO tier necessitates a CCO that has a higher degree of training and education to provide input and recommendations regarding planning and integration of contract support for operations (Yoder, 2004). It is important to distinguish that the LCO tier is not integrated with theater-level planning and may not even be leveraged for joint-level operations (Yoder, 2004). While not necessarily a limitation, it is an important consideration when considering the scope and scale of an operation, the respective units involved, and the required logistical support to enable mission success

The third and final tier of the YTTM model is Integrated Planner and Executor (IPE). This tier provides the "highest level of planning and integration" (Yoder, 2004, p. 8) and is inherently the most complex because it seeks to "link strategic operations with theater objectives" (Yoder, 2004, p. 8). Yoder goes on to explain that IPE is optimal for joint operations and significantly contributes to operational planning for contingency contracting operations. Additionally, CCOs employed at this level are required to have a higher level of contracting education and expertise than that required at the Ordering Officer and LCO tiers (Yoder, 2004). Furthermore, due to the joint and theater-level nature of the tier, Yoder strongly recommends that a CCO has substantial experience at operational level planning and integration for contracting support. As the title of the tier presupposes, a critical function of the CCO within the IPE tier is that of integrated planner, which requires substantial coordination and management of contracting operations to support strategic and theater-specific objectives (Yoder, 2004).

The three tiers of the YTTM, while distinct, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The IPE model is supported by and is extended through the lower two tiers (Yoder, 2004). The YTTM is a model designed to facilitate comprehensive understanding of contracting support roles, responsibilities and requirements and emphasizes the necessity of organizational structure that mutually supports contingency contracting operations and strategic/theater-level objectives. Also, it is important to acknowledge that the tiers are not seamless, meaning that between each level an inherent difference between knowledge and experience and application which ought to be considered when

planning. The creator of the model, Professor Cory Yoder, even goes so far as to say that it is possible for some of the tactical execution of contracting to be "counter to higher-level goals and objectives" (Yoder, 2004, pp. 14) if contracting personnel are not effectively integrated into the broader planning process, i.e. "planning in a bubble." The acknowledgment of a gap existing between tactical–operational execution and higher operational or strategic-level objectives is the driving force behind the inception of this study. Therefore, this study focuses on employing Ordering Officers at the tactical level to satisfy contracting support requirements that are currently suited better under the LCO level. Figure 5 provides a summative table of the YYTM.

Model Tier Level & Model Title	Functions/Education/Rank	Highlights and Drawbacks
Tier 1 Ordering Officer	• basic ordering • some simplified acquisitions • training: DAU CON 234 • DAWIA Certified CON Level I or II	• simple buys • little integration • no operational planning • no broad liaison functions
Tier 2 Leveraging contracting Officer (LCO)	• leverages the local economy • reduces "pushed" material support • training/education: • DAU CON 234, recommended higher education • DAWIA Certified CON Level II or III	• better local operational planning • some integration • more capability for the operational commander • no planned theater integration • no broad liaison functions • may perform to optimize local operations at the detriment to theater ops
Tier 3 Integrated Planner and Executor (IPE)	• highest level of planning and integration—joint • linked/integrated with J-4 and J-5 • creates and executes OPLAN CCO strategy • provides direction to tier two and one • links operations strategically to theater objectives of COCOM • education: Master's degree or higher and, JPME Phase I and II • DAWIA Certified CON Level III, and other DAWIA disciplines (LOG, ACQ, FIN, etc)	• performs operational and theater analysis, integrates results into OPLAN • link between COCOM and OPLAN to all theater contracting operations • coordinates theater objectives with best approach to contracted support • can achieve broader national security goals through effective distribution of national assets • includes planning, communication, coordination, and exercising with NGO and PVO in theater

Figure 5. Summary of Yoder Three-Tier Model. Adapted from Yoder (2004).

B. PILLAR II: PLATFORMS

The platforms pillar encompasses the tools, including software, procedures and processes, designed to facilitate organization and execution of contracting and reconciliation requirements. The concept of Phase Zero Contracting Operations (PZCO) intends to create contracting processes and products already within platforms familiar to operational planners and staff (Yoder et al., 2012). The *Contingency Business Environment (CBE) Guidebook* is an accessible reference to resources and software systems used by contracting and contracting support personnel.

1. Phase Zero Contracting Operations

The term *Phase Zero Contracting Operations* was coined in the OCS community to formally describe the planning and trial run-throughs that should happen before an actual event or crisis occurs (Yoder, 2010). PZCO's counterpart in the traditional planning models used by operational planners is the "shaping phase" (Yoder et al., 2012, p. 21), which encompasses necessary preparation in the form of planning, rehearsing and validating plans and actions during rehearsal (Yoder et al., 2012). PZCO is nested under the second pillar, platforms, because it emphasizes the need for sufficient and effective tools and provides a framework and scope to effectively plan for contract support. In both his initial research report in 2010 and subsequent report in 2012, Yoder appealed for PZCO to be recognized as the platform that ensures effective integration of contracting support planning into broader operational planning. The research and analysis conducted on phase-based planning and contracting capabilities drew attention to the fact that planning for logistical needs and support needs must mirror, synchronize and integrate with larger operational planning strategy (Yoder et al., 2012). PZCO and related phase-based planning concepts for OCS were formally established in joint doctrine through the 2014 updated publication of Joint Publication (JP) 4–10, *Operational Contract Support*. As seen in Figure 6, the notional operation plan phases and the notional contingency contracting support phases can be viewed as parallel and synchronous, increasing integration for key planners and specialized liaison officers such as the highest level organizational CCO, the IPE.

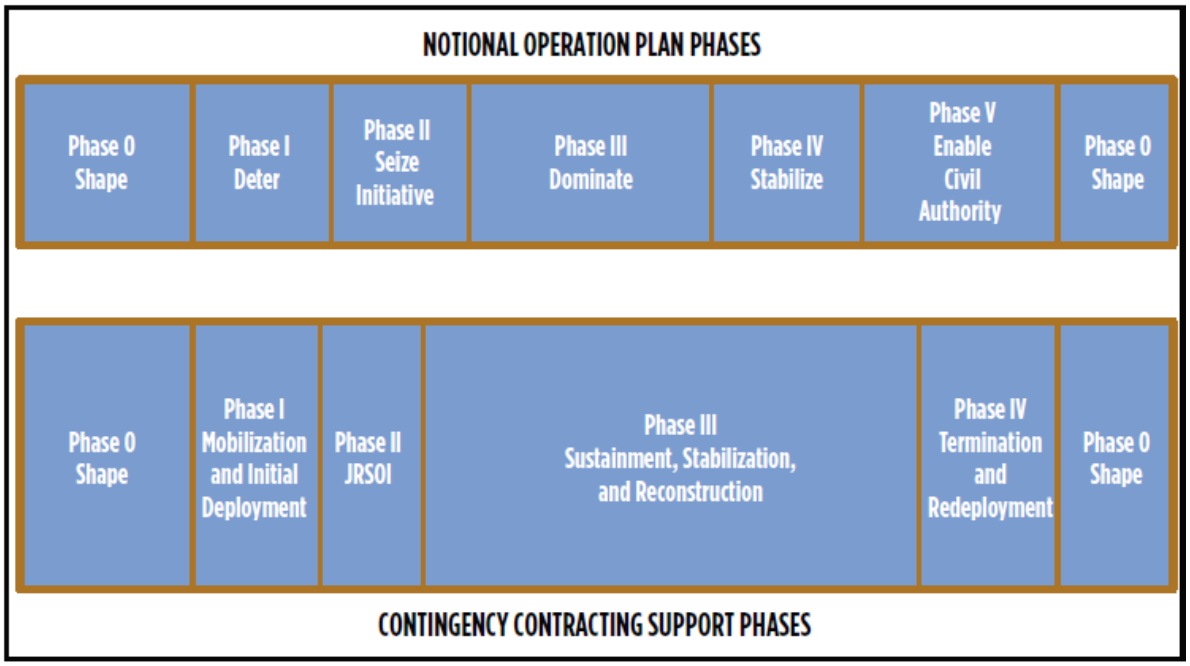

Figure 6. Side-by-Side of Notional Operational Plan Phases and Contingency Contracting Support Phases. Source: Yoder et al. (2013).

2. Department of Defense Contingency Business Environment Guidebook

The CBE Guidebook was published by the CBE Board of Governors to further "support the DoD initiative to establish and manage the contingency e-business program supporting the acquisition process, and provide the warfighter and contingency acquisition personnel with the guidance necessary to effectively utilize the e-business tolls in contingency environments" (DoD, 2014, p. 1). Moreover, the forming of the CBE and the publishing of the CBE Guidebook are part of a larger response to the Gansler Commission. The Gansler Commission, headed by Jacques Gansler, released its report *Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations* in 2007. The commission conducted a thorough assessment of the Army's processes, personnel, organization, training, policies and regulations of its acquisition program in expeditionary operations (Gansler et al., 2007). One of the key findings of the commission was the need to improve and "provide training and tools for overall contracting activities in expeditionary operations" (Gansler et al., 2007, p. 5).

The *CBE Guidebook* is a relatively short reference that is applicable to DoD organizations and acquisition personnel that have a role in the integration, preplanning,

planning and management of contracting in support of contingency operations (DoD, 2014). Most importantly, the guidebook provides information and guidance for utilizing six electronic contracting tools in contingency environments. Of the six electronic tools listed, two are mandatory and the other four are discretionary in terms of their usage and employment (DoD, 2014). The two mandatory tools are the 3-in-1 tool and the Acquisition Cross-Service Agreements (ACSA) Global Automated Tracking and Reporting System (AGATRS). The four discretionary tools are the Contingency Acquisition Support Model (cASM), *Dollars and Sense* (D&S), the Joint Contingency Contracting System (JCCS), and Theater Business Clearance (TBC). Figure 7 summarizes these tools and their functions. (The mandatory tools are in orange and the discretionary are in blue.)

3in1 Tool	AGATRS	cASM	D&S	JCCS	TBC
•Automates order, receipt, and purchase processes (SF44) •Improves procurement and cash management under the micro-purchase threshold •Provides visibility of payments and purchases	•Tracks and provides visibility of worldwide ACSAs •Manages ACSA transactions •Sources requirement support from the host nation or other nations involved	•Plan, generate, staff for approval, and track requirements packages •Outputs a complete, approved, and signed requirements package	•Reach back center that supports contract closeout process •Allows CCOs to concentrate on award and administration actions	•Provides accurate and up-to-date contingency business information •Capabilities include vendor management, solicitation posting, proposal receipt, etc.	•Process ensures AOR-specific terms and conditions are included in solicitations •Enables electronic submission of TBC packages

Figure 7. Summary of CBE Tools. Adapted from DoD (2014).

Again, the tools are applicable to all DoD organizations and acquisition personnel—meaning that they can and should be leveraged by the joint force to synchronize and harmonize acquisition processes among service branches in a joint contingency environment. Moreover, the CBE tools are designed to be utilized by the joint force to effectively plan, integrate, and manage contracting activities within the larger planning process for contingency environments (DoD, 2014). The CBE tools are scalable in the sense that they can be utilized based on the parameters and requirements

of an operation. Each service branch utilizes the aforementioned e-tools for lower-level operations, which can imply interoperability between service branches in a joint environment to leverage contracting support. However, their use is not limited to the joint environment. For example, the Marine Corps uses the 3-in-1 tool for its tactical operations and it is frequently used when utilizing the FOO/PA program. Ideally, these e-tools remain effective when applied to future operations in an EABO environment. For the purposes of this study, the 3-in-1 tool is the e-tool predominantly discussed and evaluated when analyzing the FOO/PA program in support of the Marine Corps EABO concept.

3. Deployed Disbursing System

The Deployed Disbursing System (DDS) is the software program used by disbursing offices to generate and maintain accountability reports of financial instruments; be it cash, checks, or "similar equivalent items and receivables" (Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2024, p. 15-3). The reports are submitted to the respective Defense Finance Accounting Services (DFAS) site. DDS was created to meet tactical disbursing requirements and to maintain accountability of U.S. Treasury funds held and maintained by disbursing agents (Zumwalt, 2022). Additionally, the system creates payment packages to reconcile the payment of goods and services provided by contracts (Zumwalt, 2022). Access to and use of DDS is specifically limited to financial management personnel within regional disbursing offices, based on the requirements and responsibilities held by disbursing officers, disbursing accountability officials, cashiers, deputies and pay agents (DoD FMR, 2022). It is worthwhile to note that DDS "is currently in use world-wide by DFAS, Army, and Marine Corps" (Zumwalt, 2022, p. 6) financial personnel, which signals potential for increased interoperability among service branches during joint operations. The specific policies, regulations and procedures for DDS use are outlined in the DoD Financial Management Regulation (FMR) and the DDS Manual (Draft Version 2.9).

C. PILLAR III: PROTOCOLS

The third and final pillar of the TIPS model is protocols, which refer to the published rules, regulations, policies and protocols that enable and provide controls to OCS and contracting support activities (Yoder, 2010). Since this study focuses on the

application of the FOO/PA program, several key references are discussed that directly influence operations conducted by both the contracting and disbursing communities.

The predominant references for contingency contracting are JP 4-10: *Operational Contract Support* and Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 3–40B.6 *Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Operational Contract Support*. The primary reference for the disbursing community within the scope of FOO/PA program is the DoD FMR Volume 5. In contrast to the broader JP 4-10, the DoD FMR does provide specific federal legal requirements and responsibilities of disbursing offices and personnel.

1. Joint Publication 4-10: Operational Contract Support

According to the preface of JP 4-10, written by Lieutenant General Daniel J. O'Donohue, JP 4-10 provides "fundamental principles and guidance for planning, executing, and managing operational contract support in all phases of joint operations" (p. i). JP 4-10 was first published in 2008 and was part of the response to the Gansler Commission report that recommended increased assistance via regulatory policy means to improve contract effectiveness in expeditionary operations (Gansler et al., 2007). Since its initial publication, there have been several updates, of which the 2014 update most notably saw the addition of Phase Zero considerations and overall described in more detail OCS planning and planning considerations (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CJCS], 2014). JP 4-10 is a comprehensive publication that provides thorough guidance for planning and executing contracting support for a joint force at a macro-operational or strategic level. However, as JP 4-10 makes note, the document does not use regulatory legal jargon to define terms, roles and responsibilities to enhance readability and meet "joint doctrine administrative guidelines" (CJCS, 2019, p. I-4). The Federal Acquisition Regulations provides the legal, regulatory definitions and specific information regarding the who, what, when, why and how for acquiring goods and services.

2. Marine Corps Reference Publication 3-40B.6: Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Operational Contract Support

In acknowledgement of JP 4-10's macro-level application, MCRP 3–40B.6 tailors the JP's guidance for commanders and their staff who do not necessarily have a background or formal education in acquisition and contracting. It provides further

guidance for planning and the execution of OCS and its supporting activities at the tactical level (Marine Corps, 2021b). MCRP 3–40B.6 is not exclusive to the Marine Corps; the document has several other titles as it is a reference publication for both the Army and Air Force. Also, MCRP 3–40B.6 is listed as a reference for MCO 4200.34 *Contingency Contracting Force (CCF) Program*; the two documents are closely related. The CCF MCO is more concerned with the personnel, organizational structure and functionality of the CCF providing contingency contracting to the MAGTF, ranging from MEF to battalion or even lower command levels. In contrast, MCRP 3–40B.6 relays OCS planning and execution guidance from the joint level to service components, which in the case of the Marine Corps, would be the Marine Forces (MARFOR) commanders, whose higher-echelon joint-force counterpart is the geographic combatant commander (GCC). In other words, the GCC for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and his staff would most likely reference JP 4-10, the commander of Marine Corps Forces Pacific and his staff would reference MCRP 3–40B.6, and the specific MAGTF commander would reference MCO 4200.34.

3. Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation Volume 5

The DoD FMR "directs statutory and regulatory financial management requirements, systems, and functions for all appropriated and non-appropriated, working capital revolving, and trust fund activities" (Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2024, p. I-4). The DoD FMR is far-reaching in its authority in that it goes from the secretary of defense to "all other organizational entities within the DoD" (p. I-4)—meaning down to the lowest-level units and offices in the Marine Corps. Volume 5 encompasses the entire disbursing policy, which is pertinent to the pay agent (PA) component of the FOO/PA program. It outlines the specifications for accounting for and reporting cash funds and other financial instruments for disbursement. While the DoD FMR is a regulation held at the highest militarily organizational level, it dictates actions at the tactical level. This deserves recognition because unlike other overarching publications, it is not as easy to tailor to the needs or concerns of the tactical level; rather, any Marine at the tactical level paying vouchers needs to ensure that DoD policy is being adhered in its entirety.

4. Other Research and Studies

a. Sustainment of Stand-In Forces: Analysis of Contracting Capabilities in Support of 3d Marine Littoral Regiment

In 2023, NPS student Matheu Weaver published a graduate thesis titled *Sustainment of Stand-In Forces: Analysis of Contracting Capabilities in Support of 3d Marine Littoral Regiment*. His thesis was concerned with exploring possible product or process improvements to contracting support for Stand-In Forces, specifically using 3d MLR as a platform. He argued the importance of capable and reliable OCS for units operating in contested environments, such as those operating in EABO and/or Stand-In Force AORs.

Weaver (2023) likewise utilized Yoder's TIPS Model in his analysis, and some of his findings underline the relevance of our research, including, "Requirements generation is the most significant barrier to providing timely contracting support" (p. 38), and "3d MLR has not established the necessary linkages to fully exploit operational- and strategic-level OCS capabilities" (p. 38).

While the scope of Weaver's (2023) thesis is generally limited to 3d MLR as a specific unit, these aforementioned findings are not necessarily unique to 3d MLR alone, and can, in a limited sense, be generalized. His finding, "Requirements generation is the most significant barrier to providing timely contracting support" (p. 38), suggests that the tools and capabilities available to an expeditionary or stand-in force for requisitioning are not properly employed or planned for. It can be likened to a general contractor who cannot decide which exact tools to use to build a house because he has not created a blueprint in a timely manner to meet his and his client's schedule. The FOO/PA financial mechanism is one of these various contracting tools that's use also must be planned. Though it can be used to fulfill purchasing requirements more quickly relative to other contingency contracting methods, it nonetheless requires proper prior planning to effectively utilize.

Another of Weaver's (2023) findings, "3d MLR has not established the necessary linkages to fully exploit operational and strategic-level OCS capabilities" (p. 38), brings to light the disconnect between planners and financial capabilities. At the time of Weaver's writing, 3d MLR did not have an organic FOO/PA capability, which capability

would need to be given as requested support from higher echelon commands. Relying on nonorganic assets from higher echelon commands for a financial mechanism that makes "tactical" purchases hinders the efficiency and reliability of the FOO/PA capability. Making good use of an optimized financial mechanism is one thing, but being hindered in your ability to even utilize the same because of it being a nonorganic capability stymies operational success well before an operation even goes underway.

b. Advanced Solutions for Last-Tactical-Mile Logistics in Support of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations

In 2023, NPS student Erich Lamm published a thesis titled *Advanced Solutions for Last-tactical-mile Logistics in Support of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO)*. Lamm's thesis was concerned with investigating the challenges of logistically supporting EABO units in contested environments. Lamm's research stresses the importance of prepositioned support packages to EABO forces, integration of OCS capabilities and planners early in contingency operations planning processes, and the difficulty of supporting EABO forces utilizing the current Marine Corps supply chain mechanisms even while including support from Navy logistical capabilities (Lamm, 2023).

Integrating the appropriate contracting planners early in the planning process ties in with the planning issues identified in Weaver's (2023) thesis also. These two studies speak of the lack of contracting integration without even touching on what planning issues may or have occurred with the other functional areas of the FOO/PA financial mechanism such as Ground Supply, Fiscal and Disbursing. Nonetheless, the lack of integration for proper use of a contracting capability, which the FOO/PA program is, ensures that the capability does not even make it to theater or is planned for so late that it "becomes" a requirement during or even up to the execution phase of an operation, which could have drastic effects in providing support to EABO forces and in turn affect the outcome of the mission. For want of a nail… the kingdom was lost.

Lamm's identification of the difficulty in supporting EABO forces utilizing standing Marine Corps supply chain capabilities further stresses the importance of OCS, or sourcing requirements from the open market versus the restricted military supply chain. The FOO/PA program is one of these OCS capabilities/financial mechanisms that

gives the warfighter the ability to source requirements locally without the need for reliance on a supply chain that could stretch to any corner of the globe—or at the very least from what could be a very distant continental United States. Lamm's thesis, considering the last-tactical-mile of the EABO supply chain, highlights the importance of supplies and services being requisitioned or fulfilled at or near the point of sale within the area of operations itself, giving organic capability to the tactical warfighter to reduce requisition cycles and deliver to the warfighter what is needed as soon as practical when the need arises.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter discussed previous frameworks, models and research that have established or studied the topics of contingency contracting and sustainment in an EABO environment. The literature presented above is not entirely exhaustive of all that is related to OCS or even the Marine Corps CCF; however, the chapter focused on and extracted from the current literature findings and considerations applicable to the tactical level because the FOO/PA program is a specific tool that falls under the purview of OCS and contingency operations. The TIPS model was used to organize common and relevant themes to the FOO/PA program that is familiar to the OCS community. Furthermore, each source provided insight to the FOO/PA program and its application, either by means of providing explicit information or demonstrating the lack thereof. Many of the sources—both cited above and referenced in general—do not discuss OCS at the tactical level, and the FOO/PA program is sometimes mentioned briefly as a small cog in the larger OCS mechanism if even mentioned at all. Moreover, research and studies conducted that do highlight the FOO/PA program are limited in scope to the Army and Air Force, predominantly in the Middle East in support of the Global War on Terrorism. This implies that the Marine Corps' use of the FOO/PA program in contingency operations in support of EABO is a new focus of study that needs to be further examined, analyzed and assessed. The Marine Corps has made significant strides in its force initiative to promote structural and organizational changes to support EABO concepts, like the MLR. However, the Marine Corps has yet to fully consider and develop its contracting support operations and activities to align with the same.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study qualitatively examines and analyzes the current Marine Corps FOO/PA program utilizing Yoder's TIPS model as the framework to conduct our analysis and to objectively categorize the data collected from AARs and from interviews conducted with relevant subject matter experts. The categorization of AARs and interview responses enabled us to analyze trends and highlight recurring patterns, therein denoting both efficiencies and deficiencies in the FOO/PA program as it currently operates.

A. METHODS

Keeping in mind that this study is, by design, exploratory and qualitative, we used a "quasi-Delphi" method to collect our data. The Delphi method proper was originally developed by the RAND Corporation to gather expert knowledge and opinion regarding a specific topic or field that does not easily lend itself to traditionally quantitative means of evidence and analysis (Khodyakov, 2023). Our application of a modified or as we call it, "quasi-Delphi" method, emphasizes two key attributes of the original method: the selective use of subject matter experts to answer questions and the determination of a collective response to elicit a consensus that can be used as evidence (Khodyakov, 2023).

Similar to how we present within this body of work preexisting and current literature regarding Marine Corps contracting, the FOO/PA program and other functions supporting the FOO/PA program, we use Yoder's TIPS model as a framework for our analysis. Through use of Yoder's TIPS model, we are able to analyze our data and categorize the results under a pre-existing framework that is familiar to current and future researchers of our subject of study, the contracting and related communities, and stakeholder or decision-makers seeking recommendations.

B. DATA COLLECTION

We collected qualitative data via two different means. Firstly, we collected AARs from both a general source and specific sources. The general source was through the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS) by which AARs were collected using key search words such as, "FOO," "Field Ordering Officer," "Pay Agent," and "micro-purchases." Other key search words included the names of training and operational

exercises that are known to require large, inter-service and often multi-national logistics support, such as “BALIKATAN,” “KAMANDAG,” “COBRA GOLD” and “RXR.” The collection of AARs was further refined and limited to Marine Corps AARs (or similar reflective documents) from the time span of March 2019 through September 2024. This time window loosely coincides with the original publication of Force Design, the implementation of Force Design initiatives such as the formation of the 3d MLR and marked decrease in GWOT operations across the Marine Corps.

In addition to the general collection of AARs from JLLIS, specific sources were used to collect additional AARs or similar reflective documents. These sources were determined specifically because of their close association to the FOO/PA program or similar programs and leveraged for use as a data source. One such source is from a Marine Corps reconnaissance team that deployed with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and utilized the FOO/PA program during its deployment in the Indo-Pacific region; which deployment included experimental EABO proofs of concept. Another source was the Regional Disbursing Office-Pacific (RDO-P), the source of the Disbursing Officers and Disbursing (Pay) Agents that support the FOO/PA program and other OCS services within the III MEF AO. Internal AARs from RDO-P were collected to balance the AARs from a “customer” perspective of the FOO/PA program and instead provide an “enabler” perspective because the personnel of RDO-P are one of four key players that provide the capabilities that enable the FOO/PA program to operate and function (see Figure 4).

Secondly, we conducted interviews with eight subject matter experts within the Marine Corps occupational communities of supply, contracting and finance. The interviewees were selected based on their MOS, current and previously held billets, current and prior involvement with or use of the FOO/PA program and experience testing or implementing EABO concepts to Marine Corps logistics and supply chain networks. Consequently, the interviewees were comprised of both officers and enlisted Marines with experiences ranging from serving as a KO, unit supply officer, deployed disbursing officer or unit logistics officer.

The interviewees were asked six open-ended questions regarding the FOO/PA program and its implementation by the Marine Corps within EABO environments in light of Force Design. The questions, found in Appendix A, were designed to address the research questions of this study: how can the FOO/PA program be improved to support and sustain Marine Corps forces in an EABO environment, and what (if any) changes should be made to the program? Additionally, the questions were designed using the Yoder TIPS model to categorize the questions so the responses could be more effectively categorized for discussion and analysis. The interview questions were determined as "not human-subject research" by both the NPS Institutional Review Board and the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program.

Although formally structured with six questions, the interviews were relatively semi-formal and loosely structured in terms of how the interviewees were able to respond. Also, due to the open-ended nature of the questions, interviewees were asked to expound on responses that may have required further information, background knowledge or context. Follow-up questions were asked to seek clarifying or amplifying information in order for us to gain a well-rounded understanding of the information provided in the response. Of the eight individuals interviewed, two were interviewed via email due to work constraints. The other six individuals were interviewed using video conference calls on the platform Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The interviews conducted via video conference calls were recorded for transcription purposes. No identifying information is provided in this report to protect the identity of the individuals who participated and served as subject matter experts for this study.

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V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis presented in this chapter works to assess the viability and effectiveness of the Marine Corps FOO/PA program operating within an EABO environment. This study used the Yoder TIPS model to analyze information gathered from a series of eight interviews with SMEs in Marine Corps supply, logistics, disbursing, and comptroller communities, organizing the data for analysis and discussion. Additionally, information gathered from two collected AARs and an Information Paper from 3d Reconnaissance Battalion are analyzed and discussed. The objective of this analysis is to understand where strengths, challenges and limitations and areas of improvement lie within the Marine Corps FOO/PA program.

Additionally this chapter presents an analysis of data collected from interviews and AARs that fit within the Yoder TIPS Model, suggestions for improving the FOO/PA program were given by SMEs, further highlighting possible process improvements and considerations for implementation of the FOO/PA program within expeditionary and/or EABO environments.

A. INTERVIEWS

1. Personnel

Pillar I of the TIPS model is personnel, in terms of individuals within an organization and their training but also includes the structures that personnel operate within. Recurring themes from the interviews under this section include challenges within the FOO/PA program relating to staffing, training and planning from all functional areas within the Fiscal Diamond (see Figure 4).

a. Strengths

From the SME interviews, there were no specific strengths mentioned as they relate to personnel. Although this does not lend itself to data analysis, it is worth noting a marked exclusion of personnel strengths as it further highlights the below challenges, limitations and areas for improvement delineated within the interviews in relation to the FOO/PA program.

b. Challenges/ Limitations

Numerous challenges and limitations in relation to the FOO/PA program were highlighted from the SME interviews. These include challenges identified in staffing and retention, deficiencies present in training and a lack of integration within planning processes.

(1) Challenges in Staffing and Retention

The Fiscal Diamond functional areas face ongoing staffing shortages that are significantly impacting their roles within the FOO/PA program. These shortages create bottlenecks in daily operations, leading to inefficiencies and delays in critical processes. The persistence of these issues points to systemic challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the program can effectively meet mission capability in expeditionary environments (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). Two particular difficulties worth specific mention affect the Marine Corps contracting community. Staff Non-Commissioned Officers within the community are generally younger and less experienced than they should be for the billets and roles that they often fill, and retaining officer KOs is difficult due to an incentive to leave the armed forces in order to pursue attractive civilian jobs that require their credentials (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024).

The Marine Corps supply community is similarly affected, with personnel overburdened by an excessive number of responsibilities. This overextension reduces their ability to focus on key tasks related to the FOO/PA program and increases the likelihood of errors or oversights, especially in the case of the young inexperienced officers who often take on these responsibilities. (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024).

The disbursing community, with its small size even relative to the others within the Fiscal Diamond, faces a unique set of challenges. Its limited workforce restricts its ability to manage financial operations at the scale and breadth required by the organization (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). This is especially true when considering the amount of oversight that may be required by the

disbursing office over multiple FOO/PA teams across multiple locations, such as would be the case in EABO operations. Issues with regards to staffing within the Fiscal Diamond could have succinct impacts on the FOO/PA teams they manage within EABO environments

The capability for the multiple functional areas to manage FOO/PA teams, most especially by the disbursing and contracting functional areas is reduced in light of these staffing issues. One interviewee speculated the possibility of FOO/PA hierarchies becoming flatter and lending to less oversight given the dispersed nature of EABO operations (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). This speculation and lessened oversight correlates with an increased amount of trust from the managers (Fiscal Diamond) to the FOO/PA teams. Whether this is for better or worse, it is a worthy speculation to be taken into account when considering employment of FOO/PA teams in EABO environments.

(2) Deficiencies in Training

Issues regarding training were a common theme throughout the SME interviews. This includes training to the various stakeholders of the FOO/PA program such as commanders, planners, Fiscal Diamond functional area personnel and the FOO/PA teams themselves.

FOO/PA-specific training is already a requirement; where disbursing is primarily responsible for training PAs as contracting is for FOOs. However, according to various SME interviewees, current methods fall short of adequately preparing FOO/PA personnel for their roles. Online training modules, while accessible, often lack depth and engagement, failing to provide the comprehensive knowledge necessary for effective field operations. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024). Various interviewees expressed a strong preference for in-person training, which allows for interactive learning, scenario-based exercises and real-time feedback from experienced instructors. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). One pilot program in II MEF that offered extensive in-person training showed promise, equipping FOOs and PAs with improved skills and confidence

(Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). However, these programs remain limited in scope and are not widely implemented, leaving many FOOs without the fiscal and operational knowledge needed to perform at the same level as the more experienced KOs or DAs that manage them. (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024).

The need for comprehensive FOO/PA pre-deployment training was also mentioned by multiple SMEs. In-person training, which allows for hands-on interaction and immediate clarification of questions by KOs and/or DAs has been identified as an effective method for preparing Marines to manage fiscal responsibilities in expeditionary settings. (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024). However, in-person training is often insufficient or entirely absent, forcing personnel to rely on trial and error during live operations. For example, the minimum training required for FOOs can be done online and be "clicked through" (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024). A minimalistic and limited approach to FOO/PA training, especially when already underway, not only limits the effectiveness of the FOO/PA program but also increases the likelihood of errors, which can delay mission-critical requisitions and erode confidence in the systems, processes and personnel involved.

Training issues extend beyond FOO and PA-specific training to broader fiscal training gaps across the organization. Personnel outside the Fiscal Diamond Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) often receive minimal exposure to financial management concepts, which directly impacts the effectiveness of FOO teams (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). This is important to note, because generally the only fiscal training that is received by FOOs is directly administered to them by KOs for their specific FOO/PA role in-theater (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). The same can also be said regarding Fiscal Diamond functional areas such as supply. Supply personnel receive a great deal of instruction regarding fiscal matters but their exposure and ability to manage a FOO/PA program is very limited or null without any prior experience. (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

This lack of foundational knowledge makes it difficult for teams to navigate the complexities of financial operations, particularly in dynamic field environments such as in EABO operations. Additionally, training for AISs such as the Defense Agencies Initiative (DAI) is insufficient, leaving Marines to rely on trial-and-error learning or guidance from inexperienced peers. This results in inefficiencies and mistakes that could be mitigated with proper instruction and practice (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). When poor implementation of AIS tools occurs, problems arising from this are compounded by a lack of robust training at the unit level, leaving personnel ill-equipped to use these systems effectively (Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). Furthermore, there is little to no training on manual procedures, such as the use of Standard Form 44 (SF-44), which serves as a hard-copy backup for the 3-in-1 tool (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). This gap leaves units vulnerable in situations where electronic systems are unavailable or fail, particularly in austere environments, as previously mentioned.

Command-level training deficiencies further compound these challenges. Many commanders lack a clear understanding of the capabilities and limitations of FOOs and PAs, particularly in areas like foraging and cash management. (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024; Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). This knowledge gap often leads to unrealistic expectations or underutilization of the FOO/PA program's potential or practical application as a requisition tool for commanders (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Similarly, higher-level planners frequently have little familiarity with the FOO program's tactical requisition purpose, limiting their ability to integrate it effectively into broader operational plans. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024). This disconnect between command and operational levels underscores the need for targeted education for commanders and planners on the strategic role of FOOs and PAs, as well as their operational constraints.

(3) Integration Within the Planning Process

A significant issue impacting the FOO/PA program is the lack of Fiscal Diamond representation throughout the planning process. Despite their indispensable role in ensuring financial and logistical readiness, disbursing, along with supply and contracting personnel and at times even the comptroller office are often treated as an afterthought in the Marine Corps Planning Process or are disregarded until late in the planning process when their ability to affect the mission is significantly reduced (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). This oversight leads to gaps in planning, leaving these functions scrambling to adapt to operational requirements rather than being proactively prepared. KOs, in particular, frequently find themselves needing to assert their operational relevance to gain a seat at the planning table (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). As one interviewee observed while speaking generally about plans being drawn without the involvement of Fiscal Diamond personnel: "We are putting the cart before the horse on so many items when it comes to … expeditionary environment(s)" (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Barriers to effective planning are further exacerbated by limited cross-training between general staff, such as logistics officers (S-4), and contracting or disbursing personnel (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024). Without a thorough understanding of each other's functions, roles and capabilities, coordination becomes inconsistent, and key capabilities are underutilized. Additionally, there is a widespread lack of familiarity with the specific responsibilities and potential contributions of contracting officers across the force (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024). This knowledge gap hinders seamless integration and collaboration. To make matters worse, ECPs often locally develop guidelines that vary widely across commands, leading to inconsistencies in the execution of FOO/PA programs (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5,

2024). Such disparities reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of these programs, particularly in joint or multi-unit operations.

The influence of commanders plays a pivotal role in determining how well contracting and disbursing functions are integrated into planning and execution. Commanders who are knowledgeable about the roles and capabilities of KOs are better equipped to leverage their expertise for mission success. However, in the case of some of the SMEs interviewed, commanders and their staff generally lack this understanding, which limits their ability to utilize these critical resources effectively. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Lastly, in joint environments, the involvement of G-8 staff becomes especially vital due to the complexity of managing multiple lines of accounting (LOAs). Without this higher-level financial oversight, the coordination of resources and funding across different components can become chaotic and inefficient (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

2. Platforms

Pillar II of the Yoder TIPS model, the platforms pillar, encompasses the systems and tools; including software, procedures and processes, designed to facilitate organization and execution of contracting and reconciliation requirements. (Yoder et al., 2012). Common themes from SME interviews in this section include some AIS consistency/ interoperability, praise for the 3-in-1 tool, challenges in systems integration, gaps in AIS and FOO/PA training and structural weaknesses in AIS implementation.

a. Strengths

A notable strength of the FOO/PA program with regards to its AISs is the consistency of disbursing systems between garrison and deployed environments. Not common practice in some other service branches, this continuity ensures that personnel can transition seamlessly from domestic to expeditionary operations without needing to adapt to a different set of tools or processes. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024). This consistency fosters confidence among disbursing personnel

and reduces the learning curve when disbursing is employed in expeditionary environments. Such uniformity sets a stronger foundation for expeditionary financial operations and serves as a model for other functional areas to emulate.

For FOOs and PAs, the use of the 3-in-1 tool has been instrumental in ensuring operational efficiency in the field. The 3-in-1 tool stands out for its ability to consolidate key functions, such as purchasing and documenting transactions into a single, user-friendly platform. This centralization of capabilities not only helps to streamline workflows but also minimizes some errors and redundancies, allowing FOOs and PAs to focus more on mission-critical activities rather than administrative burdens. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024). The effectiveness of the 3-in-1 tool has garnered positive feedback from the interviewed SMEs, particularly for features like purchase templates that simplify repetitive tasks and reduce the time required to execute transactions (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024). While there are broader challenges in integrating the 3-in-1 tool and other AISs with one another, as will be discussed in the following pages, the 3-in-1 tool demonstrates how well-developed systems can enhance operational readiness and support personnel in achieving their objectives.

b. Challenges/ Limitations

The principal pillar II challenges and limitations expressed in the SME interviews include challenges in systems integration and AIS and FOO/PA training gaps.

(1) Challenges in Systems Integration

One of the foremost challenges in fiscal operations is the fragmentation of AISs, which impairs seamless functionality and reduces efficiency. Tools such as DAI, Procurement Desktop-Defense (PD2), and DDS are essential systems for various financial and procurement functions amongst Fiscal Diamond functional areas. While these three systems are integrated in various enabling ways, they operate independently from and lack integration with the 3-in-1 tool. (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024). This

lack of interoperability requires users (FOOs/PAs) to manually input Lines of Accounting (LOAs) into the 3-in-1 tool, which is not necessarily an intuitive process and increases administrative workload and risks human error (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024). Additionally, purchases are often tracked using local, non-AIS methods, such as Excel spreadsheets, which, while flexible, lead to inefficiencies and fragmented record-keeping (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024). This decentralized requisition-tracking approach hampers oversight and makes it challenging to standardize processes or generate accurate, real-time data for decision-making. Finally, more fail-safes could be added, such as the ability to implement funding caps for each FOO/PA team. Currently, the tool does not have this control feature, even though each FOO/PA team is legally limited on the amount of funds it is authorized to expend (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024

Connectivity limitations compound these integration issues, particularly in the context of EABO. AISs used within the FOO/PA program rely heavily on consistent internet connectivity, but such connectivity is often unreliable or nonexistent in austere or contested environments (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). Units operating in "lights out" scenarios—where power and communication networks are unavailable—will find themselves unable to access or update vital systems, leaving them to rely on manual processes that are slow and prone to errors; if said units have even trained to this standard (Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024; Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). The lack of offline capabilities within these tools not only undermines operational efficiency but also jeopardizes the ability to sustain fiscal and logistical support in expeditionary environments.

The interconnected nature of fiscal operations further magnifies these challenges. The fiscal diamond, with regards especially to the FOO/PA program, is interdependent and relies on the smooth functioning of each functional area (supply, finance, contracting and disbursing) to maintain overall effectiveness. When one functional area experiences

inefficiencies or breakdowns, the impact ripples across the entire program (Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 8, personal communication, September 19, 2024). For example, delays in committing funds from supply can stymie disbursing since they cannot approve cash expenditures without an LOA tying the cash to the funding document. Similarly, if disbursing is unable to reconcile each business day with their cash on hand and expenditures, this can affect contracting's ability to make future purchases. The fiscal diamond is a machine, where if any of its cogs break, the system can easily fail.

3. Protocols

Pillar III of the Yoder TIPS model: Protocols refers to the published rules, regulations and policies that enable and control, in this case, the Marine Corps FOO/PA program (Yoder, 2010). Highlights from SME interviews in this section are program flexibility and responsiveness, policy variability and interpretation and policy-specific limitation.

a. Strengths

One strength of the current policies and procedures regarding the FOO/PA program is the relatively simple and straightforward nature of its implementation. Its processes are envisioned to be as such, allowing for smooth transitions between various operational settings. Whether in garrison or deployed environments, the procedures remain relatively the same, reducing confusion and enabling personnel to focus on their mission rather than learning completely new systems or protocols (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). This uniformity not only enhances operational efficiency but also helps maintain accountability and transparency, ensuring that all personnel follow the same standards and guidelines regardless of where they are stationed. The simplicity of these operations is a critical factor in their effectiveness, allowing for rapid execution and minimizing administrative overhead, which is crucial when managing resources in

expeditionary environments. We will discuss later on however, that this uniformity can sometimes be challenged in different MEFs and in a joint environment.

A major element that contributes to this streamlined approach is, as previously discussed, the 3-in-1 tool, which is integral for tracking purchases and providing electronic signatures. The tool simplifies the procurement process by consolidating multiple functions into one platform, helping ensure that transactions are accurately recorded. The ability to sign documents electronically accelerates approval processes, cutting down on time spent waiting for physical signatures and enhancing overall efficiency, especially in a disaggregated EABO environment (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

Another key strength of the current policies is their flexibility, particularly when it comes to deployment. The higher-level policies are designed to be adaptable, allowing for adjustments to suit varying local economies and deployment environments. This flexibility is crucial when operating in different parts of the world, where financial systems, local regulations, and the resources available for purchase in the local economy can vary significantly. By allowing the system to adjust to the unique challenges of different environments, it ensures that personnel are equipped with the tools they need to manage resources effectively, regardless of the specific circumstances. Whether working in a relatively stable, developed region or in a more austere, resource-limited environment, these adaptable policies ensure that procurement and financial management processes continue to function efficiently (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024). Though, in some ways, this can be interpreted as a negative aspect of the program, as will be explained later in this chapter.

Additionally, the option to use both cash and debit cards as payment methods provides further flexibility in the field, giving personnel the ability to choose the most practical option depending on the deployed environment. In certain environments, cash may be the most viable option due to limited access to banking infrastructure, while in others, debit cards offer a more secure and traceable means of conducting transactions. Despite the benefits, these dual options come with limitations. For instance, cash

transactions can be harder to track and more vulnerable to theft or loss, while debit cards may not always be accepted or may present other issues in more remote or austere locations (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024).

Finally, one of the most significant strengths of the current policies and procedures is their emphasis on responsiveness, which is especially critical in expeditionary environments. Designed to enable rapid procurement, the policies prioritize speed and efficiency, recognizing that operational needs can arise quickly and must be met without unnecessary delays. In environments like combat zones (Armey et al., 2022; Kniesner et al., 2024) or during Humanitarian Assistance/ Disaster Response (HADR) missions, the ability to acquire goods and services rapidly can have a direct impact on mission success (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

b. Challenges/ Limitations

Challenges discussed in the SME interviews include local economic constraints, policy variability and interpretation, administrative burden, the reactive nature of policies, restrictions on critical purchases, inadequate cash limits, security concerns, lack of risk-tolerance provisions and outdated joint policies.

(1) Local Economic Constraints

A notable challenge facing the FOO/PA program in expeditionary operations is the lack of debit card capability among some vendors, which limits flexibility or capability to this payment method. While debit cards offer a secure and traceable way to manage purchases, local vendors may not have the infrastructure to accept them, forcing deployed units to rely on cash. This reliance on cash introduces several financial challenges, including the risk of losses due to exchange rate fluctuations (Interviewee 1, personal communication, September 22, 2024; Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024). As currencies fluctuate, the value of cash can decrease, leading to financial inefficiencies.

(2) Policy Variability and Interpretation

Another challenge arises from the variability and interpretation of policies across services, which causes friction in joint operations. Each service has its own understanding and execution of fiscal policies, leading to discrepancies in how policies are applied. This inconsistency creates barriers when different branches work together in a joint operational environment, hindering coordination and efficiency (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024). Furthermore, the execution of the FOO/PA program is dictated differently across various MEFs due to local ECP procedures, as previously stated (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024; Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). Marine Corps-specific reporting requirements, such as daily submissions to the Treasury, further exacerbate these challenges by creating unnecessary administrative burdens (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

(3) Administrative Burden

The administrative burden associated with fiscal operations is another considerable challenge. One example is the cumbersome process of signing Standard Forms 44 (SF-44s) via email, which is inefficient and prone to delays (Interviewee 2, personal communication, September 20, 2024). The need to manually send forms for signatures and approvals creates unnecessary back-and-forth communication, wasting time and creating bottlenecks in the process.

(4) Reactive Nature of Policies

Finally, the reactive nature of current fiscal policies limits the ability to make proactive adjustments to meet evolving needs. Policies tend to be implemented in response to issues rather than anticipating future requirements or addressing potential challenges in advance. This reactive approach makes it difficult to optimize procurement processes and financial management strategies before problems arise. Additionally, the outdated Field Ordering Handbook adds to these challenges by not reflecting current or future operational realities. Updates to this manual are needed to ensure that the policies

align with current operational requirements and technological advancements, ensuring that fiscal operations are not hindered by outdated guidelines or processes (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

(5) Restrictions on Critical Purchases

One of the significant limitations of current policies is the restriction on purchasing essential items like fuel and food, which directly impacts self-sufficiency in EABO environments. These environments demand adaptive and self-sufficient logistics to sustain operations, but the inability to procure such critical supplies locally limits the ability to respond to immediate needs. These restrictions create logistical bottlenecks, forcing units to rely on more cumbersome and time-consuming supply chain processes that may not align with the speed or agility required in austere operational conditions. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024; Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024; Interviewee 7, personal communication, October 5, 2024). Though this limitation ultimately comes from the congressional appropriation of funds itself, which by law restricts the use of the funds, this does not mean that other specific appropriations cannot be used within the FOO/PA program, though to the authors' knowledge this is not in practice.

(6) Inadequate Cash Limits

The policy-imposed cash-carrying limits also pose challenges, especially in austere environments where electronic payment methods may not be feasible. The current limits are often insufficient to cover the needs of units operating in remote areas, where cash transactions are frequently the only viable option. These constraints can leave units underfunded and unable to fulfill their procurement requirements, especially in austere environments where cash resupply may be impermissible due to an inability to "pull" cash locally or to receive it from disbursing. Revising these limits to better reflect the realities of expeditionary operations would greatly enhance procurement capability and self-support (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

(7) Security Concerns

The use of credit cards in expeditionary settings may introduce significant operational security risks. In high-threat environments, credit card usage could compromise financial data or expose operational details, creating vulnerabilities that adversaries could exploit. Furthermore, the infrastructure required to support credit card transactions is often unavailable in remote areas, forcing units to rely on cash or alternative methods anyway. These security concerns underscore the need for policies that align payment methods with the unique demands and risks of expeditionary operations (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

(8) Lack of Risk-Tolerance Provisions

Another critical limitation is the absence of risk-tolerance provisions for unaccounted funds in combat scenarios. Unlike property accountability standards, for example, which acknowledge the inherent risks of combat environments, fiscal policies remain rigid, offering zero flexibility for financial losses incurred under wartime circumstances. This lack of adaptability creates undue pressure on personnel managing funds in such settings, where ensuring precise accountability may not always be feasible or practical. Incorporating risk-tolerance measures would bring fiscal policies in line with operational realities, allowing for greater flexibility without compromising overall accountability (Interviewee 4, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

(9) Outdated Joint Policies

Finally, the absence of a comprehensive joint policy further complicates fiscal operations in multi-service environments. The current reliance on vague guidelines from the FMR leaves too much room for interpretation, leading to inconsistencies in how different services execute fiscal operations. While this ambiguity may have been purposeful, allowing each service to remain flexible to their own needs and circumstances, these inconsistencies cause friction during joint missions, where a unified approach is critical to ensuring smooth collaboration and effective resource management. Updating and modernizing joint policies would address these gaps, fostering greater

cohesion and efficiency in multi-service operations (Interviewee 6, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

c. Other Notable Challenges/ Limitations for Consideration

While these challenges and limitations do not fit directly within the Yoder TIPS model, we feel they are noteworthy for consideration. They include the burdens of the role, language barriers and supply chain challenges.

(1) Burdens of the Role

Serving as a FOO or PA often presents significant challenges, particularly because these roles are typically assigned as "additional" billets. Marines tasked with these responsibilities often lack the specialized training or proficiency necessary to manage the complex requirements of fiscal operations. This is especially true in SIF or EABO environments, where personnel are expected to perform a broad range of tasks with traditionally limited support. The added strain of fiscal duties on top of their primary roles can lead to errors, inefficiencies, and burnout, reducing overall effectiveness in demanding environments. To address this, there is a critical need to integrate these roles more effectively into training pipelines and provide dedicated personnel for fiscal operations in expeditionary environments (Interviewee 3, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

(2) Language Barriers and Supply Chain Challenges

Operating in EABO environments introduces logistical complexities, including the possibility of a limited availability of reliable supply sources. Procurement becomes challenging when local vendors lack the capacity to meet military requirements or cannot provide consistent supplies. These limitations force FOOs and PAs to seek alternative solutions, often leading to delays or compromises. Compounding this issue are language barriers, which can significantly impact purchasing operations. Miscommunication with local vendors can result in incorrect orders, misunderstandings regarding payment terms, or even strained relationships that disrupt future transactions. Addressing these challenges would require improved pre-deployment training, including cultural and linguistic preparation, as well as possibly developing more robust supply chain networks

to support operations in diverse and austere environments, be they local during phase zero contingency contracting operations or external (Interviewee 5, personal communication, October 4, 2024).

B. AARS

1. Overall AAR Trends

The collection of general AARs from JLLIS resulted in several thousand reports when the key search words "Field Ordering Officer" or "FOO" were used. Of the several thousand reports, several hundred were published by the Marine Corps. However, due to limitations of the search features and filters of JLLIS, some resulting reports contained the words "Field," "Officer," or "Food" as key words identified instead of Field Ordering Officer or FOO in the context of a Tier 1 contracting officer type. A similar amalgamation of search results occurred when the key search words "Pay Agent" and "PA" were used. For instance, reports regarding service members "pay" in the context of salary resulted. Using exercise or operation nomenclature as the search words, such as "BALIKATAN" or "KAMANDAG" resulted in several thousand of results. However, it proved difficult to filter and refine the search to determine which reports discussed not only logistics and supply but specifically the FOO/PA program or micro-purchases. It proved more effective to use "Field Ordering Officer" and "Pay Agent" as key search words coupled with further manual refinement of the search field and filter.

Following further refinement and filtering of the JLLIS search field, several hundred reports resulted in total, only of which a couple hundred were specific to the Marine Corps. In most reports, the substance of the AARs revealed little to no information regarding the use of the FOO/PA program other than its existence, availability or recommending in the future the program be made available. Further details regarding the program's capabilities and limitations, implementation and integration are sparse. Furthermore, if there was mention of the program it only addressed FOO and the lowest tactical level-contracting support giving limited to no insight regarding the Pay Agent functions.

While the JLLIS database search engine resulted anywhere between several thousands to several hundred results for FOO/PA reports, a few hundred were actually relevant and specific to the FOO/PA program. Moreover, the majority of the reports relevant to the program were submitted by and regarding the Army and its use in Middle East Operations, such as OIF and OEF. Reports concerning Marine Corps logistics, supply, contracting and contracting support resulted when exercise names in which the Marine Corps explicitly participates were used. However, mention or discussion of the FOO/PA program were few and far between. Despite the sporadic and limited mentioning of FOOs and PAs, when the program was mentioned there were two pillars of the Yoder TIPS model that the observations and recommendations fell under: personnel and protocols.

a. Personnel

The reports varied in terms of whether the key issue was lack of sufficient personnel trained or lack of personnel sufficiently trained. However, an Army AAR regarding sustainment and self-reliability best encapsulated and articulated the benefit of training and maintaining FOOs and PAs in a unit. The AAR observed that FOOs and PAs provide units a self-sustaining capability during initial responses and arrival on-scene and in general in environments lacking more traditional contracting systems and networks (Stawick, 2017). Also, AARs emphasized ensuring FOOs and PAs are thoroughly and confidently trained during pre-deployment cycles to ensure units have sufficient FOOs and/or PAs available for deployments and enable further operational logistics and contracting support (Stawick, 2017).

b. Platforms

The second issue of concern mentioned frequently regarding the FOO/PA program in AARs covering operations or training exercises was related to processes and requirements for obtaining funding for FOOs and PAs to execute contracting support activities. Several Army AARs observed and discussed how there were delays in processing funds request or authorization for FOOs because of the lengthy process requiring several if not multiple personnel in different offices to review and approve the

requests (Moody, 2020). Furthermore, AARs from forward deployed Army units observed that often FOOs are restricted in their ability to provide basic logistic and sustainment support due to federal regulations concerning contracting and funding authorization (Killian, 2019). Limitations on FOOs and PAs contracting and purchasing basic sustainment requirements for units appear counter to the purpose of the FOO/PA program to provide contracting support for units when traditional methods and supply chains and networks are unavailable. Moreover, while it was recommended that FOO/PA considerations be included in Phase Zero planning, the long lead time required to correctly and effectively employ FOO/PA capabilities was not aligned with being an alternative capability allowing flexibility and higher responsiveness than traditional methods (Call, 2018).

2. Balikatan 2022 and Cobra Gold 2023

We collected two AARs internal to Regional Disbursing Office-Pacific (RDO-P) that reflected on the execution of contracting and pay programs and processes for the bilateral exercises Balkatan 2022 (BK22) and Cobra Gold 2023 (CB23). It is important to note that the AARs from RDO-P are specific to the disbursing community and the use of PAs refers to personnel whose MOS is "Financial Technician" or similar. Similar to how a FOO is a Tier 1 "contracting officer" with the lowest level of training and experience and the highest level of restrictions, a non-disbursing PA has minimal training and experience and restrictions regarding maintaining cash-funds. Furthermore, in theory it is expected that a PA will conduct the duties of responsibilities of the authority the role has regardless of whether the individual is a financial technician or not. This proves interesting when the AARs discuss shortcomings in training and resources for their own PAs who presumably have background knowledge, training, and prior experience, or at least more than a non-financial unit PA.

We also collected an information paper internal to 3d Reconnaissance Battalion (which also operates in the Indo-Pacific region) from 2022 that details their observations of using the FOO/PA program from a community and user not of the contracting, supply, or finance communities. Both the AARs and information paper provided more specific

observations and lessons learned regarding the application of FOO/PA program in operational environments at the tactical level.

a. Personnel

A consistent challenge across both exercises, as expressed by both AARs, was insufficient training and preparation for disbursing teams. According to the BK22 AAR, teams encountered delays due to unfamiliarity with DDS and insufficient pre-deployment training in realistic scenarios, particularly for Limited Depositary Account (LDA) procedures (Phan, 2022). Similarly, the CG23 AAR detailed how the team struggled with training gaps, including limited opportunities to simulate opening and closing business days and reconciling payments (Ryan, 2023). The AARs concluded that the shortcomings in training made it difficult for the disbursing teams to ensure their work effectively kept pace with the operational tempo of the exercise they were supporting. The AARs recommended that structured, scenario-based training is necessary to address these challenges, including the use of up-to-date systems and realistic simulations that mirror deployment conditions.

b. Platforms

Both the BK22 and CG23 AARs discussed equipment shortages as a significant issue. In the BK22 AAR, it was identified that the disbursing team lacked multiple DDS laptops to conduct work, which created inefficiencies, as personnel had to wait for one another to complete inputs before progressing (Phan, 2022). The AAR went on further to explain that the inefficiency extended payment reconciliation timelines and increased workloads during closeout (Phan, 2022). The disbursing team assigned to support CG23 faced similar constraints, also with only one DDS laptop available for use by the entire team, resulting in long hours and delays during the final reconciliation week (Ryan, 2023). Both AARs recommended that providing disbursing teams with additional DDS laptops and ensuring all necessary systems are fully functional before deployment would alleviate these problems and improve efficiency (Phan, 2022; Ryan, 2023).

In a broader context and understanding of platforms, both the BK22 and CG23 AARs discussed communication and coordination between disbursing, contracting,

budgeting, and the supported units as needing improvement. In BK22, the use of multiple platforms for submitting payment documents—such as the personal phone application Signal, email, and other informal channels—created version control issues and slowed down workflows (Phan, 2022). The use of email and informal, non-disbursing-or-contracting-specific platforms was necessary because the respective system and platform for each does not share data or information with one another. For example, 3-in-1 Tool data is not readily uploaded to DDS to the disbursing team's site to create and process a payment package. The BK22 AAR recommended that more tools, like the Exercise Payment Tracker (EPT) which is centralized but not mandated for use, should be mandated to ensure consistent document management, and that disbursing teams should be empowered to coordinate logistics directly with the requesting units to streamline operations (Phan, 2022).

c. Protocols

In both the BK22 and CG23 AARs, *protocols* were the pillar of the TIPS model that overlapped with personnel and platforms because it was either cited as the source of an inefficiency or the solution to improve efficiency. For example, the CG23 AAR cited the dependence on intermediary personnel, such as supply officers, for coordinating or providing transportation, as causing unnecessary delays in the disbursing team conducting business at local banks and the embassy in Thailand (Ryan, 2023). Also, security concerns were also noted in both exercises. The concerns are rooted in the DODFMR requirement that a commander and security police must be notified when any cash funds or financial instruments totaling more than $10,000 are being transported (Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2024). Furthermore, the DODFMR states that the commander requesting the cash is responsible to always secure the cash which, while not requiring armed escort, does incentivize and recommends that a commander consider the amount of cash and the security environment which the cash is being transported (Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2024).

The DODFMR is influential in RDO-P execution of disbursing operations; therefore, the BK22 AAR observed that PAs transporting large sums of cash faced inadequate security measures, including insufficient escorts and inappropriate vehicles

(Phan, 2022). Similarly, the CG23 AAR details similar security risks faced by PAs but then mitigated the risk by coordinating with banks to conduct payments securely on-site, reducing the need for armed escorts (Ryan, 2023). Both the BK22 and CG23 teams recommended that future disbursing teams and PAs should prioritize Electronic Funds Transfers (EFTs) over physical cash handling whenever possible and establish robust security plans for cash transport and payments when EFTs are not viable (Phan, 2022; Ryan, 2023). Additionally, the AARs recommended the use of pre-coordinated, secure payment venues to mitigate security risks and improve operational efficiency (Phan, 2022; Ryan, 2023).

3. 3d Reconnaissance Battalion Information Paper

The information paper written by a staff non-commissioned officer (SNCO) assigned to 3d Reconnaissance Battalion in Okinawa, Japan, provided an overview of the FOO/PA program's functions, capabilities, limitations, and application to the unit commanding officer. The paper was written following a deployment in tandem with the 31st MEU in the Indo-Pacific region during which proof-of-concept operations for EABO were executed. The paper was written from the perspective of and for the reconnaissance battalion which is unique concerning the FOO/PA program's use by units executing and proofing EABO concepts in a disaggregated environment.

The overarching observation of the information paper is that 3d Reconnaissance Battalion currently lacks the organic FOO and PA capabilities essential for rapid and effective support during distributed operations. The paper goes on to say that the shortfall significantly limits the battalion's ability to sustain itself during SIF and Early Entry Command Post (EECP) missions, particularly in contested environments (Esquivel, 2022). The SNCO highlights that FOOs and PAs play a vital role in enabling small, immediate purchases without the delays of traditional supply chains, a necessity when operating inside an adversary's weapon engagement zone (WEZ). However, the SNCO does emphasize that the administrative and logistical challenges exist, such as cumbersome training requirements, rigid purchasing rules, and limited cash-handling capabilities, which hindered the battalion's ability to fully implement this program (Esquivel, 2022).

a. Personnel

The point paper observes that gaps in FOO and PA appointment and authorization exist. FOO and PA are not standing billets nor standard qualifications readily held by members of a reconnaissance unit. The paper recommends that to address the personnel gap, FOOs and PAs should be assigned at the team and section levels, ensuring operational flexibility at the lowest levels (Esquivel, 2022). It is further explained that decentralizing these roles would allow units to adapt to real-time mission needs without waiting for higher command approval (Esquivel, 2022). Finally, it is recommended that a dedicated program manager to oversee FOO and PA operations, training and funding would provide the structure necessary for effective implementation of maintaining FOOs and PAs for the unit's use without impeding operational tempo (Esquivel, 2022).

The paper also addresses the training process for FOOs and PAs, asserting that the training for FOOs and PAs should be simplified and made more practical. The SNCO observed that the extensive certification requirements, including multiple courses and administrative steps, create unnecessary delays (Esquivel, 2022). The SNCO recommends that focused, scenario-based training sessions with operational systems pre-tested for functionality would better prepare personnel for field conditions (Esquivel, 2022). Finally, concerning personnel it is emphasized that realistic training scenarios and a standardized approach across the battalion would eliminate redundancy and better equip personnel in general to become effective FOOs and PAs capable of handling the challenges of conducting micro-purchases in distributed operations (Esquivel, 2022).

b. Platforms

Platforms were not discussed in the information paper.

c. Protocols

Another critical point to the information paper was the call to address restrictions and requirements on FOO and PA purchase types and fund amounts maintained (held). The paper advocated for loosening restrictions on the types of purchases FOOs and PAs can make, citing that purchases for items like subsistence or repair parts often require waivers, which delay operations (Esquivel, 2022). The SNCO recommends that 3d

Reconnaissance Battalion proactively obtain risk acceptance letters and mission-critical waivers from superior commands to empower FOOs and PAs to act more decisively during missions (Esquivel, 2022). The paper goes on to emphasize that deliberate planning and forecasting of likely mission needs being communicated to RDO-P would further justify increased PA fund limits, enabling more agile responses in the field (Esquivel, 2022). Additionally, it was recommended that clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should be developed to streamline appointment processes, pre-plan funding allocations, and clarify emergency protocols (Esquivel, 2022)

The paper further asserts that improvements in security and workflow are essential to the success of the FOO/PA program. The SNCO explains that handling and transporting cash in the field poses significant risks, which could be mitigated by equipping teams with regulation safes and increasing reliance on EFTs to reduce dependency on physical currency (Esquivel, 2022). Similar to streamlining administrative processes via SOPs, it was recommended that standardization for communication among FOOs, PAs, and RDO-P would also eliminate delays in accessing or using funds, ensuring smoother operations overall (Esquivel, 2022) The SNCO ascertained that collaboration with RDO-P to pre-approve PA holding amounts tied to standing Operation Plans (OPLANs) would further enhance readiness (Esquivel, 2022)

Finally, the information paper concluded that incorporating the changes regarding personnel and protocols would make the FOO/PA program an indispensable tool for the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, enabling it to adapt and thrive in contested environments. The paper emphasized that the FOO/PA program and its application to units like the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion aligns with Force Design objectives, enhancing a unit's ability to sustain itself, respond flexibly to mission demands, and operate effectively within the adversary's WEZ. By building a robust, decentralized, and agile framework, forward-deployed units can be well-positioned to meet the challenges of EABO.

C. SUMMARY

This chapter presented, discussed, and analyzed the information gathered from AARs and similar observational documents and from interviews with multiple SMEs. The information was categorized using the TIPS model pillars personnel, platforms, and

protocols. The interviews thoroughly expounded on the strengths and capabilities of the FOO/PA program. Moreover, the SMEs shared extensive insight into the weaknesses and limitations of the program as well as the challenges the program faces in being implemented to support *Force Design* initiatives. The AARs collected through JLLIS provided a broader perspective and observations regarding the FOO/PA program used by the Army, and it revealed the lack of published observations by the Marine Corps and its use of the FOO/PA program in EABO-like environments. The majority of the Army's AARs emphasize the shortfalls in training personnel to support the FOO/PA program and the restrictive regulations making the program less flexible and responsive than desired. The BK22 and CG23 AARs provided a unique perspective and observations by personnel intimately connected to the FOO/PA program. The personnel, platform, and protocol shortfalls and limitations observed by disbursing personnel supporting EABO operations has potential to be exaggerated when used by personnel without the training and knowledge of the financial community using the program. Finally, the gaps in the program observed by 3d Reconnaissance Battalion give critical feedback to how operational units understand and utilize the FOO/PA program. The unit's recommendations provide possible solutions to enabling the program to support units operating in an EABO environment.

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VI. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This exploratory research culminates by summarizing the preceding chapters and synthesizing the discussion and analysis into findings that address the research questions presented in the introduction. Next, the chapter offers recommendations based on the findings from the discussion and analysis to answer the research questions in a more applicable manner. Finally, this chapter concludes with areas for further research that may aid in further discussion and possible solutions to practically address the challenges of contracting and sustainment in an EABO environment.

A. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

This study began with substantial background and context of Marine Corps initiatives and the organizational structure of Marine Corps contracting and contracting support to include the FOO/PA program as it currently stands. Next, the study introduced current literature regarding the FOO/PA program. The literature review was structured using the Yoder TIPS model as a framework to categorize the current literature and influential documents and regulations concerning the FOO/PA program into the three corresponding pillars: personnel, platforms, and protocols. Data and information regarding the current and future application of the FOO/PA program in the Marine Corps was gathered through interviews with SMEs and AARs. Then, the resulting information was analyzed and discussed in detail using the Yoder TIPS model as a framework to synthesize and categorize the information to present it in the form of findings and recommendations for future considerations and study.

The central question to the study was: "Is the current FOO/PA program capable of effectively supporting and sustaining units in an EABO environment as desired by Marine Corps *Force Design* initiatives?" Subsequently, an additional question was: "If the current program is not capable of effectively supporting and sustaining, then what specific areas or ways does the program need to improve?" The findings and recommendation section of this chapter addresses specific challenges and possible improvements to the program to more effectively support and sustain units in an EABO environment. In short, the current FOO/PA program is structurally designed to be used at

the lowest tactical level with flexibility and response greater than that of traditional contracting and supply methods. However, specific challenges relating to personnel and protocols make the program more cumbersome than desired; therefore, the program needs to improve to be effectively applied to units operating in an EABO environment.

B. FINDINGS

The following findings are based on the information learned and collected through the SME interviews and AARs.

1. Personnel

a. Finding 1: Impact of Collateral Role and Staffing Limitations

The effectiveness of the FOO/PA program is negatively impacted by ongoing challenges related to staffing, training, and integration within the Marine Corps' broader organization and structure. One major concern is recognizing that FOO and PA are not formal billets permanently or continually held, but collateral roles assigned to personnel who already have primary roles, duties, and responsibilities within a unit. Moreover, the positions of FOO and PA have specific duties and responsibilities that impact a unit's capabilities during operations. The nature of FOO and PA being collateral positions implies that the personnel assigned do not have a high level of expertise in contracting or finance that the position may require in EABO environments where reach-back to expert resources is scarce. This overextension and lack of knowledge and experience increases the likelihood of errors and limits the ability of individuals to focus adequately on the program's requirements.

b. Finding 2: Staff Shortages

Regarding personnel who are the experts and support the FOO/PA program, staff shortages in key functional areas, including disbursing, contracting, and supply, compound these issues. For example, the contracting community struggles with high turnover among KOs and other contracting specialists, who often leave military service for lucrative civilian opportunities. Similarly, Staff Non-Commissioned Officers in contracting roles frequently lack the experience necessary for the complexity of their responsibilities. Shortages in personnel and a high turnover rate create systemic gaps in institutional knowledge and operational readiness.

c. Finding 3: Training Deficiencies

Training deficiencies are another recurring issue. Based on commentary from the interviews with the SMEs, online training modules, while accessible, are ineffective because of their lack of depth and engagement. They fail to prepare personnel adequately for real-world challenges, leaving FOOs and PAs reliant on trial and error once deployed. Scenario-based, in-person training has shown promise in improving the skills and confidence of FOOs and PAs, but such programs remain limited in availability and scope. Additionally, broader financial management and contracting support training across the Marine Corps is insufficient, particularly for personnel outside of the financial and contracting communities. This lack of foundational fiscal and contracting knowledge limits the effectiveness of FOO/PA teams and hinders coordination between general staff, contracting and contracting support personnel.

d. Finding 4: Command Understanding of FOO/PA Program

Commanders and planners also lack a clear understanding of the FOO/PA program's capabilities and limitations. This gap results in underutilization of the program's potential or unrealistic expectations during operational planning. Higher-level planners often struggle to integrate FOO/PA capabilities into broader operational strategies, further reducing the program's effectiveness. Finally, cross-training between key personnel who do possess prior knowledge, training and experience in expeditionary contracting and finance and other supporting areas is inconsistent, leading to gaps in coordination and underutilization of critical resources and missed opportunities to optimize.

2. Platforms

a. Finding 5: FOO/PA System Strengths, Integration Challenges and Operational Limitations

The systems and tools that enable the FOO/PA program are a strength but do pose specific challenges concerning integration and operational limitations. For example, a strength of the program's platform design is the continuity of disbursing systems like DDS between garrison and deployed environments allowing personnel to transition smoothly between operational settings without needing to learn entirely new platforms. Continuity between garrison and deployed systems fosters confidence and reduces the

learning curve, which is essential in high-tempo expeditionary environments. Similarly, the 3-in-1 tool is widely regarded as an effective platform for consolidating procurement and documentation processes by the contracting community at large. By centralizing key functions, it reduces redundancies and streamlines workflows, enabling FOOs and PAs to focus on mission-critical tasks.

Despite these key strengths, the platforms lack effective system integration and interoperability. The lack of interoperability between critical tools like DDS, DAI, and PD2 creates inefficiencies and increases administrative workload. Users are often required to manually input data, such as LOAs, which not only consumes time but also raises the risk of human error. Additionally, many units rely on informal, non-standardized tracking methods, such as individual computer spreadsheets, to bridge gaps between systems. This approach leads to fragmented record-keeping and limits the ability to generate accurate, real-time data for decision-making.

Connectivity issues further compound these problems and are of concern especially when considering EABO assumes operations in austere environments. AIS tools rely heavily on consistent internet access, which is often unavailable or unreliable in contested or remote areas. In such scenarios, units are forced to revert to manual processes, which are prone to errors and inefficiencies. Moreover, there is a lack of training on these manual processes, such as the use of SF-44 as a backup for electronic systems. These gaps leave units vulnerable to operational disruptions when digital tools are inaccessible. Equipment shortages, such as insufficient DDS laptops being available for processing, also compound delays and create bottlenecks in requesting, approving, and processing micro-purchases.

3. Protocols

a. Finding 6: Balancing of Operational Logistics Requirements and Legal Constraints

The FOO/PA program benefits from relatively straightforward and uniform protocols, which enhance consistency and reduce confusion across different operational settings. The use of tools like the 3-in-1 system for electronic signatures and transaction tracking further streamlines processes and ensures transparency. Additionally, the flexibility of higher-level policies allows for operational units to adapt to diverse local

economies and operational environments, which is critical in expeditionary settings. These strengths provide a solid foundation for the program's operations, particularly in environments with varying levels of infrastructure and financial system maturity.

However, these protocols also face limitations, such as the restriction on critical purchases, such as food, fuel, and repair parts, which are often subject to cumbersome approval processes or outright prohibitions. These restrictions limit the program's ability to provide rapid logistical support, particularly in environments where traditional supply chains may be disrupted or unavailable. Likewise, the cash-carrying limits imposed by current policies are often insufficient to meet the needs of units operating in remote areas for extended periods of time with limited reach-back. These constraints leave units underfunded and struggling to fulfill procurement requirements in environments where cash transactions are the only viable option.

b. Finding 7: Reactive Policies and Security Risks Limit Proactive Adaptation and Cash Management

This study also revealed the reactive nature of current policies, which often address issues after they arise rather than anticipating operational needs. This approach limits the program's ability to adapt proactively to evolving challenges. Additionally, PAs hand-carrying cash funds pose security concerns. The transportation of large sums of cash, as observed during BK22 and CG23, exposes personnel to threats, especially in hostile environments. While disbursing personnel efforts to coordinate on-site payments with banks during CG23 mitigated some of these risks, such solutions are not always feasible.

c. Finding 8: Policy Inconsistencies and Accountability Challenges in Joint Environments

Finally, inconsistencies in policy interpretation across different units and commands create friction, particularly in joint environments. Variations in execution across MEFs and other service branches complicate coordination and reduce efficiency. Additionally, the absence of risk-tolerance provisions for unaccounted funds in combat scenarios adds unnecessary pressure on personnel, who are expected to maintain precise accountability even in chaotic environments. Based on the SME interviews, the lack of

comprehensive joint policies further exacerbates these issues, as do broad guidelines from the DODFMR that leave room for interpretation and inconsistencies in execution.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are linked to the previous findings and substantiated by the commentary and recommendations provided by the SMEs interviewed and authors of the AARs and Information Paper.

1. Personnel

a. Recommendation 1: Improve FOO and PA Staffing, Training and Planning Integration

One of the most pressing challenges in the FOO/PA program is staffing and retention. To address this, ensuring FOO and PA billets are assigned with intentional consideration and incorporated into planning guidance within units frequently deployed in EABO environments is crucial. Intentional billet assignment and incorporated planning would ensure that these roles are not treated as low-level secondary duties but prioritized responsibilities. Additionally, retaining experienced KOs should be prioritized by offering targeted incentives such as career advancement opportunities and financial bonuses, which could reduce turnover and help maintain institutional knowledge.

To improve training deficiencies, expanding scenario-based, hands-on training programs is necessary. These programs should simulate realistic fiscal operations in austere environments and include cross-training between Fiscal Diamond personnel (disbursing, budgeting, contracting, and supply) and general staff to ensure smoother coordination. Furthermore, commanders and planners need tailored education on the FOO/PA program's capabilities and limitations to better integrate contracting and fiscal operations into broader operational plans. Finally, integrating fiscal personnel earlier in the planning process would ensure that financial requirements are proactively addressed, minimizing delays and improving mission readiness.

2. Platforms

a. Recommendation 2: Address Key Issues with System Interoperability, Connectivity Dependence and Equipment Availability

The interoperability of systems within the FOO/PA program needs significant improvement. Key tools such as DDS, DAI, PD2, and the 3-in-1 tool should be integrated

more effectively to automate data transfers and reduce manual data entry, which is prone to error. Investing in the development of middleware or APIs that link these tools would streamline workflows and enhance operational accuracy. Moreover, to address connectivity limitations, AIS tools should be upgraded to include offline capabilities, enabling units to continue operations in environments where internet connectivity is unreliable or unavailable.

Moreover, allocating additional hardware, such as DDS laptops, and ensuring that all necessary systems are fully functional prior to deployment would address delays and bottlenecks during processing caused by equipment shortages. In addition, communication tools must be standardized. Mandating the use of centralized platforms like the Exercise Payment Tracker (EPT) for all disbursing and contracting activities will ensure consistency in document management and improve oversight. Training on AIS tools and manual procedures, such as the use of SF-44 forms, should be comprehensive, ensuring that personnel are equipped to operate effectively when electronic systems are down.

3. Protocols

a. Recommendation 3: Revise Policy to improve Self-reliant sustainment in EABO Environments

The current purchase and cash-holding restrictions placed on FOOs and PAs limit their ability to respond quickly to operational needs, particularly in EABO environments. To improve agility, this research recommends proactively securing waivers for critical procurement categories like subsistence and repair parts, allowing FOOs and PAs to make necessary purchases without delay. In addition, cash-carrying limits should be revised to better reflect the operational realities of remote and austere environments. The security concerns surrounding cash handling need to be addressed by implementing robust protocols, including the use of regulation safes and vetted transport methods, as well as providing security escorts when necessary. Alternatively, expanding the use of EFTs would reduce reliance on physical cash and mitigate security risks. Similarly, digitizing approval workflows within the 3-in-1 tool would help reduce bottlenecks caused by manual processes, such as SF-44 form submissions, and overall minimize and streamline administrative burdens.

The introduction of risk-tolerance provisions for unaccounted funds in high-risk or combat scenarios would help alleviate pressure on personnel, aligning fiscal policies with the realities of operating in combat environments. Also, standardizing policies across all MEFs and routinely evaluating joint contracting and financial policies would reduce inconsistencies in fiscal operations across different units, improving coordination in joint and multi-unit operations. Finally, planning processes and guidance should emphasize pre-coordinating with local financial and contracting institutions and local vendors to establish EFT options, secure payment venues, and contract sourcing would further enhance operational readiness and reduce logistical delays.

D. WAY FORWARD

The Marine Corps stands at a critical juncture as it redefines its force structure and operational strategies to confront near-peer adversaries in contested and austere environments. The findings and recommendations of this study underscore the urgent need to modernize the FOO/PA program to meet the demands of EABO. By addressing challenges in personnel readiness, platform integration, and protocol modernization, the Marine Corps can transform this program into a key enabler for distributed and self-sustaining operations. Stakeholders and decision-makers within the Marine Corps need to critically examine and seek to implement necessary changes, ensuring that the FOO/PA program aligns with *Force Design* and recent initiatives and remains a reliable tool for tactical-level sustainment.

E. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following areas for further research were identified while designing and conducting this study. The list is not exhaustive but includes key areas that relate to this study. The areas for further research were identified based on their scope being beyond this study's focus or aim, or if they required substantial effort to warrant an entirely separate study.

1. Further researchers should analyze contracting data at and below the micro-purchase threshold to identify common applications of OCS and support activities in environments ranging in infrastructural maturity to identify further gaps in the FOO/PA program. Similarly, an analysis could

be conducted on data and purchases above the micro-purchase threshold during exercises and operations to identify key requirements to support and sustain units to then ascertain FOO/PA applicability.

2. Further researchers should analyze and evaluate possible internal controls and accountability concerns if the policies concerning FOO and PA authority and authorization to make contracts and purchases were increased. For instance, a future study could measure the risk of increasing cash-carrying authority in areas with less or weakened financial and contracting infrastructure. Or, a study could examine the legal ramifications of enabling fund authorization and transfer more accessible to unit commanders for FOO use and execution.

3. Further researchers should examine the interoperability of FOO/PA programs between the service branches to identify future means of employing FOO/PA programs and increasing efficiency of workflows for purchase requests, payment packages and subsequent reconciliations.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As the Field Ordering Officer/ Unit Pay Agent program is currently structured and used, does it adequately support Marine Corps expeditionary environments? Why or why not?
2. Are the policies and procedures applicable to the Field Ordering Officer/ Unit Pay Agent program optimized for mission accomplishment in expeditionary environments? Why or why not?
3. Are the Contracting, Supply and Disbursing functional areas sufficiently staffed, trained, and involved in the Marine Corps Planning Process to effectively support Marine Corps expeditionary operations? Why or why not? What experiences do you have with this?
4. Are the disbursing, contracting and supply systems (Automated Information Systems [AISs], tools, etc.) structured, integrated and used appropriately for mission accomplishment in Marine Corps expeditionary environments? Why or why not?
5. What changes would you make to the Field Ordering Officer/ Unit Pay Agent program in order to improve it (more efficient, more responsive, less administratively burdensome, etc.)?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to address or add?

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