

Heavy Deployment Schedule Limiting Marine Corps Training Time

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps is meeting its global commitments and national mission to be the ready expeditionary force but needs a reduction in its current high deployment rate to allow it to train the force for a possible future high-end fight, the Corps' top resource officer said Jan. 16.

With one-third of its operating forces currently deployed overseas, "our surge forces on each coast are ready to go now," and Marine forces "are responding and competing in every corner of the globe, providing critical deterrence, and when deterrence fails, they'll fight and win," Lt. Gen. Brian Beaudreault, the deputy commandant for Plans, Policy and Operations, said at the Surface Navy Association's annual symposium.

While giving a generally positive view of the Corps status, with aviation readiness improving and its expeditionary forces supporting the anti-terrorism mission and training with allies and partners, Beaudreault presented a long list of things the Marines need to prepare for the future.

Those requirements included increasing the self-protection and offensive capabilities of the amphibious ships, moving toward the goal of 38 gators, continuing experiments with alternative platforms, including the littoral combat ship as a possible troop carrier and armed escort, and improving its long-range precision fires.

It also needs to improve its capabilities in information warfare, cyber defense, "protected mobility" with the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle and Amphibious Combat Vehicle, the multimission group five unmanned aerial vehicle program called

MUX, and air defense capabilities.

Beaudreault gave significant emphasis to the growing threat from Chinese area-denial defense capabilities to the naval forces' ability to project power where needed, saying the Navy-Marine team must "maintain freedom of maneuver, leveraging freedom of the sea, using land-based expeditionary bases to hold adversary's assets at risk ... [and] deliver long-range precision fires from land and sea base to achieve sea control or sea denial."

While urging faster acquisition of amphibious ships, he said the Marines must do better with what they have and "need to increase the offensive lethality of amphibious warships to meet the contested environment."

He said the amphibious fleet "must integrate organic vertical launch offensive and air defense capabilities and reduce its electronic signal."

But when asked, he said he did not know of any current program to add vertical launch systems in existing amphibs or put them in the LPD 17 variant being planned to replace the aged dock landing ships.

Beaudreault said the Marines were addressing future readiness on two paths – first, to meet its statutory mission of providing ready forces, and then preparing the force to combat potential peer adversaries. The second path requires relief from its heavy deployment schedule, he said.

The Corps was operating at a one-to-two deploy-to-dwell rate, which he said was a "short-term decision made to balance modernization, satisfy global demand and meet the current requirement to regain readiness."

The current deploy-to-dwell pace "does impact the Corps' ability to execute a high-end combat mission" because of limited training time, he said.

If they added more people to reduce that deploy-to-dwell burden, it would create budget stress on modernization and readiness, he explained.

“So over time, we will need to reduce operational commitments in order to return forces back to CONUS [continental United States] and to get us into the desirable one-to-three” pace.

Talking to reporters after his remarks, Beaudreault said aviation readiness has improved after two years of increased budgets allowed an increase in depot maintenance, supply of spare parts and trained maintainers at the squadron level. He touted the F-35Bs for maintaining a high mission-capable rate on the first two at sea deployments.

And he said he was not concerned that the Marines would be unable to meet their recruiting goals with the current low unemployment rates, as the Army experienced last year.

“I have no reason to be greatly concerned,” he said. Having met their quotas every year for more than a decade, “we hope the past is an indicator of the future.”