

Berger: Lack of Amphibs Left AFRICOM with No Sea-Based Option for Sudan Evacuation



MEDITERRANEAN SEA (April 30, 2022) The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Arlington (LPD 24), center, and the Military Sealift Command Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oiler USNS Laramie (T-AO 203), background, sail through the Mediterranean Sea while conducting a replenishment-at-sea, April 30, 2022. Arlington, assigned to the Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group, is on a scheduled deployment under the command and control of Task Force 61/2 operating in U.S. Sixth Fleet in support of U.S., Allied and partner interests in Europe and Africa. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class John Bellino)

WASHINGTON – The presence of an amphibious ready group (ARG), with a Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) embarked, gives a

regional combatant commander an option to respond to a crisis ashore. When the United States government decided to evacuate its embassy in Sudan on April 23, last week, no ARG-MEU was available in the region.

Similarly, if the United States government had decided that projecting a force ashore in Sudan was needed to protect or evacuate some 15,000 Americans in Sudan, it would have had few options.

To Marine Corps Commandant General David. H. Berger, testifying April 2 before the House Armed Services Committee, the Sudan crisis is an example of the lack of a crisis response capability that the Navy and Marine Corps amphibious warfare forces, if nearby, could have provided to the combatant commander, in this case, Marine General Michael E. Langley, commander, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

To Berger, the crisis illustrated yet again why the nation's need for 31 [large and medium amphibious warfare ships] to provide the crisis response and deterrence capabilities needed by U.S. combatant commanders.

Berger was referring to the statutory requirement in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act for the Navy to sustain a fleet of a minimum of 31 amphibious warfare ships. Without such a force, there would be occasions when response would be lacking.

"We would have gaps during the year when we would not have an at-sea capability for the combatant commander when something happens," Berger said. "We would not be deterring; we would not be in a position to respond. In places like Türkiye or places like Sudan, I feel like I let down the combatant commander, because General Langley needs options. He didn't have a sea-based option. That's how we reinforce embassies. That's how we evacuate them. That's how we deter.

"It opens up risks for the combatant commander," Berger said.

"We have to have 31 [large and medium amphibious warfare ships] at a minimum; nothing less."