

Berger: Marine Corps Needs More Diversity — In Amphibious Ships



The Tarawa-class amphibious assault ship USS Saipan (LHA 2) steams alongside the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69). U.S. Navy photo / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman David Danals

ARLINGTON, Va. — The commandant of the Marine Corps said the Corps needs the Navy to broaden its family of amphibious warfare ships to create a more distributed, survivable force to operate in a future high-intensity conflict with a peer competitor.

Gen. David H. Berger, Sept. 24 speaking during an online interview by Defense One, said the three types of large amphibious warfare ships currently in the Navy's fleet — the amphibious assault ship (LHA/LHD), amphibious transport dock ship (LPD), and dock landing ship (LSD) — "have done great for us in the way that we needed to operate so far. But that's not the only way we're going to need to operate going forward."

Berger said that "those three families of pretty expensive, high-end ships are not enough. We need a more diverse family of ships in order to compete every day, in order to be ready for a crisis or conflict, hence the light amphibious warship [LAW]."

Berger is in the midst of redesigning the force structure of the Marine Corps with his Force Design 2030 plan to meet the challenges of future potential conflict with powers such as China.

"We know we need something that's smaller, that doesn't have as much draft, that can move us around from ship to shore or

shore to shore over great distances, but is affordable," the commandant said. "Whatever that turns out to be, it will broaden the portfolio and give us more tools. I need to give commanders the means, the mobility to move in a distributed operating environment. The [LAW], what ever that turns out to be, is part of that.

Berger noted that, "so far, within the Navy, within the Department of Defense, every single wargame for the past five months has borne that out. If you don't have that, they're going to know how you are moving around and you're easier to target. We've got to make it hard [for the enemy to target]."

The general said commanders "have to distribute the force first of all to give the adversary a lot of looks from a lot of different directions in every single domain. You make it very difficult for them to focus their strengths."

Berger also pointed out that medical facilities will need to be brought more forward in a high-intensity conflict to care for casualties. He also said protection of logistics and of command and control, which long have been taken for granted in the wars that the United States has fought over several decades, can no longer be taken for granted.