

Berger Says Supporting a Widely Distributed Maritime Force Will Be a Challenge



U.S. Marines load into combat rubber raiding crafts for a night mission at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., April 7, 2021. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Seth Rosenberg*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The biggest problem facing U.S. Navy and Marine Corps plans to deter great power competitors is how to supply a widely distributed maritime force in a contested environment, the commandant of the Marine Corps says.

With his Force Design 2030 plan, Gen. David Berger, seeks to reshape the Corps so it can operate and survive inside the area of operations of a peer competitor equipped with advanced manned and unmanned aerial systems and cruise missiles.

“For the first time in a generation, we have a strategic competitor and that is China,” Berger said May 12 at the McAleese Associates FY2022 Defense Programs Conference webinars. “I think our force must be lighter, must be more mobile, has to be more expeditionary. We’ve got to be able to operate from a variety of platforms.”

Marines will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations. Berger’s plan calls for both force structure and operational changes, including dispersing smaller and highly mobile Marine expeditionary units – carried by smaller, cheaper and more numerous surface vessels

“Of all the things we’re working on in the naval force, and narrowly within the Marine Corps, this is the hardest problem going forward: logistical sustainment in a distributed

environment, in a contested environment," said Berger, noting, "nobody has contested our supply lines in 70 years."

He added that this was an area where industry could help. The planned light amphibious warship (LAW), designed to complement and fill a gap in capability between the Navy's large, multi-purpose amphibious warships and shorter range landing craft, is "going to give us the organic mobility that we so desperately need in the littorals anywhere in the world," the commandant said.

He emphasized the driving force behind LAW's concept is mobility, not creating an offensive weapons platform. "Perhaps at some point it would make sense to integrate some type of naval strike missile on a light amphibious warship, that's not the driver," Berger said. "My focus is on the mobility of it."

He noted with its shallow draft, lower heat signature and organic mobility allowing it to remain forward deployed, the LAW gives commanders "the ability to move the force around in a littoral environment."

Unmanned systems in the air, and both on and beneath the sea will also play a "central, more prominent role" in the Marines, Berger said. "We're doubling the inventory of our unmanned aerial squadrons," he said.

Berger speculated that future platforms could be designed specifically for undersea warfare, carrying weapons systems, sonobuoys or sensor packages, and conventional amphibious ships with well decks might deploy unmanned surface vessels, possibly for a subsurface fight. "I think within a decade, half of our aviation, half of our logistics will be unmanned," he added.