

Expeditionary Warfare Director: Marines Will Be Sinking Ships in Future War

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine general assigned to the Navy as its director of expeditionary warfare says that Marine Corps forces will be more in support of the Navy than being the supported force.

“We’re going to have Marines out there sinking ships,” said Maj. Gen. Tracy W. King, director, Expeditionary Warfare, speaking Aug. 27 in the Surface Navy Association’s First Waterfront Symposium webinar.

King was referring to the Marine Corps’ plans to acquire anti-ship missiles such as the Naval Strike Missile to stage at expeditionary bases and engage enemy naval vessels with those precision weapons in what the Corps calls Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.

“Per the commandant’s [Gen. David Berger’s] guidance, we need to be an extension of the fleet,” King said. “It’s not, ‘What can the Navy do for the Marine Corps?’ It’s the exact opposite. If you just think of some of the missions that the Navy is going to have to do when she gets in close: fast FIAC [fast inshore attack craft] comes to mind. The Marine Corps can really help with [countering] that. If you get a Cobra [attack helicopter] on you, you are not getting away.

“Our examination of the coming fight is that it is going to begin in a very distributed fashion,” King said. “If we do come to blows with China, it’s going to be very confused for the first 30 or 45 days, but we must fight in a distributed fashion. ... It’s simply harder.”

King said that “one of the things the American joint force

does much better than its potential adversaries is that we don't culminate ... because of our logistic tails. If we have to distribute across an archipelago or wherever, that's going to become increasingly difficult, as is command and control.

"The Marine Corps' ability to project power over the shore stems directly from its relationship with the Navy," he said. "That's our center of gravity. What the Navy and Marine Corps team provides the Joint Force is the ability to do it at a time and place of our choosing, to use the oceans as maneuver space."

King said that distributed maritime operations "have all the benefits of mass absent the risks of concentration. ... That is going to be extremely difficult for our adversary to counter. We have to mess up the calculus of our adversaries. Being able to distribute and maintain the lethality that comes with the U.S. Joint Force is something we have not done normally. We normally concentrate to do that, and we don't want to do that in the coming fight with China."

King pointed to the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) being developed by the Navy as a key tool in achieving distributed maritime operations. He said the LAW is not meant to replace the large amphibious warfare ships currently in the fleet but is meant to enhance the ability of the fleet to conduct distributed operations.

"The LAW is going to be a lily pad that carries excess fuel, that can make water, that Marines can actually live on," he said. "I see them as part of the crew."

Regarding the larger amphibious warfare ships in the fleet, King said they need increased lethality, particularly the San Antonio-class amphibious platform dock ships.

"We owe that to our Sailors and to our Marines. We're working on that as well."

King said the Navy and Marine Corps will continue to deploy amphibious ready groups with Marine expeditionary units embarked as a “force of presence, not a force to take into high-end combat.”