‘Great Power Competition’ Drives Navy, Marines to Integrate Beyond Joint Operations, Berger Tells SNA



Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger speaks Jan. 15 at the Surface Navy Association’s annual symposium.

ARLINGTON, Va. — The strategy behind the integration of the Navy and Marine Corps is being driven by China’s emergence as a sea power, according to the commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps.

“The thing that has driven us to where we are right now is the paradigm shift by China moving to sea,” after years of building up its defensive forces and weaponry, Gen. David H. Berger said Jan. 15 at the Surface Navy Association’s annual symposium here.

“We can no longer afford for the Navy and Marine Corps not to be integrated,” he said, adding “It’s a must-do. Our naval force is unbalanced.”

In an era of global terrorism and asymmetric warfare, both services had different tasks to do that strayed from traditional fleet operations. However, for the next 20 to 40 years, with a rising China and a resurgent Russia creating

a new ‘great power competition,’ the tasks and the challenges have changed.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIyzZhQ8X9g&feature=youtu.be
A Sept. 6, 2019, memo signed by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Berger stated the services will work on a “comprehensive naval force architecture” and an integrated force-structure assessment.

The Navy has largely been a big ship, standoff force with long-range precision weapons. The Marines have handled a number of tasks such as counter-insurgency, infantry patrolling and urban and mountain warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s been years since most Marines have logged sea duty aboard ship.

Berger said he and Gilday are developing a force structure that provides depth “all the way forward and all the way back.” A standoff force won’t provide the deterrence needed in the future, he maintained. “The farther you back away from China, they will move toward you,” Berger said, adding that any forward projecting force must be able to switch to offense if deterrence fails. “We will not be given the chance to swap out that [deterrent] force for another force. A great power competitor will not allow us to do that,” he noted.

Deterrence is the underpinning of the National Defense Strategy, Berger told *Seapower* when asked how units like the 700 Marines rotating through training tours in Norway since

2017 fit into the new strategy.

“The forces that we have in Europe, and specifically in Norway, are part of U.S. deterrence against Russia or anyone else doing bad behavior. If that doesn’t work out on some future date, the forces that are in Norway and Europe have to be ready to fight immediately. They have to have the equipment; they have to have the training. They have to be ready.”

Asked about
the focus on China, Berger said, “I think the read of the National Defense
Strategy is pretty straightforward. What the primary focus is, in the primary
theater is not exclusive, of course, but it does prioritize. That’s where we
take our lead from.”