Marine Commandant Berger: Force Design is Top Priority



Gen. David H. Berger released a document detailing his vision for the Marines July 16. Gen. Robert B. Neller relieved his duties as 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps to Berger, 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps on July 11. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Sgt. Robert Knapp

ARLINGTON, Va. – The new commandant of the Marine Corps has made force design as his top priority as he moves to shape the Marine Corps for the future.

The "Commandant's Planning Guidance" (CPG), issued by Gen. David H. Berger July 16, lists his five top priority focus areas: force design, warfighting, education and training, core values, and command and leadership.

Berger said that changes will be based on "where we want the Marine Corps to be in the next 5-15 years. … We cannot afford to retain outdated policies, doctrine, organizations or force development strategies."

The CPG affirms that the Corps is preparing for operations in the event of a high-end fight.

"The Marine Corps will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness and prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations," the CPG said. "In crisis prevention and

crisis response, the Fleet Marine Force – acting as an extension of the fleet – will be first on the scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis and first to fight if required to do so."

> *Marines, today I released my planning guidance for the future direction of the @USMC. It will serve as the roadmap for where the Marine Corps is going, and why. Semper Fidelis. https://t.co/0w7b8YrqmC pic.twitter.com/kfmkAgbxGD*
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> *– Commandant of the @USMC (@CMC_MarineCorps) July 17, 2019*

Berger said the Corps "should take pride in our force and recent operational successes, but the current force is not organized, trained or equipped to support the naval force – operating in contested maritime spaces, facilitating sea control or executing distributed maritime operations. We must change. We must divest of legacy capabilities that do not meet our future requirements, regardless of their past operational efficacy."

He said that there is "no piece of equipment or major defense acquisition program that defines us. … Likewise, we are not defined by any particular organizing construct – the Marine Air-Ground Task Force cannot be our only solution for all crises. Instead, we are defined by our collective character as Marines and by fulfilling our service roles and functions prescribed by

Congress.”

Berger said he has “already initiated, and am personally leading, a future force design effort. Going forward, CD&I [Capabilities Development and Integration] will be the only organization authorized to publish force development guidance on my behalf. We will divest of legacy defense programs and force structure that support legacy capabilities. If provided the opportunity to secure additional modernization dollars in exchange for force structure, I am prepared to do so.”

The commandant emphasized the need to improve integration with the Navy. He pointed out that the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act removed the preponderance of the FMF [Fleet Marine Force] from fleet operational control and disrupted the long-standing Navy-Marine Corps relationship by creating separate Navy and Marine Corps components within joint forces. Furthermore, Navy and Marine Corps officers developed a tendency to view their operational responsibilities as separate and distinct, rather than intertwined. With the rise of both land- and sea-based threats to the global commons, there is a need to reestablish a more integrated approach to operations in the maritime domain. Reinvigorating the FMF can be accomplished by assigning more Marine Corps forces to the fleet;

putting Marine Corps experts in the fleet Maritime Operations Centers; and also
by shifting emphasis in our training, education and supporting establishment
activities."

He said that the
Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) will remain the Corps' principal warfighting
organization but that the three MEFs need not be identical.

"III MEF will
become our main focus-of-effort, designed to provide U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
(U.S. INDOPACOM) and the commander, 7th Fleet with a fight-tonight, standing
force capability to persist inside an adversary's weapon systems threat range,
create a mutually contested space and facilitate the larger naval campaign,"
the CPG said. "When modernized in a manner consistent with the vision above,
III MEF will be a credible deterrent to adversary aggression in the Pacific."

"I MEF will
also be focused on supporting the commander, USINDOPACOM and the commander, 3rd
Fleet," Berger said. "I MEF will continue to provide forces to USINDOPACOM to
build partner capacity and reinforce deterrence efforts and must be prepared to
impose costs on a potential adversary, globally. We will increasingly accept
risk with I MEF's habitual relationship with CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command];
however, 7th Marines is at present purpose-built to support CENTCOM

requirements; thus, I MEF will continue to support CENTCOM requirements within
the capacity of 7th Marines.

“II MEF will
undergo substantial changes to better align with the needs of commanders of 2nd
and 6th Fleets,” he said. “During a major contingency operation or sustained
campaign ashore, necessary combat power will be provided to the committed MEF
through global sourcing by the total force.

Berger said
the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) is “no longer has the same relevance as it
once had to the fleet; however, this will change. We will consider employment
models of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG)/MEU other than the traditional
three-ship model. We will accept and prepare for fleet commander employment of
LHA/Ds [amphibious assault ships] as part of three-ship ESGs [Expeditionary
Strike Groups] as desired. I see potential in the “Lightning Carrier” concept,
based on an LHA / LHD; however, do not support a new-build CVL [light aircraft
carrier]. Partnering a big-deck amphib with surface combatants is the right
warfighting capability for many of the challenges confronting the joint force,
and provides substantial naval and Joint operational flexibility, lethality and
survivability.”