Marine Corps to Shift Acquisition Strategies, Training for China Rivalry, Commandant Says



Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H. Berger speaks to Marines and Sailors during a visit to Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, California, on Aug. 27. Berger told a congressional forum on Feb. 11 that the Navy and Marine Corps are discarding development measures that have slowed the production of new amphibious ships and other platforms. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Olivia G. Knapp

WASHINGTON – To meet the pressing needs of the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are discarding development measures that have slowed the production of new amphibious ships and other platforms, Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger said.

"We're not going to do that," Berger said of past procedures where "the Navy and Marine Corps figure out what we might need, then we get with industry, then we go back and forth for a couple of years."

Instead, he told a Feb. 11 congressional forum on amphibious warships, "We have to accelerate production now. We cannot wait four or five years to begin." The requirements evaluation process is already underway, and it is teamed with industry to determine what is in the realm of possibility, Berger added.

Chairman of the Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition

> *Sam Perez spoke to coalition members and lawmakers this morning at our annual Congressional Forum, where he emphasized the importance of stable and predictable funding to maintain a strong industrial base. pic.twitter.com/HThiH0zNP6*
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> *— Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition (@amphibwarships) February 11, 2020*

When he became commandant in July, Berger said his top priority is designing a force that could meet the threat of strategic competitors like China, which is outlined in the NDS. His Commandant's Planning Guidance states that 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. His 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 – that can move their base of operations within 48 to 72 hours.

"The capability, the lethality of a forward Navy/Marine Corps team is the unique contribution that we have. This is what amphibious forces bring – the ability, at the times and place of your choosing, to put your forces where you want to, when you want to," Berger told the Capitol Hill gathering, which was sponsored by the Amphibious Warship Industrial Base

Coalition.

In his opening remarks at the forum, retired Navy Rear Adm. Sam Perez, the coalition's chairman, noted that more than 70 companies in 44 states and more than 250 congressional districts provide parts worth more than $1.4 billion for the construction of amphibious warships.

> *"We're not getting smaller for smaller's sake. We need resources, and when we shrink a little bit in structure, we're going to take that money and pour it into the Marine Corps."*
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> *Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger*

Two long-term studies — to determine how many and what kind of ships the Navy will need in the next five to 15 years and what kind of Marines and Sailors should man them — will be released soon, Berger said. A Force Structure Assessment (FSA) conducted by the Navy in 2016 called for a 355-ship fleet. A new FSA, known as the Integrated Naval FSA (INFSA), to include the new integration of Navy and Marine Corps personnel and assets, is expected to initiate a once-in-a-generation change in the Navy's mix of ships. Berger said the Corps' work on the INFSA is done, and he's waiting for Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Deputy Secretary David Norquist to complete their review.

In addition to the INFSA, the Marines have conducted their own Force Design Assessment to determine the size and structure of Marine end strength. That document also is awaiting review by Esper and acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly. In his

commandant’s guidance, Berger said he was prepared to reduce force structure in exchange for more modernization funding. The Department of the Navy’s fiscal 2021 budget, released Feb. 10, called for reducing the size of the Marine Corps by 2,100 to 184,100 active-duty personnel.

“We’re not getting smaller for smaller’s sake,” Berger told reporters after his speech to the amphibious group. “We need resources, and when we shrink a little bit in structure, we’re going to take that money and pour it into the Marine Corps.”