

Marine Force Design 2030: Reduce Tube Artillery, Increase Rockets, Missiles



Marines in an M1A1 Abrams main battle tank conduct a patrol during a predeployment training exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California. Force Design 2030 dictates that the Corps reduce its investment in heavily armored ground combat systems. U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Dalton S. Swanbeck

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The Marine Corps commandant has issued his plans for a major redesign of the Marine Corps' force structure by 2030, with substantial reductions in some venerable weapon systems and increases in new systems.

For example, traditional tube artillery is under the gun, as are tanks, but rocket artillery and precision missiles are boosted in the plan.

Force Design 2030, signed out this month by Commandant Gen. David H. Berger, is aimed at more closely aligning the capabilities of the Corps with the National Defense Strategy, from a priority of confronting violent extremism to "great power/peer-level competition," with emphasis on the Indo-Pacific.

"Such a profound shift in missions, from inland to littoral, and from nonstate actor to peer competitor, necessarily requires substantial adjustments in how we organize, train and equip our Corps," Berger said in the document.

"A return to our historic role in the maritime littoral will also demand greater integration with the Navy and a reaffirmation of that strategic partnership. As a consequence, we must transform our traditional models for organizing,

training and equipping the force to meet new desired ends, and do so in full partnership with the Navy.”

Berger, foreseeing flat future defense budgets, said he is “operating under the assumption that we will not receive additional resources, we must divest certain existing capabilities to free resources for essential new capabilities. ... With the shift in our primary focus to Great Power Competition and a renewed focus on the Indo-Pacific region, the current force has shortfalls in capabilities needed to support emerging joint, naval and Marine Corps operating concepts.”

He said the Corps is over-invested in heavily armored ground combat systems (tanks), towed cannon artillery and short-range, low endurance unmanned aerial systems (UAS) incapable of employing lethal effects.

Accordingly, Berger plans to, among other initiatives, to reduce the number of tube artillery batteries from 16 to five. These units are armed with the M777 towed cannon built by BAE Systems.

In contrast, the Corps plans to increase its rocket artillery batteries from 7 to 21. These batteries are equipped with the Lockheed Martin-built M142 HIMARS (High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System). The Corps intends to create batteries of anti-ship missiles such as the Raytheon’s Tomahawk Maritime Strike Missile and the Kongsberg/Raytheon Naval Strike Missile. These missiles will enable Marine expeditionary forces to operate in contested littoral environments.

“This investment provides the basis, over time, for generating one of the fundamental requirements for deterrence, and ultimately successful naval campaigns – long-range, precision expeditionary anti-ship missile fires,” Berger said. “This requirement is based on one of the more well-supported conclusions from wargaming analysis conducted to date.”

The Corps also plans to eliminate its fleet of M1A1 main battle tanks, divesting its “entire capacity of seven companies and prepositioned capacity,” he said.

“We have sufficient evidence to conclude that this capability, despite its long and honorable history in the wars of the past, is operationally unsuitable for our highest-priority challenges in the future,” Berger said. “Heavy ground armor capability will continue to be provided by the U.S. Army.”

Because the Corps plans to reduce its active-component infantry battalions from 24 to 21, its amphibious assault requirements will be lessened. Accordingly, two of the six amphibious assault companies are slated for the cut. The units operate the AAV7 assault amphibious vehicle and the new Amphibious Combat Vehicle, both built by BAE.

The Corps is looking at increasing force structure of light armored reconnaissance companies from nine to 12.

“While I have repeatedly stated that all-domain reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance will be a critical element of any future contingency, I remain unconvinced that additional wheeled, manned armored ground reconnaissance units are the best and only answer – especially in the Indo-Pacific region,” Berger said.

“We need to see more evidence during Phase III [of the study] to support this conclusion before engaging in an expansion of our existing capacity, or committing billions of dollars in procurement funds towards the acquisition of an Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV).”