Navy's 2021 Budget Cuts Marines Corps Funding, End Strength



U.S. Marines and a Japanese amphibious brigade simulate a beach raid on Feb. 9. The new 2021 Navy budget calls for an active-duty Marine force reduction of 2,100, but doesn't pare operational units. U.S. Marine Corps/Gunnery Sgt. Robert Dea

The U.S. Navy is seeking to shave $1.4 billion from the Marine Corps fiscal year 2021 budget request and to reduce the active-duty force by 2,100, according to new Defense Department budget documents.

The Marines' piece of the Navy Department's $207.1 billion budget request for fiscal 2021 amounts to $46 billion, down from the $47.4 billion the Corps received in the enacted 2020 budget.

See details of the Navy's proposed fiscal year 2021 budget here.

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) shifted focus from short conventional wars and protracted counterterrorism operations to "the high-end fight" and the re-emergence of China and Russia in a 'great power competition,' said Deputy Defense Secretary David L. Norquist, explaining the reasons for Pentagon funding diversions in a flat $705.4 billion topline budget.

"That means we had to make additional tough choices and major cuts in some areas in order to free up money to continue to invest in preparing for the high-end fight," Norquist told reporters at

a Pentagon budget briefing.

An MH-60S Sea Hawk lands on the dock landing ship USS Germantown. The number of amphibious ships, key to Marine Corps expeditionary operations, would stay flat at 33 ships, per the new Navy budget, with the addition of one amphibious transport dock ship and the retirement of one dock landing ship. U.S. Navy photo/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rufus Hucks

Total Marine Corps end strength dropped 2,100 to 184,100 active-duty officers and enlisted Marines from the 2020 figure of 186,200. Reserve strength remained the same as 2020 at 38,500 officers and enlisted Marines. The force reduction is part of "efforts to align and sustain our force, as described by the NDS," said Rear Adm. Randy B. Crites, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget.

The force cuts don't target operational units per se, Crite said, adding that they are "primarily focused on headquarters reductions. They looked for excess capacity."

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The Navy’s $17.2 billion aircraft procurement budget includes 10 F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing Lightning II strike fighters to replace Marine AV-8B Harrier jets. Seven CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters, nine MV-22B variants of the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and five more VH-92A presidential executive helicopters also are included in the Marine aircraft procurement budget.

The $2.9 billion Marine procurement budget also includes 752 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, a joint Army-Marine Corps program and the first full-rate production lot, 72, of the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV), which is phasing out Cold War-era Assault Amphibious Vehicles.