

Berger: Funds Reallocation Will Add Key Capabilities for Force Design



U.S. Marines load rockets into a High Mobility Artillery Rockets System (HIMARS) in 2017. The Marines have shown the system can hold naval vessels at risk and is broadening that capability. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Aaron James B. Vinculado*
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps’ top officer told Congress that the Corps requires three key capabilities to bring to pass the expeditionary force needed to counter threats of the future and support the naval and joint force. Those capabilities and modernizations and others can be paid for with internal budget reallocations, he said.

“First is long-range precision fires for sea denial and sea control,” said Gen. David Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, testifying 24 June before the Defense subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. “For several years we’ve proven that our existing HIMARS [High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System] vehicles can hold naval vessels at risk with ground-based anti-ship missiles. Through aggressive experimentation, we have further enhanced that capability.

“This year, we have successfully launched the [RGM-184] Naval Strike Missile from a modified Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, hitting a target at sea underway,” Berger said. “This system, which we call the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System – or NMESIS – is exactly the capability the combatant commanders are calling for to enhance their deterrence posture.”

Unmanned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) is the second of the key capabilities.

“In 2020, we began a transition to a mixed capability of long-range ship and ground-based unmanned aerial systems to include the MQ-9 Reaper,” Berger said. “The Reaper is a proven capability that will significantly expand our organic ISR and enable us to better support fleet and joint operations, including anti-submarine operations.

“We’ve also initiated a partnership with industry to develop a future, autonomous, long-range unmanned surface vessel,” he said. “That is going to significantly improve the reconnaissance capability of our Marine expeditionary units, or MEUs.”

The Corps also is investing in loitering munitions.

“These swarming aerial munitions, which employ automatic target recognition, have proven exceptionally lethal in recent global conflicts, most recently in Europe,” Berger said. “Our own tests have also demonstrated this technology to be effective, with five of five successful shots during testing. We plan to equip our infantry and reconnaissance Marines with this loitering capability, mounting those munitions on both ground vehicles and long-range unmanned surface vessels. We will make a final decision on vendors this year.”

Berger added that in the current budget climate, the Corps will pay for its Force Design 2030 initiatives by retiring some legacy systems and shifting the savings to new programs.

“We will self-fund our modernization,” he said. “To ensure the success of this approach, I will ask for your support in reducing the total procurement of some platforms commensurate with the recent reductions in our end-strength.

“The fact is, our Marine Corps is significantly smaller than it was a decade ago, about 24,000 Marines smaller,” he said. “That means we won’t need as many ground vehicles; we won’t need as many aircraft as we thought we did when initial procurement decisions were made decades ago. With the

reductions outlined in our Force Design report, I believe we will have sufficient resources to create the modern capabilities required for competition, deterrence and crisis response without a further reduction in our end-strength.

“That approach, however, relies 100 percent on this committee’s confidence on allowing the Marine Corps to retain and reallocate the internal resources we generate through end-strength reductions, cutting legacy platforms and right-sizing programs of record for new capabilities like the F-35 [strike fighter], the CH-53K [heavy-lift helicopter] and the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle,” he said.