

Navy, Marines Single Integrated Naval Force Means Sweeping Changes

The two senior officers who are leading the drive to design the future naval forces said they are directing a closely integrated Navy and Marine Corps force structure assessment and plan to review the initial findings on a rolling basis in future years.

Vice Adm. James Kilby, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities, and Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, Deputy Marine Corps Commandant for Combat Development and Integration, said they have been directed by their service chiefs to scrape the traditional separated force structure design process and develop a single integrated naval force.

A key element in that cooperative effort is the sweeping changes in the numbers and type of ships in the amphibious forces proposed in Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger's planning guidance. Ronald O'Rourke, the veteran naval forces analyst at Congressional Research Service, said, "If much of this is implemented, it would result in a once-in-a-generation change in Navy force structure." The scope of the potential changes also is shaped by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday's revision of his predecessor's "Design

for Maritime Superiority,” which emphasizes offensive capabilities, extensively promotes unmanned systems and demands affordability.

Those three and Michael Petters, CEO at Huntington Ingalls Industries – the Navy’s biggest shipbuilder – appeared in a panel at a Dec. 5 U.S. Naval Institute forum asking the question: “Are we building the naval power the nation needs?”

Kilby said the Navy’s force structure assessments in the past “were done pretty much in isolation” by the Navy staff. But the CNO and Berger said, “Turn that on its head,” and he and Smith “are creating that integrated piece,” which will be given to the systems requirements officials to flesh out. He said the first iteration would be finished by the end of this month and they will continue from there. The joint assessment team would remain and continue the process in a “rolling assessment, an ongoing analysis.”

Smith said, “We don’t have all the answers, but what we know is we’re a joint naval force. ... I’m in support of the fleet.” That would mean as the Marines develop new longer-range precision weapons, “I’m assuming my missiles should be able to shoot a ship,” he said. Kilby said they had to learn from the joint assessments whether “this force mix allow us to do things differently.” For example, he said, “If what the Marines do influences what happens at sea, I can change my plans.”

Petters and O’Rourke said the drive for a significantly

different force and the need to field new systems faster to keep pace with their peer competitors' rapid development could change the way the Navy designs and tests new ships, using more prototyping and accepting the risk of failure.