Reinventing Logistics and Mobility are Key Elements to Force Design, Generals say

Marines with 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment (2/5), 1st Marine Division, exit an MV-22B Osprey with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 364 as part of a training mission in support of Exercise Winter Fury 18 at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Dec. 7. U.S. Marine Corps / Lance Cpl. Nadia J. Stark

ARLINGTON, Va. – To meet the pacing threat of a near peer competitor like China by 2030 will require changes in Marine Corps platforms, equipment and, above all, changes in thinking about logistics and mobility, according to a panel of three-star Marine generals.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger's top priority for his five-year tenure is redesigning the force from its decades-long focus on countering violent extremists in the Middle East to great power, peer-level competition, with special emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region.

"We have to change by 2030, the year the decade of uncertainty begins," when Russia and China are projected to begin surpassing U.S. military advantages in technology, equipment and force size, Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration told the virtual version of the Modern Day Marine Expo on Sept. 22.

Smith, one of four deputy commandants and one assistant deputy commandant on a panel discussing what the Marine Corps will need from industry to accomplish the massive shift in less than 10 years, cited two major concerns. One is developing a combination of C5ISR with resilient sensing architecture that can operate forward deployed "in contact, in conflict, and

still pass data to the joint forces and to ourselves."

The other is long range lethal fires that can "reach out and affect an adversary, make them respect our presence" but with lightweight mobility "so that we don't overburden the naval logistics or joint logistics footprint." He added that "the overarching theme" for both concerns is mobility.

While the other deputies listed specific capabilities needed or in the pipeline for aviation, information technology and ground forces, a common theme developed about logistics and how to deliver supplies, equipment and information across vast areas of contested space.

"We have to lighten the load," said Lt. Gen. Charles Chiarotti, deputy commandant for Installations and Logistics. Competitors' long-range missiles and sensors have eliminated "the luxury" of taking days to deliver an iron mountain of supplies in a war zone. In fact, installations and infrastructures, once merely places where forces were trained and equipped, in the future will be "warfighting platforms from which we deploy from, but from which we need to maneuver," Chiarotti said.

"We're not organized to meet the future capabilities that we need for tomorrow," he said, adding that inexpensive, expendable – or at least, risk-worthy – unmanned platforms could be one solution for long-haul supply in a large, contested environment. Other problems are more complicated, however. In a GPS- and communications-denied environment, "We have to be able to reduce the signature that the logistics force brings to the battlefield," Chiarotti said.

Likewise, Deputy Commandant for Aviation Lt. Gen. Mark Wise noted that signature management was also an issue in his sector, noting that aviation has a transport and supply role, as well as air combat and defense. "How do I make myself hard to target if they see me, also, how do I keep them from seeing

me?” Sustainability is a key issue for aviation, Wise said. “We need to make sure that we are focused on the sustainment. How do I move fuel and ordnance? That is a critical enabler that we’re spending a lot of time focusing on.”