

Spencer Lauds Tight Integration of Navy, Marine Forces in 'Great Power Competition'

Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer extolled the determination of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps uniformed leaders to tightly integrate their forces to prepare for the emerging great power competition and said that effort would start with integrating the budget preparation process.

Spencer also endorsed Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger's call for a larger and more diversified amphibious fleet, including the "lightning carrier" concept that would use amphibious assault ships with dozens of F-35Bs to augment the aircraft carrier force.

"The Marines will be solely and intricately aligned with the Navy, and that starts with the POM process," Spencer said Oct. 30, referring to the program objective memorandum, which are the armed services' proposals to the Pentagon for the programs and funding they need.

America depends on her mighty Navy to defend her and to ensure open access to the world's oceans & trade with other nations. We were honored to host [@secnav76](#) Spencer for a frank discussion on the future of US naval power with [@Heritage](#) and the media. pic.twitter.com/HQjoKAsuwc

– Kay C. James (@KayColesJames) [October 30, 2019](#)

“This is integrated funding,” the secretary told a media roundtable hosted by the Heritage Foundation. “From the Navy view point, the Marine Corps is to be considered a weapons platform for the U.S. Navy, in the maritime domain and the multidomain.”

“The Marines are going back into the riggings,” Spencer said, referring to the Marines’ historic role as riflemen in the “fighting tops” of sailing ships to help the Navy in close-in fighting against enemy warships. The Marines have been engaged in a land war for 18 years, but “we’re changing our major muscle movements to great power competition.”

The reason for naval integration, he said, was due to the National Defense Strategy and “the Pacific theater, where we’ll be primarily focused ... it’s a maritime theater.”

Asked about Berger’s warning in his commandant’s planning guidance that the existing amphibious force was too small and the large amphibs too vulnerable to operate alone in the highly contested littoral waters around China, Spencer noted that Naval Sea Systems Command and the Marine Corps “weighed in on what the commandant said and what the options might be. ... I applaud the fact that we are opening up the aperture to make sure we are looking at the full spectrum of what’s available.”

Asked about the legal issues of using unarmed and civilian-crewed support ships to augment traditional amphibs, Spencer noted the

Navy already has changed some of those ships to the Navy designation, which would add uniformed sailors. "That's an option that we have. We have to get the cost per hull more manageable." Although the traditional amphibs are "great ships," he asked, "can we get more impact for the dollar? We have to explore that."

The secretary embraced Berger's proposal to use large-deck amphibious ships loaded with F-35B "Lightning II" strike fighters. He said: "Does it have the same strike capability as a carrier? No, it doesn't. But if part of the mission of the carrier is presence and forward deployability ... lightning carriers [are] a great option to augment what the requirement might be."

The secretary acknowledged that the Navy may not be able to reach its goal of a 355-ship battle fleet with the current and expected funding. "We will have 305 ships with the top-line funding we have, but that's not what we want." Addressing Congress, he added, "If you give us the funding we need, we'll go to 355."