

USMC Seeks to Jettison Some Weapons Platforms to Invest in Mobility, High Tech



Landing Craft Utility (LCU) 1661 deploys a Utility Tactical Vehicle from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit during CONTEX-PHIBEX, a bilateral amphibious exercise between the U.S. and Portuguese naval services, May 9, 2021. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / 1st Lt. Mark Andries*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps plans to shrink its force and divest itself of heavy weapons platforms such as tanks and towed artillery to pay for new investments in cyber space, artificial intelligence and high mobility, according to new budget documents and briefings.

The Department of the Navy, including the Marine Corps, is seeking \$211.7 billion from Congress in its fiscal 2022 budget request. The Marines would get \$47.98 billion, an increase of 6% over their 2021's enacted budget, "with real growth in their operational, maintenance and procurement accounts," Adm. John Gubleton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, told a Pentagon briefing at the Defense Department budget rollout May 28.

Overall, the Navy "realigned tens of billions of dollars towards higher priority programs and divested of legacy capabilities," Gubleton said. For the Marine Corps those divestments include the Corps' Abrams main battle tanks and towed artillery, to pay in part for a lighter, swifter widely dispersed force with the right skills for future challenges such as distributed operations, crisis response, and electronic, information and cyber warfare, according to budget documents.

Force Design

As part of that modernization, included in the Force Design 2030 plan announced in March 2020, the current budget request calls a reduction of 2,700 enlisted Marines, from 159,716 in 2021 to 156,650 in fiscal 2022. With the addition of 366 new officers to the existing officer corps, the total force in fiscal 2022 would be 178,500.

In the months leading up to the budget announcement, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger has stressed the Marines are divesting 20th century weaponry, like main battle tanks and towed artillery, to make room for capabilities that are unique to the threat posed by China, which Pentagon leadership has identified as the number one pacing challenge, a near-peer competitor that is catching up. But Berger has also stressed the Marine Corps has to be ready for other contingencies like natural disaster relief and rapid response across the globe.

“We’re willing to trade things like heavy armor for capabilities I think are unique to the Marine Corps, that provide a unique contribution to the combatant commander to the Joint Force,” Berger told a live-streamed forum at the Brookings Institution 10 days before the budget release. “And that is the expeditionary, the amphibious, the parts that we do better than anybody else.”

Berger said he was “willing to trade capacity, end strength, for quality,” adding, “we’ll have a slightly smaller Marine Corps in terms of end strength, but they will be more senior and better trained. So that’s a trade I’m willing to make.”



U.S. Marine Warrant Officer Zachary DeLong, a defensive cyber weapons officer with 7th Communication Bn., III Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group, demonstrates Defensive Cyberspace Operations-Internal Defensive Measures capabilities during a virtual training session with members of the Philippine Marine Corps on Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan, April 19, 2021. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Nicholas Filca*

Procurement

The fiscal 2022 request includes \$3 billion in procurements, up from \$2.7 billion enacted in 2021, including key Marine Corps development programs such as the Ground Based Anti-Ship Missile (GBASM), Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar, CH-53K King Stallion helicopter and the Amphibious Combat Vehicle.

Procurement requests include 17 short take off and vertical landing F-35B Lightning II joint strike fighter aircraft and six KC-130 aerial refueling tankers.

The request calls for replacing the CH-53 Sea Stallion, the ship-board compatible heavy-lift helicopter the Marines have been operating since the early 1980s, with the CH-53K King Stallion. The fiscal 2022 request seeks nine King Stallions.

The fiscal 2022 request would procure 613 Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) vehicles, 139 less than fiscal 2021, and associated kits. The kits will support the baseline vehicle by providing the warfighter the ability to augment the vehicle's configuration in order to respond to environmental conditions or threat situations. Kit procurement provides up to 75 individual kit options.

For the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, which will replace the legacy Assault Amphibious Vehicle in the Assault Amphibious battalions, the request is for a second full-rate production lot of 92 vehicles (20 more than FY 2021), plus procurement of related items such as production support, systems engineering/program management, engineering change orders, government furnished equipment, and integrated logistics support.

Fiscal 2022 funding seeks eight Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar (G/ATOR) systems as well as the initiation of radar decoy procurement capabilities to support air defense, air surveillance, and counterbattery/target acquisition.

The Marines are asking for \$47.9 million to begin the procurement of the initial capacity Naval Strike Missiles in support of the GBASM/Remotely Operated Ground Unit Expeditionary (ROGUE) Fires Vehicle for the Marine Littoral Regiment.

For the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, a C-130 transportable, wheeled, indirect fire, rocket/missile launcher, the Marines are also seeking funding to procure launchers, carriers and equipment to support the continued expansion of marine Corps launcher capacity, and the procurement of Reduced Range Practice Rockets for tactical training, classroom training, and handling exercises.