Marine Corps Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) and Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC): Background and Issues for Congress

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**Summary**

On January 6, 2011, after spending approximately $3 billion in developmental funding, the Marine Corps cancelled the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) program due to (1) poor reliability demonstrated during operational testing and (2) excessive cost growth. Because the EFV was intended to replace the 40-year-old Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), the Pentagon pledged to move quickly to develop a “more affordable and sustainable” vehicle to replace the EFV. The Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) is intended to replace the AAV, incorporating some EFV capabilities but in a more practical and cost-efficient manner. In concert with the ACV, the Marines are developing the Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC) to serve as a survivable and mobile platform to transport Marines when ashore. The MPC is intended to have a “robust” swim capability, which will permit it to transport Marines ashore. Both vehicles are intended to play a central role in future Marine amphibious operation.

Both vehicles are in the preliminary stages of development, with the ACV scheduled to enter service between FY2020 and FY2022 and the MPC in FY2020. The Marines currently plan on acquiring 573 ACVs and 579 MPCs. Total program and per vehicle costs have not yet been made public, with the Marines citing ongoing affordability and vehicle mix studies as the primary reason why definitive costs are not yet available.

While Congress has generally been supportive of these programs, congressional defense committees have been concerned about the viability of the programs and how they contribute to future Marine Corps operations. Current legislative proposals call for an annual Comptroller General report on the ACV acquisition program and a study on vehicle fleet mix needed to support Marine amphibious operations. In addition to the ACV/MPC fleet mix issue, Congress has expressed an interest in total program costs so that the overall budget implications of these two programs can be examined in greater detail. This report will be updated.
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Background

U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 5063, United States Marine Corps: Composition and Functions, dated October 1, 1986, states:

The Marine Corps will be organized, trained and equipped to provide an amphibious and land operations capability to seize advanced naval bases and to conduct naval land campaigns.

In this regard, the Marines are required by law to have the necessary equipment to conduct amphibious operations and land operations. The ACV and MPC are considered integral systems by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Marine Corps to meet this legal requirement.

On January 6, 2011, after spending approximately $3 billion in developmental funding, the Marine Corps—with “encouragement” from DOD—cancelled the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) program. The EFV was intended to replace the 40-year-old Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), which currently transports Marines from ships to shore under hostile conditions. The EFV was cancelled due to excessive cost growth and poor performance in operational testing. Recognizing the need to replace the AAV, the Pentagon pledged to move quickly to develop a “more affordable and sustainable” vehicle to take the place of the EFV. The Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) is intended to replace the AAV, incorporating some EFV capabilities but in a more practical and cost-efficient manner.

In concert with the ACV, the Marines are developing the Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC) to serve as a survivable and mobile platform to transport Marines when ashore. At present, the Marines do not have a wheeled armored fighting vehicle that can operate as a dedicated infantry carrier with Marine maneuver forces inland. The MPC is intended to have a “robust” swim capability, which will permit it to transport Marines ashore. Because of a perceived amphibious “redundancy,” some have questioned the need for both the ACV and MPC.

With the Marines involved in decades-long land conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and proliferating anti-access technologies such as guided missiles, some analysts questioned if the Marines would ever again be called on to conduct a large-scale amphibious assault operation. In response to these questions and the perceived need to examine the post-Iraq and Afghanistan Marine Corps, the Department of the Navy and DOD studied the requirement to conduct large-scale amphibious operations and in early 2012 released a strategic vision for how amphibious operations will be conducted in the future. The primary assertion of this study is that the Marine Corps’ and Navy’s amphibious capabilities serve a central role in the defense of the global interests of a maritime nation. The need to maintain an amphibious assault capability is viewed by Marine Corps leadership as establishing the requirement for the ACV and MPC.

Significance for Congress

Congress is responsible for authorizing and appropriating funds for all weapon systems programs, including the ACV and the MPC. In its oversight role, Congress is concerned about how the ACV and MPC would enable the Marines to conduct not only amphibious operations but also operations ashore. Given past problems associated with EFV development, as well as current and
future budgetary constraints, Congress is actively looking at the necessity, viability, and affordability of both programs.

Why the Marines Want These Vehicles

ACV

At present, the Marines use the AAV-7A1 series amphibious assault vehicle to move Marines from ship to shore. The Marines have used the AAV since 1971 and will continue to use it until replaced by the ACV or a similar vehicle. Over the years, the Marines claim the AAV has become increasingly difficult to operate, maintain, and sustain. As weapons technology and threat capabilities have evolved over the preceding four decades, the AAV—despite upgrades—is viewed as having significant operational deficiencies in mobility, firepower, and survivability. The AAV’s two-mile ship-to-shore range is viewed by many as a significant survivability issue not only for the vehicle itself but also for naval amphibious forces.

MPC

While the AAV has some armor protection and can operate inland to a limited extent, it is not intended for use as an infantry combat vehicle. The Marines do have the LAV-25, Light Armored Vehicle-25, an eight-wheeled armored vehicle that carries a crew of three and six additional Marines. The LAV-25 is armed with a 25 mm chain gun and a 7.62 mm machine gun and is also fully amphibious. The LAV-25 has been in service since 1983. According to the Marine Program Executive Office (PEO) Land Systems, the LAV is not employed as an armored personnel carrier and usually carries a four-person Marine scout/reconnaissance team in addition to its crew. In this regard, the MPC is viewed as necessary by Marine leadership for the transport and enhanced armor protection of Marine infantry forces.

Intended Operational Capabilities

ACV

The Marines’ Request for Information (RFI) to industry provides an overview of the operational requirements for the ACV. These requirements include the following:

- The proposed vehicle must be able to self-deploy from amphibious shipping and deliver a reinforced Marine infantry squad (17 Marines) from a launch distance at or beyond 12 miles with a speed of not less than 8 knots in seas with 1-foot waves.

2 Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from the Amphibious Vehicle Request for Information (RFI) issued by the Marine Corps Systems Command on February 11, 2011.
3 The Federal Acquisition Regulation defines an RFI as “a document used to obtain price, delivery, other market information, or capabilities for planning purposes when the Government does not presently intend to issue a solicitation. [FAR 15.202(e)].”
significant wave height and must be able to operate in seas up to 3-foot
significant wave height.

- The vehicle must be able to maneuver with the mechanized task force for sustained operations ashore in all types of terrain. The vehicle’s road and cross-country speed as well as its range should be greater than or equal to the M-1A1 Tank.

- The vehicle’s protection characteristics should be able to protect against direct and indirect fire and mines and improvised explosive device (IED) threats.

- The vehicle should be able to accommodate command and control (C2) systems that permit it to operate both at sea and on land. The vehicle, at a minimum, should have a stabilized machine gun in order to engage enemy infantry and light vehicles.

MPC

The Marine Corps’ Request for Information (RFI) to industry provides an overview of the operational requirements for the MPC. These requirements include the following:

- The vehicle must accommodate nine Marines and two crew members and have a “robust tactical swim capability (shore-to-shore [not designed to embark from an amphibious ship]) and be capable of operating at 6 knots in a fully developed sea.”

- The vehicle must be able to operate on land with M-1A1 Tanks in mechanized task forces across the Marine Corps’ mission profile.

- The vehicle shall provide protection for the occupants from the blasts, fragments, and incapacitating effects of attack from kinetic threats, indirect fire, and improvised explosive devices and mines.

- The vehicle shall be capable of firing existing Marine anti-structure and anti-armor missiles and should be able to accommodate existing command and control (C2) systems.

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4 Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from Annex A: Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC) Family of Vehicles (FOV) Requirements Set to the Marine Personnel Carrier Request for Information (RFI), February 17, 2011.

5 The Federal Acquisition Regulation defines an RFI as “a document used to obtain price, delivery, other market information, or capabilities for planning purposes when the Government does not presently intend to issue a solicitation. [FAR 15.202(e)].”

Is There a Need for a Marine Corps Amphibious Assault Capability?

As previously noted, Title 10 requires the Marines to have an amphibious and land operations capability. Marine involvement in protracted land campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and the growing acquisition of anti-access technologies, such as guided missiles, by both state and non-state actors, led some influential military thinkers to question if the Marines would ever again be called upon to conduct large-scale amphibious assault operations. In a May 2010 speech, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted rogue nations and non-state movements such as Hezbollah possessed sophisticated anti-ship guided missiles, such as the Chinese-designed C-802, which could destroy naval ships and force them to stay far off shore, thereby making an amphibious assault by Marines highly dangerous. These and similar pronouncements by some defense analysts led to questioning the need for dedicated amphibious assault capabilities in light of growing “anti-access” technologies and weapon systems available to both hostile nations and non-state actors. This debate resulted in a series of DOD and academic studies examining the need for an amphibious assault capability.

In early 2012, DOD began publishing the results of studies and supporting concepts that it asserted affirmed the need for the Marine Corps to maintain an amphibious assault capability. In March 2012, the Army and Marine Corps issued *Gaining and Maintaining Access: An Army-Marine Corps Concept*, which expressed the views of the two services on how they would project and sustain military power world-wide in the face of growing challenges to access and entry. The two services note:

> Marine Corps forces embarked on amphibious shipping are specifically designed to provide multi-domain capabilities that are employed from the sea. U.S. Army forces may also operate from the sea in some scenarios. Sea-based forces utilize littoral maneuver (via surface and/or vertical means) to exploit gaps and seams in enemy defenses, deceive adversaries, and maneuver directly to key objectives ashore.

In April 2012, the Marine Corps published the results of an Amphibious Capabilities Working Group study on naval amphibious capability. The study, *Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century: Strategic Opportunity and a Vision for Change*, contends the United States is a maritime nation with critical maritime interests, noting 90% of global commerce that travels by sea is most vulnerable where sea meets land in the littorals. The study further finds “for a maritime nation with global interests, a minimal two brigade amphibious force represents a sound investment in ensuring access for the rest of the joint force.” While the study did not explicitly call for the

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8 Ibid.
9 Information in this section was taken from “Gaining and Maintaining Access: An Army-Marine Corps Concept,” authored by the United States Army’s Army Capabilities Integration Center and the United States Marine Corps Marine Corps Combat Development Command, March 2012.
10 Ibid., pp 9-10.
12 Ibid., p. 12.
development of the ACV or MPC—the study recommendations are characterized as resource-informed, program-neutral—the ACV and MPC are used in the study for evaluating the ability to project power ashore. While large-scale, World War II-type amphibious operations might no longer be the norm, the study suggests there are other roles for the ACV and MPC. Noting that emerging battlefield capabilities could mean that small teams might now have the ability to generate effects once associated with larger forces, the Marines propose that company landing teams (CLTs) might now be a more appropriately sized force for most amphibious operations. CLTs are viewed as being small enough to be inserted in a single wave but large enough to provide a capable force immediately. Another alternative to large scale amphibious operations are small-scale amphibious raids described as “an historical forte of the Marine Corps.” These raid forces go ashore only for the duration of the operation and then return to the sea. These raids could be useful in denying terrorist sanctuary, securing potential weapons of mass destruction (WMD) sites, destroying pirate safe havens, or destroying threat capabilities in port. In this sense, Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century: Strategic Opportunity and a Vision for Change might be viewed as redefining thinking about the role of amphibious operations and making an argument for the need for the ACV and MPC.

Program Information

ACV Acquisition Strategy

The ACV is currently in the System Development and Design (SDD) phase. Planned FY2013 program activities include a variety of system design and developmental efforts, including conducting survivability and mine blasting initiatives and technology demonstration and integration efforts. The Marines also plan to begin ACV prototype design and development with two contractors and perform hull survivability demonstrator design build and test support. The Marines’ acquisition strategy for the ACV involves leveraging mature technological capabilities that were acquired as part of EFV development, which, in a sense, suggests the ACV program is not a “new start” in the sense the MPC program will be. Because of previous work on the EFV, it has been suggested that the Marines might skip the Technology Development phase of the ACV acquisition process.

13 Ibid., p. 48.
14 Ibid., p. 49.
15 Ibid.
16 Unless otherwise noted, information in was section is taken from information provided to CRS by the Marine Corps Office of the Program Manager for Advanced Amphibious Assault and from the Department of the Navy’s Fiscal Year 2013 President’s Budget Submission Justification Books Volume 2 (ACV) and Volume 5 (MPC), February 2012.
17 Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from information provided to CRS by the Marine Corps Office of the Program Manager for Advanced Amphibious Assault and from the Department of the Navy’s Fiscal Year 2013 President’s Budget Submission Justification Books Volume 2 (ACV) and Volume 5 (MPC), February 2012.
18 According to the Defense Acquisition University Glossary of Defense Acquisition Acronyms and Terms, 13th Edition, November 2009, SDD involves mature system development, integration, and demonstration to support Milestone C decisions and the conduct of Live Fire Test and Evaluation (LFT&E) and Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) of production representative articles. Milestones are the points at which a recommendation is made and approval sought regarding starting or continuing an acquisition program (i.e., proceeding to the next phase). Milestone C is the decision point that that approves entry into the Production and Deployment (P&D) phase.
19 According to the Defense Acquisition University Glossary of Defense Acquisition Acronyms and Terms, 13th edition...
MPC Acquisition Strategy\textsuperscript{21}

The MPC is in the SDD phase as well. The long-term acquisition strategy for the MPC is described in the Navy’s FY2013 Budget Justification:

The Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC) program will utilize Full and Open competition for [Engineering and Manufacturing Development]\textsuperscript{22} EMD. The MPC is a family of vehicles consisting of a personnel carrier, a command and control platform and a maintenance and recovery vehicle. A source selection will be held to select up to two contractors. Each of these contractors will provide three prototype personnel carrier vehicles that will be subjected to Government evaluation. The results of this evaluation will be used to down select to one prime provider of MPC and support a Milestone Decision. The results of the EMD efforts will be used to support a Milestone C Decision as well as determine the Low Rate Initial Production manufacturer.\textsuperscript{23}

How Many ACVs and MPCs Do the Marines Intend to Procure?

According to Marine officials, the Marines intend to procure 573 ACVs and 579 MPCs.

When Are These Vehicles Scheduled to Enter Service?

The ACV is scheduled to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC)\textsuperscript{24} between FY2020 and FY2022, depending on the outcome of the Analysis of Alternatives (AoA)\textsuperscript{25} and final acquisition plans. The MPC is scheduled to achieve IOC in FY2022.
What Are the Estimated Total Program and Per Vehicle Costs?

According to Marine officials, “Per vehicle and total program costs will be informed by the cost studies conducted as part of the recently completed Analyses of Alternatives (AoA). There are various affordability courses that are being looked at as part of the Marine Corps overall combat vehicle mix. Those analyses are all pre-decisional and have not yet been briefed to senior officials.”

A Second Look at ACV Requirements and the Proposed Way Ahead

Commandant of the Marine Corps General James Amos has reportedly decided to “take a second look” at the results of the AoA before formally presenting the requirements to Navy leadership and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. General Amos noted that he “wants to make sure we’re not trying to build something with either capabilities we don’t need or can’t afford.” He intends to make sure requirements are “locked in” before proceeding any further. The current plan is for the Marines to complete the refinement of ACV capabilities, and then go to the Secretary of the Navy and the Office of the Secretary of Defense with the finalized requirements. Once this is completed, the Marines intend to release a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) for the ACV.

Postponement of ACV DOD Review

A Defense Acquisition Board meeting previously scheduled for November 2012, which was expected to approve the release of RFPs for the ACV, has reportedly been delayed until 2013. This postponement is attributed to the Marines re-evaluating ACV requirements. Marine leaders are said to be debating if the ACV needs to have a high water speed. The pursuit of this high-speed capability adds complexity, limits industrial competition, and raises reliability and cost concerns—factors that contributed to the cancellation of the EFV. Beyond these concerns, developers contend if a high-speed capability becomes a requirement, then the Marines would be financially hard-pressed to put a turreted cannon on the ACV, which would permit it to destroy other armored vehicles and engage enemy troops with airburst munitions.

Current MPC Acquisition Activities

In early August 2012, it was reported the Marine Corps had selected four industry teams to build prototypes of the MPC with contracts worth about $3.5 million each. The teams include a BAE Systems-led team, a Lockheed Martin team, a General Dynamics Land Systems team, and a

26 From an e-mail to CRS from the Marine Corps Office of the Program Manager for Advanced Amphibious Assault.
28 According to the Defense Acquisition University Glossary of Defense Acquisition Acronyms and Terms, 13th Edition, November 2009, a Request for Proposal (RFP) is a solicitation used in negotiated acquisition to communicate government requirements to prospective contractor and to solicit proposals.
30 Information in this section is taken from Lee Hudson, “Source: USMC to Award Four $3.5 M Contracts for MPC this Week,” InsideDefense.com, August 8, 2012.
Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC)-led team. These prototypes are intended to inform a water performance evaluation, limited survivability evaluations and blast tests, and a human factors and stowage capacity study, as well as a study conducted with industry to determine how much of the MPC will be built in the United States.

Reports suggest that three of the four teams chosen for MPC systems demonstration contracts will submit foreign-based designs for evaluation. These include the following:

- Lockheed Martin Team—The Havoc, eight-wheel-drive vehicle based on Patria Land System’s (Finland) eight-wheel-drive armoured vehicle, which is used by six European countries and presently used by Polish forces in Afghanistan.
- BAE Systems Team—BAE teamed with Iveco (Italy) to use a version of its 24-ton Supernav eight-wheel-drive vehicle currently in use with Italian Army.
- SAIC Team—SAIC will partner with Singapore Technologies Kinetics to offer the eight-wheel-drive Terrex armoured personnel carrier in use with the Singapore armed forces.

**Congressional Activity**

**The Administration’s FY2013 Budget Request**

The Administration’s FY2013 Budget Request for the ACV was $95.182 million in Research, Development, Test & Evaluation (RDT&E) funding, while the MPC’s FY2013 RDT&E Budget Request was for $39.729 million.

**Authorizations**

**Recommended Funding Levels**

The House recommended fully funding the FY2013 ACV and MPC budget requests. The Senate also recommended fully funding the FY2013 ACV and MPC budget requests.

**Legislative Provisions**


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32 Department of the Navy’s Fiscal Year 2013 President’s Budget Submission Justification Books, Volume 2 (ACV) and Volume 5 (MPC), February 2012.


SEC. 243. CONDITIONAL REQUIREMENT FOR REPORT ON AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT VEHICLES FOR THE MARINE CORPS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—If the ongoing Marine Corps ground combat vehicle fleet mix study recommends the acquisition of a separate Marine Personnel Carrier, the Secretary of the Navy and the Commandant of the Marine Corps shall jointly submit to the congressional defense committees a report that includes the following:

(1) A detailed description of the capability gaps that Marine Personnel Carriers are intended to mitigate and the capabilities that the Marine Personnel Carrier will be required to have to mitigate such gaps, and an assessment whether, and to what extent, Amphibious Combat Vehicles could mitigate such gaps.

(2) A detailed explanation of the role of the Marine Personnel Carriers in the operations of the Marine Corps, as well as a comparative estimate of the acquisition and life-cycle costs of—

(A) a fleet consisting of both Amphibious Combat Vehicles and Marine Personnel Carriers; and

(B) a fleet consisting of only Amphibious Combat Vehicles.

(b) SUBMITTAL DATE.—If required, the report under subsection (a) shall be submitted not later than the later of—

(1) the date that is 60 days after the date of the completion of the study referred to in subsection (a); or

(2) February 1, 2013.

Appropriations

The House recommended fully funding the ACV and MPC programs.\footnote{Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2013, H.Rept. 112-493, May 25, 2012, p. 221.} The Senate recommended fully funding the MPC but recommended a $12 million cut to the ACV program, noting the program was “behind in execution.”\footnote{Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2013, S.Rept. 112-196, August 2, 2012, p. 189.}

Potential Issues for Congress

The ACV/MPC Mix in Amphibious Operations

Legislative provisions in the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act suggest despite Marine Corps testimony to the congressional defense committees in early 2012, Congress continues to have questions regarding the ACV/MPC fleet mix. In the previously discussed RFIs for both vehicles, the ACV must be able to self-deploy from amphibious shipping and deliver a reinforced Marine infantry squad (17 Marines) from a launch distance at or beyond 12 miles, while the MPC
must have a “robust tactical swim capability (shore-to-shore) and be capable of operating at 6 knots in a fully developed sea.” Some analysts note the similarity in requirements and question whether, in an era of fiscal constraint, two different vehicles are needed.

During an April 2012 Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower hearing on the proposed Fiscal 2013 Defense Authorization as it Relates to Marine Corps Acquisition Programs, the Subcommittee Chairman, Senator Jack Reed, noted as currently envisioned, MPCs would require ship-to-shore connectors to get MPCs from ship to shore.37 Suggesting ship-to-shore connectors—such as the Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC)—as “large, expensive, and few in number,”38 the committee questioned the wisdom of supposed Marine Corps plans to limit ACV procurement to four infantry assault battalions while making up the difference with MPCs and other vehicles. The Chairman further expressed the committee’s concern that substituting MPCs for ACVs could “erode Marine Corps amphibious assault capability.”39

Especially at issue is the balance between amphibious assault capabilities and requirements for inland operations. In this regard, Congress might decide to further its dialogue with Marine Corps leadership during the early stages of these two programs to ensure there is a proper mix between ACVs and MPCs so a credible and robust “over the beach” amphibious assault capability is not sacrificed at the expense of inland mobility.

Program Affordability

As previously noted:

Per vehicle and total program costs will be informed by the cost studies conducted as part of the recently completed Analyses of Alternatives (AoA). There are various affordability courses that are being looked at as part of the Marine Corps overall combat vehicle mix. Those analyses are all pre-decisional and have not yet been briefed to senior officials.40

With no projected program costs or per unit costs, it is difficult to examine the affordability of these two programs. In the case of the ACV, Marine Corps leadership is hoping that a $3 billion dollar investment in the cancelled EFV will translate into an overall programmatic savings for the ACV, but to date, little has been said publically about the potential program impact. With the AoA for the ACV reportedly completed and the awards for MPC prototypes announced in early August 2012, some would argue that Marine leadership should have at least some preliminary program cost estimates for the ACV and MPC. In order to gain greater insight into program affordability, Congress might require the Marines to provide currently available preliminary program cost estimates and per vehicle cost targets for the ACV and MPC. These preliminary cost figures could prove invaluable as Congress evaluates the potential implications of the Budget Control Act of 2011 on the Marine Corps budget.

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38 Ibid., p. 2.
39 Ibid., p. 3.
40 From Marine Corps Office of the Program Manager for Advanced Amphibious Assault.
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