



New U.S. Marine Corps Force Design Initiatives

Updated March 2, 2021

Background

On March 23, 2020, the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) [announced](#) a major force design initiative planned to occur over the next 10 years. The Marine Corps aims to redesign the force for naval expeditionary warfare and to better align itself with the National Defense Strategy, in particular, its focus on strategically competing with China and Russia. The Marines intend to eliminate or reduce certain types of units and eliminate some military occupational specialties (MOS). The Marines also plan to reorganize higher echelon Marine formations and get smaller—reducing forces by 12,000 personnel by 2030.

Major Ground Force Eliminations/Reductions/Realignments

Marine ground force eliminations/reductions/realignments include the following:

- eliminate all Marine Corps Tank Battalions and associated MOSs;
- eliminate all Law Enforcement Battalions and associated MOSs;
- eliminate all Bridging Companies and associated MOSs;
- reduce the number of Infantry Battalions from 24 to 21;
- reduce the number of Cannon Artillery Batteries from 21 to 5; and
- reduce the number of Amphibious Vehicle Companies from 6 to 4.

Major Aviation Force Deactivations

Marine aviation force deactivations include the following:

- Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 264;
- Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462;
- Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 469;
- Marine Wing Support Groups 27 and 37; and

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- Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367.

Of particular note, the Marines plan to reduce the number of F-35 B and C aircraft (see CRS Report RL30563, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler) in each squadron from 16 to 10.

Reorganization at Higher Echelons

Per the Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG), the III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) headquartered at Camp Courtney, Okinawa, Japan, is to be the focal point of higher echelon modernization [described](#) as follows:

- The Marine Corps is to establish three Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs) organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish sea denial and control within contested maritime spaces as part of the modernized III MEF.
- The III MEF's Pacific posture is to be augmented by three globally deployable Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) possessing both traditional and Expeditionary Advanced Base capabilities that can deploy with nonstandard Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs).
- I MEF (Camp Pendleton, CA) and II MEF (Camp Lejeune, NC) are to generate forces to support MLRs and MEUs.

Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs)

The first MLR [reportedly](#) consists of units from the 3rd Marine Regiment in Hawaii. After a series of exercises and evaluations, the Marines plan to convert two other regiments, the 4th and 12th Marine Regiments currently stationed in Japan into MLRs that are to be stationed in Japan and Guam. The MLR is to include about 1,800 to 2,000 Marines and sailors, and it would include three main elements: a Littoral Combat Team (LCT), a Littoral Anti-Air Battalion, and a Littoral Logistics Battalion. The LCT is to be organized around an infantry battalion along with a long-range anti-ship missile battery. The Littoral Anti-Air Battalion is intended to employ air defense, air surveillance and early warning, air control, and forward rearming and refueling capabilities. The Littoral Logistics Battalion is to provide tactical logistics support to the MLR. A regimental headquarters is intended to provide the MLR with enhanced signals and human intelligence, reconnaissance, communications, logistics planning, civil affairs, cyber, and information operations capabilities.

Proposed Future Capabilities of the Redesigned Force

As part of the redesigned Marine Corps for 2030, the Marines intend to pursue the following [capabilities](#):

- **Expansion of Long-Range Fires:** Achieve a 300% increase in rocket artillery capacity, which, in conjunction with anti-ship missiles, is intended to significantly expand the Marine Corps' ability to support the fleet commander in sea control and denial operations.
- **Lighter, More Mobile and Versatile Infantry:** Reduce the size of infantry battalions in order to support naval expeditionary warfare and to facilitate distributed and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.
- **Investments in Unmanned Systems:** Double the number of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) squadrons and austere lethal unmanned air and ground systems to enhance the ability to sense and strike targets.
- **Maritime Mobility and Resilience:** Seek new capabilities to increase littoral maritime mobility and resilience, including a new light amphibious warship, as well as more affordable stern-landing and operational support vessels.

- **Mobile Air Defense and Counter-Precision Guided Missile Systems:** Pursue a variety of efforts to include directed energy systems, loitering munitions, signature management, electronic warfare, and expeditionary airfield capabilities and structure to support manned and unmanned aircraft and other systems from austere, minimally developed locations.

Commandant's 2021 Update

In a [February 23, 2021, Memorandum from the Commandant of the Marine Corps](#) to the Secretary of Defense provided to CRS, the Commandant offers an update on the progress of the 2020 Force Design Initiatives. The update includes the following highlights:

- removing all main battle tanks and heavy bridging equipment from the inventory;
- Marine infantry battalions have been reorganized to provide greater lethality and nonkinetic influence in mobile, distributed operations;
- using the savings from divestments, Marines are fielding long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles with payloads for airborne communication, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare;
- future plans include elimination of most towed cannon artillery and significant numbers of manned rotary and fixed winged aircraft; and
- phasing out most legacy logistical capability, previously intended for sustained land operations, and modernizing the rest for distributed maritime operations.

Potential Issues for Congress

Potential issues for Congress include the following:

- How does the elimination of the Marine's two tank battalions impact the ability of the Marines to defend against enemy mechanized and armored forces?
 - How does the elimination of most towed artillery affect the Marines' ability to provide fire support if air or naval assets are unable to deliver fire support due to nonavailability, range limitations, or adverse weather?
 - How does the elimination of significant numbers of manned rotary and fixed winged aircraft effect the Marines' ability to transport Marines and supplies by air and the provision of close air support?
 - If the Marines phase out most of their legacy sustained land operations-specific logistics capability, will they be able to participate in sustained land operations in the future if required?
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Author Information

Andrew Feickert
Specialist in Military Ground Forces

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