

U.S. Military Forces in FY 2020

Marine Corps

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Part of U.S. Military Forces in FY2020: The Struggle to Align Forces with Strategy

The Marine Corps focuses on developing capabilities for great power conflict after two decades of conducting counterinsurgency ashore. End strength holds steady in FY 2020, with no significant growth in the foreseeable future, requiring tradeoffs of legacy capabilities to create new capabilities and potentially causing stress on the force as it continues to meet high day-to-day deployment demands.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Marine Corps' end strength remains largely constant, holding at roughly 186,000 after expanding during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Despite a continuing high operational tempo, the Marine Corps is choosing to pursue modernization over expanding force structure.
- New capabilities will therefore require offsets from legacy capabilities.
- General Berger's new guidance aims to restore the Marine Corps to its naval roots after two decades of operations ashore, invest in capabilities focused on great power conflict in the Pacific, and enhance individual fighting prowess.
- Marine Corps aviation continues to upgrade its platforms at a steady rate, leading to a newer and younger fleet. Although the Marine Corps procures three MQ-9 Reapers in FY 2020, it lags the other services in fielding UAVs.
- As part of General Berger's guidance, the Marine Corps is looking into smaller, more affordable amphibious ships and alternative platforms for amphibious operations.

Unique among the services, the Marine Corps comes out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan larger than it went in (186,100 today versus 172,600 in 1999). That growth has allowed it to maintain its traditional ground and aviation units and create new units for cyber and information warfare. Nevertheless, unlike the other three services, it grows little through FY 2024 and does not attempt to attain its previous goal of 194,000. That creates a tension in the future between creating additional new capabilities and maintaining traditional capabilities.

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) creates two further tensions. The first is the direction to create new capabilities for great power conflict, sacrificing force structure as necessary, while at the same time meeting demands to provide continuing high levels of forward deployments for global engagement and crisis response. The other tension is between preparing units for these day-to-day forward deployments or for great power conflict, the training and equipment being different for each.

The FY 2020 budget looks like a continuation of the existing Marine Corps’ strategy, but guidance set by the new commandant, General David H. Berger, directs the Marine Corps to march off in a different direction, with important future changes to forces and equipment.

Force Structure in FY 2020

Table 1: Marine Corps – Active, Reserve, and Civilians

	Marine Corps Active Authorized End Strength	Marine Corps Reserve Authorized End Strength	Civilian Full-Time Equivalents
FY 2019 Enacted	186,100	38,500	21,582
FY 2020 Request	186,200	38,500	21,974
Change	+100	0	+392

Source: *Highlights of The Department of the Navy FY 2020 Budget* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2019), <https://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/20pres/Budget%20Highlights%20Book.pdf>; Active End Strength data in Figure 2.5, 2-8; Reserve End Strength data in figure 2.7, 2-10; Civilian data in Figure 2.10, 2-13.

The FY 2020 Marine Corps budget increases active duty end strength by only 100. In the past, the Marine Corps had talked about expanding the active force to about 194,000, but the FY 2020 budget projects only a small increase to 186,400 through FY 2024.¹ This lack of growth makes the Marine Corps unusual in that the other three services all plan to add at least some end strength, but it reflects the broader priorities of the NDS: fix readiness, then focus on modernization to prepare for a great power conflict; force structure comes last. General Berger doubles down on this budget strategy, saying: “If provided the opportunity to secure additional modernization dollars in exchange for force structure, I am prepared to do so.”²

Despite a lack of end strength growth, the Marine Corps, alone among the services, is coming out of the wars at a higher level (186,000) than it went in (172,600). Thus, despite the Marine Corps’ long-standing concern (sometimes called paranoia) about maintaining its standing among the other services, it has been gaining ground over the long term.³

1. On the higher target: Lee Hudson, “Marines Need 194,000 Troop Force to Meet Requirements,” *Inside Defense*, February 8, 2017, <https://insidedefense.com/daily-news/marines-need-194000-troop-force-meet-requirements>.
2. David Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Arlington, VA: 2019), p. 6, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/%2038th%20Commandant%27s%20Planning%20Guidance_2019.pdf?ver=2019-07-16-200152-700.
3. For a classic expression of the Marine Corps’ concern in this regard, see the Introduction to Victor Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984).

Marine Corps Reserve end strength stays level at 38,500, where it has been for many years. On the one hand, the retention and recruitment challenges of expanding are too great. (The Marine reserves got into some trouble in the past when they tried to expand over 40,000). On the other hand, the demands of maintaining a full division-wing structure prevent it from getting much smaller. General Berger's guidance hints at some flexibility here in the future: "We will explore the efficacy of fully integrating our reserve units within the Active Component, as well as other organizational options."⁴

Marine Corps civilians increase, as with DOD civilians overall, a reflection of the focus on rebuilding readiness and the substitution of civilians for military personnel in support activities.

The budget maintains the three active-duty Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEFs): I and II MEFs located in the continental United States (California and North Carolina, respectively) and III MEF on Hawaii, Okinawa, and mainland Japan. It also maintains the reserve division-wing team, headquartered in New Orleans but spread over the entire country. (The reserve division-wing team lacks the headquarters to make it a MEF. Since the reserves are employed at lower unit levels, such a headquarters is not needed.) There is, however, some change at lower unit levels, as described below.

The Tension in Meeting Day-to-day Deployment Demands.

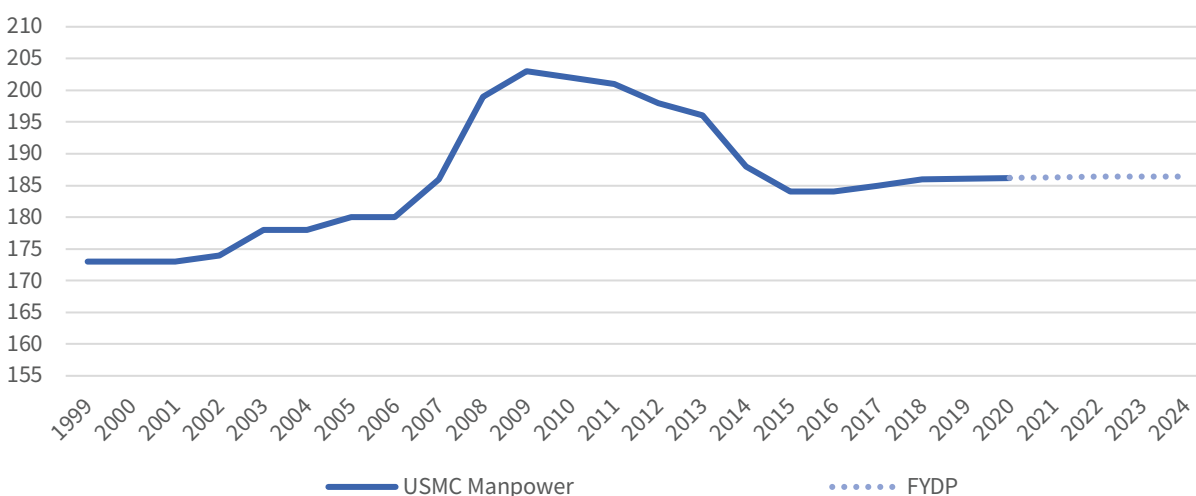
The previous commandant, General Robert Neller, appeared to downplay the stress of deployments. In previous years, his posture statement listed all the many deployments and exercises the Marine Corps participated in. The FY 2020 posture statement skipped that. General Neller did note that the Marines remain at a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio when the goal is 1:3. In previous posture statements, he called this level of operational tempo "unsustainable." This year he called it "challenging." Neller called maintaining this ratio "a conscious, short-term decision" that entailed risk in a major contingency. It could only be remedied by a large increase in end strength or a decrease in commitments, neither of which he foresaw.⁵ This is the first major tension about Marine Corps force structure: how to meet continuing high levels of day-to-day deployment requirements with limited forces.

General Berger has indicated privately that he intends to "say no" to some missions to keep operating tempo down. This would allow the Marine Corps to achieve its desired 1:3 deployment-to-dwell ratio within existing end strength, but COCOM demands for forces and presidential priorities can make this unachievable.

4. Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*.

5. Robert Neller, "Posture of the Department of the Navy," Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., April 19, 2018, p. 15, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Neller_04-09-19.pdf.

Figure 1: Marine Corps Active Duty End Strength 1999-2024 (000s)



Source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2020* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2019), Table 7-5: Department of Defense Manpower, p. 260-262, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/FY20_Green_Book.pdf; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *PB 20 Budget Roll Out Brief* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 2019), p. 12., https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/fy2020_Budget_Request.pdf.

The McKenzie Group of 2013 (named for its leader, then-Lieutenant General Kenneth F. McKenzie, now General McKenzie, commander of CENTCOM) argued that forward presence and crisis response were the Corps' primary force drivers.⁶ This was not a new argument since forward deployments had long put strain on the Marine Corps, which maintained Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) in the Middle East/Indian Ocean and Pacific, as well as unit deployments to Okinawa and Australia and special purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (SP-MAGTFs) globally.

Nevertheless, the Marine Corps did not ask for additional end strength in its budget or its \$2.1 billion unfunded requirements list.⁷ The new commandant's guidance implicitly rejects this argument and is explicit that force structure might shrink in order to build capability for great power conflicts. Thus, this tension will continue.

New Force Structure

General Berger's guidance had three major themes: to reestablish the Marine Corps' naval roots after years of operations ashore in Iraq and Afghanistan; to build structure and weapons for great power conflict, particularly in the Pacific; and to maintain a high level of individual warfighting prowess. These themes expand on the Marine Corps force structure assessment of 2016-2017, called *Marine Corps Force 2025*, and appear in Marine Corps/Navy doctrinal publications *Marine Operating Concept*, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* and *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*.⁸ These concepts are consistent with the

6. Brian Buggeman and Ben Fitzgerald, *Crisis Response: Institutional Innovation in the United States Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, Nov 2015), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/crisis-response-institutional-innovation-in-the-united-states-marine-corps>. Robert Neller, "Posture of the Department of the Navy," Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 116th Cong., 1st sess., April 9, 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Neller_04-09-19.pdf.

7. "Fiscal Year 2020 Marine Corps Unfunded Priority List," Defense Daily, https://www.defensedaily.com/wp-content/uploads/post_attachment/239637.pdf.

8. U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, September 2016), <https://www.mccdc.marines.mil/Portals/172/Docs/MCCDC/young/MCCDC-YH/document/final/Marine%20Corps%20Operating%20Concept%20Sept%202016.pdf?ver=2016-09-28-083439-483>; "Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment," U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Navy, 2017,

NDS. They foresee a shift to distributed operations and the Marine Corps contributing to sea control in a naval campaign through shore-based aircraft and fires, not just projecting power ashore. How much force structure change these new concepts will involve will not be known until the Marine Corps conducts a future force structure assessment.

However, high-end capabilities have not been traditional Marine Corps strengths because the Marine Corps has typically focused on regional conflicts and small wars. Indeed, difficulty in recruiting enough cyber Marines caused the corps to create a “Marine Corps Cyber Auxiliary” to bring outside cyber expertise into the Marine Corps. These auxiliaries would be volunteers who would mentor and train Marines but would not participate in actual operations or wear the coveted eagle, globe, and anchor. Time will tell whether such a voluntary organization will be successful.⁹

Dakota Wood, a retired Marine officer and senior analyst with the Heritage Foundation, proposed eliminating specialties that do not relate directly to the Marine Corps’ core mission in amphibious operations. That would mean pulling Marines out of cyber and special operations.¹⁰ General Berger’s guidance barely mentions cyber and special operations, which may be a signal that these capabilities are not central to his new concept for the Marine Corps.

There is also a tension in training between the needs of routine forward deployment of Marine air ground task forces (e.g., low-intensity conflict; crisis response; peacekeeping operations; partner training) and the needs of a great power conflict (e.g., full-spectrum combat in a high threat environment; massive, long-range firepower). Having units switch back and forth is difficult for equipment and personnel. One Marine general noted that this might require two different kinds of units, but that would require a lot of force structure.¹¹ General Berger’s guidance rejects specialized units (“We cannot afford to build multiple forces optimized for specific contingency”), so this tension will remain.

Ground Forces

Table 2: Marine Corps Ground Force Structure

	<i>Marine Corps Active Infantry Battalions</i>	<i>Marine Corps Reserve Infantry Battalions</i>
<i>FY 2019 Enacted</i>	24	8
<i>FY 2020 Request</i>	24	8
<i>Change</i>	0	0

Source: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), Defense Budget Overview: Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 2019), Appendix A, Table A-4, A-2, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/fy2020_Budget_Request.pdf.

At the macro level, Marine Corps force structure does not show any changes. However, several important changes are occurring at lower levels of organization, driven by Marine Corps 2025 concepts to prepare

<https://www.candp.marines.mil/Concepts/Subordinate-Operating-Concepts/Littoral-Operations-in-a-Contested-Environment/>; “Expeditionary Advance Base Operations,” U.S. Marine Corps, 2018, <http://www.candp.marines.mil/Concepts/Subordinate-Operating-Concepts/Expeditionary-Advanced-Base-Operations/>.

9. “Marine Corps Establishes Volunteer Cyber Auxiliary to Increase Cyber Readiness,” Marine Corps, press release, May 13, 2019, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Press-Releases/Press-Release-Display/Article/1845538/marine-corps-establishes-volunteer-cyber-auxiliary-to-increase-cyberspace-readi>.

10. Dakota L. Wood, *Rebuilding America’s Military: The United States Marine Corps – Refocusing the Corps on Its Primary Mission: Contributing to the Prosecution of Naval Campaigns* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, March 21, 2019), https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/SR211_0.pdf.

11. Brian Beaudreault in Megan Eckstein, “Marine Corps Wants Forces in US Ready to Surge for Major War,” U.S. Naval Institute, June 4, 2018, <https://news.usni.org/2018/06/04/34100>.

for major wars. For the ground forces, these changes are enhancing cyber and information warfare and restructuring the infantry squad by adding a drone operator (with InstantEye mini-drone) and an assistant squad leader. The idea is to leverage emerging technology and provide more depth of leadership as infantry tasks become more complex.

The Marine Corps’ ground modernization effort consists of a collection of small programs, from rifles to radios to engineer equipment and trucks. The largest by total program cost are the JLTV, a light armored truck developed jointly with the Army, and the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV), the corps’ third attempt to replace the 1970s-era Amphibious Assault Vehicles. Both are conventional and evolutionary and, as a result, are moving ahead smoothly.

The Marine Corps has a lot of concepts for future technology, such as antiaircraft and anti-cruise missile defenses and long-range precision missiles for the artillery. It has initiated a series of experiments called “Sea Dragon” and has been using one battalion (3rd Battalion, 5th Marines) to test new equipment and concepts. However, none of these capabilities are yet being procured in the budget.

Aviation Forces and Challenges

Table 3: Marine Corps Aviation Force Structure

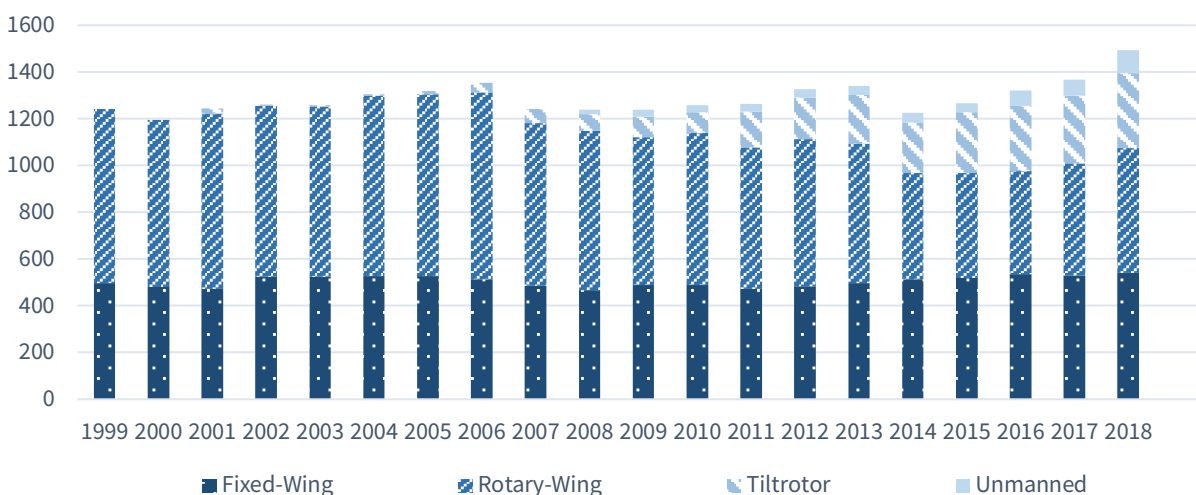
	Total Force Aviation		
	Fixed-Wing Squadrons	Rotary-Wing Squadrons	Unmanned Aircraft Squadrons
FY 2019 Enacted	22	36	4
FY 2020 Proposed	22	36	4
Change	0	0	0

Source: Fixed-wing squadrons include F-35B, F/A-18 A++/C, F/A-18D, F/A-18A++, AB-8B, KC-130J, and KC-130T. Rotary Wing includes MV-22B Osprey, AH-1Z, AH-1W, UH-1Y, and CH-53E. Unmanned Aircraft are squadrons of RQ-21A. Does not include Fleet Replacement Squadrons. Data based on current force PPA squadrons from the respective aircraft plans, including active and reserve components, *2019 Marine Aviation Plan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019), <https://www.aviation.marines.mil/Portals/11/2019%20AvPlan.pdf>.

Marine aviation continues to upgrade platforms and incorporate new systems.¹² The KC-130J, AH-1Z, and, finally, the F-35B are all in serial production. Funding for the MV-22 acquisition target of 360 aircraft has been completed, though deliveries will continue for the next few years. As noted in the Navy section, the CH-53K is in initial production, after experiencing development problems and some delays. The last EA-6B electronic countermeasures aircraft have retired, replaced by the organic capabilities in the F-35. The good news is that Marine aviation will have a lot of new aircraft in its inventory. The bad news is that there will be half a dozen squadrons in transition at any given time.

12. For details on all aspects of Marine aviation, see U.S. Marine Corps, *2019 Marine Corps Aviation Plan* (Arlington, VA: 2019), <https://www.aviation.marines.mil/Portals/11/2019%20AvPlan.pdf>.

Figure 2: Marine Corps Aircraft Inventory by Type



Source: Data from successive editions of International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999-2019), <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>.

Aircraft inventories remain relatively stable with some growth in tiltrotor (as MV-22 deliveries continue) and unmanned aircraft. The rotary-wing fleet has mostly been recapitalized with the MV-22 and UH/AH-1 procurements so that it is modern and relatively young. The CH-53K program will complete that recapitalization. The fixed-wing fleet is in the process of recapitalization with the F-35. So, despite the high cost of contemporary aircraft, Marine aviation, unlike the Air Force, is in pretty good shape.

Nevertheless, questions arise about the structure of Marine aviation. General Berger raised the key issue: “It is unlikely that exquisite manned platforms represent a complete answer to our needs in future warfare.”

Lag in Fielding UAVs

One approach to meeting General Berger’s guidance would be to field lower-cost UAVs. However, the Marine Corps, having led the way on UAVs in the 1980s, now lags the other services in fielding UAVs. Fielding of the RQ-21 Blackjack

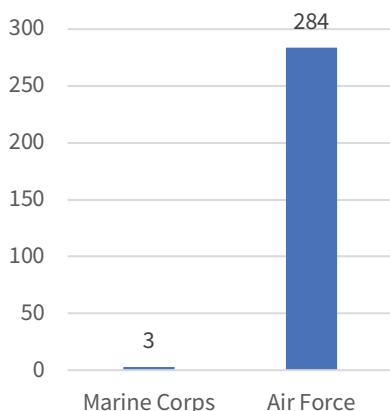
UAV will be completed in FY 2019 to 4 operational squadrons, having experienced difficulties in development and a reduction in planned quantities to 38.¹³ Located at regiment/MEU level, it will be capable of operating both ashore and from L-class ships. It performs reconnaissance and surveillance functions but has no attack capability.

The corps also fields a wide variety of smaller UAVs (RQ-11, -12, -20) for tactical reconnaissance and targeting and is experimenting aggressively with integrating such capabilities into small unit operations. None of these systems have attack capabilities, however.

Larger (group 4 and 5) UAVs for division/MEF level operations are still conceptual. To fill the gap in Afghanistan, the Marine Corps has contracted with General Atomics for a single orbit of Reaper (MQ-1) coverage. The Marine Corps requests three MQ-9 Reapers in the FY 2020 budget and another three in FY

13. Defense Operational Test and Evaluation, *RQ-21A Blackjack Unmanned Aircraft System* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2016), <http://www.dote.osd.mil/pub/reports/FY2015>; Justin Katz, “Marine Corps Manpower Shift Leads to Reduction in RQ-21 FY-19 Request,” *Inside Defense*, February 16, 2018, <https://insidedefense.com/insider/marine-corps-manpower-shift-leads-reduction-rq-21-fy-19-request>.

Figure 3: Marine Corps v. Air Force Armed UAVs in FY2020



Source: *Highlights of The Department of the Navy FY 2020 Budget* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2019), 4-5, <https://www.secnave.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/20pres/Budget%20Highlights%20Book.pdf>; *Budget United States Air Force Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, March 2019), 38, <https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY20/FY2020%20Air%20Force%20Budget%20Overview%20Book%20Final%20v3.pdf?ver=2019-03-13-082653-843>.

2021, but the MQ-9 is not yet an official program of record and conflicts with the conceptual UAVs.¹⁴ General Berger vows to change this, saying that, “starting with POM-22 [the Marine Corps will] develop a much broader family of unmanned systems.”

Overall, the Marine Corps, like the Navy, is focused on manned aircraft and is far behind the Army and the Air Force in fielding UAV capabilities. General Berger’s guidance directs more attention to UAVs, but he faces decades of aviation culture.

Guam and Pacific Force Stationing

The Marine Corps is engaged in a long-term effort to ease the burden of its force footprint on Okinawa. What was once a rural and sparsely inhabited island has become crowded and developed. One element of this effort is moving forces off Okinawa, mainly to Guam, though also to mainland Japan, Hawaii, and the mainland United States. The current plan is for the number of Marines on Okinawa to be halved, to 11,500, by 2027.¹⁵

The government of Japan is paying for much of the massive facility construction on Guam, but this construction has proved to be more expensive, complicated, and politically controversial than expected. Work moves forward, though, with more contracts awarded, and sections of the Marine Corps base are expected to be completed this year.¹⁶ The current target is for 4,000 Marines to be on Guam by 2024, though that timeline has slipped repeatedly.¹⁷

The re-stationing effort also involves building a new air facility—called the Futenma replacement facility—in the less inhabited northern area of Okinawa at Camp Schwab. This project continues to move forward (slowly) despite opposition from local politicians, who complain that Okinawa bears too much of the burden of stationing U.S. forces. The project’s completion date was pushed to 2022, but recent reports about soil instability and potentially expensive fixes have cast doubt about the entire endeavor.¹⁸

The entire re-stationing effort is a cautionary tale to those seeking to move U.S. forces around the Pacific. Although there are strong strategic reasons for such posture changes, actually executing them can be extremely challenging in the real world of local politics, regional tensions, and the inevitable difficulties involved with large-scale construction projects.

14. Yasmin Tadjdeh, “Reapers to Give Marine Corps New Set of War Fighting Tools,” *National Defense*, June 2019, p. 34-35, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2019/6/7/reapers-to-give-marine-corps-new-set-of-warfighting-tools>.

15. Matthew Burke, “Marines’ move from Okinawa to Guam could begin as early as October 2024, report says,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/marines-move-from-okinawa-to-guam-could-begin-as-early-as-october-2024-report-says-1.581201>.

16. Ibid.; Matthew Burke, “Work on Guam’s \$8.7 Billion Portion of Pacific Realignment Gaining Momentum, Officials Say,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 14, 2018, <https://okinawa.stripes.com/news/work-guams-87-billion-portion-pacific-realignment-gaining-momentum-officials-say>.

17. “U.S. to start moving Okinawa-based marines to Guam in 2024,” *Japan Times*, April 27, 2017, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/27/national/politics-diplomacy/u-s-start-moving-okinawa-based-marines-guam-2024/#.WZw_qsa1vct.

18. Paul Mcleary, “SecDef & Marines Want To Disperse Across Pacific, But It’s Hard,” *Breaking Defense*, August 29, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/08/secdef-marines-want-to-disperse-across-pacific-but-its-hard/>.

By contrast to the slow and controversial moves on Okinawa and Guam, the Marine Corps' rotational deployments to Darwin, Australia continue into their ninth year without controversy, with six-month rotations on the ground. This year the rotational force reached the target of 2,500 Marines originally set by President Obama in 2011.¹⁹ The rotations establish a U.S. presence in Southeast Asia and provide opportunities to train with the Australian defense forces. The rotations have continued through changes of administration in both Australia and the United States, so the politics look settled. The disadvantage is that the forces are a great distance from any likely conflict (2,500 miles from the South China Sea).

Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces (SP-MAGTFs)

Although not new, SP-MAGTF units represent a different capability for the Marine Corps. Traditionally, the smallest unit that the Marine Corps deployed was a MEU with about 2,200 Marines.²⁰ To provide rapid response and persistent presence in AFRICOM and CENTCOM and periodic theater engagement in SOUTHCOM, the Marine Corps established these land-based, special-purpose units, which are smaller than the MEU. That made them both more agile and easier to deploy, though at the cost of logistics and firepower.

Last year, the Marine Corps appeared to be backing away from SP-MAGTFs in order to use the assets elsewhere. Although there is no indication of such a shift this year, General Berger's desired alignment with the Navy raises questions about whether these land-based units will continue.

Amphibious Ships and Alternative Platforms

As noted in the Navy section, a major headline coming out of General Berger's guidance was the change in how the Marine Corps would think about amphibious ships. For many years, the Marine Corps had sized the amphibious requirement as the ability to carry two Marine Expeditionary Brigades in a wartime operation (34 ships), with 10 percent additional to cover ships in long-term maintenance (total requirement 38 ships).²¹ The Navy's 355-ship target included 38 amphibies, and the FY 2019 30-year shipbuilding plan achieved this level in the future, although as noted earlier, there is risk in the plan's affordability.

However, General Berger, like many others, noted that this approach produced a small number of very expensive, though very capable, ships. The resulting amphibious fleet was well suited for day-to-day forward deployments and regional conflicts but not well suited for distributed operations or operations in the highly contested environment that the NDS foresaw. Thus, General Berger's vision opens the possibility of building a different kind of amphibious ship ("smaller, low signature, affordable platforms"), perhaps LST size (about 5,000 tons versus 25,000 tons for the proposed LPD Flight II class).

The Navy and Marine Corps may also use non-amphibious ships, such as Maritime Prepositioning Force ships (TAK-Es), high-speed vessels (Expeditionary Fast Transports, EPFs), and mobile landing platforms/afloat forward staging bases (now called Expeditionary Sea Base, ESB and Expeditionary Transfer Dock, ESD).

General Neller mentioned experiments with such ships in his posture statement, and they are included explicitly in General Berger's guidance.²² In the past, the Marine Corps argued that such ships lack the

19. Seth Robson, "Australia-bound battalion will boost Marines' Darwin presence to 2,500," Stars and Stripes, April 25, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/australia-bound-battalion-will-boost-marines-darwin-presence-to-2-500-1.578356>.

20. A Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has a headquarters, a ground element (built around a reinforced infantry battalion), an aviation element (usually a reinforced medium rotary-wing squadron), and a logistics unit.

21. A Marine Expeditionary Brigade has the same elements as a MEU but is built around an infantry regiment and notionally has about 17,000 Marines. Thirty-eight ship requirement: U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Expeditionary Warfare: Annual Report 2017* (Alexandria, VA: August 2017), p. 11. <https://news.usni.org/2017/10/27/document-2017-u-s-maritime-expeditionary-warfare-report>; same statement of requirement is in the 2018 report, which is not available online.

22. Robert D. Holzer and Scott C. Truver, "The U.S. Navy In Review," U.S. Naval Institute, *Proceedings*, May 2017, <https://www.usni>.

survivability needed for high-intensity conflict. Nevertheless, they do provide cargo storage, flight decks, and personnel berthing that could be used for training and engagement events with allies and partners. They also have the advantage of not being as large as regular (“L”-class) amphibious ships and therefore do not overwhelm some of the smaller navies with which they might work. The Navy is making modifications to some of these ships to allow them to accommodate Marine Corps aircraft and troops more easily.

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org/magazines/proceedings/2017-05/us-navy-review; Megan Eckstein, “3rd Marine Division Experimenting with Using MSC Ships in Higher Level Operations,” U.S. Naval Institute News, January 12, 2016, <https://news.usni.org/2016/01/12/3rd-marine-division-experimenting-with-using-msc-ships-in-higher-level-operations>; Megan Eckstein, “Council Looking into Using JHSV as Afloat Command and Control Platform for Marines,” U.S. Naval Institute News, November 6, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/11/06/council-looking-into-using-jhsv-as-afloat-command-and-control-platform-for-marines>. These ships are receiving new designations as “E” or Expeditionary-class ships: MLP as Expeditionary Transfer Dock (ESD), JHSV as Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF), and AFSB as Expeditionary Mobile Base (ESB).