



# 39<sup>th</sup> COMMANDANT'S PLANNING GUIDANCE

AUGUST 2024







# INTENT

Marines, after a year serving as your Commandant and visiting with Marines in every corner of our Corps, I remain confident that we are on the right track as a Service. Force Design remains a righteous journey, and we are in perhaps the most difficult phase - implementation. Our aggressive approach made truly significant strides in a few short years. Force Design, to include Talent Management, Training and Education, Installations and Logistics, Project Eagle, and Barracks 2030, involves many key efforts which are still in motion. I won't sugarcoat it – there are many challenges we still face to stay ahead of the changing character of war. Force Design remains our strategic priority and we cannot slow down.

*“Our core purpose remains the same: to deter conflict, and when deterrence fails, to defeat our Nation’s enemies in battle.”*

My intent with this Commandant’s Planning Guidance (CPG) is to provide all Marines with the strategic direction for the Marine Corps. This document is necessarily broad, and I will issue directive guidance to the Deputy Commandants and Commanding Generals when necessary. Force Design remains our aim point, and this guidance focuses on specific challenges requiring near-term action. Some items will take time to realize, but we must lay the groundwork now.

My priorities remain: (1) **Balancing Crisis Response and Modernization**, (2) **Naval Integration and Organic Mobility**, (3) **Quality of Life**, (4) **Recruit, Make, and Retain Marines**; and (5) **Maximize the Potential of our Reserves**. These priorities drive my decisions as Commandant and are woven throughout the document. My Planning Guidance provides the context for us to achieve those priorities so we can fight and win today and set conditions to win in the future.

Discipline and Core Values are up front on purpose – they are our ethical foundation and define who we are as Marines. We must protect our Marine Corps culture and Naval heritage at all costs. I expect all Marines to read this Planning Guidance and leaders to discuss its key concepts with their Marines. Most of all, I want you to know that Sergeant Major Ruiz and I are proud of you, we are thankful for what you do, and recognize that none of our progress is possible without you.





## DISCIPLINE AND CORE VALUES

Ironclad discipline is the currency of our Corps. Ruthless adherence to standards is what makes us special as a Service. Those standards, developed over hundreds of campaigns and battles, make us better warriors. They force us to pay attention to detail every day so that we do so automatically in combat – when precision matters most. Those with combat experience know this to be true. Our profession of warfighting is unforgiving, with no margin for carelessness. Errors in combat lead to defeat, and Marines do not lose. We must eliminate negative behaviors that pull us apart, erode good order and discipline, jeopardize safety, and deprive us of the cohesion that wins battles. Our professionalism, self-discipline, ethos, warfighting proficiency, and personal conduct define what it is to be a Marine. We all share a common foundation of **Honor, Courage, and Commitment**, and we must strive to hold each other to those values.

If a Marine fails to meet the standard, we all have a collective obligation to teach, mentor, and train that Marine until the standard is achieved. When holding Marines accountable, I ask that commanders look at our young Marines as the future Corporals, Gunnery Sergeants, or Colonels they could become if afforded the opportunity to learn and grow from their mistakes. There is a difference between moral or ethical shortfalls, and not achieving a performance standard. When screening Marines for promotion or reenlistment, I trust that we will exercise due diligence to consider personal *growth* after non-judicial punishment, adverse action, or a single subpar report. Make no mistake: we will not lower our standards, but we must also recognize that the most impactful learning happens after an honest mistake is made.

The Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and I are drafting an updated version of Marine Corps Tactical Publication 6-10, *Sustaining the Transformation*. This is a valuable tool to help all leaders look out for their Marines, help them be successful both in and out of uniform, and to uphold the discipline and core values for which we are known. Once published, I expect all Marines to read and discuss how it applies to you as a team regardless of rank or occupational specialty. Sustaining the transformation means holding our high standard throughout our time in uniform, earning our place in the Corps every day, and eventually returning to society as better versions of ourselves.



## OUR LEGACY

Marines – we are different, plain and simple. We are all links in a chain that stretches back to 1775. Like all Marines who came before us, we are all, first and foremost, riflemen. That fact will never change. We became Marines to fight, and we work hard every day to be the country's choice to be the **first to fight**. We will remain offensively oriented and aggressive in all we do. "First to Fight" is more than a slogan – it is our heritage. Our warfighting ethos determines who we attract, who we train, and who we are. We are a Corps of warriors who fight from the sea and campaign in forward locations in pursuit of our Nation's interests. The American people trust we will always do the right thing, and that we will win every time. Our Nation's trust took generations of Marines and many battles to build. Collectively, we have an obligation to every other Marine, past or present, to reinforce and build upon that trust. We will.

As Marines we trust each other with our lives. Trust allows us to operate in a highly decentralized manner – knowing that our subordinates will do what it takes to accomplish the mission, and that they know how best to accomplish it. To this day, the special relationship between commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) brings Marines a decisive advantage on the battlefield. In the fights to come, the officer-NCO relationship will remain as much *leader to leader*, as it is *leader to led*. Behind the wars we have fought, the battles we have won, and the campaigns we have endured in our long history, are a series of actions by individual Marines, enabled by their leaders. The future will be no different.

"...we work hard every day to be the country's  
choice to be the first to fight."





## CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) prioritizes the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the pacing challenge, and the Marine Corps will continue to modernize to meet it. **Force Design remains the Marine Corps' vehicle to create innovative formations, equipment, and concepts and ensures we remain lethal on any battlefield while optimized against the pacing challenge.** In practice, our purpose remains the provision of ready forces to meet Combatant Commander and Fleet needs – specifically, through expeditionary Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) capable of combined arms and integration into the Joint Force. Our Service's measure of effectiveness remains the relevance of our formations against the pacing challenge.

It is important that our Marines share a common understanding of the context in which Force Design is occurring. While Russia is a capable acute threat involved in an illegal war of aggression against another sovereign nation, we must remain focused on our pacing challenge, the PRC, who continues to grow in capability, capacity, and boldness. Every day the PRC practices illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive tactics designed to slowly erode the international rules-based order and advance its own revisionist view of the world. The counter to these tactics requires a whole-of-government approach, in which our expeditionary forces play a critical role through campaigning, deterrence, rapid response to crisis, and contributing to joint and combined combat operations.

The PRC represents the most challenging competitor in both capability and intent – but every threat, pacing or acute, will continue to learn, adapt, and find new ways to counter the strengths of our Joint Force. Advanced conventional weapons and long-range precision munitions, once only possessed by peer and near-peer militaries, will continue to proliferate in every theater, including their use by non-state actors. By focusing on the most complex and dangerous threat, the Marine Corps will remain ahead of any challenge we face, be it the PRC, Russia, Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or Violent Extremist Organizations.

Force Design implementation is well underway and continues to benefit from bottom-up refinement across the force. I am consistently awestruck by the ingenuity and dedication to continual improvement of our concepts and equipment that I see from Marines of all ranks – Marines like Corporal Gage Barbieri, who identified a flaw in the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle's maintenance program and shared the fix with the entire Corps; or Sergeant Kristopher Hassmer, a Tactical Data Link Maintainer who on his own initiative created a Small Form Factor Air Command and Control system which outpaced industry and was immediately ready for forward employment; or Sergeant Samantha Delgado, who built and tested a "remote kit" for securely operating air search radars thousands of miles away, resulting in an expeditionary command and control (C2) node capable of passing data required for air defense operations. **These examples of our Marines' initiative are what a culture of innovation looks like.** We must continue to capitalize on the inherent brilliance of our Marines and implement their innovation at speed.

As we move Force Design forward, we must continually assess where we are, and we must commit our resources in ways that reinforce success. There are no "untouchable" programs – we will assess each program based on its effectiveness and applicability to the future fight. Through our Campaign of Learning we will identify and transition resources away from good ideas that are either ahead of their time or have been proven ineffective after additional experimentation. It is imperative that we continually refine our modernization through experimentation, force-on-force exercises, data, and analysis. Our Campaign of Learning is continuous, and the Service has proven willing to adjust where necessary – including refinements to our quantity of cannon artillery, the size and shape of our infantry battalions, capacity within our Marine Aircraft Wings, composition of our Marine Wing Support Squadrons, and our gap crossing capabilities.











# THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF WAR

The Marine Corps has an obligation to adapt to, harness, and even drive the changing character of war. We must continue to capture the lessons being learned in blood on active battlefields from Ukraine to the Middle East. We should pay special attention to the increasing importance of range and precision; sensing, making sense, and striking at range; the ability of shore-based sea denial capabilities to impose cost, coupled with the difficulty of targeting those forces; the proliferation and effectiveness of drones, loitering munitions, and uncrewed systems; the employment of Electronic Warfare (EW) as an essential form of fires; the difficulty of achieving enduring air superiority against a peer adversary; the importance of the recon – counter-recon contest; the ability of tactical maneuver to shape strategic-level information effects; the warfighting advantage of organic mobility; the need to plan for protracted conflict; and the difficulty of logistics and sustainment on a contested battlefield.

**As professional warriors, it is essential that we always keep in mind the immutable nature of war.** Regardless of what enemy we fight in the future, we will face friction, uncertainty, chance, and hardship – all enduring elements of violent clashes of will. The human element of our business will always matter more than the technologies we employ as Marines. No system we design will reduce the importance of discipline, physical toughness, mental agility, or moral strength. Force-on-force training remains the gold standard to simulate the rigors of combat, and we must sustain exemplary opportunities such as our MAGTF Warfighting Exercises (MWX) that enable us to train like we fight at every echelon in all domains.

In a future peer fight, sanctuary will be difficult to achieve for our formations. Bases and stations are no exception – even in the homeland. Resiliency, dispersal and hardening, rapid repair and recovery, and robust C2 system architectures must be inherent traits of our bases and stations across all warfighting functions. Importantly, the threats to our bases and stations are theater-agnostic. The Marine Corps Installations Plan is our roadmap to adapt our installations to meet the future threat environment, and we will implement it at speed.

It is important that Service planning accounts for the significant risk of protraction in a peer versus peer conflict. We must possess sufficient depth of magazine supported by a resilient and distributed logistics network to persist throughout a protracted high-intensity fight. Maintaining a ready and capable reserve component will play an outsized role in our ability to sustain combat operations against a peer adversary. We must continue to incentivize accession into the reserve component for all Marines who are transitioning out of the Corps. Depth of reserves has made the difference in protracted combat throughout history, and future conflicts will be no different.

As we modernize and field advanced kinetic capabilities with extended ranges, and sophisticated non-kinetic capabilities that leverage space, cyberspace, and the electro-magnetic spectrum, we must be increasingly creative in our approach to training. We must fully integrate constructive and virtual training into our exercises to complement live force actions so that we can train with the full complement of our new capabilities. Virtual and constructive training also allows us to better conceal certain capabilities until we are ready to employ them against our adversaries. The Marine Corps' Project Tripoli is moving rapidly to develop a Service-wide live, virtual and constructive training environment that enables Marines to integrate and train with the full suite of our Force Design capabilities from wherever they are on the globe, and to integrate that training with our naval and joint force partners.

## FISCAL ENVIRONMENT

The character of war is changing in parallel with significant constraints and restraints on our ability to drive modernization at speed. The Department of the Navy continues to benefit from congressional support to strategic priorities that accelerate Force Design. An on-time and predictable budget remains the most consequential means of success, and I will continue to advocate for predictable and timely funds to maintain the momentum of our progress. Where necessary to take care of Marines and their families, accelerate critical capabilities, deliveries, or infrastructure improvements, I will seek additional funding above topline.

We have a finite budget and each of the Services must make hard decisions to prioritize resources to prepare for the future fight. The Marine Corps has many competing requirements, all of which are important. We must sequence our investments over time, applying capital when and where it makes the most difference. Simultaneously, we must sustain the hard work that led to a clean audit for the Service. We will do right by the American taxpayer and demonstrate that a dollar invested in the Marine Corps is a dollar well spent.



## OUR FORCE

No platform, operating concept, or strategy is as important to the Service as the individual Marine. Everything we do as a Service must possess a singular focus on maximizing their lethality on the battlefield. Some investments we make in our Marines – the platforms they operate, weapons they employ, and the training we give them – directly affect their combat employment. Others, like Quality of Life and Barracks, are supporting efforts which enhance their performance when they get to the fight. The investments we make in our Marines' performance is as important as the weapons they use in combat.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

While we owe it to our Marines to instill in them the discipline and core values that will lead to their success on the battlefield, we also owe them and their families the quality of life necessary to keep them coming back for another tour. Our focus is not simply on retention to benefit our end strength – it is about doing right by our Nation's sons and daughters and their families.

The Barracks 2030 plan is the most consequential infrastructure investment plan to-date – we will see it through. The current condition of our facilities is the result of years, in some cases decades, of deferred maintenance within our installations portfolio. Solving our problems will require increased funding in facilities sustainment, restoration and modernization, and military construction accounts over several future years' budget cycles, as well as supporting efforts to right-size our existing inventory. While the cost is great, we will accurately and aggressively engage with Congress to see this through. At the same time, I need all Marines to understand that this project will take time. Many of us will not see the completion of this task during our careers, but I am committed to getting our junior Marines quick wins wherever possible – and if you have a good idea that can have a quick, low-cost, and substantial effect on the morale or performance of your unit, I want to hear from you.

Our Quality of Life initiatives are a recognition that while we recruit the Marine, we retain the family. We have an obligation to adapt our policies to ensure they are realistic for the needs of the 21st century family, to include programs oriented to support working spouses, childcare needs, and geographic stability. We are aggressively implementing policies which will provide families increased predictability about their next assignment; we are investing in our military spouses through hiring authorities, such as expanding Military Spouse Preference; and we are expanding military meal entitlements to Morale, Welfare, Recreation (MWR) restaurants. Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) programs are well underway to expand Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience (WARR) centers to all major installations. To reinforce MCTF, the Service is establishing 327 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions across the FYDP to support Marines, units, and families in all fitness domains: social, spiritual, mental, and physical. It is critical that we continue to implement total fitness programs so that we may better attract, grow, and retain the elite warriors and families we need to serve our Nation.







## RECRUITING AND RETENTION

No single issue is more existential for our Corps than recruiting and retaining high-quality Marines. The current labor market, historic lows in qualification rates, and lower propensity to serve all create an environment which will continue to challenge our recruiters. Despite these challenges, we have continued to make mission, and we will do so again this year. I am immensely proud of our recruiters – they are among the best in our Corps. We must keep it that way and continue to provide high quality talent to Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC). Leaders must understand that Marines selected for Special Duty Assignment as a recruiter are chosen to fight for the existence of our Marine Corps. Their qualifications and contributions to their fleet units are important, but no unit is more important than the Corps writ large.

While MCRC leads the charge in recruiting efforts, **they cannot and should not do it alone.** Every Commander and Senior Enlisted Leader must share in this task. **This obligation means engaging with community leaders and conveying the value and importance of service wherever possible.** All Marines, past and present, are ambassadors for our Service, and we must all do our part to ensure its future. I am willing to accept risk in other areas to ensure MCRC is appropriately resourced.

Retaining high quality Marines and civilians remains a key component of Force Design. Since the publishing of Talent Management 2030, we have taken significant steps to evolve how we retain the talent we recruit. A key component of this is our Talent Management Engagement Platform (TMEP) that provides our Marines a more personally responsive and transparent system for assignments. I am proud of the initiatives that are underway which give Marines more predictability during the orders process, transparency with their monitors, improved personnel management systems, financial incentives to those who volunteer for a Special Duty Assignment, and bonuses for lateral moves into certain Military Occupational Specialties. Our Active and Reserve component officers now have the option to opt-out of consideration for promotion once without penalty – allowing them to pursue unconventional career experiences or formal education. This effort will expand throughout the total force in the years ahead. We will maintain the trajectory of Talent Management and continue to remind our Marines why they decided to join our Corps in the first place.



## WARFIGHTING

The Marine Corps fights as a Marine Air Ground Task Force, bringing balanced air-ground, all-domain combined arms formations under one commander to create single-battle effects. The greatest strength of this warfighting system is its ability to be rapidly tailored-to-purpose and subsequently scaled in accordance with the changing operating environment or threat. Our MAGTFs, whether MEU, Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), or MEF, remain our base units of task organization, and our Regiments, to include Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs) provide base organizational units around which we can build larger formations. We will remain flexible in the employment, task organization, and organic capabilities of our MAGTFs, but it is a proven warfighting system and will endure.

In combat, we will fight as a Joint and Combined Force under the command of a Joint Force Commander. Our ability to interface with the joint structure as seamlessly as we interface with organic Marine Corps units is vital to our success against a peer adversary. Each element of the MAGTF must possess the ability to benefit from, and contribute to, the joint fight.

My observations over the last year reinforce my belief that command and control, as well as our ability to share data, will play an outsized role in future conflict, especially in realizing distributed concepts such as the Stand-in Forces (SIF) and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). Future large-scale combat operations will require a fully resourced and modernized Command Element at the MEF and intermediate headquarters (e.g., MEB, Division, Logistics Group, and Air Wing), capable of seamlessly aggregating and disseminating high-fidelity targeting information, coordinating multi-domain effects in support of maneuver, and synchronizing distributed operations into concentrated combined arms effects. Sensors and C2 capabilities across intermediate headquarters are similarly critical to enable Joint and Coalition C2 and kill webs – we must continue to invest in their proliferation.

## MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

Our Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEFs) are both our primary force generators and warfighting headquarters. As we continue to modernize through fiscal and personnel restraints, we must recognize that all MEFs can no longer perform all tasks equally. We must adapt our traditional approach of balanced MEFs toward a more flexible approach that leverages each MEF's unique structure, location, and resources to fullest effect. Our MEFs are necessarily different from one another in size, capabilities, and mission, due to both the geopolitical realities of their assigned regions and the prioritization of limited resources. The deliberate task organization of our MEFs will allow us to more efficiently allocate resources and prioritize training time to meet more refined missions. Further, subordinate elements of each MEF must be ready to task organize with any other element, or MEF, quickly and effectively.





## **I MEF**

I MEF remains our globally deployable MEF, focused on major contingency operations in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Area of Operations (AOR). As our largest MAGTF with ready access to large-scale live-fire ranges and amphibious landing sites, I MEF is best poised to focus on power projection and offensive operations in support of major regional conflicts. As such, I MEF will retain significant combat power. When individual I MEF units are tasked and resourced to support sea denial missions, those units are capable of training to the appropriate skills for those tasks as needed. During competition, I MEF supports USINDOPACOM objectives and postures throughout the AOR. In crisis, they immediately maneuver to gain early positional advantage shoulder to shoulder with III MEF. In conflict, I MEF conducts amphibious operations and Combined Joint Forcible Entry Operations (CJFEO) to support allies and partners and to open the competitive space by threatening adversary interests elsewhere. Due to the expansiveness of the USINDOPACOM AOR and its priority within the NDS, it is imperative that we protect I MEF from emergent taskings to non-priority theaters.

## **II MEF**

II MEF will be the Marine Corps' crisis response force-in-readiness, able to quickly task organize battalion and regimental-sized forces under a MAGTF construct. As the Service Retained MEF, II MEF is not specifically assigned to a Combatant Commander and must necessarily remain flexible for a wider range of contingencies. This is not to mean "be ready for everything, everywhere, at all times." I trust II MEF leadership to plan against their assessment of a "pacing contingency," in accordance with the priorities of the NDS.

While we must recognize capacity limitations, II MEF should be our first resort as our continental U.S. (CONUS)-based "911 Force" for planned and emerging requirements to U.S. Central Command, Africa Command, European Command, Southern Command, and Northern Command. In a major contingency, II MEF can provide augmentation, reinforcements, or headquarters to the other MEFs, and it will remain a Joint Task Force enabled Headquarters. In the event of a major protracted war, II MEF can shift focus to provide a second general-officer MAGTF headquarters.

## **III MEF**

III MEF will remain our main effort MEF as we campaign to deter the PRC. It will provide USINDOPACOM and PACFLT with a "fight-now," Stand-in Force capability to persist inside an adversary's WEZ, create a mutually contested space, complicate adversary decision making, facilitate the larger naval/joint campaign, and build partner capacity. Uniquely equipped with the MLRs, III MEF must stand ready to seize and hold key maritime terrain within the littorals, effect sea denial through long-range precision fires and ubiquitous sensing, and set conditions for follow-on actions by I MEF and the Joint Force. III MEF is similarly postured to provide rapid response to regional crises throughout the Indo-Pacific and it is critical that we sustain a robust crisis response capability inherent within the MEF.

III MEF will continue to develop and experiment with the MLRs as a vehicle for integrating new capabilities into the operating forces, supported by a standing MLR force development team within DC CD&I. We must continue to develop innovative solutions to provide increased range, magazine depth, and sustainment options for our MLRs. Similarly, it is imperative that the Service continues to fight to source the high-demand but low-density occupational specialties that maximize the capabilities of the MLR.

## **STAND-IN FORCES (SIF)**

The Marine Corps concept for SIF is an operating concept, not a particular unit or capability. III MEF, due to proximity to the pacing threat, has the unique ability to generate forces that contribute to the SIF concept. These Marines will act as the "JTAC of the Joint Force" – sensing, making sense, and communicating to the rest of the Joint Force with an "any sensor, any shooter" mindset. The unique capabilities contained within the MAGTF paired with the special operations capabilities of our Raiders forms a modernized warfighting capability with the agility and lethality capable of gaining and maintaining advantage from inside the WEZ. We will continue to develop the SIF concept through iterative experimentation and exercises to fully mature its methods and equipment.



## MARINE COMPONENTS

As the Marine Corps continues to invest in increasing the lethality and capabilities of our MAGTFs, in a joint warfighting context, we must ensure appropriate linkages to the Combatant Commanders who possess the authorities to employ these forces. The roles and responsibilities of our MARFORs play a vital role in effective implementation of Force Design. Every theater is different, and MARFORs must be tailored for validated Service requirements such as capability, capacity, scope, scale, and naval integration. We will deliberately resource the capabilities for certain staffs in priority theaters and accept risk in others. It is critical that we enable the essential linkages between Marine Corps tactical and operational capabilities with Combatant Commander authorities.

## MARINE FORCES RESERVE

While not organized as a traditional MEF, Marine Forces Reserve (MARFORRES) is a critical force provider in a manner no different from the standing MEFs. They are an operational reserve, and I remain committed to maintaining their readiness. MARFORRES will continue to reinforce, augment, and sustain all three MEFs as required, as well as support SOUTHCOM and 4th Fleet requirements within their means. While we will prioritize battalion-level deployments for our Reserve units, we will also flexibly deploy smaller units where necessary to supplement active-duty formations.

## MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNITS (MEUS) – 3.0 REQUIREMENT

The Amphibious Ready Group / Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU) is the premier force offering of our Corps, and I will make all necessary investments to keep it that way. No other formation we offer as Marines is as responsive or flexible as a three-ship ARG/MEU. Forward deployed, the MEU provides our national leadership with combat credible forces that are persistently on-scene and contribute to deterrence, campaigning, crisis response, and combat operations. The ARG/MEU provides our Nation's premier seabasing capability, which remains a national imperative and delivers unmatched flexibility without the need to first request access, basing, or overflight permissions prior to conducting operations. In a peer fight, the ARG/MEU can hold adversary overseas holdings at risk, and if necessary, expand the conflict to strain adversary resources in protracted conflict. For these reasons, the Geographic Combatant Commanders' demand for ARG/MEUs greatly exceeds the Navy and Marine Corps' ability to source them.

The Marine Corps has an obligation to meet Geographic Combatant Commander requirements for continuous MEU presence as an essential enabler of the Marine Corps' Title 10 responsibilities. My intent is for the Marine Corps to provide Geographic Combatant Commanders with a continuous 3.0 MEU presence. The term 3.0 refers to heel-to-toe deployments of one MEU from the East Coast, one MEU from the West Coast, and the 31st MEU originating from Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) in Japan. I will continue to coordinate with the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) to realize this strategy, to include advocating for a 5 ship FDNF to support ARG generation and campaigning objectives. Each of our MEFs and MARFORs must prioritize MEU generation and employment to meet this requirement.

## MEU MODERNIZATION

The ARG/MEU is a proven formation with a track record of providing our Nation with a host of capabilities across the competition continuum. In parallel with Service-wide modernization, MEU capabilities must continue to adapt to the demands of our Geographic Combatant Commanders, Joint, and Service warfighting concepts. Future MEUs must be capable of operating inside the WEZ of advanced conventional weapons as they are a characteristic of any environment we are likely to operate in. Our MEUs must couple proven capabilities with additional focus on Combined Joint All Domain C2 (CJADC2) as a node for the Joint Force to fully integrate the organic sensing capabilities now inherent to the ARG. The increasing proliferation of unmanned systems must also factor into the modernization of the ARG/MEU. The myriad unmanned subsurface, surface, and aerial systems that the Joint Force is rapidly procuring are a perfect match for our well decks and flight decks. We should not design our own exquisite low volume platforms, but we must be capable of supporting Joint Force programs and initiatives. Lastly, I see no better forward location than the ARG/MEU for innovation in the contested logistics space. Our amphibious ships are the perfect place for additive manufacturing, 3D printing, and advanced sustainment methods to pair with our means of tactical distribution through the Aviation Combat Element (ACE) and surface connectors.











## BALANCING MODERNIZATION WITH CURRENT OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The natural tension between modernization and current operational requirements necessitate tough decisions and require that we accept some risk in Global Force Management force offerings. In the past, we have regularly staffed deploying units and units within their Pre-deployment Training Plan (PTP) well above the levels required by the Department of Defense (DoD) and above the norm for the other Services. As we continue to aggressively modernize, we will use a systematic approach to determine the appropriate manning levels for deploying and PTP units within DoD mandates. Additionally, it is imperative that the operating forces exercise disciplined adherence to the approved MCBUL 3120 to avoid overtasking beyond what our limited resources can absorb. **Accepting near-term risk for long-term gain has, and always will be, the essence of Force Design.**

Headquarters Marine Corps must drive this institutional balance through manning, equipment delivery timelines, and Global Force Management. However, I need every commander, from the squadron or battalion to the MEF or MARFOR, to know that you have my support as you exercise your best judgement in building your training plan and generating readiness. I trust you to distinguish between true requirements and mere desires. My priority is to fill critical capability needs in III MEF, specifically fixing systemic shortfalls currently addressed administratively through the Fleet Augmentation Program. We must do everything we can to enable III MEF and U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) to be able to “fight now.”

## ALLIES AND PARTNERS

Our Allies and Partners are identified as our greatest source of strategic advantage in the NDS. The coalition we will fight alongside must factor into the development of our strategies, operating concepts, and technologies. We can only operate effectively with our Allies and Partners in execution if we involve them in our planning, analysis, concept development, and experimentation. Our future design efforts must include Allied input and considerations. We must continue to fight to be the military service partner of choice for our Allies and Partners. Combined training, security cooperation, and Professional Military Education give us outsized return on investment and service planners should seek to capitalize on these opportunities wherever possible. When it comes to integration and information sharing, we must write our concepts for release, not default to overly restrictive classifications.

## NAVAL INTEGRATION AND ORGANIC MOBILITY

From actions required to set the theater prior to large-scale combat, to projecting power and sustaining forces ashore, the ARG/MEU will continue to serve as a critical component of our system of warfighting long into the future. Lessons learned from the ongoing Russian and Ukraine conflict highlight the immense logistics and sustainment challenges of a protracted conflict on a modern battlefield. Our Amphibious Warfare Ships (AWS), Maritime Prepositioning Ships, and large quantities of surface connectors are all critical components to using the maritime domain as maneuver space. When combined, these naval assets enable an immediate transition from steady-state competition and campaigning to crisis response or high-end conflict without external augmentation.

The congressionally mandated minimum inventory of AWS provides for no fewer than 31 AWS, with a mix of 10 LHAs and 21 LPDs. As we look toward the future, the requirement for the number and availability of AWS will be driven by the combined Navy and Marine Corps' requirement to generate a 3.0 presence globally. To meet the material and personnel readiness goals associated with a 3.0 MEU requirement, the United States Navy will likely require increased resources across multiple Future Years Defense Programs (FYDP). In the meantime, our MEFs and MARFORs must find creative solutions in lieu of perfect remedies to meet Combatant Commanders' requirements.



## **LITTORAL MANEUVER**

An organic shore-to-shore surface connector capability is critical to supporting the mobility and sustainment of MLRs and the SIF. The procurement of no fewer than 35 Medium Landing Ships (LSM) remains the Marine Corps' main effort to build this capability and is separate from the congressionally mandated 31 AWS. The LSM is not an amphibious warship; it is a connector that provides a unique capability. Based upon the current procurement schedule for the LSM, the Service requires a near to mid-term Littoral Maneuver Bridging Solution (LMBS) that provides a level of organic mobility to the SIF until the LSM fleet is fielded. The two leased Stern Landing Vessels scheduled to complete delivery in FY26 are vital to Service experimentation but will not satisfy our near-term mobility requirements. We must exploit existing commercial and military capabilities that require minimal modification and can provide sustainment and littoral mobility until the LSM is fully procured. This effort will be temporary in nature, intended as a hedge to support near-term requirements.

## **MARITIME PREPOSITIONING**

In times of crisis or conflict, our adversaries will use every domain and all means available to disrupt and contest the mobilization and flow of logistics from the continental United States to the contested theater. Marine Corps prepositioning provides global coverage with inherent mobility and enduring forward presence. Our afloat and ashore prepositioning programs are a vital strategic capability that reduces reaction time and force closure distances while providing Geographic Combatant Commanders with scalable MAGTFs and initial sustainment capability.

We must acknowledge the enduring value of Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) operations in support of day-to-day campaigning, global response, and theater-setting actions while we simultaneously expand ashore prepositioning sites in USINDOPACOM. Near- to mid-term MPF employment must be supported by the existing inventory of Cargo Container (T-AK) ships and a family of Maritime Prepositioning capabilities best suited to distributed operations. The groundwork of developing a diverse family of capabilities now will pay dividends in the long-term when defining the requirement for a Maritime Prepositioning Ship, Next (MPS(X)) capable of supporting a distributed, flexible, and resilient web of sustainment.

## **SEA DENIAL, SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION (SLOCs), AND C2**

Force Design put us on a path not only to increase the lethality of the Marine Corps, but to provide more robust capabilities to the Navy and Joint Force. Our Title 10 responsibilities center around the "conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign." While power projection from the sea remains critical to the success of future naval campaigns, our land operations must contribute to naval campaign objectives at sea. The Marine Corps must remain capable of seizing and defending key maritime terrain, denying maritime maneuver space to our adversaries with our sea denial capabilities, holding targets at risk, and when necessary, destroying them or enabling the Joint Force to do so.

## **BLUE IN SUPPORT OF GREEN – PERSONNEL**

Navy medical and religious services personnel are invaluable contributors to our success at home and abroad. Our Docs and Chaplains pick us up when we go down and keep us fighting at our best. We simply cannot serve as a force-in-readiness without sufficient staffing to support our medical and spiritual readiness. I will continue to engage with the CNO and Secretary of the Navy to ensure that our units are manned to the appropriate level with Corpsmen, Medical Department Officers, Chaplains, and Religious Program Specialists – especially those in forward deployed locations.











# CRITICAL CAPABILITIES AND FUTURE INVESTMENTS

We will aggressively experiment with prototype platforms in real-world operations. As the war in Ukraine continues to demonstrate, the cycle from development to procurement to obsolescence in both hardware and software is lightning fast on a modern battlefield. The specific platforms delivering these capabilities will continually evolve as we encourage competition within industry and use multiple-vendor contracts whenever feasible. In the future, we will fight with prototypes. Battlefields throughout history demonstrate this fact, from the first usage of a tank in combat to the current employment of first-person-view drones in Ukraine. We must build agility into our acquisition processes to increase the velocity of fielding key capabilities as we identify them.

Due to the nature and significance of the challenge we are modernizing to meet, many modern capabilities being developed are necessarily protected by classification. Since the beginning of Force Design, the USMC has grown its classified portfolio investments by 435%, focused heavily on force modernization and future capabilities to combat the pacing threat. These investments are fundamental to Force Design and support maintaining a strategic advantage as we provide forward presence as the Stand-in Force around the world. These capabilities further enhance our ability to fight inside the WEZ, accelerate our force modernization, and keep pace with rapidly changing battlefield technologies. It is imperative that we continue to invest in these programs, exercise and train with them securely, and field them in a manner that will only be apparent to our adversaries at the time and place of our choosing.

Our Campaign of Learning and observations of current conflicts have solidified our focus on the following broad capability sets. This list is not all-encompassing of our current and future modernization investments but represents the most critical capabilities required to realize the vision of Force Design and the SIF. We will continue to experiment with and invest in burgeoning capabilities that are defining the modern battlefield such as Ground Based Air Defenses, including Counter-small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-sUAS), our own sUAS, and loitering munitions.

1. Contested Logistics and Littoral Mobility. This category encompasses our Maritime Pre-Positioning Force, Global Positioning Network; interim and long-term solutions for littoral surface connectors; and myriad burgeoning tactical resupply capabilities, such as autonomous aerial, surface, and subsurface vehicles to close the last tactical mile.

2. Enabling Joint & Coalition C2 & Kill Webs. Marines in the Stand-in Force, critically bolstered by our MARSOC Raiders, are the tip of the spear of the entire Joint and Combined Force. Their true value lies in what they enable the rest of the spear to do. We will continue to invest in capabilities and refine tactics that allow us to act as the forward element of the Joint Force – sensing, making sense, and communicating that information to any shooter. We will continue to pursue smaller form factor C2 nodes, field expeditionary ICD-705 compliant shelters capable of providing access to higher levels of classification at the tactical level, and leverage advances in artificial intelligence to enhance decision making at the tactical edge. Our Cyber Marines are already creating tremendous effects in the cyber and space domains – they will play a critical role in any future conflict.

3. Long-Range Precision Fires. Lessons observed in both the Black and Red Seas have re-emphasized the effectiveness of land-based precision fires in effecting sea denial. Moreover, we have seen cheap, long-range one-way attack drones used to great effect in imposing a steep cost in both conflicts. We will continue to invest in these capabilities as they are not only our most effective deterrent in the vastness of the Pacific, but also the best way to levy an outsized cost on any adversary we face. We will continue to experiment with our Long-Range Missile Battery while also pursuing a smaller form factor capability in-line with our expeditionary nature.

Certain enduring priorities must persist throughout budget cycles and remain key service objectives. Barracks, Quality of Life, recruiting, and incentive pay must possess consistent budget-share year over year commensurate with the importance of our Marines to our success.



## CONCLUSION

Marines, we have come a long way, but our adversaries are working just as hard to gain the advantage over us. I understand that the challenges we face are complex, layered, and multifaceted, requiring flexible solutions. Marines do not shy away from the hardest problems, and we will find the right path forward.

Sergeant Major Ruiz and I look forward to hearing your feedback, and we expect and need your bottom-up refinements to this top-down guidance. Regardless of rank and billet, we plan, train, and fight as one team.

It is the honor of my lifetime to be a Marine, and I am humbled to be your Commandant. I am excited for our shared future, and you should be, too. Make no mistake, we will have our challenges to face, battles to fight, and setbacks to endure. As with Marines of every age, we will overcome them with peerless discipline and move forward. Each of you inherited a proud legacy the moment you graduated Recruit Training or a commissioning program – a legacy that is built on the **Honor, Courage, and Commitment** of the Marines who came before you. I know that you will uphold their legacy and respect the effort and sacrifice they put forth to build it.

Semper Fidelis!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric M. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Eric" being the most prominent.

Eric M. Smith

General, U.S. Marine Corps

Commandant of the Marine Corps







