Texas National Security Review: Volume 6, Issue 3 (Summer 2023)
Print: ISSN 2576-1021 Online: ISSN 2576-1153

# MARINE FORCE DESIGN: CHANGES OVERDUE DESPITE CRITICS' CLAIMS

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The Marine Corps' Force Design 2030, written under the direction of the 38th commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. David Berger, has been the target of much criticism since its release in 2020. In this article, former Undersecretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work addresses these criticisms and defends the document's vision for the future of the Corps. Ultimately, he argues that it's time for the self-proclaimed Chowderites, who have fought without success to oppose the commandant's vision, to cede the field.

In the military, as in most public organizations, new leaders need to take stock. They are obligated to determine the state of the institution and its preparedness to execute its current missions, particularly during times of rapid technological change. Leaders must also assess whether the organization is ready to account for evident or anticipated changes in the foreseeable future. If they judge that the institution is not prepared for current or future challenges, then it is incumbent upon them to make the changes deemed necessary to make it so.

As he assumed the role of 38th commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. David Berger, the sitting commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, conducted just such an assessment. Upon completion, he concluded, "Significant change is required to ensure we are aligned with the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* and [Defense Planning Guidance] and prepared to meet the demands of the Naval Fleet in executing current and emerging operational naval concepts."[1] This was a difficult judgment to make for a decorated leader of a service as fiercely proud of its martial prowess as the Marine Corps. I understand this intimately, having served as a Marine artillery officer for 27 years. But Berger was convinced by the evidence that change was required, and he was intent on doing something about it. The "doing something about it" came in the form of *Force Design 2030*,[2] which is both a case for change and a vision and a plan for a modernized Marine Corps that is ready to take on future challenges.

Berger's plans were not met with universal acclaim.[3] Indeed, the opponents of the commandant's vision would give the Energizer Bunny a run for its money. They have lobbied on Capitol Hill and fired off a spate of opinion pieces with machine-gun rapidity in various periodicals that come off as if they were generated by ChatGPT.[4] They describe Berger's plans in the most heated of terms, depicting them as both destructive and possibly illegal.[5] They've implied that Congress has failed over the last few budget cycles to provide proper oversight of the merits of the programs and budgets they have approved. Their stated objective is to get Congress to stop Berger from pursuing his plan until it holds hearings, presumably to discredit his reforms and then chart a path into the future that better suits their preferences. These dissenters have thus far failed to convince Congress of the

1 *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps*, U.S. Marine Corps, July 15, 2019, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/%2038th%20Commandant%27s%20Planning%20Guidance_2019.pdf?ver=2019-07-16-200152-700.

2 *Force Design 2030*, U.S. Marine Corps, March 2020, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460.

3 Jim Webb, "Momentous Changes in the U.S. Marine Corps' Force Organization Deserve Debate," *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/momentous-changes-in-the-marine-corps-deserve-debate-reduction-david-berger-general-11648217667.

4 Charles Krulak, Jack Sheehan, and Anthony Zinni, "War Is a Dirty Business. Will the Marine Corps Be Ready for the Next One?" *Washington Post*, April 22, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/22/marines-restructuring-plan-scrutiny-generals/; Paul K. Van Riper, "Jeopardizing National Security: What Is Happening to Our Marine Corps?" *Marine Corps Times*, March 21, 2022, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/opinion/commentary/2022/03/21/jeopardizing-national-security-what-is-happening-to-our-marine-corps/; Bing West, "A Response to Mr. Christopher Corrow, Headquarters Marine Corps," *National Review*, March 19, 2022, https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/a-response-to-mr-christopher-corrow-headquarters-marine-corps/; and Owen West, "Are the Marines Inventing the Edsel or the Mustang?" *War on the Rocks*, May 27, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/are-the-marines-inventing-the-edsel-or-the-mustang/.

5 Paul K. Van Riper and Jerry McAbee, "How the Corps' New Training Document Ignores US Law," *Marine Corps Times*, March 23, 2023, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/opinion/2023/03/23/how-the-corps-new-training-document-ignores-us-law/.

merits of their case,[6] but that has not discouraged them from continuing to disparage the commandant's plans publicly and often.[7] They just keep going ... and going ... and going.

Berger's opponents refer to themselves as "Chowder II,"[8] a reference to the original "Chowder Society" formed in 1946 to fight efforts to limit the post-war role of the U.S. Marine Corps — if not eliminate it entirely. The original Chowder Society was fighting against *external* attacks on the Marine Corps that were being made by the U.S. Army, Defense Department leadership, and the Truman administration.[9] President Harry Truman infamously wrote, "For your information the Marine Corps is the Navy's police force and as long as I am President that is what it will remain. They have a propaganda machine that is almost equal to Stalin's."[10] Needless to say, Truman's vision for the Marine Corps did not win the day.

While there is no meaningful effort to eliminate the Marine Corps today or to diminish its standing in the joint force, questions about its future role have been unfolding in public for several years.[11] In fact, this questioning started within the Marine Corps itself, particularly under Commandant Gen. Robert Neller, Berger's immediate predecessor. Indeed, Neller concluded, "The Marine Corps is not organized, trained, equipped, or postured to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving future operating environment."[12] Berger agreed with this assessment, which helped to frame his *Force Design 2030* plans. These plans have now proceeded to the point that they are having a real impact. As just one example, in January 2023, the U.S. secretary of defense and U.S. secretary of state, in a "2+2" meeting with their Japanese counterparts, specifically featured one of the service's new *Force Design 2030* capabilities — the Marine littoral regiment.[13] Having this emerging capability at the center of the discussion with one of America's most important treaty allies was only possible because the sitting commandant had concluded that the Marine Corps needed to make changes if it were to prevail on future battlefields. Yet, today's Chowderites are unhappy with these changes, so much so that they have deemed Berger an enemy of the Corps who must be defamed and stopped at all costs.[14]

The Chowderites proclaim that their group has grown from a small number of retired senior marines to "hundreds of former and retired Marines of all ranks."[15] No one knows for sure what the true numbers are because the Chowderites refuse to reveal their members.[16] Indeed, many of their early articles were pseudonymous and published in the *Marine Corps Gazette*.[17] My best guess is

6 At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on March 28, 2023, Sen. Daniel Sullivan (R, AK) said he would like to have a hearing on *Force Design 2030*. It is unclear if the chairman agrees with him. But Congress has had numerous budget and modernization hearings over the past two budget cycles and executed its lawful oversight role over *Force Design* 2030. "To Receive Testimony on Navy and Marine Corps Investment Programs in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2024 and the Future Years Defense Program," Subcommittee on Seapower, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, March 28, 2023, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/to-receive-testimony-on-navy-and-marine-corps-investment-programs-in-review-of-the-defense-authorization-request-for-fiscal-year-2024-and-the-future-years-defense-program.

7 "The Future of War," *Washington Post*, April 28, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/28/future-war/; Charles Wilhelm, "Transforming the Marines for an Uncertain Future," *National Interest*, Jan. 21, 2023, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/transforming-marines-uncertain-future-206131; and Anthony Zinni, Jefferson D. Howell, and Frank Libutti, "A Strategy that Squanders U.S. Marines' Greatest Strengths," *Newsweek*, March 8, 2023, https://www.newsweek.com/strategy-that-squanders-us-marines-greatest-strengths-opinion-1786148.

8 Paul Van Riper, "This Is the Marine Corps Debate We Should Be Having," *Marine Corps Times*, Dec. 7, 2022, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/opinion/2022/12/07/this-is-the-marine-corps-debate-we-should-be-having/.

9 For a description of the original Chowder Society and its activities, see Robert Coram, *Brute* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2010); and Alan Rems, "Semper Fidelis: Defending the Marine Corps," *Naval History Magazine* 31, no. 3 (June 2017), https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2017/june/semper-fidelis-defending-marine-corps.

10 Alan Rems, "A Propaganda Machine Like Stalin's," *Naval History Magazine* 33, no. 3 (June 2019), https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2019/june/propaganda-machine-stalins.

11 For a good summation of these questions, see Scott Cuomo, "On-the-Ground Truth and Force Design 2030 Reconciliation: A Way Forward," *War on the Rocks*, July 12, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/on-the-ground-truth-and-force-design-2030-reconciliation-a-way-forward/.

12 U.S. Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps*.

13 "Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2")," Department of Defense, Jan. 11, 2023, https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3265559/joint-statement-of-the-2023-usjapan-security-consultative-committee-22/; and Ashley Roque and Lee Ferran, "Japan Signs Off on Marines Plan for New Littoral 'Stand-in' Group in Okinawa," *Breaking Defense*, Jan. 11, 2023, https://breakingdefense.com/2023/01/japan-signs-off-on-marines-plan-for-new-littoral-stand-in-group-in-okinawa/.

14 Van Riper, "Jeopardizing National Security."

15 John J. Sheehan and James Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030," *National Interest*, Dec. 12, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/former-marine-generals-%E2%80%98our-concerns-force-design-2030%E2%80%99-205989.

16 Chris Woodbridge, "Transparency," Marine Corps Association, Dec. 5, 2022, https://mca-marines.org/blog/gazette/transparency/.

17 Marinus, "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2022, https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Maneuverist-19.pdf. Although the *Gazette* later declined to publish further articles from this group as their submissions were, according to the publisher, not based in fact and not sufficiently cited. Marine Corps Association, "Transparency."

that Chowder II probably numbers fewer than 30 dedicated members.[18]

Make no mistake. Having been a deputy secretary of defense in two administrations, I can confidently say that these public attacks on a commandant's plans by retired general officers are highly troubling, raising serious concerns about civil-military relations and the role of retired general and flag officers in the development of defense programs. As will be described, these officers are, in essence, urging the commandant to ignore strategic guidance from the president and the secretary of defense. Moreover, requiring sitting service chiefs to gain the "permission" of retired senior leaders for their visions and plans would set a terrible precedent and lay a substantial burden on all future chiefs — and not just Marine commandants.

This would be problem enough if the complaints and criticisms of the retired officers had merit. However, the Chowder II arguments are, in general, flimsily constructed assertions based on opinions, straw-man arguments, incorrect data, and misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the commandant's intent and plans.

An example of these arguments came in a recent article written by retired Marine general officers John J. Sheehan and James Amos.[19] Together, they trod the same ground previously plowed by several other retired senior marines — which is to say they make the same arguments that Congress has considered and rejected after more than 400 meetings and briefings.[20] Indeed, a case can be made that the arguments have had the opposite effect to that intended: They have spurred full-throated congressional and combatant commander support for *Force Design 2030* and increased funding for the Marine Corps to accelerate its implementation.[21]

Chowder II has articulated numerous complaints about the vision laid out in *Force Design 2030* and its associated implementation decisions. Sheehan and Amos consolidate these complaints into five key categories of concerns "that pose an unnecessary risk to national security, the role of the Marine Corps in national defense, the readiness of Marine forces for global contingencies, and those intangibles that define Marines." According to the Chowderites, these represent high crimes and misdemeanors that should be considered and impeached. However, when critically examined, their concerns fail to make a convincing argument that Berger's vision and plans should be blocked.

I assess them here.

## Employing One Method, in One Place, and on the Defense? Hardly

When outlining his case for change, Berger identifies three unmistakable trends that are changing the competitive landscape in military affairs and should be accounted for.[22] The first is the rise of the precision-strike regime, which sees battlefields that are largely — although not completely — transparent and swept by short-, medium- and long-range guided munitions with "near zero miss" accuracy. These circumstances have changed and are continuing to change the character of war. They have given rise to theater-wide anti-access and area denial networks designed first to deter any U.S. power-projection operation or, failing that, to defeat it.[23] Both China and Russia have built their own such networks, and Iran is trying to follow suit, albeit on a far lesser scale. All cover the maritime approaches into their respective theaters and regions. This threatens the typical ways in which the United States has projected power, particularly large-scale amphibious assault operations. The late Sen. John McCain-led Senate Armed Services Committee, among many others, called into question such amphibious assault operations just prior

18 As best as I can tell, the hardcore Chowderites are (ranks are provided, but all are retired): Gen. James Amos, Col. Gary Anderson, Col. Stephen W. Baird, Col. Harvey Barnum, Col. Mark Cancian , Lt. Gen. Terrence Dake, Brig. Gen. Mike Hayes, Lt. Gen. Barry Knutson, Gen. Charles Krulak, Lt. Col. John D. Kuntz, Maj. Gen. James Livingston, Col. Michael P. Marletto, Brig. Gen. Jerry McAbee, Col. Robert Modrzejewski, Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold, Col. Warren Parker, Maj. John Schmitt, Gen. John Sheehan, Lt. Gen. Martin Steele, Col. James K. Van Riper, Lt. Gen. Paul K. Van Riper, Col. Jay Vargas, former Senator and Secretary of the Navy Jim Webb, Col. Timothy C. Wells, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Bing West, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Owen West, Gen. Charles Wilhelm, Col. G. I. Wilson, and Gen. Anthony Zinni.

19 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"

20 Berger cites more than 420 *Force Design 2030* briefings in his recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. Subcommittee on Seapower, "To Receive Testimony on Navy and Marine Corps Investment Programs."

21 Seth Moulton and Mike Gallagher, "Send In the Marines for a Modernization," *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/send-in-the-marines-for-a-modernization-congress-plan-2030-forces-strikes-capability-11653940925.

22 David Berger, "The Case for Change: Meeting the Principal Challenges Facing the Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2020, 8–12, https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Case-for-Change.pdf.

23 Shawn Brimley et al., "The Future of Anti-Access/Area Denial," *Building the Future Force: Guaranteeing American Leadership in a Contested Environment*, Center for a New American Security, March 1, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep16986.7.

to Berger becoming commandant.[24]

The second imperative for change devolves from the first. The rise of continental based anti-access and area denial networks undoubtedly increases the risk and costs of any U.S. response to Chinese or Russian aggression against U.S. allies and partners. As a result, Berger believes that both China and Russia are using the degree of deterrence they have achieved to pursue their malign interests through so-called "gray zone" actions, "hybrid warfare," proxy warfare, and related "salami-slicing" strategies.[25] All these strategies "are designed to avoid obvious counters by the United States and its allies" by presenting American leaders with what Michael O'Hanlon calls the "Senkaku Paradox":

> Faits accompli on matters of such insignificance, in areas at the margins of our current ability to project and logistically support significant forces, that we perceive a lethal response as simply "not worth it."[26]

Basing large forces forward to combat these strategies and tactics below the level of armed conflict would be prohibitively expensive and diplomatically difficult. Moreover, large forward-based forces would be at risk of devastating preemptive or first strikes from the overhanging anti-access and area denial networks, should either country decide to resort to overt military action.[27]

Small, agile, "light footprint," and difficult-to-target maritime forces tailored to confront specific Chinese or Russian malign activities in their regions — like those envisioned by Berger in *Force Design 2030* — appear to make great sense militarily, economically, and diplomatically. Indeed, Japanese leaders see these types of forces as "key to expanded Pacific security cooperation." Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the most senior U.S. and Japanese defense and diplomatic leaders view these types of forces as essential for optimizing the "posture of the U.S. forces in Japan, with enhanced Japanese Self Defense Force capabilities and posture in areas including the Southwestern islands." The senior leaders also stated that these capabilities "would substantially strengthen Alliance deterrence and response capabilities."[28]

As Berger sees it, the "principal [places] where these first two trends are playing out today are in maritime theaters." The third impetus for change is thus the need to pursue better integration with the Navy, spurred by the imperative for maritime campaigning.

This is hardly a novel idea. Ever since the Marine Corps started planning to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, every commandant has called for the service to return to its "maritime roots." Amos, although now an avowed opponent of *Force Design 2030*, had this to say in a posture report to the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee of Defense in 2014 when he was commandant:

> Naval forces control the seas and use that control to project power ashore. The fiscal and security challenges we face demand a seamless and fully integrated Navy-Marine Corps team. Achieving our shared vision of the future naval force requires strong cooperation. Now more than ever, the Navy-Marine team must integrate our capabilities to effectively protect our nation's interests.[29]

Integrated naval campaigning is especially important when it comes to responding to potential Chinese aggression. However, the Chowderites believe that *Force Design* 2030 has a "myopic" focus on China and should instead have focused on all the other potential global contingencies at which the Marine force-in-readiness has long excelled.[30] Berger rightly rejects this criticism. The 2022

24 Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "SASC Seeks Sweeping 'Roles & Missions' Report: Wither the Marines?" *Breaking Defense*, June 6, 2018, https://breakingdefense.com/2018/06/sasc-seeks-sweeping-roles-missions-report-wither-the-marines/.

25 Salamah Magnuson, Morgan Keay, and Kimberly Metcalf, "Countering Hybrid Warfare: Mapping Social Contracts to Reinforce Societal Resiliency in Estonia and Beyond," *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 27–52, https://tnsr.org/2022/01/countering-hybrid-warfare-mapping-social-contracts-to-reinforce-societal-resiliency-in-estonia-and-beyond/; Richard W. Maass, "Salami Tactics; Faits Accomplis and International Expansion in the Shadow of Major War," *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2021/2022): 33–54, https://tnsr.org/2021/11/salami-tactics-faits-accomplis-and-international-expansion-in-the-shadow-of-major-war/; "U.S. Marine Corps Commandant on Readiness," *C-Span*, March 14, 2023, https://www.c-span.org/video/?526691-1/us-marine-corps-commandant-readiness; and Michael Kofman, "Getting the Fait Accompli Problem Right in U.S. Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, Nov. 3, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/getting-the-fait-accompli-problem-right-in-u-s-strategy/.

26 Michael E. O'Hanlon, *The Senkaku Paradox* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019), as cited in Berger, "The Case for Change."

27 Luis Simon, "Demystifying the A2/AD Buzz," *War on the Rocks*, Jan. 4, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/demystifying-the-a2ad-buzz/.

28 Department of Defense, "Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2")."

29 James F. Amos, "2014 Report to the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Defense on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps," House Appropriations Committee, March 25, 2014, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP02/20140325/101924/HHRG-113-AP02-Wstate-AmosJ-20140325.pdf.

30 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"

*National Security Strategy* describes China as "the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it."[31] For its part, the 2022 *National Military Strategy* states, "The most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security is the [People's Republic of China's] coercive and increasingly aggressive endeavor to refashion the Indo-Pacific region and international system to suit its interests and authoritarian preferences."[32] Both refer to China as the "pacing threat" — the priority focus of U.S. strategic and defense planning. In essence, then, the Chowderites are urging the commandant to ignore this definitive civilian guidance and instead concentrate on being an all-around force-in-readiness (more on this point later).

Berger cannot be true to his oath and ignore strategic guidance. If he were to ignore it, he would justifiably face being replaced. After having considered that guidance, the commandant concluded that assembling a large amphibious force within the range rings of the Chinese anti-access and area denial network will not be possible. Two decades of wargaming and campaign analysis support his judgment. Instead, he envisions a Marine Corps operating in close support of the Navy's new distributed maritime operations concept with smaller, distributed, and low-signature "stand-in forces."[33]

The idea is this: Properly executed, stand-in forces persisting close to China within contested spaces can gain and maintain a capability to rapidly strike targets while denying a coherent picture of the fleet to adversaries. Marine forces extend the fleet's ability to sense and make sense of the environment while becoming an unavoidable obstacle to enemy actions. It does this as an inside force, disintegrating an adversary's system from the inside out and providing opportunities for the fleet to exploit.[34]

To make this concept a reality, Berger directed three regiments already based in the Western Pacific — two infantry and one artillery — to be reconfigured as Marine littoral regiments,[35] optimized as stand-in forces.[36] These new formations would be the eyes of the fleet commander and the entire joint force, fighting a reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance battle to give U.S. and allied forces an advantage in sensing, sense-making, and targeting. These so-called "risk-worthy" forces could be inserted long before actual combat operations, working with allies to unmask and confront Chinese malign activities throughout the Western Pacific, as they are doing today.[37] They would thus already be in a position to contest any Chinese overt aggression, and likely be the "first to fight." In a war with China, stand-in forces would help to transform the entire first island chain into a garotte around the neck of China's military.

When performing the stand-in force role, these littoral regiments would conduct distributed operations using widely dispersed smaller units, just as the U.S. Navy plans to fight at sea. Opponents of *Force Design 2030* believe that these small forces would be too widely separated to provide mutual support and therefore would be vulnerable to defeat in detail. This is a valid concern, but one greatly mitigated by the other U.S. military services, as well as America's allies and partners.

Moreover, risk should be balanced against the advantages afforded by distributed operations in the precision-strike regime, as explained by a Royal United Services Institute report about preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine:

> Survivability is often afforded by being sufficiently dispersed to become an uneconomical target, by moving quickly enough to disrupt the enemy's kill chain and thereby evade engagement, or by entering hardened structures. … Forces should prioritise concentrating effects while only concentrating mass under favourable conditions

31 *National Security Strategy*, The White House, October 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

32 *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, Department of Defense, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

33 Barry Rosenberg, "Distributed Maritime Operations: Dispersing the Fleet for Survivability and Lethality," *Breaking Defense*, Sept. 15, 2021, https://breakingdefense.com/2021/09/distributed-maritime-operations-dispersing-the-fleet-for-survivability-and-lethality/.

34 *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, U.S. Marine Corps, December 2021, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Users/183/35/4535/211201_A%20Concept%20for%20Stand-In%20Forces.pdf.

35 Irene Loewenson, "Marine Littoral Regiment Fends Off Traditional Regiment in Exercise," *Marine Corps Times*, March 16, 2023, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2023/03/16/marine-littoral-regiment-fends-off-traditional-regiment-in-exercise/.

36 Eric Smith, "Stand-in Forces: Adapt or Perish," *Proceedings*, Vol. 148/4/1,430 (April 2022), https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/april/stand-forces-adapt-or-perish.

37 Dzirhan Mahadzir, "U.S. Marines, Japan Self Defense Force Kick Off Iron Fist Exercise in Western Pacific," *USNI News*, Feb. 19, 2023, https://news.usni.org/2023/02/19/u-s-marines-japan-self-defense-force-kick-off-iron-fist-exercise-in-western-pacific.

– with an ability to offer mutual support beyond line of sight – and should give precedence to mobility as a critical component of their survivability.[38]

In addition to claiming that *Force Design 2030* has a myopic focus on China, the Chowderites charge that the Marine Corps that it envisions would be employed *only* as stand-in forces — the "one method" they refer to. When doing so, they purposely fail to note four important things. First, stand-in forces are theater agnostic. They work as effectively in Europe's confined waters as they do in the Western Pacific.[39] Second, only two of seven Marine infantry regiments will be reconfigured as Marine littoral regiments. The other five will retain their "traditional" infantry-heavy structure, which is optimized for sustained operation ashore. Third, the group also fails to acknowledge that stand-in forces are just one manifestation of a new organizational design that is optimized to support distributed operations down to the lowest tactical level. Finally, they purposely ignore the results of experiments that suggest that the new Marine littoral regiment may outmatch a traditional infantry regiment.[40]

**IMAGINE A CORPS THAT CAN EMULATE WHAT THE UKRAINIAN ARMY DID TO THE RUSSIAN ARMY DURING THE FIRST PHASE OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S "SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION," BUT AMPLIFIED BY AN ORDER OF MAGNITUDE OR MORE.**

Distributed operations are the true secret sauce behind *Force Design 2030* that account for a largely transparent battlefield and the constant threat of intense, long-range guided weapon attacks. While most militaries see the infantry company (units of approximately 150–200 warriors) as the lowest fighting echelon capable of coordinating combined arms, Berger wants to push combined-arms capabilities, including small uncrewed aircraft and loitering precision munitions, to the squad level (13–15 warriors). As he puts it, "success will be defined in terms of finding the smallest, lowest signature options that yield the maximum operational utility." This move is part of a redesigned infantry battalion organization that incorporates many of the advancements suggested by the Close Combat Lethality Task Force established by then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis.[41]

Curiously, the Chowderites argue that these advancements will make the Marine Corps less adept at close combat. This is an opinion unsupported by facts. The truth of the matter is that the adaptations suggested in *Force Design 2030* promise to make Marine infantry battalions — which will remain the heart of the service's combat formations — more lethal than they are today.[42] These changes include providing companies, platoons, and squads with their own intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting capabilities; resilient network communications systems; and precision fires. These new capabilities will be equally effective for both defensive and offensive operations.

A Marine Corps designed from the ground up and organized, manned, trained, and equipped for distributed operations is a military service that is designed for combat in the precision-strike regime in "any clime and place" — on any battlefield, in any theater, against any opponent. Moreover, stand-in forces operations are just one form of naval campaigning that the Marine Corps, as described in *Force Design 2030*, is "capable of rather than designed exclusively for." Imagine a Corps that can emulate what the Ukrainian army did to the Russian army during the first phase of Russian President Vladimir Putin's "special military operation," but amplified by an order of magnitude or more. It will likely be one of the apex predators in the mature precision-strike regime.

As such, the Chowderites' charges that Berger's reforms are myopically focused on one enemy (China), in one geographical region (the Western Pacific), employing one method (stand-in forces), and with a defensive orientation all ring hollow.

38 Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi et al., "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022," Royal United Services Institute, Nov. 30, 2022, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022.

39 Frank Donovan and Ryan Evans, "The Task Force at the Bleeding Edge of the Marines Corps," *War on the Rocks Podcast*, Aug. 11, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-task-force-at-the-bleeding-edge-of-the-marine-corps/.

40 Loewenson, "Marine Littoral Regiment."

41 Daniel S. Roper, "Regaining Tactical Overmatch: The Close Combat Lethality Task Force," Institute of Land Warfare, April 2018, https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/publications/SL-18-2-Regaining-Tactical-Overmatch-The-Close-Combat-Lethality-Task-Force.pdf.

42 "Task Force Looks at Making Infantry Squads More Lethal," Department of Defense, Sept. 19, 2018, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1639138/task-force-looks-at-making-infantry-squads-more-lethal/.

## No More Global Response? Not So Fast

This is one of the most frequently cited objections by the opponents of *Force Design 2030*. It is closely related to the charge that the new design has a "myopic" focus on China. Chowderites claim that the evidence is "overwhelming" that "the Marine Corps is clearly less capable to serve as a global response force and a force-in-readiness ... and can no longer claim [its] traditional role as the Nation's premier 9-1-1 force."[43]

The wording used by Sheehan and Amos is important because it reveals the true motivations of Chowder II: They want to turn back time to 1952.

The original 1946 Chowder Society helped to cement the Marine Corps' role in the Department of Defense. The subsequent National Security Act of 1947 protected the Marine Corps as an independent service in the Department of the Navy.[44] Later, in 1952, after comparing the sub-par performance of the U.S. Army at the start of the Korean War, combined with the subsequent stirring combat performance of the Marine Corps at the Pusan Perimeter, Inchon, and the Chosin Reservoir, a subcommittee in the 82nd Congress wrote that the Marine Corps "has fully demonstrated the vital need for the existence of a strong force in readiness. ... The nation's shock troops must be the most ready when the nation is generally least ready."[45]

The subcommittee went on to say that the force-in-readiness should be a "balanced force ... for a naval campaign and, at the same time, a ground and air striking force ready to suppress or contain international disturbances short of large-scale war." Marines, and especially the Chowderites, fiercely embrace this vision, which helps explain why they think of themselves as America's global 9-1-1 response force.

Chowder II wants Berger to retain the force design of the 1952 force-in-readiness role — one that is optimized for amphibious assault and expeditionary combat operations ashore. It believes that any force design that is not aligned with this role is a threat to U.S. national security. Although executive branch agencies often seek to comply with language found in committee and subcommittee reports, their language is not legally binding in the same manner as statutory text.[46] The full weight of law is found in Title 10 of the U.S. Code, which provides the legal basis for the roles, missions, and organization of the U.S. Department of Defense and each of the armed services. Title 10 directs that the Marine Corps shall include no fewer than three combat divisions and three air wings, "and be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet."[47] Nothing in *Force Design 2030* ignores these Title 10 mandates.

Furthermore, Berger continues to tout the Marine Corps' role as an expeditionary force-in-readiness at every opportunity. As he noted:

> The Marine Corps will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness. ... In crisis prevention and crisis response, The Fleet Marine Force — acting as an extension of the Fleet — will be first on the scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis, and first to fight if required to do so.[48]

## A Devastating Reduction of Operational Capabilities? Only in 1952 Dreams

Chowder II might concede that Berger is saying all the right words. But they will likely quickly add that the "devastating reductions" associated with *Force Design 2030* prove that the future Marine Corps will not be organized or equipped for the global response mission. To make their case that such reductions will take place, the Chowderites rely heavily on percentage decrements of legacy capabilities. Some advice: View these numbers skeptically because they are generally off the mark.

For example, the Chowderites claim that *Force Design 2030* will result in a 21 percent loss in

43 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"

44 Benis M. Frank, "A Giant Passes: General Merrill B. Twining, 1902-1996," *Fortitudine* 26, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 3–9, https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/Fortitudine%20Vol%2026%20No%201.pdf; and "National Security Act of 1947," Marine Corps University, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Frequently-Requested-Topics/Historical-Documents-Orders-and-Speeches/The-National-Security-Act-of-1947/.

45 George J. Flynn, "Fast, Austere, Lethal: Marine Core Values," *Proceedings*, Vol. 135/4/1,274 (April 2009), https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2009/april/fast-austere-lethal-marine-core-values.

46 "Congress's Authority to Influence and Control Executive Branch Agencies," Congressional Research Service, updated March 30, 2023, 38, https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45442.pdf.

47 *United States Marine Corps: Composition; Functions*, 10 U.S. Code § 8063, Aug. 10, 1956, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/8063.

48 U.S. Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps.*

Marine infantry battalions. This is not correct.

The total number of infantry battalions will drop from 24 to 21, a reduction of 12.5 percent, not 21. Recall, however, that Title 10 calls for a Marine Corps of no fewer than three divisions and three air wings. Chowder II appears to interpret this to mean a force-in-readiness Marine Corps should always have no fewer than three "full strength" divisions, with nine regiments and 27 battalions. A drop from 27 to 21 battalions is a 22 percent cut, close to the 21 percent that the Chowderites cite. But that dog won't hunt. Due to budgetary constraints, the Marine Corps has not had a force structure of this configuration since the 1990s, and since then the service has aligned its force design within these congressionally established limits. The 2018 and 2019 Marine Corps had already been cut by one regiment to eight, and by three infantry battalions down to 24 (reductions that were approved by many of the current opponents when they were in charge). *Force Design 2030* further cuts the number of Marine infantry regiments by one, from eight to seven. That cut regiment's three organic infantry battalions go with it, resulting in the number of battalions falling from 24 to 21.

One might also get close to a 21 percent decrease if considering *manning cuts* to the infantry battalions. Legacy battalions had 896 personnel. The *Force Design 2030* battalions will have somewhere between 800 and 835 Marines (and another 66 Navy personnel). This results in a manning cut ranging from 7 to 22 percent, the final number depending on the results of experimentation.

Critically, and a point often overlooked by the critics, even a reduced battalion of 800 to 835 marines will be the largest infantry battalion in the world. Moreover, *Force Design 2030* calls for 100 percent manning of the 21 infantry battalions. Over the past several decades, infantry battalion manning has been substantially lower, often 90 percent or below. As a result, the individual manning of keys billets, such as squad leader, were filled by a rank lower than that defined by the table of organization — for example, with a corporal rather than a sergeant.[49] *Force Design 2030* will see a higher degree of seasoned leadership and readiness in the infantry battalions than ever before.

Even a cut of three battalions upsets the opponents, who apparently believe any reductions to a "full-strength" three-division Marine Corps force structure are unacceptable. Yet, Berger lives in the real world of defense requirements and budget allocations. *Force Design 2030* starts from an approved 2018–2019 force structure of 24 battalions. An analysis of joint war plans revealed that 21 battalions satisfy all currently assessed naval and joint requirements.[50] It therefore makes sense to divest the three "excess" battalions to invest in new combat capabilities that are more appropriate for distributed operations and integrated naval campaigning in the mature precision-strike regime. And, as discussed, the opponents of Berger's force design fail to mention that the 21 remaining battalions promise to be more capable than legacy battalions.[51]

One of the main objects of criticism is Berger's decision to direct the Marine Corps to rid itself of all its tanks. But the Chowderites doth protest too much. Some of this group's members appear to have been ambivalent about tanks, before they came out against cutting them. For example, during the confirmation hearing for Gen. Charles Krulak's successor as commandant, Sen. John Warner (himself a former undersecretary of the Navy) noted:

> General Krulak recently made the comment that he would eliminate the tank fleet found in the Marine Corps today if he could. He went on to suggest that heavy armor has limited relevance for future defense challenges and the operation and support costs for a heavy force seriously impact limited defense dollars.[52]

In the Marine Corps, tanks have most often performed the role of "mobile protected firepower" in support of infantry in a close fight, especially in urban combat. In the 1990s, the Marine Corps total force included two active and one reserve tank battalions, each with 56 tanks (although the reserve battalion typically had fewer than 56). In addition,

49 Jim Lively, "Rifle Squad Leader Staffing: Time for Change," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 2018, 31–33, https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/0518-Rifle-Squad-Leader-Staffing.pdf.

50 U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*.

51 For more on the ongoing transformations occurring within the Marine infantry, listen to three of the Corps' leading infantry battalion 2030 experts: Devon Sanderfield, Nathaniel Baker, and Michael Carreiro. "#3 Devon Sanderfield, Nathaniel Baker, and Michael Carreiro," *Controversy & Clarity*, Sept. 9, 2022, #3--Devon Sanderfield, Nathaniel Baker, and Michael Carreiro by Controversy & Clarity (spotify.com). In the podcast, these three marines describe their experiences serving within one of the service's infantry battalion 2030 experimental units. See also Stephen W. LaRose, "A View from the Trenches on the Debate Wracking the Marine Corps," *War on the Rocks*, May 6, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/a-view-from-the-trenches-on-the-debate-wracking-the-marine-corps/.

52 "Special Report: The 32d Commandant's Senate Confirmation Hearing," *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 7 (July 1999): 23–24.

each of the three maritime prepositioning force squadrons carried a battalion's worth of tanks. More tanks were stored in caves in Norway to support Marine force operating on NATO's northern flank. Importantly, however, none of these prepositioned stocks included the marines to operate and maintain the tanks.[53]

In total, then, by 2019, with access to a protected port to offload tanks from a maritime prepositioning force squadron, the total force Marine Corps could employ at best three tank battalions, each with 56 tanks. To support this force of 168 tanks, the Marine Corps needed to procure and maintain obstacle-breaching and bridging equipment, substantial numbers of refuelers, tank retrievers, and other heavy engineering capabilities. Moreover, when they were in charge and making force structure decisions, the Chowderites never upgraded Marine tanks. If Berger were to do so now, such as installing active protective systems and other upgrades, an up-armored M1A2 tank would weigh 80 tons — too heavy for either the current landing craft air cushioned or new ship-to-shore connector to carry.[54] Berger deemed the opportunity cost to maintain and operate this heavy equipment in support of such a small number of tanks to be too high. In addition, he knew he could count on getting tank support from the Army if needed, as the Marine Corps did in Operation Desert Storm and more recently in Operation Iraqi Freedom, including when 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment served as 1st Marine Division's main effort in Fallujah in 2004.[55]

Regardless of these historical truths, *Force Design 2030* opponents now believe a force-in-readiness should be entirely self-contained and not dependent on any other service. If experimentation suggests that the ground combat element would benefit from organic mobile protected firepower, the Marine Corps has the option to procure the Army's new Mobile Protected Firepower system — a light tank — should future analysis or experience call for this capability.[56]

The truth of the matter is that M1 Abrams tanks that weigh 70 tons or more, along with all the heavy equipment needed to support them, represent an incredible logistics burden for a fighting organization that counts on fleetness and mobility for its combat effectiveness and survival. The burden is especially acute for Marine forces coming from the sea. Nowhere is this more evident than in the premier Marine Corps crisis response organization — the Marine expeditionary unit. A combined-arms capable, Marine air-ground task force built around an infantry battalion landing team ground combat element, with supporting aviation and logistics combat elements, the Marine expeditionary unit is typically embarked on a three-ship Amphibious Readiness Group where space is especially tight. This lack of space helps to explain why marines often decide not to embark tanks with the Marine expeditionary units, despite having the available inventory to do so. Indeed, prior to Berger's divestment decision, the service — when led by many of the Chowderites — deployed a Marine expeditionary unit out of Japan for decades without tanks,[57] including twice into combat situations: Once was in support of Desert Fox in Kuwait in 1999[58] and the other time was to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004. Importantly, the 2004 deployment saw the Marine expeditionary unit's ground combat element, Battalion Landing Team 1/3, serving as one of the primary clearing units in the Second Battle of Fallujah, where it had a U.S. Army infantry task force, reinforced with a tank company, fighting on its flank.[59] The Chowderites fully supported multiple decisions over the decades to deploy annually one of the service's "crown jewel" sea-based,

53 Email exchange between the author and Gen. Eric Smith, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, May 7, 2023.

54 The ship-to-shore connector is the replacement for the landing craft air cushioned. Todd South, "Goodbye, Tanks: How the Marine Corps Will Change, and What It Will Lose, by Ditching Its Armor," *Marine Corps Times*, March 22, 2021, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/03/22/goodbye-tanks-how-the-marine-corps-will-change-and-what-it-will-lose-by-ditching-its-armor/.

55 For more on U.S. Army "Tiger Brigade" tank support for the Marine Corps in Desert Storm, see, for example, Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 244–46. For more details on how U.S. Army tanks supported the 1st Marine Division during the second battle for Fallujah, see, for example, Coley D. Tyler, *Ghosts of Fallujah* (Athens, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2020); and Scott Kuhn, "New Book About Battle of Fallujah Takes a Look at 2-7 CAV Involvement," U.S. Army, Oct. 12, 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/212387/new_book_about_battle_of_fallujah_takes_a_look_at_2_7_cav_involvement.

56 Jeff Schogol, "Army's Mobile Protected Firepower Vehicles Will Give Light Infantry Units Added Punch," *Task and Purpose*, Dec. 13, 2022, https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-mobile-protected-firepower-light-infantry-airborne/.

57 For more information on this Marine expeditionary unit's operational experiences deploying without tanks, see the annual 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit historical command chronologies, from 1992 to the present, available at Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

58 For more on this deployment, including details on how an attached U.S. Army tank platoon supported the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit's Battalion Landing Team 2/4 during Desert Fox, see D. D. Fulton, "31st MEU Command Chronology for the Period of 1 July to 31 December 1998," Feb. 6, 1999, available at Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

59 For more information on how the marines and soldiers fought side-by-side in the second battle for Fallujah, see "Introduction: Battle of Fallujah Staff Ride," Army University Press, 348–54, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/educational-services/staff-rides/VSR/Fallujah/Staff%20Ride%20Readahead%20Guidance%20Fallujah.pdf.

Marine air-ground task forces without tanks. It is curious, then, that they now believe that tanks are an absolute must for a Marine formation to be considered as a self-contained, combined-arms-capable, force-in-readiness.

Berger's opponents also decry a 67 percent loss of direct support cannon artillery.[60] It is again difficult to duplicate their stated number. Initial *Force Design 2030* plans announced a divestment of 16 155 mm towed artillery cannon batteries, from 21 to 5, a 76 percent decrease. Berger subsequently clarified his plans, cutting 22 batteries from a total force of 29 active and reserve batteries, a 75 percent decrease. Whatever the final percentage is, if this were the whole story, it would certainly raise questions about the sufficiency of *Force Design 2030*'s indirect fire support. But the opponents fail to mention that these were not zero-sum cuts. Although he reduced towed cannon artillery batteries, Berger added longer-range rocket and missile batteries, increasing their number from seven to 20, with the majority capable of attacking ships at sea. In other words, he traded shorter-range fires for longer-range precision fires. In sum, *Force Design 2030* reduces the number of Marine Corps firing batteries in the total force from 39 to 33 (a 15 percent reduction) to get an indirect fires capability that is far more suited to a distributed-operations-capable Corps. It is also much better able to support integrated naval campaigning operations in the mature precision-strike regime: It is more mobile, has longer range, and is more accurate.

Moreover, the seven residual cannon batteries "are sufficient to satisfy traditional requirements of a Marine Expeditionary Force engaged in sustained operations ashore." As discussed, the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will retain five "traditional" infantry regiments (in addition to two reconfigured as Marine littoral regiments). In expeditionary combat operations, each infantry regiment would have a 155 mm towed howitzer battalion in direct support, each with three cannon batteries. However, *Force Design 2030* batteries will have eight guns versus the six in the legacy Marine Corps. This equates to one more battery worth of cannons by 2019 standards. Indeed, the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will be able to field a Marine expeditionary force nearly identical to the ones it used to fight Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, less the Marine tank battalions. This is why Berger confidently states that the redesigned Marine Corps will be every bit as capable in sustained operations ashore as the legacy Corps.

The *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will continue to organize itself into tailorable Marine air-ground task forces, each with an organic air combat element, including both fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft. The Chowderites claim that *Force Design 2030* cuts about 30 percent of the aircraft from the legacy force.[61] No one outside their group knows where this number comes from. The *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will have 18 fighter attack squadrons, the same as in the legacy Corps. True, *Force Design 2030* reduces the number of aircraft assigned to each fighter attack squadron from 16 to 10, which is likely the cause of the opponents' concerns. But this is simply an asset management decision. The Marines still intend to procure their long-established acquisition objective of 420 F-35s. In other words, under these reforms, the Marine Corps will have access to the same overall number of strike fighters as before, but with more assigned as training and attrition aircraft. This design is more sustainable in terms of pilots, training, flying hours, and maintenance costs.

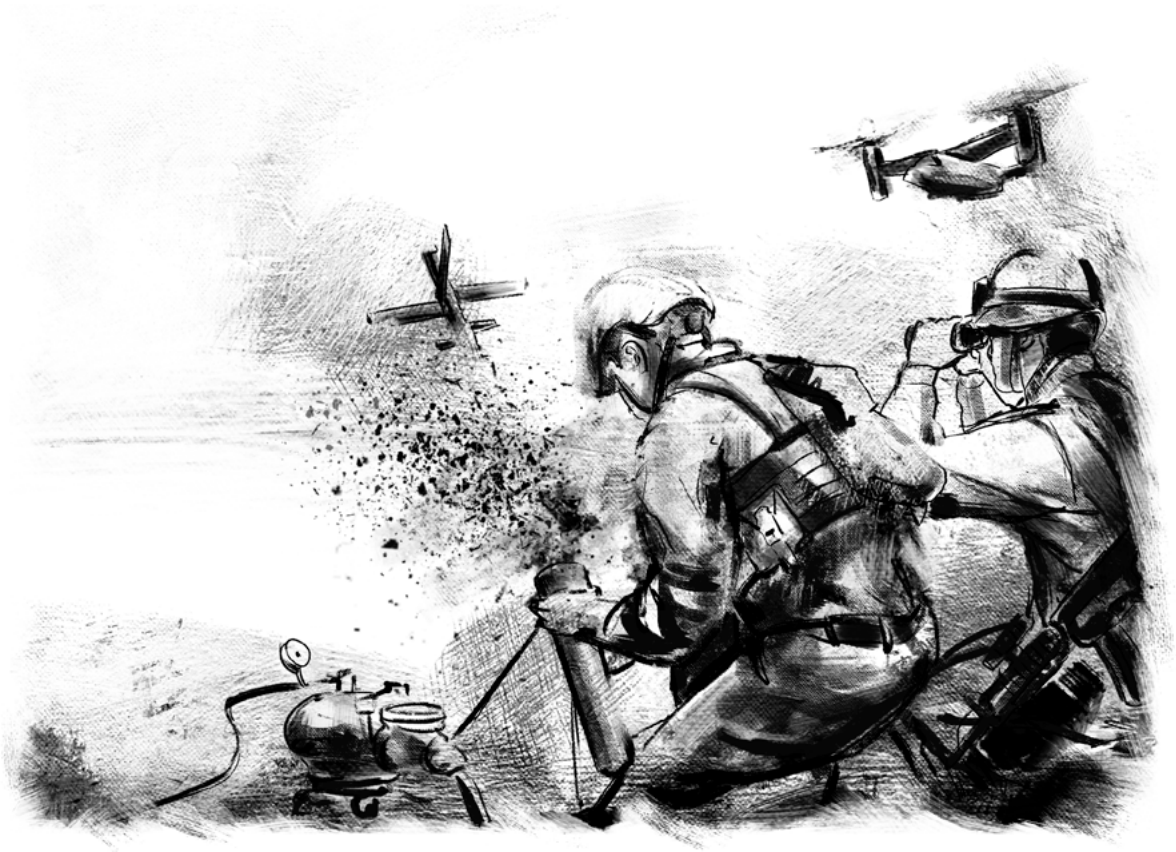
Berger's initial plan was to reduce the number of tiltrotor (i.e., MV-22), heavy lift, and light attack helicopter squadrons by three, three, and two squadrons, respectively. These cuts were made possible by the reduction of infantry battalions requiring aviation support by three. In other words, the slightly smaller *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will have the same *relative level* of aviation support as the legacy force, except in the case of unmanned aerial vehicle squadrons, which will see a 100 percent increase from three to six squadrons, and aerial refueling squadrons, which will move from three to four squadrons. Moreover, the commandant subsequently decided to "buy back" two MV-22 squadrons based on input from the operating forces.

The final tally: The legacy aviation combat element had 56 squadrons of all types. *Force Design 2030* will have 54.

Of course, these numbers obscure a critically important fact: *Force Design 2030* embraces the ongoing democratization of airpower due to the maturation and proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles of different sizes. In the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps, infantry squads, platoons, companies, and battalions will have their own "aerial reconnaissance squadrons" and "close air support" embedded in their formations. As such, instead of cutting aircraft by 30 percent, *Force Design 2030* would ac-

60 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"

61 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"



tually increase the number of aircraft in the Marine Corps manyfold.[62]

The Chowderites are also upset about the reduction in the number of amphibious ships and maritime prepositioning force ships, and large cuts in land-based prepositioning. As a result, the Marine Corps "would find it challenging to get to the fight and sustain itself successfully in a conflict in Korea, Iran, or Europe."[63] This would be true if we were just counting ships. And if costs were irrelevant. And if pressures on the Navy's shipbuilding accounts did not exist. But blaming *Force Design 2030* for these circumstances is disingenuous. As the opponents well know, the number of amphibious ships and maritime and land-based prepositioning sets are Department of Defense programmatic decisions based on strategic priorities and the requirements of the national defense strategy and its associated war plans.[64] Indeed, debates over the appropriate size of the future amphibious fleet continue between the Defense Department and Congress, the Defense Department and the Department of the Navy, and the Navy and the Marine Corps. It is not yet clear where these debates will land. In any case, this is more of an analytical beef with the Department of Defense than with *Force Design 2030* itself.

Moreover, on Berger's watch, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act set the minimum size of the amphibious fleet at 31 ships and mandated that

62 Jon Harper, "Marine Corps Commandant Gung-Ho About Loitering Munitions," *Fedscoop*, May 10, 2020, https://fedscoop.com/marine-corps-commandant-gung-ho-about-loitering-munitions/; Caitlin M. Kenney, "Marine Corps Wants Loitering Munitions for Its Infantry Units," *Defense One*, May 11, 2022, https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/05/marine-corps-wants-loitering-munitions-its-infantry-units/366805/; Audrey Decker, "Loitering Munitions Will Remain a Priority in Marine Corps' FY-24 Budget," *Inside Defense*, July 18, 2022, https://insidedefense.com/daily-news/loitering-munitions-will-remain-priority-marine-corps-fy-24-budget; and T.X. Hammes, "The Democratization of Airpower: The Insurgent and the Drone," *War on the Rocks*, Oct. 18, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/the-democratization-of-airpower-the-insurgent-and-the-drone/.

63 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns with Force Design 2030.'"

64 Mallory Shelbourne, "Navy: OSD Directed Amphib Procurement Pause, Joint Staff Says Current Amphib Force 'Sufficient,'" *USNI News*, March 13, 2023, https://news.usni.org/2023/03/13/navy-osd-directed-amphib-procurement-pause-dod-says-current-amphib-force-sufficient.

the commandant of the Marine Corps now legally sets the requirement for amphibious shipping.[65]

Finally, with the divestiture of all tanks and the purported drastic reduction in direct support cannon artillery, Chowder II asserts that the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will have great difficulty employing combined arms in the future. To make their case, the opponents define combined arms as "the employment of infantry, artillery, armor, engineers, close air support and all with needed logistics in a way that places an enemy on the 'horns of a dilemma.'" But this definition deviates from the Marine Corps' own doctrine, which describes combined arms as "the full integration of arms in such a way that to counteract one, the enemy must become more vulnerable to another."[66] This more open-ended definition does not mandate that combined-arms operations include armor or cannon artillery to place an enemy on the horns of a dilemma. That is a self-serving Chowderite mandate.

Chowder II is so worked up over their false assertion that the *Force Design 2030* is incapable of conducting combined-arms operations that they claim it "comes dangerously close" to violating the law.[67] Recall that Title 10 stipulates that the Marine Corps be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms. So, the Chowderite logic goes something like this: Because *Force Design 2030* offers no tanks and less cannon artillery, the Marine Corps will no longer be capable of employing combined arms. They continue: If the plan does not allow for a force capable of employing combined arms, it is ignoring the law.

This is pure sophistry.

With the introduction of ubiquitous guided munitions, unmanned vehicles of all types, and cyber and electronic warfare capabilities, the fact is that the character of combined arms is changing. Fortunately, Berger's predecessors recognized these realities, creating the Marine Corps Forces Cyber Command in 2009, when Amos was serving as assistant commandant. The command has grown under every commandant since, suggesting that senior leaders expect cyber capabilities to make powerful contributions to future combined-arms operations. And, as the Royal United Services Institute explains, "To enable kill chains at the speed of relevance, [electronic warfare] for attack, protection and direction finding is a critical element of modern combined arms operations."[68] In the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps, talented commanders will employ both traditional and new arms in novel ways to complicate enemy actions and reactions.

To recap, the evidence provided by the Chowderites for the "devastating" reduction of operational capabilities for global response is weak. It is based off dated visions of warfare. Their criticisms fail to take into account strategic guidance, geography, or technology. Every reduction in legacy capabilities is generally matched by an addition of new capabilities such as long-range fires, unmanned systems, and resilient command-and-control networks. These capabilities aim to make the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps more capable and lethal than the legacy Corps.

## Too Much Risk Today? Depends on Your Point of View

The concern that these changes will put marines at greater risk is closely tied to Berger's decision to cut some legacy capabilities now to free up the resources to buy the things the *Force Design 2030* Marine Corps will need in the future, such as long-range precision fires, unmanned systems, resilient command and control, air and missile defense, and advanced technologies like AI. The opponents object to this "divest to invest" policy, writing, "The unnecessary and unwise reductions in needed force structure and equipment were not made to make the Marine Corps more combat-ready. They were made to self-fund unproven, experimental capabilities that will not be fully operational until 2030 or beyond."[69]

First off, the unproven, experimental capabilities that the opponents are apparently referring to are the Marine littoral regiment, which

65 10 USC 8062: United States Navy: Composition; Functions, Para. (b): "The naval combat forces of the Navy shall include not less than 11 operational aircraft carriers and not less than 31 operational amphibious warfare ships, of which not less than 10 shall be amphibious assault ships. For purposes of this subsection, an operational aircraft carrier or amphibious warfare ship includes an aircraft carrier or amphibious warfare ship that is temporarily unavailable for worldwide deployment due to routine or scheduled maintenance or repair."
10 USC 8695: Navy Battle Force Ship Assessment and Requirement Reporting, Para. (e): "Amphibious Warfare Ships. In preparing each assessment and requirement under subsection (a), the Commandant of the Marine Corps shall be specifically responsible for developing the requirements relating to amphibious warfare ships."

66 "The Conduct of War," in *Warfighting*, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997, 94, https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCDP%201%20Warfighting.pdf.

67 Van Riper and Jerry McAbee, "How the Corps' New Training Document Ignores US Law."

68 Zabrodskyi et al., "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."

69 Sheehan and Amos, "Former Marine Generals: 'Our Concerns With Force Design 2030.'"

is organized for stand-in operations, and the redesigned infantry battalion. It is true that new combat organizations are unproven until they are tested in combat. But that is a red herring. It didn't stop Germany from forming *Panzer* units prior to World War II. Or, for that matter, the Marines from reorganizing the Corps for amphibious assault operations — even after the disaster at Gallipoli. Many of the new capabilities now being adopted by the Marine Corps — such as long-range precision fires and unmanned aerial systems — have been thoroughly tested and proven, several in battlefield conditions in Ukraine. Others, such as the technologies being incorporated in the redesigned infantry battalions, are now being put through their paces. None of them require technological leaps.

Second, the "divest to invest" strategy is Department of Defense policy, even if it's not stated exactly in these terms. For his part, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin talks in terms of "divestiture of capabilities no longer needed as the *National Defense Strategy* changes."[70] Chinese leader Xi Jinping has directed the People's Liberation Army to be ready to seize Taiwan by 2027. As Adm. John Aquilino, the commander of Indo-Pacific Command, recently said, "Everything needs to go faster. ... Everyone needs a sense of urgency, because that's what it's going to take to prevent a conflict."[71] Shedding legacy capabilities that are no longer as effective as they once were to pay for new, more advanced capabilities is a good way to jumpstart change at scale and rapidly. Here's the running scorecard: Berger has thus far ordered the divestment of $17 billion in legacy Marine capabilities. The Defense Department allowed him to apply $15 billion toward his preferred capabilities (the remaining $2 billion went to pay "corporate bills" assessed by the Defense Department). There was no way that Berger could expect the Defense Department to divert $15 billion toward the Marine Corps, and no way to procure the capabilities he deemed necessary by 2030, unless the Marine Corps found a way to "help itself." So, Berger boldly did the smart thing and pulled the trigger. He accepted some near-term risk, to accelerate the acquisition of more relevant capabilities and thus reduced mid- to long-term risk. The *National Military Strategy* of 2022 encourages such an approach.[72]

Every single sitting service chief is following the same divest to invest approach to a greater or lesser degree. And, if any of the Chowderites were sitting in Berger's seat, they likely would, too. If they didn't, they would lose out in the annual development of the defense program overseen by the secretary of defense. Indeed, to demonstrate its approval of *Force Design 2030* and Berger's approach, and to encourage other service chiefs to follow his lead, the Defense Department recently increased its planned future resource spending on the Corps to push forward the fielding of aspects of Berger's plan from 2030 to 2027.[73]

The difference in approaches favored by each camp is a reflection of their own views on risk. The Chowderites repeatedly say that the risks associated with Berger's plans are too high. For example, they point out that by divesting capabilities today to procure capabilities needed for tomorrow, he is creating a period of risk where the Marine Corps will have divested useful combat capabilities before the new capabilities are available. They also argue that the decisions made to date weaken the Corps' ability to perform its traditional force-in-readiness role, thereby risking U.S. national security. For his part, Berger (and the secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) believes these risks are far outweighed by the risk of doing nothing. As the precision-strike regime continues to mature and China becomes more aggressive, Berger has concluded that the Marine Corps must reinvigorate the service's commitment to its Title 10 responsibilities. That it must try to shape its future *before* the next war, even if that future cannot be perfectly known. The opponents of *Force Design 2030* implicitly are arguing that doing nothing is far better than doing anything.

Finally, given that *Force Design 2030* debate has been going on, and on, and on, for four years, the argument over divest to invest is moot. The divestments have been approved by the Department of Defense and Congress and have been made. All that remains is to invest the additional resources that Congress has provided to grow new capabilities and capacity.

70 "Austin Lays Out Reasoning Behind DOD Budget Request," Department of Defense, April 7, 2022, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2993216/austin-lays-out-reasoning-behind-dod-budget-request/.

71 Ellen Nakashima and Christian Sheperd, "The New Shape of Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific," *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2023, A14.

72 *National Military Strategy: Strategic Discipline*, Department of Defense, 2022, 4. The unclassified version of the strategy calls for "ruthless prioritization" of investments and advises that the department "must consider transferring risk away from priority threats/theaters and be more risk tolerant in the present to reduce risk in the future."

73 Mark F. Cancian, "Military Forces and Acquisition Programs: How Did They Fare in the FY 2024 Budget?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 17, 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/military-forces-and-acquisition-programs-how-did-they-fare-fy-2024-budget.

CHOWDER II SUPPORTS A FORCE DESIGN OPTIMIZED FOR AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT OPERATIONS AND SUSTAINED COMBAT OPERATIONS ASHORE. BERGER SEES THAT FORCE DESIGN AS DATED AND ILL-SUITED FOR THE EMERGING COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT.

## Broken Process? Only If It Isn't Yours

If it sometimes appears that the supporters and critics of *Force Design 2030* are talking past each other, it is because they often are. The opponents talk in terms of combat development while the supporters talk in terms of force design. *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication-1, Warfighting* outlines the Marine Corps' philosophy of warfighting. Neither combat development nor force design are defined in this document.[74]

Instead, in the chapter entitled, "Preparing for War," it uses the term "force planning" to describe activities "associated with the creation and maintenance of military capabilities." It explains that all these activities are concept based and describes how Marine Corps forces "will operate and perform certain key functions ... and provide the basis for identifying required capabilities and implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities."

The Chowderites prefer to think in terms of a force (i.e., combat) development process that was championed by many of the opponents of *Force Design 2030* when they were on active duty. According to the Marine Corps combat development and integration directorate in Quantico, Virginia, force development activities "plan, design, and implement the translation of strategic priorities into manned, trained and equipped Marine Corps organizations able to provide capabilities to Unified Combatant Commanders."[75] In other words, it is generally about procuring the systems and organizing the units best suited for the Marine Corps' view of future warfare. The Chowderites believe that this should be a slow deliberate process, notionally about four years long, divided into five phases: a learning campaign, a Marine Corps capabilities-based assessment, programming, budgeting, and execution.

This didn't work for Berger. He keenly felt the urgency demanded by the secretary of defense and didn't have the time to conduct a years-long analysis before making a move. He therefore made his initial decisions based on the wargaming, analysis, and concept development that had been conducted during the last years of Neller's tour as commandant — activities he himself had led while at the Marine Corps Combat Development Command. He freely admitted at the time that some of his initial decisions needed to be validated. He therefore announced a campaign of learning based on subsequent wargaming and experimentation to refine his initial decisions and make new ones based on new information. This approach "laid out a plan for modernizing the force, inspiring ownership and action throughout the service."[76]

The crux of the Chowderites' argument is that Berger's capabilities-based assessment was flawed, making all subsequent decisions — what to divest, what to invest in, how to reorganize units — suspect. The group falsely contends that Berger's capabilities-based assessment was made in secret and was informed by faulty wargames, opaque analysis, and untested concepts such as stand-in forces.[77] The move toward *Force Design 2030* should therefore be slowed down and revisited. But such an approach presumes that the pace of the unipolar era in which the critics served is ongoing — an era in which no rising or assertive competitors existed.

The Chowderites often point to the development of the revolutionary MV-22 tiltrotor aircraft as proof of the superiority of "their" combat development process over *Force Design 2030*'s force design process for integrated naval campaigning and operations in the precision-strike regime. Their attitude is reflected in an article written by another opponent of *Force Design 2030*, Owen West, entitled, "Are the Marines Inventing the Edsel or the Mustang?"[78] He compares the "secret" development of the Marine littoral regiment to the failed introduction of the Ford Edsel, which was developed in relative secrecy outside Ford's normal product development process. It was this process that produced the Mustang — a spectacular corporate success.

The analogy of the Edsel loses much in translation, as Ford also decided to build the GT40 that defeated Ferrari at Le Mans in a "secret effort" away from the typical Ford process.[79] Moreover, the Edsel example not only misses the point entirely; it's the wrong analogy. Berger is trying to

74 *Warfighting*, U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, 1997, https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCDP%201%20Warfighting.pdf.

75 "CD&I [Combat Development and Integration] Overview," Marines, the official website of the United States Marine Corps, accessed May 9, 2023, https://www.cdi.marines.mil/About/What-we-do/CD-I-Overview/.

76 Kyle B. Ellison, U.S. Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory Experiment Division Staff, "Marine Corps Adaptation: The Future Is Now," *Proceedings* Vol. 149/4/1/1,442 (April 2023): 20, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/april/marine-corps-adaptation-future-now.

77 The charge that *Force Design 2030* was developed in secret is thoroughly rebutted in Cuomo, "On-the-Ground Truth and Force Design 2030 Reconciliation: A Way Forward."

78 West, "Are the Marines Inventing the Edsel or the Mustang?"

79 Cuomo, "On-the-Ground Truth and Force Design 2030 Reconciliation: A Way Forward."

make sure the Marine Corps avoids the fate of Kodak, which at one time dominated the film photography market. Unfortunately for Kodak, its leaders could not bring themselves to shift the company's operating model to that of digital photography — a technology that it invented. As a result, it was replaced as the market leader in photography and ultimately declared bankruptcy. As one analysis of Kodak's subsequent failure concluded, "Kodak failed to realize that *its strategy which was effective at one point was now depriving itself of success*" [emphasis added].[80]

Moreover, the opponents of *Force Design 2030* fail to mention that the first MV-22 flew in 1989, but it did not achieve initial operational capability until 2007 — nearly 20 years later. This timeline is simply not tenable today in a dynamic competitive environment characterized by rapid change. In addition, the combat development process lauded by *Force Design* 2030 opponents resulted in the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, a 79,000-pound amphibious assault vehicle designed carry a squad of marines over the water at 25 miles per hour. The unit cost of this dream machine was 15 times that of its predecessor. The Marine Corps was forced to reduce the number of Expeditionary Fighting Vehicles it had planned to procure by nearly 50 percent due to the unit cost rising to over $22 million. Soon thereafter, the secretary of defense ordered the cancellation of this "exquisite" combat system — a polite way to refer to this costly Edsel and the $3 billion plus wasted on its development.[81]

In any event, debating the proper process to transform the Marine Corps is an inside baseball argument. In the end, Berger is in no way bound by any process connected with manning, organizing, and equipping the Corps, except those dictated by the secretary of the Navy and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Moreover, he would undoubtedly argue that any force development process should properly *follow* force design, which outlines the vision of what the future force must be able to do. Chowder II supports a force design optimized for amphibious assault operations and sustained combat operations ashore. Berger sees that force design as dated and ill-suited for the emerging competitive environment. As he wrote, "As good as we are today, we need to be even better tomorrow to maintain our warfighting overmatch. … Future force development requires a wider range of force options and capabilities."[82] This is exactly the type of judgment he was selected by the president and confirmed by the Senate to make.

It would be against civilian guidance and common sense not to urgently prepare for a possible war with China, which entails ensuring that the most robust deterrent posture can be attained in the relevant timeframe. Thus, Berger's campaign of learning is necessarily happening simultaneously with the four subsequent phases: capabilities-based assessment, programming, budgeting, and execution. The Chowderites prefer a years-long serial process. Berger's approach reflects his thinking that the Marine Corps cannot spend time getting everything perfectly right before making changes toward his objective force. The competitive environment is simply changing too rapidly. The Marine Corps should begin to transform now or risk failing to provide the deterrent effects needed by the combatant commander or being ill-prepared if war breaks out. Of course, this approach requires that Berger be willing to modify some of his own initial decisions as new analysis, experimentation, and wargaming provide additional information. He has demonstrated that he is ready to do just that. As discussed, Berger initially planned to divest three MV-22 squadrons. But input from the Fleet Marine Forces convinced him to change his mind and divest only one.

## Undermine What It Means to Be a Marine? You Gotta Be Kidding Me

The final concern laid out by Sheehan and Amos is that the changes brought about by *Force Design 2030* will erode the customs, traditions, and ethos of the Marine Corps.

This is the Chowderites' ultimate straw-man argument, designed to anger current and retired marines who are justifiably proud of their service and to undermine Berger. It is also a bunch of hokum. All marines in the *Force Design 2030* Corps will continue to go to boot camp. They all will continue to earn the title "Marine" after enduring and completing the Crucible. They will get better weapons and capabilities than any marines before them. They will be led by more senior, seasoned marines. And they will get better training than that afforded to the Marine Corps when the Chowderites were

80 "Kodak Case Study 2, The Rise and Fall of the Empire," accessed at Course Hero, May 5, 2023, https://www.coursehero.com/file/109961196/Kodak-Case-Study-2pdf/.

81 For full disclosure, I was undersecretary of the Navy at the time, and I argued for the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle's cancellation while developing alternative concepts of operation and potential vehicle variants that would effectively meet the Corps' needs and budget.

82 U.S. Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps.*

on active duty. They will continue to strive to be the first to fight in any clime and place.

## Time to Cede the Field

The Chowder II Society is made up of some of the most famous and capable marines of the last several generations. They care deeply about the service. Even if one finds their tactics distasteful and arguments weak, no one can question their love and concern for the Marine Corps. But there comes a time in every debate when, having said everything you have to say, you should concede that no one is listening to or buying your line of reasoning.

And that is where Chowder II finds itself today.

Congress is not listening. It is supporting Berger's efforts in both national authorization and appropriations acts, as well as with bipartisan letters for the record.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense is not listening. The secretary is backing the changes being submitted by Berger in the defense program. Indeed, he provided additional budget resources to speed *Force Design 2030* along.

And, although it is impossible to know for sure, there is little evidence that marines in the force are listening. Instead, they appear to believe that the *Force Design 2030*'s Marine air-ground task forces will be stronger and more lethal than the past, and that the enhanced tool-set they are getting will be more relevant to the future challenges they may face in Asia and beyond. They are not interested in endless reminisces of past fights in Korea or Hue City. They are looking at new threats, geography, and emerging technologies with a critical eye to ensure that they remain a potent force in readiness. As one 30-year infantry gunner recently wrote: "I have some candid advice to senior leaders lambasting the Marine Corps' reforms: Look in the trenches. The character of war has changed. We will either adapt or perish."[83] And when it comes to adapting, today's marines know a good plan when they see one.

It appears the only people now listening to the opponents of *Force Design 2030* are the opponents themselves. They fought the fight for public opinion, but they have clearly failed to sway it. It's far past time for them to cede the field and let today's marines and those who will come after them continue their proud tradition of adapting to new challenges, thereby ensuring that the future Corps will continue to win the nation's battles.

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83 Stephen W. LaRose, "A View from the Trenches on the Debate Wracking the Marine Corps."