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Updated January 13, 2026

Congressional Research Service
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R46374

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

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SUMMARY

R46374

January 13, 2026

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Navy Medium Landing Ship (LSM) Program: Background and Issues for Congress

The Navy's Medium Landing Ship (LSM) program, previously called the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) program, envisions procuring a class of 18 to 35 new amphibious ships to support the Marine Corps, particularly in implementing a new Marine Corps operational concept called Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO).

The EABO concept was developed with an eye toward potential conflict scenarios with China in the Western Pacific. Under the concept, the Marine Corps envisions, among other things, having reinforced-platoon-sized Marine Corps units maneuver around the theater, moving from island to island, to fire anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and perform other missions so as to contribute, alongside Navy and other U.S. military forces, to U.S. operations to counter and deny sea control to Chinese forces. The LSMs would be instrumental to these operations, with LSMs embarking, transporting, landing, and subsequently reembarking these small Marine Corps units.

LSMs would be much smaller and individually much less expensive to procure and operate than the Navy's current amphibious ships. In December 2025, the Navy announced that it had selected the design of the Landing Ship Transport 100 (LST-100)—a design from the Dutch shipbuilder Damen Naval—as the design to which initial LSMs are to be built. LSMs might be built by multiple shipyards. The Navy anticipates that construction of LSMs will begin in late 2026 and wants the first LSM delivered to the Navy by 2029.

In the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (S. 1071/P.L. 119-60 of December 18, 2025):

- Section 127 provides the Navy authority to use a block buy contract for the procurement of not more than 15 LSMs; and
- Section 129(a) directs the Navy, after awarding a contract for the first LSM, to select a vessel construction manager (VCM) (i.e., a person outside the Navy) to manage the contracting for procuring not more than eight additional LSMs.

In the FY2025 reconciliation act (H.R. 1/P.L. 119-21 of July 4, 2025, also called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act [OBBBA]), Section 20002 provides $160.0 million for advance procurement of materials for LSMs and $1,803.941 million (i.e., about $1.8 billion) for procurement of LSMs. This funding appears sufficient to procure several LSMs.

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Introduction

This report provides background information and issues for Congress on the Navy's Medium Landing Ship (LSM) program, previously called the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) program. The LSM program envisions procuring a class of 18 to 35 new amphibious ships to support the Marine Corps, particularly in implementing a new Marine Corps operational concept called Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO).

An issue for Congress is whether to approve, reject, or modify the Navy's annual funding requests and acquisition strategy for the LSM program. Congress's decisions regarding the program could affect Navy and Marine Corps capabilities and funding requirements and the U.S. shipbuilding industrial base.

A separate CRS report discusses the Navy's programs for building much-larger LPD-17 Flight II and LHA-class amphibious ships.[1] Other CRS reports provide an overview of Navy force structure and shipbuilding plans[2] and the Marine Corps' overall plan for redesigning its units and equipment to meet future mission demands, called Force Design (previously called Force Design 2030), of which the LSM program is a part.[3]

Background

U.S. Navy Amphibious Ships

Roles and Missions

Navy amphibious ships are operated by the Navy, with crews consisting of Navy personnel. They are battle force ships, meaning ships that count toward the quoted size of the Navy. The primary function of Navy amphibious ships is to lift (i.e., transport) embarked U.S. Marines and their weapons, equipment, and supplies to distant operating areas, and enable Marines to conduct expeditionary operations ashore in those areas. Although amphibious ships can be used to support Marine landings against opposing military forces, they are also used for operations in permissive or benign situations where there are no opposing forces. Due to their large storage spaces and their ability to use helicopters and landing craft to transfer people, equipment, and supplies from ship to shore without need for port facilities,[4] amphibious ships are potentially useful for a range of combat and noncombat operations.[5]

[1] CRS Report R43543, *Navy LPD-17 Flight II and LHA Amphibious Ship Programs: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[2] CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[3] CRS Insight IN11281, *New U.S. Marine Corps Force Design Initiative: Force Design 2030*, by Andrew Feickert.

[4] Amphibious ships have berthing spaces for Marines; storage space for their wheeled vehicles, their other combat equipment, and their supplies; flight decks and hangar decks for their helicopters and vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) fixed-wing aircraft; and in many cases well decks for storing and launching their landing craft. (A well deck is a large, garage-like space in the stern of the ship. It can be flooded with water so that landing craft can leave or return to the ship. Access to the well deck is protected by a large stern gate that is somewhat like a garage door.)

[5] Amphibious ships and their embarked Marine forces can be used for launching and conducting humanitarian-assistance and disaster-response (HA/DR) operations; peacetime engagement and partnership-building activities, such as exercises; other nation-building operations, such as reconstruction operations; operations to train, advise, and assist foreign military forces; peace-enforcement operations; noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs); maritime-security (continued...)

On any given day, some of the Navy's amphibious ships, like some of the Navy's other ships, are forward-deployed to various overseas operating areas. Amphibious ships typically are forward-deployed in multiship formations called amphibious groups (ARGs). Amphibious ships are also sometimes forward-deployed on an individual basis, particularly for conducting peacetime engagement activities with foreign countries or for responding to smaller-scale or noncombat contingencies.

Current Types of Amphibious Ships

The Navy's current amphibious-ship force consists entirely of large amphibious ships, including the so-called "big-deck" amphibious assault ships, designated LHA and LHD, which look like medium-sized aircraft carriers, and the smaller (but still quite sizeable) amphibious ships, designated LPD or LSD, which are sometimes called "small-deck" amphibious ships.[6] As mentioned earlier, a separate CRS report discusses the Navy's current programs for procuring new LHA- and LPD-type ships.[7] The LSMs discussed in this CRS report would be much smaller than the Navy's current amphibious ships.

Amphibious Ship Force-Level Goal Under Navy's 381-Ship Plan

The Navy's Battle Force Ship Assessment and Requirement (BFSAR) study, which was provided to the congressional defense committees in June 2023, calls for achieving a future fleet of 381 manned battle force ships, including 31 larger amphibious ships (i.e., LHAs, LHDs, LPDs, and LSDs) and 18 LSMs.[8] A Navy table outlining the 381-ship goal, however, includes a table note stating: "The [Department of the Navy's] 2022 Amphibious Force Requirements Study determined an initial capacity goal of 18 LSM[s], with a total requirements [sic] of 35."[9] Increasing the LSM total from 18 to 35 would change the Navy's overall force-level goal from 381 manned battle force ships to 398 manned battle force ships.

10 U.S.C. 8062 requires the Navy to include not less than 31 larger amphibious ships.[10] The Marine Corps supports procuring a total of 35 LSMs and summarizes its preferred amphibious ship force-level goal as "31+35," meaning 31 larger amphibious ships and 35 LSMs. A total of 35 would include nine operational LSMs for each of three envisioned Marine Littoral Regiments

operations, such as anti-piracy operations; smaller-scale strike and counter-terrorism operations; and larger-scale ground combat operations. Amphibious ships and their embarked Marine forces can also be used for maintaining forward-deployed naval presence for purposes of deterrence, reassurance, and maintaining regional stability.

[6] U.S. Navy amphibious ships have designations starting with the letter L, as in amphibious *landing*. LHA can be translated as landing ship, helicopter-capable, assault; LHD can be translated as landing ship, helicopter-capable, well deck; LPD can be translated as landing ship, helicopter platform, well deck; and LSD can be translated as landing ship, well deck. Whether noted in the designation or not, almost all these ships have well decks. The exceptions are LHAs 6 and 7, which do not have well decks and instead have expanded aviation support capabilities. For an explanation of well decks, see footnote 4. The terms "large-deck" and "small-deck" refer to the size of the ship's flight deck.

[7] CRS Report R43543, *Navy LPD-17 Flight II and LHA Amphibious Ship Programs: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[8] U.S. Navy, *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2025*, March 2024, p. 4 (Table 1).

[9] U.S. Navy, *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2025*, March 2024, p. 4 (Table 1, note 5).

[10] For more on the Navy's 381-ship goal, see CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke. For a review of earlier amphibious ship force structure requirements, see Appendix A of archived CRS Report RL34476, *Navy LPD-17 Amphibious Ship Procurement: Background, Issues, and Options for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

(MLRs),[11] plus eight additional LSMs to account for factors such as a certain number of LSMs being in maintenance at any given moment.[12]

Medium Landing Ship (LSM) Program

Overview

As discussed above, the LSM program is to include 18 to 35 ships. LSMs would be much smaller and individually much less expensive to procure and operate than the Navy's current amphibious ships.

Operational Rationale, Including EABO

For details on the operational rationale for the LSM, including its role in implementing the EABO concept, see **Appendix A**.

Program Name and Class Name

As noted earlier, the LSM program was previously called the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) program. On January 16, 2025, the Navy announced that the first ship in the envisioned class, LSM-1, would be named *McClung* in honor of Major Megan M. L. McClung, a Marine Corps Public Affairs Officer who was killed in action in Iraq in 2006.[13] McClung was the first female Marine officer to be killed in the Iraq war and the first female graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy to be killed in the line of duty. Ships in the class will henceforth be referred to as McClung-class ships. The Navy's announcement about the naming of LSM-1 did not state a naming rule for the class.

Ship Design

As noted above, LSMs would be much smaller and individually much less expensive to procure and operate than the Navy's current amphibious ships. In December 2025, the Navy announced that it had selected the design of the Landing Ship Transport 100 (LST-100) (**Figure 1**, **Figure 2**, and **Figure 3**)—a design from the Dutch shipbuilder Damen Naval—as the design to which initial LSMs are to be built.[14]

[11] For more on the MLRs, see CRS In Focus IF12200, *The U.S. Marine Corps Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR)*, by Andrew Feickert, The U.S. Marine Corps Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR), by Andrew Feickert.

[12] See, for example, U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030 Annual Update*, June 23, p. 9.

[13] U.S. Navy, "SECNAV Del Toro Names Future Medium Landing Ship LSM 1," Navy news article dated January 16, 2025.

[14] For press reports about the Navy's selection of the LST-100 design, see, for example, Justin Katz, "Navy, Marine Corps Pick Dutch Company's Design for New Island-Hopping Vessel," *Breaking Defense*, December 5, 2025; Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025; Nick Wilson, "Damen LST-100 Selected as Landing Ship Medium Design," *Inside Defense*, December 5, 2025; Rich Abott, "Navy Picks Dutch Design For LSM Over Bollinger," *Defense Daily*, December 8, 2025; Sam LaGrone, "Navy Retools Landing Ship Medium Program Around Dutch LST-100, Vessel Construction Manager to Lead Design Process," *USNI News*, December 8 (updated December 9), 2025; Jeff Schogol, "Marines May Finally Get Landing Ships for Modern-Day Island Hopping," *Task & Purpose*, December 23, 2025.

Figure 1. Rendering of LST-100 Design Selected for LSM

Source: Cropped version of rendering accompanying "Damen Landing Ship Transport (LST) 100 Design Selected by NAVSEA for US Navy Landing Ship Medium Initiative," Damen Naval news release dated December 9, 2025.

Figure 2. Rendering of LST-100 Design Selected for LSM

Source: Cropped version of rendering accompanying Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025. A caption to the rendering credits the rendering to Damen.

Acquisition Strategy

Multiple shipyards might be used to build LSMs. In the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (S. 1071/P.L. 119-60 of December 18, 2025),

- Section 127 provides the Navy authority to use a block buy contract (a type of multiyear contract)[15] for the procurement of not more than 15 LSMs, and

[15] For more on block buy contracting, see CRS Report R41909, *Multiyear Procurement (MYP) and Block Buy Contracting in Defense Acquisition: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

- Section 129(a) directs the Navy, after awarding a contract for the first LSM, to select a vessel construction manager (VCM) (i.e., a person outside the Navy) to manage the contracting for procuring not more than eight additional LSMs.

Figure 3. Rendering of LST-100 Design Selected for LSM

Source: Rendering accompanying Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025. A caption to the rendering credits the rendering to Damen.

Under the VCM approach, the VCM can have broad authority to implement and oversee a ship-construction effort for another party (in this case, the Navy), particularly with an eye toward achieving a contractual environment for the effort that is closer to that used in building commercial ships. The VCM approach is viewed by its advocates as being potentially useful for building military ships whose designs are less complex and somewhat similar to the designs of commercial ships.[16]

[16] For an article discussing the use of the VCM approach for another U.S. government shipbuilding program, see Douglas Burnett, "A Better Way to Build Ships, The Navy Should Consider Following the Maritime Administration's Example of Using Commercial Fixed-Price Contracts for Vessel Construction," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 2022.

For press reports about the use of the VCM approach for the LSM program, see, for example, Abby Shepherd, "Navy Wants Vessel Construction Manager Candidates for LSM," *Inside Defense*, August 7, 2025; Rich Abott, "Navy Begins Looking Into Vessel Construction Manager For First LSM Amphib," *Defense Daily*, August 11, 2025; Nick Wilson, "LSM Vessel Construction Manager Could Set Precedent in Navy Shipbuilding, Industry Says," *Inside Defense*, October 10, 2025; Sam LaGrone, "Navy Retools Landing Ship Medium Program Around Dutch LST-100, Vessel Construction Manager to Lead Design Process," *USNI News*, December 8 (updated December 9), 2025; Rich Abott, (continued...)

FY2025 Reconciliation Act Funding

In the FY2025 reconciliation act (H.R. 1/P.L. 119-21 of July 4, 2025, also called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act [OBBBA]), Section 20002 provides $160.0 million for advance procurement of materials for LSMs and $1,803.941 million (i.e., about $1.8 billion) for procurement of LSMs. This funding appears sufficient to procure several LSMs.

Procurement Schedule

Details on the procurement schedule for the LSM program will be included in the Navy's FY2027 budget submission. The Navy anticipates that construction of LSMs will begin in late 2026 and wants the first LSM delivered to the Navy by 2029.[17]

Procurement Cost

Details on the procurement costs of LSMs will be included in the Navy's FY2027 budget submission. In December 2024, it was reported that the Navy had cancelled its January 2024 Request for Proposals (RFP) for the LSM program due to bid costs that were much higher than anticipated. A December 17, 2024, press report stated,

> The development of a new landing ship key to the Marines Corps' island-hopping strategy in the Western Pacific is on hold due to Navy concerns over cost, USNI News has learned.
>
> After receiving bids from industry, the Navy canceled the request for proposals for the Landing Ship Medium, a beachable platform crucial to how the Marine Corps envisions itself operating in a conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific under its Force Design plans.
>
> "We had a bulletproof—or what we thought [was a bulletproof]—cost estimate, [one that was] pretty well wrung out design in terms of requirements, [and] independent cost estimates," Assistant Secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition Nickolas Guertin said at an American Society of Naval Engineers symposium last week.
>
> "We put it out for bid and it came back with a much higher price tag," he added. "We simply weren't able to pull it off. So we had to pull that solicitation back and drop back and punt."
>
> A Marine Corps spokesman acknowledged the difficulty in developing an affordable platform that can effectively shuttle Marines around islands and shorelines. For now, to quickly get the Marines a ship that can move them around the region, the Navy plans to buy a "non-developmental vessel" while it works on the requirements, Lt. Col. Eric Flanagan told USNI News last week.
>
> "The Marine Corps and Navy are currently working to create an acquisition way ahead for LSM Block I that includes a schedule, cost estimate, and detailed requirements," Flanagan said. "Affordability and delivery schedule are key factors in pursuing littoral maneuver in support of [stand-in forces]. As with all modernization efforts, our capabilities must be pursued within affordability constraints."[18]

"Lawmakers Give Navy Flexibility On Carriers And Sub Procurements, But Mandates Outside Manager For LSM And Oiler," *Defense Daily*, December 17, 2025.

[17] See, for example, Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025; Rich Abott, "Navy Expects First LSM Hull Ready By 2029," *Defense Daily*, December 10, 2025.

[18] Mallory Shelbourne, "Landing Ship Medium Program Stalled Over Price, Navy Cancels Industry RFP," *USNI News*, December 17 (updated December 18), 2024. See also Nick Wilson, "Navy Punting LSM Award Due to Pricier-than-Expected Bids," *Inside Defense*, December 11, 2024.

Issues for Congress

Acquisition Strategy

One potential oversight issue for Congress concerns the Navy's acquisition strategy for the LSM program, including details on the Navy's plan for implementing the VCM approach, annual LSM procurement quantities, the number of shipyards that might be used in building LSMs, the schedule for bringing shipyards other than the builder of the first LSM into the program, and the use of competition in awarding contracts to build LSMs.

Cost, Schedule, and Technical Risk

Another potential oversight issue for Congress concerns cost, schedule, and technical risk in the LSM program, meaning the risk of cost growth, schedule slippage, or technical problems.

The Navy's selection of the LST-100 design, which reportedly has already been built for use by at least one foreign navy,[19] is intended to limit the LSM program's cost, schedule, and technical risk. A December 5, 2025, press report quoted a Navy official as stating that for the LSM program, "no significant changes are planned to the baseline LST-100 design."[20] A December 8, 2025, press report quoted a Navy statement as saying: "By leveraging a mature, non-developmental design and strategic engineering, we are shortening acquisition timelines and ensuring our forces have the littoral mobility they need when they need it." The press report further stated:

> Secretary of the Navy John Phelan, speaking at the Reagan National Defense Forum on Saturday [December 6], said the Navy chose the LST-100 because it's a proven design and would require not many, if any, design changes.
>
> "We have settled on a design we It's a well-known ship. The requirements are going to be put in and done before we start building the first one," he said. "When we start building the first one, any change order will have to be put through me. So I've reserved Friday at 5 p.m. for my change order meeting. If you want to change it, fine; if not, just write it down. And then when we build the next one, you can make those changes."[21]

Force Design and EABO Operational Concept

Another potential oversight issue for Congress concerns the merits of Force Design and the EABO operational concept that the LSM is intended to help implement. Debate on the merits of Force Design and the EABO concept has been vigorous and concerns issues such as

- whether Force Design and the EABO concept are focused too exclusively on potential conflict scenarios with China at the expense of other kinds of potential Marine Corps missions;

[19] See Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025, which states: "At least one LST-100, which was notably built at the Albwardy Damen yard in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, is in service with the Nigerian Navy, which also has a second example on order. In 2024, the Australian government also selected the LST-100 design as the starting point to meet its Landing Craft Heavy requirements. The ships for the Royal Australian Navy are set to be built in that country by Austal."

[20] Joseph Trevithick, "This Will Be The Navy's New Medium Landing Ship," *The War Zone*, December 5, 2025.

[21] Sam LaGrone, "Navy Retools Landing Ship Medium Program Around Dutch LST-100, Vessel Construction Manager to Lead Design Process," *USNI News*, December 8 (updated December 9), 2025. See also Rich Abott, "Navy Picks Dutch Design For LSM Over Bollinger," *Defense Daily*, December 8, 2025; Jeff Schogol, "Marines May Finally Get Landing Ships for Modern-Day Island Hopping," *Task & Purpose*, December 23, 2025.

- the ability of Marine forces to gain access to the islands from which they would operate;
- the ability to resupply Marine forces that are operating on the islands;
- the survivability of Marine forces on the islands and in surrounding waters;
- how much of a contribution the envisioned operations by Marine forces would make in contributing to overall U.S. sea-denial operations; and
- potential alternative ways of using the funding and personnel that would be needed to implement EABO.[22]

Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following:

- What are the potential benefits, costs, and risks of the EABO concept?
- What work have the Navy and Marine Corps done in terms of analyses and war games to develop and test the concept?
- Would EABO be more cost effective to implement than other potential uses of the funding and personnel?

Industrial-Base Implications

Another potential oversight issue for Congress concerns the potential industrial-base implications of the LSM program. In recent years, all Navy amphibious ships have been built by the Ingalls shipyard of Pascagoula, MS, a part of Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII/Ingalls). As noted earlier, LSMs could be built by multiple U.S. shipyards. Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following:

- What implications might the LSM program have for the distribution of Navy shipbuilding work among U.S. shipyards?
- In a situation of finite defense resources, what impact, if any, would funding the procurement of LSMs have on funding available for procuring other types of amphibious ships, and thus on workloads and employment levels at HII/Ingalls, its associated supplier firms, and their surrounding communities?[23]

[22] For a CRS report on Force Design, see CRS Insight IN11281, *New U.S. Marine Corps Force Design Initiative: Force Design 2030*, by Andrew Feickert. See also CRS In Focus IF12200, *The U.S. Marine Corps Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR)*, by Andrew Feickert. For examples of articles published since April 2021 discussing the merits of Force Design and the EABO concept, see the **Appendix B**.

[23] Two observers argue that shifting the Navy to a fleet architecture that includes a larger proportion of smaller ships would have beneficial impacts on U.S. shipbuilding industry's ability to support Navy shipbuilding needs. See Bryan Clark and Timothy A. Walton, "Shipbuilding Suppliers Need More Than Market Forces to Stay Afloat," *Defense News*, May 20, 2020.

Appendix A. Operational Rationale, Including EABO

This appendix discusses the operational rationale for the LSM, including its role in implementing the EABO concept.

To improve their ability to perform various missions in coming years, including a potential mission of countering Chinese forces in a possible conflict in the Western Pacific, the Navy and Marine Corps want to implement a new operational concept called Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO). DMO calls for U.S. naval forces (meaning the Navy and Marine Corps)[24] to operate at sea in a less concentrated, more distributed manner, so as to complicate an adversary's task of detecting, identifying, tracking, and targeting U.S. naval forces, while still being able to bring lethal force to bear against adversary forces.[25]

In parallel with DMO, and with an eye toward potential conflict scenarios in the Western Pacific against Chinese forces, the Marine Corps has developed two supporting operational concepts, called Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE) and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). Under the EABO concept, the Marine Corps envisions, among other things, having reinforced-platoon-sized Marine Corps units maneuver around the theater, moving from island to island, to fire anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and perform other missions so as to contribute, alongside Navy and other U.S. military forces, to U.S. operations to counter and deny sea control to Chinese forces.

More specifically, the Marine Corps states that the EABO concept includes, among other things, establishing and operating "multiple platoon-reinforced-size expeditionary advance base sites that can host and enable a variety of missions such as long-range anti-ship fires, forward arming and refueling of aircraft, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance of key maritime terrain, and air-defense and early warning,"[26] The use of Marine Corps units to contribute to U.S. sea-denial operations against an opposing navy by shooting ASCMs would represent a new mission for the Marine Corps.[27]

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[24] Although the term *naval* is often used to refer specifically to the Navy, it more properly refers to both the Navy and Marine Corps, because both the Navy and Marine Corps are naval services. Even though the Marine Corps sometimes operates for extended periods as a land fighting force (as it has done in recent years, for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq), and is often thought of as the country's second land army, it nevertheless is, by law, a naval service. 10 U.S.C. §8001(a)(3) states, "The term 'member of the naval service' means a person appointed or enlisted in, or inducted or conscripted into, the Navy or the Marine Corps." DON officials sometimes refer to the two services as the Navy-Marine Corps team. For additional discussion, see CRS In Focus IF10484, *Defense Primer: Department of the Navy*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[25] For more on DMO, see CRS In Focus IF12599, *Defense Primer: Navy Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) Concept*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[26] Emailed statement from Marine Corps as quoted in Shawn Snow, "New Marine Littoral Regiment, Designed to Fight in Contested Maritime Environment, Coming to Hawaii," *Marine Times*, May 14, 2020. See also David H. Berger, "Preparing for the Future, Marine Corps Support to Joint Operations in Contested Littorals," *Military Review*, April 2021, 8 pp.

[27] For press articles discussing these envisioned operations, see, for example, Jeff Schogol, "Inside the US Military's Modern 'Island Hopping' Campaign to Take on China," *Task and Purpose*, June 16, 2022; Justin Katz, "Marines' New Warfighting Concept Focuses on Small, Agile Forces with an Eye on China," *Breaking Defense*, December 1, 2021; Bill Gertz, "Marine Commandant Reveals New Mission Preparing for China Conflict," *Washington Times*, April 21, 2021; Megan Eckstein, "CMC Berger Outlines How Marines Could Fight Submarines in the Future," *USNI News*, December 8, 2020; David Axe, "Meet Your New Island-Hopping, Missile-Slinging U.S. Marine Corps," *Forbes*, May 14, 2020; Shawn Snow, "New Marine Littoral Regiment, Designed to Fight in Contested Maritime Environment, (continued...)

LSMs would be instrumental to these operations, with LSMs embarking, transporting, landing, and subsequently reembarking these small Marine Corps units. An August 27, 2020, press report states, "Maj. Gen. Tracy King, the director of expeditionary warfare on the chief of naval operations' staff (OPNAV N95), said today that LAW was perhaps the most important investment the Marine Corps was making to optimize itself for expeditionary advance base operations (EABO)."[28] A February 2021 Marine Corps tentative manual on EABO states

> Littoral maneuver will rely heavily on surface platforms such as the light amphibious warship (LAW) and a range of surface connectors, as well as aviation assets. The LAW is envisioned as the principal littoral maneuver vessel of the littoral force.…
>
> The LAW supports the day-to-day maneuver of stand-in forces operating in the LOA [littoral operations area]. It complements L-class amphibious ships[29] and other surface connectors. Utilizing the LAW to transport forces of the surface reduces the impacts of tactical vehicles on the road network, increases deception, and allows for the sustainment of forces during embarkation. The range, endurance, and austere access of LAWs enable the littoral force to deliver personnel, equipment, and sustainment across a widely distributed area. Shallow draft and beaching capability are keys to providing the volume and agility to maneuver the required capabilities to key maritime terrain.
>
> LAW employment requires reconnaissance and prior planning relating to the bathymetry of the littoral environment. Effective LAW employment relies on knowledge of the beach makeup, slope, currents, tidal effects, and other environment factors.
>
> As envisioned and when properly postured, LAWs possess the range, endurance, speed, sea-keeping, and C4ISR capabilities to support and conduct complementary operations with, but not as part of, US Navy tactical groups, including an expeditionary strike group (ESG) or amphibious ready group (ARG). Forward-positioned LAWs may augment the capabilities of deploying ARG/MEUs during regional engagement and response to crises or contingencies.
>
> The LAW with embarked forces, generates and/or enables the following effects:
>
> - Rapidly maneuver forces from shore-to-shore in a contested environment
> - Sustain a combat-credible force ashore
> - Conduct enduring operations
> - Enable persistent joint-force operations and power projection
> - Provide increased and capable forward presence[30]

The survivability of LSMs would come from their ability to hide among islands and other sea traffic, from defensive support they would receive from other U.S. Navy forces, and from the ability of their associated Marine Corps units to fire missiles at Chinese ships and aircraft that

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Coming to Hawaii," *Marine Times*, May 14, 2020; William Cole (Honolulu Star-Advertiser), "The Marine Corps Is Forming a First-of-its-Kind Regiment in Hawaii," *Military.com*, May 12, 2020; Joseph Trevithick, "Marines To Radically Remodel Force, Cutting Tanks, Howitzers In Favor Of Drones, Missiles," *The Drive*, March 23, 2020; Chris "Ox" Harmer, "Marine Boss's Audacious Plan To Transform The Corps By Giving Up Big Amphibious Ships," *The Drive*, September 5, 2019.

[28] Megan Eckstein, "Marines Already In Industry Studies for Light Amphibious Warship, In Bid to Field Them ASAP," *USNI News*, August 27 (updated August 28), 2020. See also Paul McLeary, "'If It Floats, It Fights:' Navy's New Small Ship Strategy," *Breaking Defense*, August 28, 2020.

[29] The term *L-class amphibious ships* refers to the Navy's LHA/LHD- and LPD-type amphibious ships, whose designation begins with the letter L in reference to amphibious *landing*.

[30] Department of the Navy, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, February 2021, pp. 7-9 to 7-10.

could attack them with their own missiles (which can be viewed as an application of the notion that the best defense is a good offense).

As a key platform for implementing EABO, the LSM program forms a part of Force Design, the Marine Corps' overall plan for plan for redesigning its units and equipment to meet future mission demands.[31]

[31] For more on Force Design, see CRS Insight IN11281, *New U.S. Marine Corps Force Design Initiative: Force Design 2030*, by Andrew Feickert.

Appendix B. Articles Regarding Debate on Merits of Force Design and EABO

This appendix presents examples of articles published since April 2021 discussing the merits of Force Design 2030 and the EABO concept, starting with the most recent on top.

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