

EXPEDITIONARY WARSHIPS

Combined with embarked Marines, naval expeditionary warships provide US leaders with forward-presence and flexible crisis response forces. They also provide the most formidable expeditionary forcible-entry capability in the world, the development and maintenance of which is the statutory responsibility of the Marine Corps, as directed by *Title X of the US Code*.

Expeditionary lift requirements are formulated to support the national military strategies, satisfy combat surge demands, and meet day-to-day commitments. The total warfighting amphibious lift requirement for the Marine Corps is 3.0 Marine Expeditionary Brigade Assault Echelons (AE), which currently equates to 14 three-ship Amphibious Ready Groups. This remains a priority requirement. However, fiscal constraints have limited amphibious force structure to a programmatic goal of 12 ARGs capable of lifting 2.5 MEB AEs, while the current active Navy fleet is only capable of lifting 1.93 MEB AEs.

The delivery of the twelfth *San Antonio* (LPD 17)-class landing assault ship

during the 2013-2014 timeframe will bring the Navy's amphibious lift capability to 2.48 MEB AEs. Until then, the Amphibious Lift Enhancement Program (ALEP) has been established to mitigate lift shortfalls until this last delivery. Shortfall in active amphibious ships remains an area of concern, and makes the expeditious completion of the 12-ship LPD 17 program even more essential.

Large-deck amphibious assault ships, the centerpieces of ARGs/ESGs and other expeditionary task forces, are likewise essential to maintaining amphibious lift and power-projection capabilities. Currently, there are 12 large-deck ships (seven *Wasp*-class LHDs and five *Tarawa*-class LHAs) in service. Congress directed the construction of an eighth *Wasp*-class multi-purpose amphibious assault ship, (LHD 8) *USS Makin Island*, which is currently under construction and will be delivered in FY 2007. LHD 8 will be similar to LHD 1-7 but will be powered by gas turbine engines and have all-electric auxiliaries. Upon commissioning of the LHD 8, the Navy will retire one of the five *Tarawa*-Class LHAs.

