

General Purpose Amphibious Assault Ship Replacement (LHA(R))

DISCUSSION

The amphibious fleet is organized for forward presence into twelve ARGs (eventually Expeditionary Support Groups), each with three ships. The centerpiece of the ARG is a *Wasp*-class or *Tarawa*-class amphibious assault ship. The five ships of the *Tarawa* class general-purpose amphibious assault ships (LHA) reach the end of their expected service lives at the rate of one per year from 2011 to 2015. LHD 8 will replace one of these LHAs, while the LHA(R) program will replace the last four *Tarawa*-class LHAs.

In March 2001, the Navy and Joint Staff approved and validated the LHA(R) Mission Need Statement. The office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics authorized Milestone "A" Acquisition status for the program, as well as its entry into the Concept Exploration phase in July 2001.

Under Department of Defense guidance, the Navy conducted an analysis of alternatives (AoA) study to determine the best method of replacing the four remaining LHAs. This study, completed in the summer of 2002, evaluated the following alternatives: (1) a repeat LHD 8 with evolutionary modifications; (2) a modified LHD 8 (77 feet longer and 10 feet wider), upgraded to enhance its

ability to operate the larger and more capable new-generation amphibious systems; and (3) new ship designs spanning a wide range of size and capability.

The first ship in the LHA(R) Program (a modified "Plug Plus" LHD-8) is currently scheduled for an FY 2007 contract award (as LHD-9) and an FY 2013 delivery, with the following ships in the class being acquired every 3 years. The department is in the process of determining the preferred designs for the remaining ships of the LHA(R) class. This extended procurement and construction schedule will result in the last *Tarawa*-class LHA being retired in 2022, seven years past its 35-year expected service life.

MARINE CORPS POSITION

The Marine Corps supports construction of a new LHA(R) design that will allow concurrent flight operations (rotary wing/tiltrotor aircraft turning on deck during fixed-wing launch and recovery) and increased vehicle stowage. The Marine Corps supports the Program of Record for a modified LHD 8 ("plug-Plus") ship design in FY 2007 and will evaluate the adequacy of the programs R&D and SCN funding for the spiral development of future LHA(R) ships for the remainder of the class.