

THE MARINE CORPS' COMMON-SENSE APPROACH TO FIRE SUPPORT

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The Marine Corps' decision to field the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), along with the Lightweight 155mm Howitzer are yet more examples of the Corps' common-sense solutions to its tactical challenges.

Years ago, when the Corps had the option to buy the tracked version of **HIMARS**, the Multiple Launch Rocket System, it passed, and with good reason. MLRS was deemed too heavy and too delicate for the salt-water rigors of amphibious operations and the Corps' vision of maneuver warfare. To some at the time, the Marine Corps erred by not taking the opportunity to acquire more artillery firepower. But time proved the Marines right. When the 1st and 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigades deployed to Saudi Arabia, they did so quickly, with M198 155mm towed howitzers and M109A3 155mm self-propelled howitzers, along with a handful on S-inch self-propelled howitzers.

But the Corps has since retired its self-propelled howitzers, and while the M198 has sufficient range and adequate firepower, it lacks the mobility the Corps needs in today's environment of over-the-horizon operations. Also gone is a great deal of naval gunfire support. A decade ago, the Corps could rely on *Iowa*-class battleships and an assortment of 5-inch guns aboard cruisers and destroyers. Today, the battleships are gone, and the 5-inch guns are disappearing. The Navy's next-generation destroyer, DD-21, and its much-anticipated long-range gun, is still just a concept. Consequently, the Corps is left with a glaring firepower gap during ship-to-objective movement.

HIMARS gives the Corps what it needed all along – the punch of MLRS without the weight. With the capability to transport HIMARS via C-130, the Marine Corps has one solution to its woes stemming from the cumbersome, fragile M198 155mm howitzer, and the current inadequacy of fire support – both Marine and Navy – in the crucial early stages of amphibious operations.

The same will be true of the Lightweight Howitzer, which will give the Marine Corps all the firepower of its current cannon, but only half the weight. Together, these systems will enable the Corps to realize its vision of expeditionary warfare that requires agile, flexible and dependable fire support.

HIMARS versus MLRS

