Force Design 2030 & Stifling Opposing Views

By Roger Thompson

To say that Force Design 2030 is a controversial plan to update the U.S. Marine Corps to meet the needs of future warfare would be a gross understatement. On December 21, 2022, the journal *The Hill* published an article titled “[Reduce the Risk to National Security: Abandon ‘Force Design 2030’](https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3779378-reduce-the-risk-to-national-security-abandon-force-design-2030/)” by two retired U.S.M.C. generals, and they described FD2030 as follows: “Almost three years ago, the United States Marine Corps adopted a new, unproven concept to guide future combat developments. The overarching vision for the approach was codified in [Force Design 2030](https://mailtrack.io/trace/link/8d316c1fdd75cabfc9f94c6915347eb1b6504b49?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hqmc.marines.mil%2FPortals%2F142%2FDocs%2FCMC38%2520Force%2520Design%25202030%2520Report%2520Phase%2520I%2520and%2520II.pdf%3Fver%3D2020-03-26-121328-460&userId=8056581&signature=81886bbf3b02a8e1). The path chosen focused almost entirely on a single threat — China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The strategy embraced was defensive, essentially arguing that the proliferation of precision munitions and advanced sensors had changed the character of war, rendering the defense decisively dominant over the offense. A ‘Mature Precision Strike Regime’ had made maneuver all but impossible. The Marine Corps now deemed defense the primary method for fighting peers, and even lesser rivals”.

They continued: “To acquire the innovations required for this approach, the Marine Corps divested organizations and equipment needed today to self-fund future, largely experimental capabilities that will not be fully fielded in sufficient quantities until 2030 or beyond. Simply stated, the capabilities the Marine Corps needs to respond quickly and effectively to current and subsequent threats have been jettisoned to fund a narrowly focused, one-dimensional, largely regional future force. The Marine Corps envisions this force, consisting of small teams known as stand-in forces, to be widely distributed and effectively isolated among the island chain of the Western Pacific. The mission of these stand-in forces is to acquire and sink Chinese warships with mid- to long-range missiles.” “[Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations](https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Maneuverist-19.pdf),” *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2022, p. 103 suggests that for FD20230 strategy to be successfully executed the Marines need to have forces in place before the onset of hostilities. Thus, FD2030 must be able to predict pre-hostilities lying in wait knowing exactly where and when in the Pacific China will strike.

Furthermore, another [article](https://fabiusmaximus.com/2023/01/10/force-design-2030/) written by three retired senior officers (two colonels and a lieutenant colonel) noted: “FD2030 sows the seeds for a defeat in detail by trying to defend an Indo-Pacific island chain within the Chinese Weapons Engagement Zone (WEZ). FD2030 fundamentally positions the majority of the Corps’ warfighting capability on island fixated positions within easy striking range of the Chinese. These small, isolated Marine units will not be able to avoid detection for long given the electromagnetic energy generated by their weapon systems and a more mobile enemy will easily locate, isolate and destroy them. Additionally, logistically supporting such far-flung detachments would pose considerable challenges, either by air or sea, given the immense distances of the Indo-Pacific region and China’s sophisticated sea mining capabilities.”

This drastic overhaul of Marine Corps strategy provoked outrage by a large number of serving and retired Marine officers and enlisted personnel, and they decided to organize a protest and called themselves ‘Chowder II’. Some say that the number of people in the organization is actually quite small compared to the total number of officers in the Marines, but retired Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper says that he sees things differently. “It’s not the numbers alone, but who these Marines are: 21 former Commandants and combatant commanders signed a letter detailing their concerns with Force Design 2030 at the start of our effort.  Four more felt they could not sign for personal reasons ([for] example, sons on active duty) but they were in full agreement with the contents of the letter.  Five lieutenant generals who retired within the past 18 months and saw up close what General Berger was doing are part of or support our group.  Our core group numbers in the hundreds and we have thousands of supporters who we reach through large email lists. More importantly, the group continues to grow daily as more former and retired Marines learn what General Berger has done to destroy the Corps.”

Chowder II submitted a series of articles to *Marine Corps Gazette*, which were initially accepted for publication, but were subsequently pulled “at the last minute” because the editor felt using a pseudonym instead of real names undermined the credibility of their work. In addition, the editor said the lack of transparent references and alleged lack of an alternative approach to FD 30 were unacceptable. To be more specific, [the editor wrote](https://mca-marines.org/blog/gazette/transparency/) “the essays as written only make their points in opposition to FD2030 – in other words FD2030 becomes the military problem and the only solution is ‘not FD 2030.’ Second, there was insufficient citation of sources or references for statements asserted as facts.  My associate editors and I indicated where this documentation was required and collected the references from the representatives of Chowder II.  Some of the sources are not authoritative, and further fact checking was required.  Some sources are anonymous which leads to the second issue.  As a best practice in publishing, anonymous sources are to be avoided as much as possible and pseudonyms/pen names should be used sparingly by individual authors not groups.  Neither anonymous sources nor anonymous groups of authors lend credibility to the article or the journal.”

[Chowder II responded to the editor](https://marinecorpscompasspoints.substack.com/p/chowder-ii-setting-the-record-straight) saying that his words were disingenuous and misleading. Their first counterargument was that the editor was under political pressure not to publish dissenting views in *Marine Corps Gazette*: “Regarding his decision not to publish the articles the Editor wrote in ‘Transparency,’ ‘No pressure or influence from the leadership of the Association, HQMC [Headquarters Marine Corps], or anyone else forced me to change course.’  How are we to square that statement to one he made earlier in an email to a Chowder II member dated Wednesday, 30 November at 3:49 PM: ‘Break, break, we [Marine Corps Association/*Gazette*] have also started taking heavy fire from HQMC over this [the three articles]’? Two members of Chowder II asked the President and CEO of the MCA about pressure from HQMC, and he said, ‘the Editor had received no pressure from the Commandant, Assistant Commandant, or anyone of consequence.’  When we asked him to clarify the term ‘anyone of consequence’ he said it was a colonel.  *So, in fact the Editor did receive pressure from HQMC.****”***

**The members of Chowder II then rebutted the editor’s complaints and Lt. Gen. Van Riper also challenged the claim that the numbers in Chowder II’s articles don’t match official Marine documents and are therefore not reliable: “**Our numbers in the ‘divest to invest’ approach came directly and personally from General Berger in March 2022 or from Force Design 2030, its updates, and related documents such as the ‘Stand-in Force’ concept with one exception, the cuts in aviation, which come from a trusted source with access to the appropriate documents. Our figures are elimination of 100 percent of tanks, breaching and bridging equipment, 67 percent reduction of cannon artillery batteries, and a near 30 percent reduction of aircraft.” The general then asked critics to correct him if he was mistaken. Finally, he said that another claim that the Commandant, General Berger, has heard and understood Chowder II’s position is false: “True, General Berger has spent considerable time listening to many senior generals including three hours with me; the trouble is he doesn’t hear. He has changed nothing after these conversations and in March 2022 stated forcefully he has no intention of changing anything.  I have heard personally from the defense officials that [a critic of Chowder II] mentions and they stated unequivocally that nothing in the National Defense Strategy or National Military Strategy required General Berger to do what he has done. Much of what he has done appalls them!”

**In the end, the articles were published, albeit in a magazine not affiliated with the Marine Corps, and no doubt by refusing to publish the three articles at the last moment, the editor of *Marine Corps Gazette* has given the members of Chowder II even more publicity, so his decision backfired. Censorship in the Military Industrial Complex has always been a serious problem, and is getting worse, and that is what concerns me the most about this whole thing. I myself was the victim of this sort of thing by the journal *Proceedings*, published by the U.S. Naval Institute, which ironically is the same organization that published my second book on the U.S.N.**

**Notes**

# **Terrence R. Dake and Charles E. Wilhelm, “**[Reduce the risk to national security: Abandon ‘Force Design 2030’](https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3779378-reduce-the-risk-to-national-security-abandon-force-design-2030/)” *The Hill*, December 21, 2022.

# Marinus, “[Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations](https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Maneuverist-19.pdf),” *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2022, p. 103.

# Colonel Gary I. Wilson, U.S.M.C. (Ret.) Lieutenant Colonel William A. Woods, U.S.M.C. (Ret.) and Colonel Michael D. Wyly, U.S.M.C. (Ret.), “[Force Design 2030 Fumbles Maneuver Warfare and Nature of War](https://fabiusmaximus.com/2023/01/10/force-design-2030/)”, Fabius Maximus website, 10 January 2023.

# Statement by Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper, U.S.M.C. (Ret.) for public consumption. February 11, 2023.

# Colonel Chris Woodbridge, U.S.M.C. (Ret.) “[Transparency](https://mca-marines.org/blog/gazette/transparency/)”, Marine Corps Association website, December 5, 2022.

# Chowder II, “[Setting The Record Straight](https://marinecorpscompasspoints.substack.com/p/chowder-ii-setting-the-record-straight)” Marine Corps Compass Points Substack, December 9, 2022.

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