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Marine Corps Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV)

What Is the Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV)?

According to the Marine Corps, the Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) is planned to be a new armored vehicle family to replace the Light Armored Vehicle (LAV):

Since the 1980s, the Light Armored Vehicle (LAV) has supported Marine Air-Ground Task Force missions on the battlefield. While the LAV remains operationally effective, the life cycle of this system is set to expire in the mid-2030s.... The Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) will be highly mobile, networked, transportable, protected, and lethal. The capability will provide, sensors, communication systems and lethality options to overmatch threats that have historically been addressed with more heavily armored systems.

ARV Desired Operational Capabilities

A Marine Corps May 2019 briefing describes some of the ARV's desired operational capabilities as

- an automatic medium-caliber cannon;
- anti-armor capability to defeat close-in heavy armor threats;
- precision-guided munitions (PGMs) to defeat threats beyond the engagement range of threat systems;
- unmanned systems swarm capability to provide persistent, multifunction munitions;
- advanced, networked, multifunctional electronic warfare (EW) capabilities;
- a modern command-and-control suite and a full range of sensors;
- organic unmanned aerial and ground systems (UAS/UGS) that can be deployed from the ARV;
- active and passive vehicle protection; and
- robust cross-country/on-road mobility performance with *shore-to-shore* water mobility.

ARV in Marine Corps Force Structure

The ARV was originally intended to be the primary combat system in Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalions. The mission of the LAR Battalion is to conduct mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, surveillance, and security operations. LAR Battalions are also expected to conduct offensive and defensive missions and conduct deception operations and raids to create decisive conditions for the Marine Division and the supported unit commander.

Program Status

The Marines plan for a number of ARV variants—referred to as a “family of vehicles.” The first variant is the Command, Control, Communications and Computers/Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C4/UAS) version. Reportedly, on July 16, 2021, the Marines selected Textron Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems to build ARV prototypes with prototype delivery expected in the first quarter of FY2023 with evaluation of the prototypes concluding in the third quarter FY2023. Textron reportedly delivered its ARV prototypes, known as the “Cottonmouth,” to the Marine Corps’ Nevada Automotive Test Center on December 1, 2022. General Dynamics reportedly delivered its ARV prototypes to the Marines on December 23, 2022. The delivery of these two prototypes marked the beginning of the formal government evaluation process.

ARV Prototype Evaluation

In February 2023, the Marine Corps reportedly began evaluation of three ARV prototypes. In addition to Textron and General Dynamics prototypes, BAE systems—the Amphibious Combat Vehicle’s (ACV) manufacturer—provided a third prototype (based on a modified ACV) for evaluation. The prototype evaluation reportedly was to focus on the ARV’s ability to navigate “mission-representative terrain” in addition to its C4 and UAS capabilities.

ARV Prototype Contracts Awarded

On March 6, 2024, the Marines selected General Dynamics and Textron to design, develop, and manufacture an Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle 30 mm Autocannon (ARV-30) prototype vehicle. Reportedly, the prototypes are to be delivered in FY2025 and procurement is planned to begin in FY2028.

Figure I. Textron Cottonmouth ARV Prototype



Source: Defense Daily, “GD Submits Prototype Proposal for Marine Corps ARV, SAIC Is Out,” May 6, 2021.

Figure 2. General Dynamics ARV Prototype



Source: Seapower, “General Dynamics Land Systems Delivers Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle Prototype to U.S. Marine Corps,” January 5, 2023.

The ARV and the Marine Corps Force Design Initiative

In March 2020, the Marines undertook a major force design initiative planned to occur over the next 10 years. The Marine Corps intends to redesign the force for naval expeditionary warfare and to better align itself with the National Defense Strategy. In February 2021, the Marines updated the Secretary of Defense on the progress on force design initiatives. The March 2020 force design initiative plan raises questions that some have about the role or even the desirability of the ARV in future force design. According to then-Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David Berger,

While I have repeatedly stated that all-domain reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance will be a critical element of any future contingency, I remain unconvinced that additional wheeled, manned armored ground reconnaissance units are the best and only answer – especially in the Indo-Pacific region. We need to see more evidence during Phase III to support this conclusion before engaging in an expansion of our existing capacity, or committing billions of dollars in procurement funds towards the acquisition of an Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) (see page 10).

In the Marines’ February 2021 Force Design Update to the Secretary of Defense, the Commandant further noted,

The 12 Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Companies identified in the initial Force Design Report must be re-evaluated in light of the emerging concept of multi-domain mobile reconnaissance. This may affect the overall requirement for armored land mobility in the form of the Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) (see pages 5-6).

In the Marines’ May 2022 Force Design Update to the Secretary of Defense, the Commandant directed the Marines to

[r]eview and validate all assumptions regarding programmed or potential future capabilities, such as the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV)-30 and Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) (see page 9).

While the Marines’ program plans call for the procurement of the ARV in FY2028, these past three statements arguably raise questions regarding the future of the ARV program, seemingly implying the ARV might not be the best solution for the Marines’ reconnaissance needs. The June 2023 Force Design Annual Update does not reference the ARV, potentially raising further questions about the Marines’ long-term commitment to the ARV program.

FY2025 ARV Budgetary Information

Table I. FY2025 ARV Budget Request

Funding Category	Total Request (\$M)	Total Request (Qty.)
RDT&E	\$63.736	—

Source: United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request, Navy Justification Book, Volume 2 of 5, Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, March 2024, p. 623.

Considerations for Congress

Oversight questions Congress could consider include the following:

- In view of the Commandant’s statements in 2020, 2021, and 2022, and lack of a reference to the ARV in the 2023 update, what is the Marine Corps’ current official position on the operational requirement to procure the ARV?
- If the requirement for the service’s LAR companies and the ARV “must be re-evaluated,” as stated in the February 2021 update, what are the Marines’ plans to reevaluate this requirement? Has the reevaluation been accomplished and, if so, when will the results be communicated to Congress?

For additional information on the Marine Corps Force Design Initiative, see CRS Report R47614, *U.S. Marine Corps Force Design 2030 Initiative: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

For additional information on the Marine’s Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV), see CRS In Focus IF11755, *The Marine Corps’ Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV)*, by Andrew Feickert.

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