

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

ON

21 APRIL 1999

CONCERNING READINESS

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee. Having been privileged to command the III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) for the past two years, I can assure you that readiness of the force lies at the heart of everything we do in the Western Pacific. Therefore, I am pleased to give you my personal views of our capability to carry out assigned missions and tasks.

The III MEF is comprised of the 3rd Marine Division, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, 3rd Force Service Support Group, and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). While Okinawa, Japan, serves as our main operating base, by no means should you assume that our forces are there to garrison Okinawa. We also have forces stationed on mainland Japan, Korea, and Hawaii. Moreover, on average, 20 percent of the force is deployed to other locations in the Pacific for training and operations. In addition to my III MEF responsibilities, I serve as Commander, Marine Corps Bases, Japan; Commander, Marine Forces Japan; and Commander, Landing Force, 7th Fleet (CTF 79). As such, I am responsible for 24,000 Marines and Sailors.

Implicit in our forward deployed status are two major responsibilities. The first is to furnish the National Command Authorities and the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command with quick response forces for crisis situations across the spectrum of conflict. A strong and viable Marine Air Ground Task Force

(MAGTF), III MEF is fully capable of serving as either the nucleus of a Joint Task Force (JTF) command element or the Marine component of a JTF throughout the Pacific Rim region. Additionally, III MEF is fully capable of responding on short notice with two highly flexible standing contingency packages. The first, the Alert Contingency MAGTF, is a robust air-ground team that is prepared to commence deployment within 24 hours of notification by a unified Commander in Chief. The second, the 31st MEU, is the only permanently forward-deployed MEU. Together with Amphibious Readiness Group-11 from 7th Fleet, 31st MEU has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to quickly respond to contingencies. Most recently, in November 1998, 31st MEU responded in less than 96 hours, fully manned, fully maintained, and combat ready, for deployment to the Persian Gulf for Operation Desert Fox.

The second major responsibility pertains to Cooperative Engagement, in support of the National Military Strategy for coalition warfare. This is key to building and maintaining alliances and to promoting regional stability. We accomplish this through an aggressive program of 70 off-island exercises annually, most of which are Battalion sized or larger, numerous humanitarian assistance operations, senior officer visits, and military-to-military contacts designed to develop mutual trust and understanding.

These responsibilities require that we remain both ready and capable of rapidly and decisively executing the full range of military operations. From deployment (by strategic air and sea lift) to employment (as a fully manned and superior trained fighting force) to sustainment (with modern working equipment, maintained with adequate supplies and parts), your MEF stands ready to ensure the success the American people expect and demand.

In my view, readiness is, quite simply, the continuous capability to provide and sustain personnel and units to execute assigned missions. When measuring readiness, troop strength, adequacy of training, condition of equipment and systems, and other largely quantitative data are considered. But, in the end, it is the commander who must judge whether those indicators are sufficient and accurate. The commander's assessments must be followed by critical analyses to determine where resources (Marines, materiel, money) can most effectively be applied. When possible, we realign resources internally to relieve stresses and strains, but one can “rob Peter to pay Paul” only so long; eventually, additional assets will be required to eliminate deficiencies. By any measure, our readiness today is adequate, as evidenced by the 31st MEU’s recent successful deployment and our continued involvement in a robust exercise schedule. On average, 93 percent of our ground combat systems were up and operationally ready throughout 1998, and we

maintained our tactical aircraft at an average mission capable rate of 77 percent during the same year.

However, there are unique features that make readiness within III MEF particularly challenging. The constantly changing political and economic environment within the Pacific AOR and especially the challenges we face with the Okinawa Prefectural Government require us to be ambassadors 24 hours a day. Additionally, the immense size of the area in which we train and operate is approximately eight times the size of CONUS, as reflected in Figure 1.

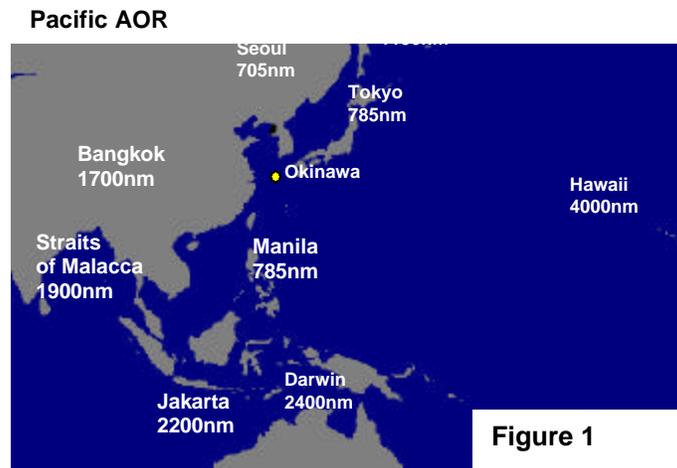


Figure 1

Note: All Distances are from Okinawa

Let me give you my personal view of what I believe are our strengths and weaknesses.

The one area that keeps me awake at night is the shortfall of strategic lift, both sea and air, because it directly impacts my war fighting readiness. The lack of adequate training areas and ranges on Okinawa requires us to deploy and conduct nearly all of

our live fire and combined arms training off island. And, we no longer have access to the vast, multi-purpose ranges once used extensively in the Philippines. We are, however, eagerly awaiting the signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement, so we can return to the Philippines to train. Instead, we must rely on exercises in such countries as Australia, Thailand, and Korea to “train as we fight.” Getting to off-island training locations is not only difficult, but expensive. The U.S. Navy and USTRANSCOM do their best to accommodate us, but the lack of sea and air lift is a reality which we view with deep concern. In the words of former Commandant, General Barrow, "I have more fight than I can ferry." Eighty percent of our off-island training requires air lift, but the C-141 fleet is being retired (and not replaced on a one-for-one basis by the C-17). The continuing drawdown of C-141s may well eliminate our Western Pacific-based strategic air lift and require us to spend significantly more to maintain our training commitments by paying to fly these aircraft from CONUS. Consequently, we rely heavily on opportune lift by the Air Force to meet deployment support requirements. Additionally, higher air lift costs reduce the amount of funding available for maintenance and equipment, while lengthier periods of time at off-island training sites (awaiting return transportation) not only consumes funds, but also increases deployment tempo. To cope with the shortfall in strategic lift, we sometimes schedule exercises around strategic lift availability or leave equipment in place for follow-on exercises in the same location.

Although leaving equipment in place can result in rapid degradation and additional equipment maintenance expense, it ensures the equipment is available and saves cost of strategic lift. For example, in FY98 we supported two back-to-back Korean Incremental Training Program exercises with the same equipment that was used for Ulchi Focus Lens; we simply left the gear and support personnel in Korea for approximately six months to support the follow-on exercises.

The limited availability of amphibious sea lift also negatively impacts my war fighting readiness. Only four amphibious ships are forward deployed in the Western Pacific, three of which primarily support our standing maritime contingency force, the 31st MEU. The lack of amphibious sea lift limits opportunities for the MEF Command Element and other Major Subordinate Commands to train for amphibious-based missions, a troubling deficiency considering that III MEF is designated an amphibious assault force in two major war plans.

Secondly, we have reached a critical point in the life cycle of our ground and aviation equipment; we are facing virtual block obsolescence of crucial end items. As our equipment ages it becomes more expensive to maintain in terms of parts and man-hours. Our Marines are spending time maintaining aged equipment which draws valuable time and resources away from training. Deployments in support of real-world contingencies further complicate the challenge of equipment readiness. As I mentioned earlier, the 31st MEU deployed last November to the U.S. Central

Command's area of responsibility with only a 96 hour notice. When the initial strike against Iraq was launched in support of Operation Desert Fox, the 31st MEU was deployed on the ground in Kuwait, relying on 30-year-old CH-46Es as the prime troop transport helicopter. The MEU's 17-year-old M198 howitzers provided organic artillery support. For ground transportation support, the 31st MEU used its 28-year-old Assault Amphibious Vehicles (AAV), 13-year-old High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs), and 19-year-old five-ton trucks. To deploy the 31st MEU at 100 percent readiness last November, other units had to relinquish equipment, particularly motor transport vehicles, to replace MEU resources undergoing maintenance. This placed an increased (\$350K) maintenance burden on the sourcing, nondeploying units which continued to handle routine, on- and off-island commitments with fewer resources.

While many of the most urgent readiness concerns and priorities are beyond our control (e.g., inadequate strategic lift; lack of on-island training areas and ranges; delayed modernization of ground and aviation equipment), we have sought to minimize or postpone the detrimental affects of those deficiencies. Where possible, commanders and staffs are aggressively pursuing local solutions to mitigate the continuing readiness challenges. I'd like to describe a few of the innovative ways we are trying to help ourselves.

First, there has been a great deal of talk in American military circles about a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). These discussions usually focus on technological advances, but an RMA is about thinking as much as it is about technology. And one area that demands new thinking is our approach to business affairs. In our Business Reform Initiatives program, Marines are systematically and rigorously reviewing our business processes with an eye toward adopting more efficient practices and creating processes that work better and cost less.

Second, we recently consolidated (for a one-year test) the supply and maintenance battalions into “Materiel Readiness Battalion.” The concept, which revolves around commodity-based companies, promises real potential in reducing inventory and leveraging better industry practices.

Third, our movement to “just in time” logistics represents a potentially viable option for reducing the footprint of deploying forces, though it has not been tested during a long term, major deployment and will require a transportation system with depth and redundancy. As strategic air and sea lift assets are reduced, maintaining a long-term logistics flow to support high intensity operations remains a concern.

Clearly, local initiatives go only so far. While our operating forces are adequately funded today to perform assigned missions, a modest increase to our annual operations and maintenance budget would enable us to focus on training (instead of equipment maintenance), thereby becoming a more effective fighting

force. The supplemental funds provided by Congress last year were greatly appreciated: III MEF's share (\$2.5M) was used to pay for strategic lift for training opportunities and to address equipment maintenance needs. On the aviation side, the flying hour program is funded, but we are heavily dependent on supplements from the Navy to keep the aircraft maintained and flying; every year, we risk shutting down in the fourth quarter or deferring maintenance until the new fiscal year's appropriation arrives. We need \$25M more to fully fund the program this year. Finally, our supporting establishment (Bases) would also benefit from additional funding for key concerns: maintenance of real property, year-round air conditioning in our barracks and workspaces, contract mess attendants, information technology, and our Marine Corps Community Services program.

Now, I would like to address what I consider a few of our strengths. Despite challenges, training readiness and morale throughout III MEF are good. I attribute this to the fact that our mission is operationally relevant and therefore provides members a sense of professional worth. The quality of today's Marines coupled with the augmentation provided by the Marine Reserve Forces, creates a Total Force capable of sustained combat in the event of a major theater war. Our reserve augmentation is a "win-win" scenario because it provides reservists the chance to train in a theater in which they will most likely deploy under current mobilization plans while simultaneously relieving some of the strain of the high operational

tempo on our active force. The support provided by the government of Japan, approximately \$324 M per year, allows our forces to remain forward deployed with less expense to the US taxpayers. Additionally, III MEF includes several units that deploy from CONUS and Hawaii to Okinawa for six months. They arrive fully staffed, highly trained, and ready, and we enhance their training readiness through a robust exercise schedule.

Quality of life is good, particularly for those with families who appreciate the opportunity to experience a different culture; to raise children in a relatively drug and crime free environment; and to travel to exotic places. To provide a great QOL and not short-change those hardworking Marines and Sailors, we need continued focus on increasing availability of military housing; reducing the overcrowding in schools; enhancing after-school academic activities for family members; and improving recreational opportunities for Marines, Sailors, and their families.

I assure you that III MEF remains a key part of your force in readiness today, thanks to the dedicated efforts of many superb men and women. To continue performing to the high standards that you expect and America demands, we must retain the proverbial “best and brightest” among this young force. Our increasingly sophisticated technology and the complex strategic environment means our Marines will be making tactical and moral decisions with potentially strategic consequences. The “strategic corporal” (a term coined by our Commandant) is an absolute

necessity for the 21st century. We're building "strategic corporals" in III MEF by demonstrating that we want risk takers -- and you don't get them just by saying it, but by supporting them along the way. We realize that when we ask them to walk on water, they're going to get their feet wet! Your support is also key in this effort; your recent support of a pay increase and retirement benefit reinstatement goes a long way in assuring members and their families that the American people recognize and appreciate their service and sacrifices.

There are serious issues of strategic import for the United States and for our service that must be confronted in the next two years. In my view, the need to station American forces overseas will not diminish; indeed, it has become even more important as the world becomes increasingly complex. If we try to avoid the expense and difficulty of keeping troops abroad, the deterrence value of the U.S. military will fall. No matter how advanced the U.S. military's technology or electronics become, they will never eliminate the need for troops on the ground, nor will they do much to reduce the time it would take for warplanes or ships to reach areas of conflict from domestic bases. How we, as a nation, as a department, as a service, resolve them -- with the support of the Congress and the American people -- will influence global security for decades to come.