

STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
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CONCERNING READINESS

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is my privilege to appear before you to report on the state of readiness of your Marine Corps. I would like to thank the Committee for your recent support, which has helped your Corps address pressing recruiting, retention, modernization, and infrastructure needs. Your support for pay and retirement initiatives is especially important: those measures expressly thank and compensate our personnel in uniform for their service and sacrifice. Your actions send a clear message that their efforts are appreciated.

On 1 July of this year, I published my “commander’s intent”—entitled *Commandant’s Guidance*—to the Marine Corps. Its purpose was to introduce my philosophy to all Marines. I reemphasized that “Winning Battles” is our fundamental purpose and our reason for being. It is our Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) that win battles, and they are what makes the Marine Corps warfighting capability unique. I will testify about many issues of concern to the Marine Corps today, but the readiness of our MAGTFs to perform their central role must lie at the heart of the decisions that come out of these hearings where the Marine Corps is concerned. Everything Marines do supports our readiness and our capability to answer the Nation’s call.

In the three months since becoming Commandant, I have traveled widely and spoken to Marines of all ranks. They are enthusiastic about today’s missions, proud to be at the forefront of the Nation’s foreign policy and national security actions, and grateful for the support of the Congress and the American people. Although too much of the equipment upon which they depend is aged, and they would appreciate more stability for their families and quality time at home, they remain firmly committed to Country and Corps. Your Marines are well aware of the great demand for their special and unique talents around the globe, and they take great satisfaction in their opportunity to make a difference.

The events of the past year point out the many challenges of providing for our common defense in the post-Cold War era. Operations Desert Fox, Allied Force, and Joint Guardian each required a large investment of scarce resources and the deployment of thousands of troops to accomplish the mission. America's continuing operations in the Balkans and the Arabian Gulf region, as well as our support of humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping activities stretching from Africa to East Timor, regularly test the ability of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. Our collective task is to execute today's missions and to organize, train, and equip our forces to face an increasingly broad array of potential threats in the future.

Of the 172,200 Marines on active duty today, two thirds are in the Operating Forces. Nearly 30,500 Marines are forward deployed, forward based, forward stationed, or deployed for training. Marines are ashore as part of the joint and combined task force supporting humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in East Timor, and a detachment of Marines and Sailors from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) is embarked on board the USS BELLEAU WOOD in nearby waters supporting that same operation.

Our current commitments, while significant in their own right, belie the pace and breadth of operations since January. The record of the 26th MEU(SOC) in the European theater captures the essence of the flexibility of our forward deployed MAGTFs. Arriving in the EUCOM area of responsibility on 28 April, the MEU was tasked to assume an immediate alert posture for the execution of Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) missions. Starting on 1 May, the MEU's Harriers participated in air strikes during Operations Noble Anvil and Allied Force. In late May, elements of the MEU provided security and humanitarian relief support to refugees in Albania as part of Joint Task Force Shining Hope, and in June the MEU spearheaded the entry

of American ground forces into Kosovo. Re-embarking on their ships in July, the 26th MEU(SOC) provided disaster relief for earthquake-stricken areas of Turkey in August. Theirs was a complete demonstration of the flexibility of amphibious forces, and, along with our EA-6B and F/A-18 squadrons, they contributed greatly to the success of operations in Southern Europe this year.

On the opposite side of the globe, Marine Forces Pacific MEUs demonstrated the unique flexibility of forward-deployed naval power as they responded to contingencies and helped cement ties with allies throughout the Pacific and Indian Ocean littorals. In South and Central America, Marines provided security, assisted in disaster relief and humanitarian operations, and supported our Nation's counter-narcotics effort. In the United States, Marines assisted hurricane victims in North Carolina and continued to participate in numerous deployments for training. At our bases and stations, Marines conducted the myriad activities designed to gain and maintain essential combat skills. As this century draws to a close, there is no lack of missions for our MAGTFs.

Outside of our Operating Forces, the Marine Corps performs a wide variety of other tasks deemed essential for the Nation. We provide Marines to the intelligence community, airlift support to the Executive Branch, and a Chemical Biological Incident Response Force, now a national asset. There are Marines guarding diplomatic outposts in 122 detachments throughout the world and, thanks to your increase in the end strength of the Marine Security Guard Battalion by 370, more posts will be established soon. Active and reserve Marines support counter-narcotics operations, and serve in countless billets throughout the defense establishment and other government agencies. The Marines of the Blount Island Command in Florida man the Nation's premier prepositioning facility, one that is indispensable to the timely deployment and

reconstitution of our sealift-dependent heavy ground and air forces. Your Marine Reserve maintains a presence in 192 sites in the United States, and they—and the active Marines who support them—perform an impressive array of augmentation and reinforcement tasks as part of our Total Force.

While all of these duties are very important to the Nation, our primary obligation to the people of the United States is to field fully manned, combat-ready MAGTFs.

The readiness of our MAGTFs rests on four pillars: Marines and their families, current systems, facilities, and modernization. All need due attention and resources in order to maintain a Corps that will be ready and relevant on the battlefields of the future. I would like to share with you some of the most notable successes we are achieving in these areas. Later, I will discuss the challenges we face and some of the ways you can help us, if you are so inclined.

Marines and their families are our first priority and our greatest success story. We continue to maintain our high standards throughout the process of transforming young men and women from civilians into Marines. I am pleased to report that the Marine Corps Recruiting Command has now met or exceeded its recruiting goals for 51 consecutive months. Before we take this performance for granted, please remember that it took an extraordinary amount of time and energy on the part of every member of the recruiting force to achieve this result. Just one or two years ago, most of the young sergeants and staff sergeants on the “front lines” of the recruiting battle were in highly demanding assignments in the Operating Forces, where they worked long hours to maintain their equipment and endured necessary family separations while participating in frequent deployments. Now, they are working an average of more than 60 hours a week to identify the young Americans who are best qualified to enter the Corps. Their dedication and their results are inspirational.

Recruiting and accessing quality people remains a great and continuing challenge. The Corps, which enjoys the fruits of this impressive effort on the part of our recruiters, needs your continued support. Our Marines work the same recruiting beat as their counterparts in the other services. To illustrate the magnitude of the challenge being confronted and overcome by Marine recruiters, I would note that in Fiscal Year 1999, they enlisted over 37,000 recruits to our depots at Parris Island and San Diego. This is a remarkable achievement, and a critical one, because 68 percent of our active duty enlisted Marines are on their first enlistment

One of my goals, as stated in the *Commandant's Guidance*, is to place emphasis on what we call "sustaining the transformation." In times past, once our young men and women earned the title "Marine," we tended to look upon them as "finished products." We have found that our Marines benefit from a team-building approach that must be logically applied from recruitment through discharge or retirement. By changing the way we make initial assignments for new Marines and the way we manage their first tour of duty in the Operating Forces, we have made great strides in building cohesion in small units. Our Marines have better knowledge of, and trust in, their leaders, peers, and subordinates. This is a crucial step in better preparing them for a 21st Century that, by every appearance, could exceed this one in terms of instability and strife. We have been very pleased with the results so far, and we continue to pursue cohesion-building programs energetically.

High operational tempo, which has become an ongoing concern for service chiefs in recent years, is a readiness issue that impacts both people and equipment. Since 1991, the Marine Corps has sustained force structure reductions while our mission and commitments have increased. These were cuts well into "muscle"—and we knew it at the time—but those decisions were made in anticipation of a "peace dividend" that we thought would allow for a compensatory

reduction in operations short of major theater war. As you are well aware, the world today is a very different place than many of us envisioned in the optimistic days following the Gulf War. What we did not realize at the time was that the loss in force structure represented the Marine Corps' loss of what I term its "shock absorber."

The presence of this "shock absorber" in the era from Vietnam to the end of the Cold War allowed us to operate continually without derailing readiness. In recent years, we have answered the call in the Arabian Gulf, Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Cuba, Panama, the Balkans, and now East Timor. The net effect is that our Marines and their equipment have little or no time for rest, reconstitution, maintenance, and retraining between commitments. The cumulative effect of repeated short-notice deployments could result in continued degradation in overall readiness. We must manage the fine balance between contributing when and where we can and being ready at all times for major contingencies. Unfortunately, contingencies have a habit of thrusting themselves on the Nation with little warning. We cannot afford to allow readiness to suffer while we tend to the many trouble spots around the world.

Having recruited top-quality young men and women and trained them as Marines, we want to be sure that we are living up to our promise to provide them with a professionally challenging and personally rewarding lifestyle. In an effort to reduce the amount of time Marines spend involved in activities that do not directly contribute to combat readiness, we are looking for ways to reduce the time spent in routine "housekeeping" chores. We must find sensible, economic alternatives to such long-held practices as garrison mess duty so that our Marines can be assigned, integrated, and retained in combat-ready units with minimum disruption. Toward this end, we recently identified nearly 1,200 positions that are good candidates for replacement with civilian or contractor personnel. Still other positions may be

reduced through centralization and the use of computer technology. For instance, we are looking at the administrative occupational field as a candidate for technology-driven reduction. The Department of Defense reform initiatives will serve as our guideposts in this process. Manpower savings realized from these initiatives will result in increased manning levels in the units of the Operating Forces, and the cost savings will allow needs in other areas to be addressed.

We know we are doing things right because Marines want to stay in the Corps. Currently, we are retaining the right mix of high-quality, experienced Marines. That said, I do have concerns about the long-term retention of some of our aviators, aircraft mechanics, and information technology personnel. We met our first term reenlistment goals for Fiscal Year 1999, but we are careful to avoid overconfidence about our future success in this arena. It is subject to sudden change, as frequent deployments and long working hours spent maintaining aging equipment can have a negative effect on family life and can eventually become retention issues. Whether or not to stay on active duty is a personal decision that all Marines consider at some point in their careers. As today's Marines make those decisions, the Corps competes with a strong economy and an industry-wide recognition of the talent and potential that Marines bring to the civilian sector.

We recognize that our success in retention has a great deal to do with the outstanding support the Congress and the Administration have provided us. As previously mentioned, your efforts to make basic military compensation attractive and competitive are appreciated by your Marines. Competitive pay and allowances remain critical elements for the continued success of the all-volunteer force.

Since Fiscal Year 1992, we have been paying for near-term readiness by reducing funding for modernization and infrastructure support. We have sacrificed our procurement

accounts to assist in meeting the growing costs of keeping our aging equipment and weapons “ready.” For example, we have deferred roughly \$3.6 billion of much needed ground equipment modernization in order to fully fund near-term readiness. While we have consistently identified a requirement of \$1.2 billion in procurement, it is important to note this only reflects a “steady state” funding needed to avoid additional protraction of the timeline from research and development to operational capability. This level of funding does not restore the modernization dollars that were spent on near-term readiness over the past eight years. As equipment maintenance costs continue to escalate, recovery from the procurement recess will require more resources to be applied to meet our stated requirements.

The same pattern has also occurred in our aviation platforms. We have deferred investment in replacing our fleet of aging aircraft. We can no longer continue this pattern. Finally, investment is not limited to equipment. We also need to address investment in the aging physical plant of our bases and stations.

Maintaining near-term readiness was balanced primary from the modernization accounts, as described above, to include aviation modernization. Today, a number of major ground and aviation weapons are facing block obsolescence. For example, your Marines are maintaining 29-year old AAV’s that had an original life of 10 years, received a service life extension to add another 10 years to their life, and are now undergoing a rebuild to extend their service life until the AAV is fielded beginning in Fiscal Year 2006. Our M198 howitzers average 17 years of age, our TOW and Dragon systems are in their early 20s, and our 81mm mortars are 14 years old. Our 5-ton truck fleet is at the 19 year point of its planned 20 year life, and our HMMWVs are well into their second decade of service.

The majority of our aircraft (KC-130F, CH-46E, CH-53D, and UH-1N) have already exceeded their service life. The KC-130F, for example, is 18 years past its planned retirement. Our CH-46Es are entering their fourth decade of service as we speak, and our CH-53Ds are only one year away from that milestone. The “A” and “B” models of our F/A-18 force have been in service for 13 years, and our CH-53Es are close behind them, averaging 11 years of age. EA-6Bs are at the 20 year point now, and we have put a lot more hours on those airframes this decade than planned. Faced with this challenge, we have taken maximum advantage of service life extension programs for both ground and aviation weapons systems to maintain readiness while deferring modernization, but we have reached a point at which we must replace old equipment.

Last year, General Krulak outlined \$10.5 billion in priority Marine Corps shortfalls across the Future Years Defense Program. This was almost equally split between aviation and ground programs. The top line relief the Administration provided last December addressed approximately half of the shortfall and allowed us to pursue our most critical requirements, helping us to reach a funding level of \$1.2 billion annually for procurement in Fiscal Year 2000. Further, we will achieve our recovery rate of \$1.8 billion annually by Fiscal Year 2005. In aviation we accelerated the procurement of the much needed V-22 in the out years and provided upgrades to our existing F/A-18 fleet. While the pace of modernization for ground and aviation has improved, it still does not provide the needed equipment in a timely manner to obviate the near-term readiness challenge that we continue to face.

The Administration also addressed key infrastructure requirements. The additional funds brought welcome relief in the backlog of maintenance and repair (BMAR), helping us to level off at a \$700 million deficit, from a previously projected high of approximately \$1 billion for

Fiscal Year 2003. Our goal is to reduce BMAR to \$100 million by Fiscal Year 2010. We have been able to accelerate replacement of our family housing units, putting us on track to comply with defense plans to eliminate inadequate housing by 2010. We have not, however, been able to address our current deficit of approximately 10,000 units. Additionally, the Administration Add helped to place our military construction projects on a 100-year replacement cycle, as compared to the 190-year cycle we previously sustained. This is, of course, much longer than the industry standard of 50 years, but it represents considerable progress, nonetheless. While investment in infrastructure is improved, much remains to be done.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of our Navy's amphibious ships. The centerpiece of our Marine forces afloat are our big-deck amphibious assault ships, the LHAs and LHDs, which are critical to maintaining our amphibious lift capability. These ships provide 60 percent of the troop berthing capacity of an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), 72 percent of its cargo carrying capacity, and 93 percent of its aircraft carrying capacity. The LHAs are scheduled for retirement over the next 15 years and we need to closely examine options for their replacement. An LHD-8 transition ship and follow-on LHA replacement ships will better serve and meet Marine Corps requirements. The LPD-17 program represents a new generation of amphibious ships. In 2009, when the last LPD-17 class ship is scheduled to join the fleet, the amphibious force will consist of 36 ships or 12 three-ship ARGs.

While our current readiness posture is sound, there is much that you can do to help your Marine Corps remain prepared in the 21st Century. First, and most important, we need to restore the "shock absorber" that provides us the depth and flexibility to manage multiple, simultaneous, and frequent commitments, such as we are experiencing today. While the Marine Corps is initially undertaking internal actions in this regard, the Congress can assist through continued

attention to quality of life issues that sustain high enlistment and retention rates, combined with adequate resourcing for readiness and modernization. Specifically, this means increasing readiness support to Operating Forces, increasing the pace of modernization, and increasing and sustaining our bases' and stations' infrastructure.

The area that has suffered perhaps the biggest degradation over the past decade is that of fire support, both in organic artillery as well as naval gunfire capabilities. We are evaluating our artillery force structure and equipment plans with the intent of increasing the fire support organic to our ground units. There are many options available, and we will explore all reasonable avenues that technology offers, to include advanced cannon artillery weapons and rockets. We support and encourage the Navy's efforts toward the development of systems that will provide our MAGTFs with improved naval surface fire support in littoral operations.

Another developmental area with great promise for our MAGTFs is the field of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). These platforms, working as part of an integrated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance system, can provide our Marines with access to near-real time information over a broad, three-dimensional area of operations. We are exploring the potential for further increases in our use of UAVs with the intent of employing this rapidly maturing technology at its full potential.

Your Marine Corps is excelling today in spite of the significant challenges we face. Our deployed forces are on the equivalent of outpost duty around the world every day. They are trained, they are ready, and they are backed up by many more Marines at bases and stations in the United States who can deploy on very short notice to the world's trouble spots. This is our core competency.

Our Marines continue to be an unending source of pride and amazement to me, and I am sure you share in that sentiment. In the finest tradition of the Corps, they take whatever resources they are given and accomplish their assigned mission. Sometimes they even make it look easy, but when you scratch the surface you get a true sense of the effort required to win the battle of the day, whether out in the recruiting force, on the flight line, or on our gunnery ranges.

Your continued support of the Marine Corps ensures a capable, ready force that can and will respond to threats across the widening spectrum of conflict. Your Marines are firmly committed to the readiness of today's Operating Forces and the intellectual, technical, and physical preparedness of our future Marine Air Ground Task Forces for the challenges of the next century.