

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF  
  
THE HONORABLE KENNETH J. BRAITHWAITE  
  
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
  
ON NAVY AND MARINE CORP READINESS

BEFORE THE  
  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND  
  
MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

DECEMBER 2, 2020

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In May of 1943, American troops, aircraft and ships were sent to the Aleutian island of Attu to dislodge the Imperial Japanese troops occupying our soil. These young Americans were dedicated and brave, but unprepared and underequipped. Our force was not ready for this type of fight in Arctic conditions.

The amphibious landing on Attu was marred by embarrassing setbacks, stemming from a failure to appreciate the impact of cold weather and rough seas on our operating procedures, equipment, and people. Air sorties were scattered and unreliable due to poor visibility and high winds.

Engines on landing craft froze, stranding their crews and the troops on board. Batteries failed because operators hadn't gained the experience that would teach them to keep them on trickle charge through cold water operations. Ice and rough seas threatened to destroy the PT boats and other small craft as they approached the landing site. Heavy fog resulted in multiple collisions.

The only thing that prevented the operation from ending in catastrophe was the fact that the landing was unopposed. Our forces did not make contact with the enemy immediately, and so they were able to recover their battle readiness and execute the mission.

In short: we got lucky. But that should never be accepted as good enough, for our fleet, our force, or our nation. As Secretary of the Navy I am determined to ensure that our Sailors and Marines are never sent into a situation without the right training, the right equipment, and the right leadership, to dominate the fight and return safely home.

Chairman Sullivan, Ranking Member Kaine, distinguished Members of the Committee, we cannot be caught unprepared in any clime or place. The Department of the Navy must always stand ready with the personnel, platforms, and operational skills necessary to secure vital sea lanes, stand together with our allies, and protect the American people wherever and whenever necessary.

The Sailors, Marines, and civilians of our forward-deployed, globally maneuverable team, are prepared and equipped to respond, from the Arctic to the Indo-Pacific to the Gulf. And we intend to keep it that way. In partnership with Admiral Gilday and General Berger, I am determined to strengthen our people, build on the pride of service, and develop a ready force for the future.

The reemergence of long-term great power competition, the evolving character of that competition, and the accelerating advancements in technology are spurring a period of transformation in the strategic environment, requiring us to adapt our integrated naval force design and operating concepts to new realities. As the National Defense Strategy (NDS) states, “there can be no complacency – we must make difficult choices and prioritize what is most important.”

Thus far this century, terrorist groups and rogue states have dominated our perception of the threat environment. These threats were lethal, but did not pose an existential threat to our national security. China and Russia present a different challenge, as each continues to develop sophisticated military capabilities backed by sizable economies. Their investments in surface, air, and undersea platforms have significantly increased the potential for kinetic conflict, while the

leadership of both nations demonstrate increasing contempt for international law and the rules-based order that ensures the prosperity and security of all nations.

A dominant naval force is central to the effective execution of the NDS in a changing world. We must be ready at all times to execute as one integrated naval force – Navy and Marine Corps seamlessly linked at every level – with common logistics, infrastructure, practices and support networks – executing a fleet-wide emphasis on resilient and combat ready forces.

To make that happen, the Department of the Navy FY21 budget request prioritized recovering the readiness of the platforms that deliver victory in a major conflict, from amphibious ships and ground element equipment, to our agile destroyers and cruisers, and the heavy-hitting aircraft carriers, air wings and attack submarines that ensure continued freedom of action throughout the global commons.

To meet the forward maneuverable force requirements of the NDS, the Marine Corps has put into motion an aggressive modernization of the Service. Force Design 2030 is not simply an improvement on its existing form and function; it is transformational. With a studied concentration on the future operating environment, the Marine Corps is reinvigorating the Fleet Marine Forces within existing resource constraints as an indispensable element to global maritime operations. We appreciate the Committee's advocacy for new training venues and opportunities that simulate the operational complexities of a contested maritime domain.

We greatly appreciate the Committee's efforts to ensure funding stability and predictability over the past several years. This has given our force the agility and flexibility needed to address emerging threats, to invest in critical future capabilities for our integrated naval force, while shifting away from less beneficial and relevant spending. This stability has saved money for the American taxpayer and enabled a greater focus on readiness across the Navy and Marine Corps, enabling greater long term shipbuilding and maintenance planning, and fueling the Marine Corps transformation as the Nation's stand-in, fight-tonight force. These investments mark a commitment to creating asymmetric advantages across the entire Joint Force.

The Department of the Navy is building on this foundation by aggressively pursuing better readiness, lethality, and capabilities in those areas of warfighting technology showing the greatest promise of delivering non-linear warfighting advantages. Across both services, we are executing force designs centered on Naval Expeditionary force deployment, giving us a sustainable edge and a resilient capability to deliver the integrated all-domain naval power required by the Joint Force.

Hard experience has shown that this capability cannot be sustainably achieved through "can do" and "make do" improvisation. Our front line personnel may be determined, adaptive, and skillful enough to get the job done in the face of equipment shortfalls and intense battle rhythms, but relying on their adaptability is no substitute for genuine fleet readiness. We owe it to the Sailors and Marines out in the fleet to make sure they always have the tools they need to do the dangerous jobs we ask of them.

The changes generated from the Readiness Reform and Oversight Council (RROC) and other relentless self-examination efforts have enabled us to improve readiness, training, and maintenance processes at every level. For example, we've implemented a uniform readiness assessment and certification process that must be followed before a ship can be certified to return to the fleet. We have also increased opportunities for shipboard certification and skills enhancement, while adjusting manning schedules to maximize safety and improve quality of life and professional effectiveness for our personnel while underway. These and many other changes will result in a better prepared, rested, and equipped force.

We continue to pursue greater readiness in the development and maintenance of our fleet, particularly in our critical public shipyards. Through the Navy's Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan (SIOP), the Navy has outlined a 20-year investment plan for the facilities and tools needed to improve shipyard performance, starting with shipyard-specific Area Development Plans (ADPs) already underway. We must stay committed to this objective.

We appreciate the leadership of this committee to provide direct hiring authority, which has been instrumental in helping naval shipyards achieve their accelerated hiring goal of 36,100 personnel – one full year ahead of schedule. An extension of this authority granting an exception to the 180-day “cooldown” requirement before hiring retired members of the armed forces would further assist our shipyards in maintaining acceptable staffing and experience levels. Finally, the Navy has worked with the shipyards to develop their workforce by establishing new learning centers that reduced worker training time by 50% or more.

We have also achieved greater aviation readiness for both the Navy and Marine Corps, including the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE) efforts to meet the Strike Fighter aircraft availability goals for both services. The NAE is incorporating commercial best practices to improve performance on targeted production lines. For example, process reforms have improved organic depot capacity and repair speed, reducing the turnaround time for F/A-18E/F maintenance from over 100 days to 60 days.

The Department of the Navy appreciates the leadership of this committee in helping ensure both aviation and systems readiness across our force. Towards that end, the Department requests assistance from the committee to secure the necessary space to conduct critical combat training.

Most prominently, expansion of the Navy's training range in Fallon, Nevada is imperative to maintaining our readiness in the skies and across every domain. We are concerned that Congress will not act on the Administration's legislative proposal to expand the Fallon Range Training Complex (FRTC) to provide the area needed to fully accommodate modern military training requirements this year. The FRTC is currently too small to accommodate realistic and safe training with precision-guided munitions. This modernization is driven by real-world threats and the need for longer range stand-off release for training with precision guided munitions.

Aircrews and special operations forces cannot fully exercise tactics and are unable to train in sufficiently-realistic conditions, which compromises their safety and success in combat. In many cases, the first time a pilot is able to fully use the F-35's sensor and weapons systems suite is during combat. Expanding this range will allow us to send our Sailors and Marines into combat fully prepared by providing them with the training they need to win. Over the past five years, the

Navy has worked exhaustively with key stakeholders, including Members of Congress, federal agencies, tribes, state and local government, and environmental groups. We need the authority from Congress not only for modernization, but to follow through on our promises to these groups.

Unfortunately, Fallon is only one of the challenges we face with our training spaces. We continue to assess how proposed active offshore windfarm operations off the coast of California impact our aircraft navigation, communication, and weapons systems, with an expectation that other stakeholders are assessing prospective windfarm locations and impacts beyond the Navy's operating areas. Easements granted by the Department of the Navy to San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station and San Diego International Airport are soon expiring; we need to use these parcels of land for military training. Special use airspace supporting the Marine Corps ranges at Twenty-nine Palms is surrounded by congested commercial air routes, causing interruptions to military aircraft and artillery fire training. This is against a backdrop of historical Navy range closures and realignments occurring over the past three decades. If the Navy and Marine Corps are to remain the world's premier Naval force, this trend cannot continue.

The threats to our Nation are real and as our adversaries close the technological divide, our greatest strength is our training. We ask that this and all other relevant Committees seriously consider the national security impact of any decisions made regarding any development or land use initiatives that may impact our training areas.



We also recognize that we cannot meet the global challenges our Nation faces alone. Readiness requires presence and rapid capabilities in every part of the world, as well as specialized and localized knowledge to handle evolving and challenging situations. Just as Canadian troops joined in the operation to retake Kiska in 1943, the strategic maritime defense partnerships we maintain today with our partners and allies around the world extend the reach and power of our force. They underscore the importance of cooperation and coordination in maintaining the rules-based international order that enables so much of our global prosperity and security.

Our personnel regularly train and operate alongside their foreign counterparts, test the interoperability of our systems, and build our collective readiness on the front lines of great power competition. In the critical Arctic region, the destroyer USS THOMAS HUDNER just completed Operation Nanook alongside our Canadian, French and Danish allies, as well as our vital partners, the US Coast Guard. And during my time as our Ambassador to Norway, I was proud to look to our United States Marines guarding NATO's northern flank alongside Norwegian soldiers.

Operational exercises, international port calls, joint Marine force training, and other interactions generate the personal contact that builds understanding, respect, and trust across national and functional lines. Our Sailors, Marines and civilian personnel know that through their service they are front-line diplomats for our nation. Their professionalism and dedication promotes the connections that strengthen our collective security and cultivate shared ideals that send the message that the United States is a friend worth having.

The Department of the Navy appreciates the dedicated oversight provided by this committee following recent events that have potential impacts on the readiness of our fleet forces. As this committee is aware, 2020 has brought its share of challenges and adversity. But failure in our mission is never an option, and we look forward to working with each member of the committee to ensure the continued readiness and lethality our nation needs to preserve the forward maneuverability, lethality, and resilience needed to ensure our nation's readiness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the strength and agility of our people, as active duty and reserve service members have responded to the call for medical, logistics, and security support wherever and whenever the American people have needed it. At the same time, our Sailors, Marines, and civilian teammates have continued to execute the NDS while maintaining the procedures and safeguards necessary to prevent the debilitating spread of the pandemic across our platforms and facilities.

Like all Americans, the Navy and Marine Corps have had to adjust to this global pandemic, from preventing, mitigating, and recovering from positive cases detection of positive cases aboard ships, to changing the recruitment and training of our personnel, to helping our military families cope with longer separation and other challenges like virtual learning and social distancing. This pandemic has forced us to rethink and refine our recruitment, training, and personnel movements throughout the force. And it has taken a toll on our shipyard operations and deployment and maintenance schedules.

Both the Navy and Marine Corps are actively implementing Force Health Protection measures in an effort to protect Marines, Sailors, civilians, contractors, and our military families. Across the department, we've implemented prevention, mitigation, and recovery guidance from the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We have implemented—and will continue to evaluate—active testing protocols to detect asymptomatic COVID-19 positive personnel, contain outbreaks aboard vessels or elsewhere in the fleet, and conduct surveillance to detect and treat the disease as early as possible.

Within our shipyards, the Navy took aggressive steps at the start of the pandemic and continues to implement safety measures to minimize the spread of this disease and to protect the personnel, civilians, contractors, and families that power our naval enterprise and protect our nation. These steps include maximum telework opportunities for shipyard employees, administrative leave for high-risk individuals unable to telework, altered shifts to maximize social distancing, sanitization and hand-washing stations throughout the shipyard, cloth face coverings and face shields for the workforce, and screening checks at all workplace entry points.

We're also working closely with our partners and suppliers in the defense industrial base to ensure the continued viability of the crucial businesses and infrastructure needed to ensure our ships, aircraft, and ground equipment are available when needed for the defense of our nation, both during this current challenge and long into the future. We must be transparent and honest about the potential impact this pandemic may have on certain aspects of our readiness. But we will never fail to maintain the global vigilance and readiness required to execute our global mission. That mission never abates, because the demand signal never fades.

Finally, we must never forget that the greatest source of readiness and strength for our force will always be the men and women who wear the uniform, who comprise our civilian workforce, and the families that serve alongside them. We are committed to ensuring our Sailors, Marines, and civilians are trained and equipped to execute the mission and return home safely, and that their families are provided with the housing, medical attention, and education they need.

Through a combination of non-monetary, quality of life, and customer service programs, we are increasing our responsiveness to the needs of the individual warfighter and their family, making continued service a viable and attractive option. We are increasing avenues for civilians with prior service through the Targeted Reentry Program, and expanding opportunities to serve in meaningful roles. We are also increasing opportunities for our personnel to learn, operate, and innovate with partners from the private sector, across the joint force, and alongside our allies.

Our people must be confident that their leadership will look out for their interests and advocate tirelessly for their safety and well-being. We remain committed to making sure we assess, monitor, and remediate issues of concern in all forms of military housing, including those managed by Public Private Venture (PPV) providers, with quick, effective, and engaged leadership and reinforced Department-level oversight.

We are also determined to eliminate the scourges of sexual assault and sexual harassment from every part of our force. These behaviors are a betrayal of those who have stepped forward to serve in uniform and have a direct impact on our readiness. We will continue to work with this

Committee to share best practices and ideas, relentlessly pursuing a future where no Sailor, Marine, or civilian teammate ever has to fear for their own safety while protecting us all.

As leaders we must also do all in our power to ensure that our people feel respected and valued. In this moment of national reckoning with longstanding issues of racial injustice, we cannot and will not tolerate discrimination or racism of any kind. Our readiness, and the bedrock strength of our core values, depends on the elimination of any policies or practices seeming to tolerate or promote racial inequity in any aspect of the Navy and Marine Corps, from recruiting and assignment practices, to advancement and promotions, to our military justice system.

As I wrote to the entire fleet in my first month as Secretary of the Navy, “We must never forget that equal treatment, equal justice, and equal opportunity require continual determined effort. ‘United’ is the most important word in ‘United States Navy and Marine Corps’.”

Our Sailors, Marines and civilian teammates will always be our greatest source of readiness and strength in a challenging and changing world. On behalf of each of these brave patriots and the families that serve at their side, I would like to once again thank the leadership and membership of this Committee for your attention, interest, and ongoing support.