

STATEMENT
OF
GENERAL ROBERT B. NELLER
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
NAVY AND MARINE CORPS FY17 BUDGET REQUEST
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ROOM G50

General Robert B. Neller
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Biography

General Robert B. Neller is the 37th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Commander, Marine Forces Command from July 2014 to September 2015 and Commander, Marine Forces Central Command from September 2012 to June 2014.

A native of East Lansing, Michigan, General Neller graduated from the University of Virginia and was commissioned in 1975. He has served as an infantry officer at all levels, including command of Marine Security Force Company Panama during Operations JUST CAUSE and PROMOTE LIBERTY; 3d Light Armored Infantry Battalion during Operation RESTORE HOPE; 6th Marine Regiment; and 3d Marine Division.

General Neller also served as Deputy Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (05-07); Assistant Division Commander for 1st and 2d Marine Divisions; and President of Marine Corps University.

His Joint assignments include service in the Policy Division of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Casteau, Belgium, and as the Director of Operations (J-3) of the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C.

General Neller is a graduate of the Armor Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, NATO Defense College, and the Armed Forces Staff College. He holds a master's degree in Human Resource Management from Pepperdine University.

The Commandant's Posture of the United States Marine Corps President's Budget 2017

Prologue

The United States Marine Corps is the Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. The intent of the 82nd Congress defined and shaped our culture, organization, training, equipment, and priorities. Marines appreciate the leadership of the 114th Congress in reaffirming that role, especially as the strategic landscape and pace of the 21st Century demands a ready Marine Corps to buy time, decision space, and options for our Nation's leaders. Congress and the American people expect Marines to answer the call, to fight, and to win.

Our global orientation, maritime character, and expeditionary capability have all been ably demonstrated during the past year. The capabilities of our total force are the result of the planning and execution of committed Marines and Sailors operating under the leadership of my predecessors. These capabilities and the posture of our force would not be possible without the support and actions of the Congress. As our attention is spread across the globe in a security environment where the only certainty is uncertainty, we must make decisions about our strategy and structure that will determine our Nation's military capability in the future. Today's force is capable and our forward deployed forces are ready to fight, but we are fiscally stretched to maintain readiness across the depth of the force, and to modernize, in order to achieve future readiness.

Situation

The current global security environment is characterized by violence, conflict and instability. Multidimensional security threats challenge all aspects of our national power and the international system. The expansion of information, robotics, and weapons technologies are causing threats to emerge with increased speed and lethality.

Over the last 15 years, the United States fought wars in the Middle East, and your Marines continue to respond to crises around the globe. There has not been an "inter-war period" to reset and reconstitute our force. Your Marines and Sailors have remained operationally committed at the same tempo as the height of our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we have remained engaged in the current fight, our enemies and potential adversaries have not stood idle. They have developed new capabilities which now equal or in some cases exceed our own.

This unstable and increasingly dangerous world situation is further complicated by a constrained resource environment from which we must continue current operations, reset our equipment, maintain our warfighting readiness, and at the same time, modernize the force. Therefore, it has become necessary that we continually balance our available resources between current commitments and future readiness requirements. This requires pragmatic institutional choices and a clear-eyed vision of where we need to be in 10-20 years.

What Marines are doing today...

Today, Marines remain forward deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and ready to respond to crisis around the world. Marines and Sailors are presently managing instability, building partner capacity, strengthening allies, projecting influence, and preparing for major theater combat operations. In 2015, Marines executed approximately 100 operations, 20 amphibious operations, 140 theater security cooperation events, and 160 major exercises.

Our Nation has Marines on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan today, and we anticipate our commitment could grow in the future. Marines continue to advise, train and enable the Iraqi Security Forces and other designated Iraqi forces with peer-to-peer advising and infantry training. In Afghanistan, Marines continue to serve as advisors with the Republic of Georgia's Liaison Teams (GLTs) in support of Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT. From forward-deployed locations afloat and ashore, Marine tactical aviation squadrons continue to support operations in Syria and Iraq. In 2015, aviation combat assets executed over 1,275 tactical sorties and 325 kinetic strikes that have killed over 600 enemy combatants and destroyed over 100 weapons systems and 100 technical vehicles.

Our Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU) Teams continue to show their capability a flexible and agile maritime force. In 2015, the Marine Corps deployed over 12,000 Marines with our shipmates on Navy warships. This past year, five separate MEUs supported every Combatant Commander, participating in exercises and executing major operations. The 31st MEU, our Forward Deployed Naval Force in the Pacific, performed disaster relief operations on Saipan after Typhoon Soudelor passed through the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Marines were ashore to support the relief effort within 12 hours of notification and delivered a total of 11,000 gallons of fresh water and 48,000 meals.

As part of the *New Normal* your Corps deployed two Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces – Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR) to US Central Command and US Africa Command. These

forces are tailored to respond to crises and conduct security cooperation activities with partner nations, but they do not provide the same flexibility and responsiveness of an ARG/MEU. Our SPMAGTF assigned to CENTCOM today provides dedicated Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) support to Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, in Iraq and Syria, and simultaneously provides a flexible force for crisis and contingency response. In AFRICOM, our SPMAGTF supported Embassies through reinforcement, evacuation, and operations to reopen a previously closed Embassy in Central African Republic. Your Marines also supported operations during the Ebola crisis and assisted with elections. Finally, a SPMAGTF deployed to the US Southern Command in 2015. SPMAGTF-SC's primary focus was the reconstruction of a runway in Mocoron Airbase, Honduras and theater security cooperation and training in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize.

The Marine Corps' activities in the Pacific are led by Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, with a forward stationed Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), III MEF, headquartered in Okinawa, Japan. III MEF contributes to regional stability through persistent presence and Marines remain the Pacific Command's (PACOM) forward deployed, forward stationed force of choice for crisis response. The Marine Corps continues to rebalance its force lay-down in the Pacific to support Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG), with 22,500 Marines West of the International Date Line, forward-based, and operating within the Asia-Pacific Theater. The planned end state for geographically distributed, politically sustainable and operationally resilient MAGTFs in the Pacific is a long-term effort that will span the next 15 years. The Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D), based in Australia's Robertson Barracks, is in its fourth year of operation. This year we will deploy approximately 1,200 Marines to Darwin for a six-month deployment.

The Marine Corps continues to work closely with the State Department to provide security at our Embassies and Consulates. Today, Marines are routinely serving at 174 Embassies and Consulates in 146 countries around the globe. Approximately 117 Embassies have increased support in accordance with the 2013 NDAA. We have added 603 Marines to the previously authorized 1,000 Marine Security Guards; 199 in new detachments, 274 towards increased manning at current detachments, and 130 towards the Marine Security Augmentation Unit (MSAU). Additionally, the US Embassy in Havana, Cuba was reopened on July 2015, with Marines serving at this Embassy as they do in any other.

Our partnering capabilities assure allies, deter adversaries, build partner capacity, and set conditions for the readiness to surge and aggregate with a Joint, Coalition or Special Operations force

for major theater combat operations. Partnering also trains our Marines for environments in which we are likely to operate. In 2015, the Marine Corps, in conjunction with Combatant Commanders and the Marine Forces Component Commands, conducted more than 140 security cooperation activities, including exercises, training events, subject matter expert exchanges, formal education key leader engagements, and service staff talks. Your continued support has allowed the Marine Corps to operate throughout the world today; now we must ensure our readiness tomorrow.

Five Areas of Focus

Today, in addition to supporting the Combatant Commander's requirements, the Marine Corps is focused on near-term efforts in five interrelated areas that are vital to achieving our future success: People, Readiness, Training, Naval Integration, and Modernization. Across these five areas, three major themes run throughout: maintaining and improving the high quality people that make up today's Marine Corps; decentralizing the training and preparation for war while adhering to Maneuver Warfare principles in the conduct of training and operations; and modernizing the force, especially through leveraging new and emerging technologies. The future requires Marines to embrace change to leverage the rapid advancements in technology at the pace of the 21st Century in order to gain an operational advantage over any potential adversary we may face in the future.

People

The success of the Marine Corps hinges on the quality of our Marines. This is the foundation from which we make Marines, win our Nation's battles, and return quality citizens to American society. The Marine Corps will maintain a force of the highest quality which is smart, resilient, fit, disciplined and able to overcome adversity. Maintaining the quality of the men and women in today's Corps is our friendly center of gravity. Our goal is to ensure every Marine is set up for success on the battlefield and in life, and understands their value to the Marine Corps and the Nation.

The Marine Corps continues to benefit from a healthy recruiting environment that attracts quality people who can accomplish the mission. Our recruiting force continues to meet our recruiting goals in quantity and quality and is postured to make this year's recruiting mission. We are on track to meet our active duty end strength goal of 182,000 Marines in Fiscal Year 2016, and we will look to maximize the capabilities of each and every Marine. Where it makes sense, we will look to leverage

the unique skills of our Reserve Marines to align what they bring from the civilian sector and better enable the readiness of our Total Force.

As the Marine Corps completes our current draw down, competition for retention will continue. We will strive to retain the very best Marines capable of fulfilling our leadership and operational needs. This is accomplished through a competitive career designation process for officers and a thorough evaluation process for enlisted Marines designed to measure, analyze, and compare Marines' performance, accomplishments, and future potential. The Marine Corps continues to retain quality Marines in a majority of occupational fields while others, like aviation and infantry, are more challenging. An additional challenge for all Marines is remaining focused on training for war balanced against the volume of mandatory "top down" training requirements not directly associated with warfighting.

Marine Leaders have a moral obligation to ensure the health and welfare of the Nation's Marines from the day they make the commitment to serve. We take this responsibility very seriously and strive to maintain the trust and confidence of Congress and the American People by immediately addressing any challenge to Marine Corps readiness and finding solutions through our people and readiness programs. We have reinvigorated the Marine for Life Program and continue to progress with our Marine Corps Force Integration Plan (MCFIP), Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program (SAPR), Protect What You've Earned Campaign (PWYE), Suicide Prevention and Response Program, our Wounded Warrior Regiment, Marine and Family Programs, and Transition Assistance Programs. The Marine Corps remains focused on solutions to address the destructive behavior of sexual assault, suicide and hazing. The abuse of alcohol has proven to be a contributing factor across the spectrum of force preservation issues that impact the readiness of our force. Our goal continues to be the elimination of this destructive behavior from our ranks, and we believe that preserving our commanders' ability to lead in this area is a vital element to reaching this objective.

Readiness

The Congressional intent to serve as the "Nation's Force in Readiness" guides who we are and what we do – being ready is central to our identity as Marines. As a force, we will remain ready to fight and win across the range of military operations and in all five warfighting domains – maritime, land, air, cyber and space. The fiscal reductions and instability of the past few years have impacted our readiness. As resources have diminished, the Marine Corps has protected the near-term

operational readiness of its deployed and next-to-deploy units in order to meet operational commitments. This has come at a risk.

The Marine Corps will continue to prioritize the readiness of deployed and next-to-deploy units over non-deployed units. The majority of our units are deploying ready while our non-deployed commands lack sufficient resources to meet the necessary personnel, training, and equipment readiness levels in order to respond today. However, to meet Congress' intent that we remain the nation's force in readiness, the Marine Corps requires a "ready bench" that is able to deploy with minimal notice and maximum capability.

Our aviation units are currently unable to meet our training and mission requirements primarily due to Ready Basic Aircraft shortfalls. We have developed an extensive plan to recover readiness across every type/model/series in the current inventory, while continuing the procurement of new aircraft to ensure future readiness. The recovery and sustainment of our current fleet is necessary to support both training and warfighting requirements. Each type/model/series requires attention and action in specific areas; maintenance, supply, depot backlog, and in-service repairs. For example, in our F/A-18 community we are 52 aircraft short of our training requirement and 43 aircraft short of our warfighting requirement due to back log and throughput at the Fleet Readiness Depot and our inventory of spares. If these squadrons were called to on to fight today they would be forced to execute with 86 less jets than they need. With the continued support of Congress, Marine Aviation can recover its readiness by re-capitalizing our aging fleet first as we procure new aircraft to meet our future needs and support our ground forces.

Simultaneous readiness initiatives are occurring with our ground equipment. Our post-combat reset strategy and Equipment Optimization Plan (EOP) are key components of the overall ground equipment "Reconstitution" effort. As of Jan 2016, the Marine Corps has reset 78% of its ground equipment with 50% returned to the Operating Forces and our strategic equipment programs. This strategic war reserve is our geographically prepositioned combat equipment both afloat and ashore where it makes the most sense to respond to contingencies. We remain focused on this recovery effort and project its completion in May of 2019. This service-level strategy would not have been possible without the continued support of Congress and the hard work of your Marines.

The Facility Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) initiative and current state of facilities is the single most important investment to support training, operations, and quality of life.

The 2017 budget proposes funding FSRM at 74% of the OSD Facilities Sustainment Model. This reduced funding level is an area of concern. FSRM is a top priority to fix.

The sustainment of military construction (MILCON) funding is crucial to managing operational training and support projects. Marine Corps readiness is generated aboard our bases and stations. As we transition to new capabilities and realign our forces in the Pacific, adequate MILCON will be a key enabler for the Marine Corps' future success.

Readiness is not just in our equipment supply and maintenance, but in the quality and challenging nature of our training through the mental, spiritual and physical readiness of Marines and Sailors across the force. Readiness is the result of a variety of factors: commitment by leadership, standards-based inspections, evaluated drills and training exercises, and an understanding by all Marines and Sailors that the call can come at any time. And we must be ready and able to answer.

Training, Simulation and Experimentation

The Marine Corps' training and education continuum requires parallel and complementary efforts, from Squad Leader to MAGTF Commander. Organizing and executing high quality training is a difficult task. It takes time, deliberate thought, and effort. Our approach to training must evolve. It will emphasize the basics: combined arms, competency in the use of our weapons and systems, and expeditionary operations; but it must reemphasize operations in a degraded command, control, communications, computers and intelligence (C4I) environment, camouflage/deception, operations at night, operations in a nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) environment, and decision-making in rapidly unfolding and uncertain situations. We must provide opportunities to experiment and work with the latest technological advances.

Our war gaming supports the combat development process in order to develop and refine emerging concepts, conceptualize force design, and identify future capabilities and deficiencies within the future operating environments. War gaming achieves this purpose by permitting the dynamic, risk-free consideration of disruptive ideas and capabilities which enable innovation and inform Service priorities. War gaming also supports the development of operating concepts and facilitates analysis of alternatives across the ROMO. The Marine Corps is committed to the future development of a war gaming facility at Marine Corps Base Quantico to enhance the study of the evolving characteristics of, and the requirements for, successful warfighting in the future. The Marine Corps is working to leverage virtual and constructive training environments with better tools to train higher level staffs and

a focus on our leaders, from the Battalion to the Marine Expeditionary Force level. Enabled by technology, we will increase the amount of training each unit can accomplish in mentally and physically stressing environments for all elements of the MAGTF before they execute on a live training range or in combat.

Our current training schedule of major events will all focus on building on our maritime based operational capability and at the same time providing venues for experimentation. We will emphasize and increase opportunities for force-on-force training and operations in degraded environments in order to challenge Marines against a “thinking enemy” and maximize realism.

Demanding and challenging Professional Military Education (PME) is the best hedge against uncertainty and its purpose is to prepare for the unknown. Marines and Sailors of all ranks have the responsibility to educate themselves. The Marine Corps University (MCU) educates over 75% of Marine Corps’ Captains and Majors and provides PME opportunities for 100% of our enlisted force. Our training and education initiatives contribute to our readiness and enhance our ability to integrate with the Naval and Joint Force.

Integration with the Naval and Joint Force

In order to be the Nation’s expeditionary force in readiness the Marine Corps must remain a naval combined arms expeditionary force. Our naval heritage is based on more than tradition; it is mandated by law as our primary service responsibility. Marines will reinforce our role as a naval expeditionary force to create decision space for national leaders and assure access for the Joint force as part of a naval campaign. As the service with the primary Department of Defense Directive and Title 10 responsibility for the development of amphibious doctrine, tactics, techniques, and equipment, our capabilities are reliant on the Nation’s investment in our partnered Navy programs. This requires the proper balance of amphibious platforms, surface connectors, and naval operating concepts to shape our force explicitly as part of the Joint Force, understanding where we will both leverage and enable the capabilities of the Army, Air Force and Special Operations Forces.

The Navy and Marine Corps Team require 38 amphibious warships, with an operational availability of 90%, to support two Marine Expeditionary Brigades, in order to provide the Nation a forcible entry capability. The Marine Corps fully supports the Secretary of the Navy and Chief of Naval Operations’ efforts to balance amphibious platforms and surface connectors that facilitate operational maneuver from the sea and ship-to-objective maneuver. The Long Range Ship Strategy

(LRSS) increases the amphibious warship inventory to 34 by FY22. We appreciate Congress providing the funding to procure a 12th LPD and the funding for a second ship with the same hull form.

The LPD and the LXR represent the Department of the Navy's commitment to a modern expeditionary fleet. L-Class ships with aircraft hangars and the command and control capabilities for the distributed and disaggregated operations that have become routine for our ARG/MEU teams. The Marine Corps fully supports the Navy's decision to use the LPD-17 hull for the LXR program. This decision is an acquisitions success story that provides a more capable ship, at lower cost, with increased capacity, on a shorter timeline to better support how Marines are operating today and are likely to in the future.

Steady state demand and crisis response sea basing requirements must be met through creative integration of all platforms and formations. This requires an integrated approach that employs warships, alternative shipping and landing basing in a complementary manner. Corresponding to the amphibious ship effort is our investment in tactical ship-to-shore mobility because at some point in the naval campaign, the landing force is going to land. The Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) is critical in the conduct of protected littoral maneuver and the projection of Marines from sea to land in permissive, uncertain, and hostile environments. Our planned investments are framed by our capstone service concept, Expeditionary Force 21 (EF-21). Working with our naval partners, we are aggressively exploring the feasibility of future and existing sea based platforms to enhance the connector capabilities of our LCACs and LCUs. We have a need to modify traditional employment methods and augment amphibious warships by adapting other vessels for sea-based littoral operations. Maritime Prepositioning Ship squadrons have one Maritime Landing Platform (MLP) that is effectively a "pier in the ocean." These ships can move pre-positioned war reserves into theater and serve as afloat staging bases to receive and transfer equipment and supplies as part of an integrated MAGTF or regionally oriented MEB. The end-state is a "family of systems" designed to enhance mobility, interoperability, survivability, and independent operational capabilities to further enhance sea basing and littoral maneuver capabilities well into the 21st Century. The Marine Corps will continue to work closely with the Navy to implement the 30-year ship building plan and to address the current readiness challenges of the amphibious fleet.

The continued development of Information Warfare and Command and Control capabilities are also required for the Marine Corps to operate against increasingly sophisticated adversaries. This

requires investments in interoperable combat operations centers. We are identifying and developing command and control systems and information technology architecture to support operations and ensure our ability to maneuver. Framed by service-level concepts like the Navy's Cooperative Strategy 21 (CS-21), we will collaborate with the Navy on a Naval Operating Concept revision in order to shape future naval campaigning and naval expeditionary operations. This concept will include a greater Marine Corps contribution to Sea Control operations through interoperability with the Navy Composite Warfare Commander (CWC) structure in order to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) threats and optimize the single naval battle success on and from the sea. Since Marines and Special Operations Forces (SOF) remain forward deployed, we must create true integration models to maximize the capabilities of the sea-based MAGTF, including command and control (C2), alongside our SOF partners. The end state is a fully integrated and ready Navy and Marine Corps team, trained and resourced to support our joint operating concept.

Modernization and Technology

History has not been kind to militaries that fail to evolve, and the change we see in the 21st Century is as rapid and dramatic as the world has ever known. That said the Marine Corps' modernization and technology initiatives must deliver future capabilities and sustainable readiness. Marines will continue working to do what we do today better, but equally important, must be willing to consider how these same tasks might be done "differently." The Marine Corps must continue to develop and evolve the MAGTF, ensuring it is able to operate in all warfighting domains. To do so Marines are invigorating experimentation of new concepts in order to advance our capabilities.

We will continue to develop our concepts to take advantage of the capabilities of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and all of our emerging aviation platforms, particularly in regard to sensor fusion and electronic warfare. Marines will continue to experiment with and exercise new ways to get the most out of the MV-22 and challenge previous paradigms in order to provide the most effective MAGTFs to our Combatant Commanders.

We will establish and define, in doctrine, our distributed operations capability in our MAGTFs by the end of FY16. With distributed capabilities, we must also ensure our forces are not constrained at the littoral seams between Combatant Commanders. You can also expect the Marine Corps to continue to pursue technologies that enhance our warfighting capabilities such as unmanned aerial

systems (UAS) and robotics, artificial intelligence, 3-D printing, and autonomous technologies that provide tactical and operational advantage.

The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab leads our experimentation effort to capitalize on existing and emerging technology and MAGTF level exercises. In conjunction with our coalition partners, the Navy and Marine Corps team has experimented with dispersed sea based SPMAGTFs, integrated MAGTFs in Anti-Access/Area Denial environments, incorporated emerging digital technologies with aviation platforms and our ground forces, and conducted naval integration with interoperable Special Operations Forces during Joint Exercises. We will continue to emphasize experimentation during our exercises as a way to inform the development of distributed doctrine and future operating concepts. Exercises serve as a test bed for experimentation as we search for faster, cheaper and smarter acquisition processes and programs.

The following equipment platforms and acquisition initiatives require special mention:

Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV)

The ACV is an advanced generation eight-wheeled, amphibious, armored personnel carrier that will support expeditionary maneuver warfare by enhancing tactical and operational mobility and survivability. The Marine Corps plans to procure 694 vehicles: 204 in the first increment and 490 in the second increment. Our plan is to have our first battalion initially capable in the 4th Quarter of FY20 and all battalions fully capable by the 4th Quarter of FY23. Your investment in this program provides the Marine Corps with an advanced ship to shore maneuver capability for the Joint Force.

Joint Strike Fighter (F-35)

The F-35 is a fifth generation fighter that will replace the Marine Corps' aging tactical aviation fleet of F/A-18 Hornets, AV-8B Harriers, and EA-6B Prowlers. The F-35 will have a transformational impact on Marine Corps doctrine as we work to both do what we're doing today better and "differently." The Marine Corps plans to procure 420 aircraft: 353 F-35Bs and 67 F-35Cs. The first F-35B squadron achieved initial operating capability in July 2015, and our second squadron will become operational in June 2016. The Marine Corps plans to complete its F-35 transition by 2031. We believe the Congressional support investment in this program will pay significant dividends for the capabilities of the Marine Corps and the Joint Force.

CH-53K

The Marine Corps' CH-53K "King Stallion" helicopter will fulfill the vertical lift requirement for amphibious and Joint Forcible Entry Operations. This CH-53 transition is critical to increasing the degraded readiness of the CH-53E community and decreasing the platform's operations and maintenance costs. The Marine Corps plans to procure 200 aircraft. The program achieved Milestone B in December 2005. The CH-53K's first flight occurred in October 2015 and our two aircraft have flown 25.8 hours.

Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence (C4I)

The modernization and technology effort of the Marine Corps requires an integrated network that is deployable, digitally interoperable, and supportive of rapid advancements in technology and the evolution of combat capabilities. The Marine Corps Enterprise Network (MCEN) establishes a comprehensive framework requiring the development of command and control architecture to simplify and enable operating forces to use services in a deployed environment. The priority is to provide worldwide access to MCEN services from any base, post, camp, station network, tactical network and approved remote access connection. Our goal is to provide an agile command and control capability with the right data, at the right place, at the right time.

Digital Interoperability (DI) is the effective integration of Marines, systems, and exchange of data, across all domains and networks throughout the MAGTF, Naval, Joint, and Coalition Forces, to include degraded or denied environments, in order to rapidly share information. This is a vital step in linking the MAGTF and the Joint Force to get the vast amount of information collected on all platforms into the hands of the warfighters that need it; in the air, on the ground and at sea.

The Marine Corps' goal is to retain our tactical advantage across the range of military operations with today's and tomorrow's systems. Our end state is to field and operationalize ongoing programs and continue to develop solutions that will enhance institutional capabilities and retain our tactical advantage across the ROMO.

Our Challenges

The character of the 21st Century is rapid evolution. Our potential adversaries have not stood still, and it is imperative that we keep pace with change. Two years ago, the 35th Commandant, came before Congress and testified that:

“...the 36th Commandant will reach a point, probably two years from now, where he's going to have to take a look at that readiness level and say, I'm going to have to lower that so that I can get back into these facilities that I can't ignore, my training ranges that I can't ignore, and the modernization that I'm going to have to do eventually. Otherwise we'll end up with an old Marine Corps that's out of date.”¹

This is where we find ourselves today. The Marine Corps is no longer in a position to generate current readiness and reset our equipment, while sustaining our facilities, and modernizing to ensure our future readiness. The efforts of the 114th Congress have provided sufficient resources to support the Marine Corps' near-term readiness and we thank the Congress for this fiscal stability. However, PB17 increasingly stretches the Nation's Ready Force. We are deploying combat ready-forces at a rate comparable to the height of our commitment to Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM; we are facing future facilities challenges as we try to sustain our current installations; and we are struggling to keep pace as our potential adversaries rapidly modernize. This is not healthy for your Marine Corps or for the security of our Nation.

The Marine Corps is now on its way down to 182,000 Marines by the end of fiscal year 2016. Although our recruiting force continues to meet our recruiting goals we are challenged to retain certain occupational fields like infantry and aviation. The 21st Century demands capabilities in 5th Generation Fighter Aircraft (F-35), Cyber Warfare, Information Operations, Special Operations, Embassy Security Guards, and the Security Cooperation Group that advises and assists our allies and partner nations. The Marine Corps must continue to develop and retain these capabilities with quality Marines.

In last year's FY15 budget we were compelled, due to fiscal pressures, to limit and reduce training for our operating forces. In this year's FY16 budget our operation and maintenance funding was further reduced by 5.6%. This reduction has been carried forward into our FY17 budget. Two years of fiscally constrained operation and maintenance funds will force us to employ a prioritized readiness model for our deploying forces and prevents us from our desired readiness recovery, both in operational training and facilities sustainment. This means the Marine Corps will not have as deep and as ready a bench to draw from for a major contingency.

Modernization is future readiness. The recapitalization of our force is essential to our future readiness with investments in ground combat vehicles, aviation, command and control, and digitally

¹ Gen Amos. Posture of the United States Marine Corps. CMC, Mar 2014.

interoperable protected networks. We have important combat programs under development that need your continued support. The Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) will replace our Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), which is now over four decades old. The Joint Strike Fighter will not only replace three aging platforms, but provides transformational warfighting capabilities for the future. Our ground combat vehicles like the Light Armored Vehicle (LAV) have an average age of 33 years and our M1A1 tanks have an average age of 26 years. The Marine Corps is grateful for Congress' support of our wartime acquisition and reset efforts of the MRAP, HMMWV, and the contracting of the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). In summary, the increasingly lean budgets of FY16 and FY17 will provide increased readiness challenges and cause shortfalls in key areas. This reality will force tradeoffs.

Conclusion

*“One fact is etched with clarity; the Marine Corps, because of its readiness to fight, will have a vital role in any future war.”*² Senator Mike Mansfield

Marines will continue to meet the high standards the American people have set for us. As responsible stewards of the Nation's resources, the Marine Corps remains committed to its auditability in order to provide the best Marine Corps the Nation can afford. We will therefore continue to produce highly trained Marines, formed into combat-ready forces, and provide the capabilities the Joint Force requires. The wisdom of the 82nd Congress as reaffirmed by the 114th Congress remains valid today - the vital need of a strong force-in-readiness. Marines are honored to serve in this role.

Marines are innovators and the history of the Marine Corps is replete with examples of innovation out of necessity. With the continued support of Congress, the Marine Corps will maintain ready forces today and modernize to generate readiness in the future because when the Nation calls, Marines answer and advance to contact.

² Hon. Mansfield. Fixing the Personnel Strength of the United States Marine Corps, Adding the Commandant of the Marine Corps as a Member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 82nd Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, HR 82-666, 30 Jun 1951.