

STATEMENT  
OF  
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BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
ON  
READINESS AND MODERNIZATION CHALLENGES FOR THE UNITED  
STATES MARINE CORPS  
15 SEPTEMBER 2016  
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM G50

## **Introduction**

The landscape and pace of the 21st Century demands a ready Marine Corps to buy time, decision space, and options for our Nation's leaders. All Marines, past and present, understand the expectations of the American people and their elected leaders – to answer the Nation's call, fight, and win. Marine Corps capabilities and the posture of our force would not be possible without the support and actions of the Congress. A balanced Marine Corps is a force that is healthy, has a sustainable operational tempo, is able to train with the needed equipment for all assigned missions, and has a reasonable quality of life across the force. The result of this balance is optimally trained and equipped forces that deploy when planned, with the ideal quantity of forces (capacity), on the required timeline with a steady reserve of non-deployed forces that can surge to meet large scale contingencies and operational plans. 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 in the near term, and to modernize to achieve future readiness.

## **Our Threats**

Multi-dimensional security threats challenge all aspects of our national power and security. The evolution and expansion of the information domain, advanced robotics, and improved weapons technologies are causing threats to emerge with increased speed and lethality. While your Marines and Sailors have been and remain operationally committed 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 modernize the force. We continue to make tough choices and balance our available resources to meet current operational commitments and, at the same time, achieve tomorrow's readiness.

## **Our Readiness**

Marines have a unique perspective on 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 must 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 emerging

technologies and threats of the 21st Century demand a modernized force with new capabilities that complement our traditional warfighting skills and equipment. The fiscal reductions and budget instability of the past few years have negatively impacted our current and future 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 cost. The current operational risk to the Marine Corps is tangible.

### **Amphibious Warships and Operations**

Decreased quantity and availability of Navy Amphibious warships, the preferred method of deploying and employing Marine Corps capabilities, have resulted in establishing land-based Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces (SPMAGTFs) to compensate so the Marine Corps can meet operational commitments and ensure timely response to crises. Where an Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU) may have been the response force of choice in the past, these SPMAGTFs have been called on to conduct operations in support of Geographic Combatant Commands.

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. 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.

The Navy and Marine Corps Team require 38 amphibious warships, with an operational availability of 90%, to support two Marine Expeditionary Brigades, and to provide the Nation a forcible entry capability. The Marine Corps fully supports the efforts of the Secretary of the Navy and Chief of Naval Operations 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 (using the LPD hull form) represent the Department of the Navy's commitment to a modern expeditionary fleet.

## **“Ready Bench”**

The Marine Corps will continue to prioritize the readiness of deployed and next-to-deploy units over non-deployed units. Our deploying units are ready, while our non-deployed commands lack sufficient resources to meet the necessary personnel, training, and equipment readiness levels to respond today. 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. Commitment of regional SPMAGTFs removes regimental-level headquarters and associated ground, aviation, and logistics elements from their parent Marine Expeditionary Force, which commits leadership and forces of what previously was the “ready bench.” This requirement does not allow these units the stability or time for additional training, professional development, and readiness to respond to a major contingency.

## **Aviation**

For several years, our aviation units have been unable to adequately meet our aircrew training requirements, primarily due to Ready Basic Aircraft (RBA) shortfalls. To remedy this critical situation, we have developed an extensive plan to recover or improve readiness across every Type/Model/Series (T/M/S) in the current inventory, while continuing the procurement of new aircraft to ensure future readiness. In executing this plan, we are seeing slow but steady improvements in aviation readiness, but the plan requires sustained funding and time. The recovery and sustainment of our current fleet is necessary to support both training and warfighting requirements. Each T/M/S requires attention and action in specific areas: maintenance, supply, depot backlog, and in-service repairs.

Operational tempo has increased the utilization and stretched the sustainability of our most in-demand aviation assets. To continue to meet operational commitments, we are reducing our MV-22 footprint from 12 to 6, and our KC-130J footprint from 4 to 3 for our SPMAGTFs in CENTCOM and AFRICOM. To reduce risk in the stressed USMC TACAIR force, we have reduced F-18 squadron aircraft levels from 12 to 10.

Over the past year, the Marine Corps committed nearly every MV-22 Osprey pilot to source all of its global commitments, and the increased utilization rates on these airframes affects the longevity of their service life. Exacerbating our concerns in aviation is a potential exodus of pilots and

maintenance personnel to join civilian airlines. We anticipate requiring additional fiscal resources in future budgets to provide bonus incentives to remain competitive and keep the talent we have invested in. With the continued support of Congress, Marine Aviation can recover its readiness by re-capitalizing our aging fleet, while at the same time procuring new aircraft to meet our future needs and support our ground forces.

## **Ground Forces**

The Marine Corps is also executing readiness initiatives with our ground equipment. Our post-combat reset strategy and Equipment Optimization Plan (EOP) are key components of the overall ground equipment “Reconstitution” effort. The Marine Corps has reset 90% of its ground equipment, with 61% returned to the Operating Forces and our strategic equipment programs. This strategic war reserve is our geographically prepositioned combat equipment, located 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 2019. This service-level strategy would not have been possible without the continued support of Congress and the hard work of your Marines. That said, our ground forces require modernization to replace legacy capabilities in addition to development of new capabilities to be effective on the modern battlefield.

## **Bases, Stations, and Facilities**

Improving the current state of our facilities is the single most important investment to support training, operations, and quality of life. The Marine Corps has developed a Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (FSRM) initiative to achieve this requirement. Our 2017 budget proposes funding FSRM at 74% of the OSD Facilities Sustainment Model. This reduced funding level is an area of concern because our bases and stations are more than where we work and live – they are platforms from which we train and generate readiness. The sustainment of military construction (MILCON) funding is crucial to managing operational training and support projects. As we transition to new capabilities and realign our forces in the Pacific, adequate MILCON is a key enabler for the Marine Corps’ future success.

Readiness is not just in our equipment supply and maintenance, but also 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 of our leadership;

standards-based inspections; evaluated drills and training exercises; and an understanding that the call to respond to crises can come at any time. Our Marines and Sailors know we must be ready and able to answer.

## **Training**

Organizing and executing high quality training is not easy. It takes time, deliberate thought, and effort. Our approach to training is to emphasize the basics: combined arms, competency in the use of our weapons and systems, and expeditionary operations; but also to 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.

## **Modernization**

The Marine Corps must continue to evolve. The change we see in the 21st Century is as rapid and dramatic as the world has ever known. The Marine Corps' modernization and technology initiatives must deliver future capabilities and sustainable readiness. The Marine Corps must continue to develop and evolve the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF), ensuring it is able to operate in all warfighting domains. To do so, Marines are re-invigorating experimentation of new concepts in order to advance our capabilities.

The ability to properly plan achieves stability and predictability for our personnel and families, ensures ample time to train, and fosters development of our small unit leaders. Effective planning produces unit cohesion and leadership in our operating forces, and financial predictability for our necessary modernization programs. The Marine Corps' goal is to retain our tactical advantage across the range of military operations with the most capable systems today and in the future. 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 range of military operations.

Modernization is a key part of our 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 interoperable protected networks. The Marine Corps has important combat programs under development that need your continued support. The Amphibious Combat Vehicle

(ACV) will replace our aging Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), which is now more than 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). The increasingly lean budgets of FY16 and FY17 will provide increased readiness challenges and cause shortfalls in key areas.

### **Our Challenges**

As recently as the 1990s, the Marine Corps' operational tempo was relatively predictable and sustainable (1:3 deployment-to-dwell.) Marines were home for approximately 18 months and deployed for 6 months. There was a "healthy bench" of non-deployed forces to surge in time of major contingency, such as Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Since the formal conclusion of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM AND ENDURING FREEDOM, the Marine Corps, like the other military services, has not had the benefit of an "interwar" period to reset and reconstitute our force. Fifteen years of continuous combat have created a high operational tempo, adding significant stress on the force, specifically on our people, our equipment (particularly aviation) and our readiness. There has not been a post-war intermission to reset the force.

Today's Marines (and Sailors) are deploying at a rate comparable to the height of our commitment during Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM (1:2 deployment-to-dwell) with an end strength of only 183,500. The stress on our force will continue as we decrease to the currently-planned end strength of 182,000. To mitigate our current operational tempo, return to a sustainable 1:3 deployment-to-dwell ratio, retain necessary combat capability, and grow future capabilities, the Marine Corps will need to be larger, as such our end strength needs to be revisited." Requirements will likely drive the future force to consist of more senior Marines overall. A more senior force will be more expensive to maintain. Without an end strength increase and associated funding we will be forced to trade capacity and/or capability to build the force we believe we will need.

The Marine Corps is now on its way down to 182,000 Marines by the end of fiscal year 2017. 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 maintain the skill sets we need today, and develop future skill sets with quality Marines.

The character of the 21st Century is rapid evolution. Our potential adversaries have evolved, and it is imperative that we keep pace with change. 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 provided sufficient resources to support the Marine Corps' near-term readiness, and we thank the Congress for this fiscal stability. However, current funding levels increasingly stretch the Nation's Ready Force. This is not healthy for your Marine Corps or for the security of our Nation as we prepare for future readiness.

Unstable fiscal environments prevent the deliberately planned, sustained effort needed to recover current readiness of our legacy equipment in the near term, and to modernize in the longer term. The harmful effects of "sequestration" are well known and will continue to harm the Marine Corps if they continue. A BBA II budget that allows flexibility in distributing funding cuts according to service discretion is certainly preferable to sequestration, but still does not meet our readiness requirements. A service chief manages uncertainty and risk through planning. The 2017 budget has yet to be approved. Decisions in the 2017 budget will affect the 2018 program, which will be impacted by sequestration or BCA caps if the BCA is not repealed.

Threats to our Nation remain constant. The Services have become all too accustomed to Continuing Resolutions (CR). A short-term CR of three months or less is undesirable but manageable, but a longer duration CR dramatically increases risk to an already strained fiscal environment and disrupts predictability and our ability to properly plan and execute a budget and a 5-year program.

## **Conclusion**

The Marine Corps will continue to provide trained and ready forces to meet current operational requirements. However, without consistent sustained funding we cannot rebuild and recapitalize our readiness. We have readiness recovery and future modernization plans to address aviation, ground forces, and facilities, bases and stations. We can re-establish our "ready bench" to ensure the Marine Corps has greater depth to respond to crises or contingencies. With the continued support of Congress,



the Marine Corps can maintain ready forces today and modernize to generate readiness in the future. The wisdom of the 82nd Congress, and reaffirmed by the 114th Congress, remains valid today - the vital need of a strong force-in-readiness. The Marine Corps remains committed to be ready to go when we are called.