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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND
PROJECTION FORCES

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES

CONCERNING

A DAY WITHOUT SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES

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Introduction

Chairman Akin, Ranking Member McIntyre, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, I am honored to appear here today.

Our Nation faces an uncertain future in an era of considerable fiscal constraints. Competing economic pressures have generated vigorous debate regarding the military capabilities and capacities necessary to protect the broad range of U.S. national security interests across the globe.

In today's testimony, I will describe the vital and increased requirement for seapower that supports our National Security Strategy, and enable us to fulfill Joint Force requirements. In these challenging times, the United States Marine Corps is uniquely positioned to provide a stabilizing force in critical regions of the world.

Overview

We are a maritime nation with global interests and responsibilities. The future, like today, will be characterized by shifting demographics, economic transition, political upheaval, increasingly swift access to information, the proliferation of advanced weapons, and technology and resource competition. Environmental degradation and the associated loss of resources, especially clean water and arable land, will add to instability.

Forward-deployed amphibious forces provide the capability to conduct security cooperation and engagement activities to build partnership capacity; respond to natural and man-made crises; and overcome access challenges to gain entry. In times of international crises the ability to position amphibious forces offshore allows policy makers to signal U.S. concerns or intentions without prematurely committing forces ashore, providing an invaluable means of deterring potential foes. For example, amphibious forces have conducted strikes against terrorist targets in Afghanistan and loyalist forces in Libya, conducted counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, responded to national disasters in Japan, conducted numerous security cooperation activities with the forces of our partner nations, reinforced combat operations in Afghanistan, and stood off the coasts of several countries in crisis ready to rescue American citizens if called upon to do so. While one might assume these various events have occurred over a number of years, in point of fact they occurred in a mere five month period this year.

These events reveal why persistent forward presence is a cornerstone of American seapower. Failure to maintain an adequate forward presence undermines our national security and economic well-being. Without an adequate forward presence the United States puts maritime commerce at risk; loses credibility among both friends and foes; forfeits opportunities to establish and maintain influence; relinquishes the ability to operate in austere environments or overcome damaged infrastructure; and divests itself of a critical means of responding to crises. We diminish our ability to protect our citizens, our interests, or to project power overseas, becoming reliant on the willingness of others to grant access.

Strategic Environment

Assured access to and freedom of maneuver within the global commons is being challenged by state and non-state actors. Terrorists, criminal networks, and pirates undermine the rule of law and present obstacles to the free flow of goods through the world's oceanic network. The U.S. two-way trade in goods and services totals \$1.4 trillion annually. With 95% of U.S. international trade, 90% of world trade, and two-thirds of world petroleum transported by sea, maritime security is paramount. The world economy is tightly interconnected and economic prosperity is not possible without secure passageways for the flow of goods.

Trends in the world's population further complicate the need for stability in the maritime domain. We live in a dynamic, interconnected world in which our Nation's security and prosperity are inseparable. Nations with poor economic conditions and weak governance are more prone to armed conflict. With the majority of the world's population residing within 200 miles of the sea, and global population projected to increase by approximately 1.2 billion by 2025, access to the littorals is paramount. The mix of population density, social instability, mass communication, and extremist ideologies highlights the potential for significant international disruptions.

The result of these environmental challenges was seen this year in the outbreak of protests throughout North African and Middle Eastern countries during what is now known as the Arab Spring. The spark for these uprisings was a combination of high youth unemployment/economic disparity, authoritarian leaders, corruption, lack of human rights, and low levels of development – basic economic and governance issues. Social networks enabled these otherwise small-scale incidents of discontent to mobilize into full blown revolutions.

The world's littoral regions sit at the nexus of this challenging new world, increasing the importance of the littorals to the more interconnected global economy and increasing the potential for instability in those regions. In an era of growing sensitivities to U.S. and coalition presence on sovereign soil, sea-based forces provide a discrete, flexible and effective means of selectively engaging to build partners and prevent conflict. Seapower is that singular unifying force that assures stability, access, and confidence in the maritime domain.

A Day Without Seapower

The *Backgrounder* piece “Thinking About a Day Without Seapower: Implications for U.S. Defense Policy” is enlightening but does not go far enough. The U.S. Air Force recently conducted a study of the impacts of a day without space – highlighting the challenges we might face if we lose our space-based communications and surveillance systems – among others. In a world without seapower, the outlook for U.S. and global economic stability is similarly bleak.

If we lose our ability to be forward deployed and ready to respond to crisis, the challenges are similar to those uncovered by the Air Force study – but terrestrial. This change would create challenges in terms of weapons of mass destruction, protection of shipping on the high seas, protection of American citizens living and working abroad, reduced employment,

harm to our economic and financial systems, and, lastly, in our ability to face adversaries on their ground – not American soil.

Without seapower, piracy would increase from a regional challenge in a couple of locations – to becoming almost worldwide. While our citizens may be vaguely aware of piracy off the coast of Africa, they would be outraged by piracy in the Caribbean. With recent events in Libya, Americans may recognize the shores of Tripoli as something more than a line in a well known hymn – but we must remember that it was a lack of seapower – or the ability to project the same – that developed the circumstances that gave the Barbary pirates the confidence to openly feed on trade. That is why a young nation established a Navy and Marine Corps.

Americans have become accustomed to traveling and working abroad with very few restrictions. While there are those that choose to hike in areas where westerners are not welcome, most Americans travel with a high level of assurance for their safety. When circumstances rapidly change - and local tensions risk the safety of Americans - like they did in Lebanon in 2006 - we expect forward deployed sea-based forces to save the day. In Lebanon, nearly fifteen thousand Americans were evacuated from the country - enabled by American seapower. While we are all uncomfortable when a couple of hikers in Iran are taken prisoner - having thousands held hostage by the Hezbollah would have been unthinkable. Yet, without the forward presence of naval forces, this scenario was absolutely in the realm of the possible. Without seapower, on July 16-24, 2006, the 26th MEU would not have been forward deployed and able to rescue these Americans from Lebanon when war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah paramilitary forces.

Without seapower, on November 25, 2001, Task Force 58 would not have been able to launch from the amphibious assault ship Peleliu and travel nearly 400 miles from the North Arabian Sea before touching down in Afghanistan. Within a week of the initial assault, more than 1,000 Marines had landed on the dusty airstrip in Kandahar province.

Without seapower, on 12 August 2010, the USS Peleliu (LHA-5) Amphibious Ready Group (ARG)/15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) would not have been able to rapidly respond with humanitarian assistance after the record-breaking monsoon rains caused massive flooding in Pakistan.

Without seapower, 28 days later on 9 September 2010, 24 Marines from 15th MEU's Maritime Raid Force would not have been postured to recover the Magellan Star and liberate its crew from nine pirates who had seized the vessel a day earlier.

Without seapower, on March 12, 2011, the Marines with 31st MEU would not have been able to rapidly deploy critically-needed supplies and aid to areas that need it most in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2010.

Without seapower, on March 22, 2011, Marines from the 26th MEU would not have been positioned off the coast of Libya where they safely rescued a pilot of a downed Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle after it crashed during a mission against a missile site. The Marine aircraft began

launching off the USS Kearsarge, which was roughly 130 nautical miles from the pilot, within 30 minutes of the crash.

The force for the future must be able to project power overseas, build partnerships to reduce the bravado of would be belligerents, respond to small-scale crisis and, when necessary, forcibly enter the sovereign domain of another state or the area held by non-state actors to do whatever has to be done. Amphibious forces have inherent strategic mobility and operational flexibility. They can rapidly sail to a position to influence potential crises from the sea, without forcing escalation or aggravating sovereignty concerns. They can loiter unseen over the horizon or provide a visible deterrent. Once action ashore is deemed necessary, they can maneuver by air or surface means, as the situation warrants, while being sustained from the sea. Amphibious forces can create access, forcibly if necessary, and return to the sea with the same swiftness with which they went ashore.

This national ability to project power at a time, place, and manner of our choosing creates a strategic asymmetry that imposes great costs on potential enemies. The U.S. is unlikely to engage in extended land campaigns in the visible future, but addressing the smaller-scale contingencies that accompany an uncertain world demand a team that can protect our citizens and interests swiftly and effectively. Other methods for crisis response may be subject to denial of over flight or landing permissions, lack of infrastructure in the objective area, or have inherent limitations regarding the operational capabilities of the force, especially with respect to self-sustainment.

Conclusion

Even with economic headwinds, the United States remains the world's largest economy. We are, however, critically dependent on the global commons for the exports and imports that sustain our livelihood. Disruptions in the global system have measurable economic impacts on every family. Maritime commerce is most vulnerable in the littorals—where sea meets land. The Nation's amphibious forces provide the ability to maneuver throughout the seaward and landward portions of the littorals to deter, defend, and protect these vital areas from a variety of threats without dependence on bases or stations ashore.

The Marine Corps provides this amphibious flexibility at an affordable cost. For approximately 8% of the total DoD budget (Marine Corps budget plus Navy budget portions that support the Marine mission, including amphibious shipping and naval aviation, corpsmen, doctors, chaplains, etc.), our Nation gains the ability to respond to unexpected crises, from humanitarian disaster relief efforts, to non-combatant evacuation operations, to conduct counter-piracy operations, raids or strikes. That same force can assure access for other critical joint capabilities anywhere in the world in the event of a major contingency; it can be dialed up or down like a rheostat to be relevant across the range of military operations. No other force possesses the flexibility to provide these capabilities and yet sustain itself logistically for significant periods of time, at a time and place of its choosing. As the early 20th century military historian Sir B.H. Liddell Hart accurately stated, amphibious flexibility is the greatest strategic asset that a sea based power possesses.

In this age of uncertainty, the demand for adaptable forces—capable of immediately responding to crises—is certain. All things are not equally important or affordable. As the Nation resources its future national security, it will be forced to make tough choices between capabilities, capacities, and levels of readiness in and among the Services. Although it is impossible to know where the next flare-up will be, well trained and equipped amphibious forces will be ready to respond and protect interests or prevent undesired effects. We are ever mindful of what we provide to this Nation and the resources we ask for in order to conduct our missions.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.