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House Armed Services Committee

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
READINESS IN THE AGE OF AUSTERITY
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Our Nation faces an uncertain future security environment in an era of considerable fiscal constraints. This dynamic has generated a vigorous debate about our national security strategy to include a dialogue about the military capabilities and capacities necessary to protect the broad range of U.S. national security interests across the globe.

As we address this inflection point in our strategic approach, we will be driven to make difficult choices and reduce the size of the U.S. military. With a smaller joint force and perhaps a further reduction of our forward based forces, our future engagement will be more selective.

Reducing our presence in areas where we have traditionally had more robust engagement will create risk and incur opportunity cost. Our challenge will be to mitigate that risk and seek efficient methods to project influence, maintain access, and continue to build the capacity of partner states.

Although we will have reduced capacity, we must continue to deter and defeat our adversaries, respond to unexpected crises and contingencies, and provide a stabilizing presence in key regions of the world. I believe the United States Marine Corps is uniquely postured to contribute to our Nation's security during this difficult period.

WHY THE MARINE CORPS

As was discussed repeatedly during Secretary Panetta's and General Dempsey's testimony, we, as a nation, do not have a good track record when it comes to predicting the future. And attempting to predict it has become more difficult since the end of the Cold War, as the international system within which we operate has become more open and complex. Rather than two primary global powers, there are many regional powers and a host of lethal groups with agendas that are inimical to our interests. These groups do not conform to the old system of nation-state relationships.

Although we can't predict where or what future crises will be, with 75% of the earth's population living within 200 miles of the coast there is reasonably good probability that future crises will occur in the littorals. As such, assured access to the littorals comes from the sea. In addition to being sea-based, a ready-force must be trained and equipped to conduct a wide-range of missions from humanitarian assistance to combat operations.

In an era of increased sensitivity to U.S. forces overseas, a sea-based approach provides a discrete, flexible and effective means of selectively engaging to build partnerships and respond to crises. Our nation needs a force that can be forward deployed and forward engaged – flexible and not reliant on host nation support. That force is the Navy-Marine Corps team.

THE GENESIS OF OUR ROLE

We exist in this role of being “the most ready when the nation is least ready” because of the wisdom and foresight of the 82nd Congress. This designation arose in response to the costly lessons our nation learned during the Korean War when a lack of preparedness in the beginning stages of the conflict resulted in large numbers of casualties and tactical defeats.

In 1951 and 1952, Congress conducted hearings about what had happened in the early days of the Korean War. They were angered that we had sent young Americans in harm's way so unprepared. They were horrified at the lack of readiness of our armed forces to respond to the Korean conflict and they determined that we would be adequately prepared for future crises.

After hearing from witnesses and studying the events of 1950, the 82nd Congress concluded that the nation needed a standing, combined-arms force in readiness that was highly mobile, combat ready and able to hold aggression at bay while decisions were being made and the nation mobilized. The 82nd Congress appreciated that forces needed to be forward deployed to respond to crises before they became large contingencies.

In 1951-1952 Congress determined that the Navy-Marine Corps team was the force of choice to perform this role. And our role has been validated with Marines responding from the sea in more than 110 interactions and contingencies just in the last 20 years.

TODAY'S RELEVANCE

Today, while the tactics, techniques, and procedures change, the enduring requirement remains and that is the nation's need for a forward deployed, forward engaged crisis response force. Our nation needs an expeditionary force that can respond to today's crisis, with today's force, today.

This is an important point and it's integral to our ethos. Expeditionary is not a bumper sticker to us, or a concept. It's a state of conditioning that Marines work hard to maintain. And crisis response is incompatible with tiered readiness. Marines don't get ready when a crisis occurs. We must be forward deployed and ready to respond immediately when that 911 call comes. That's the most important aspect of who we are and what we do.

AN IMPORTANT INVESTMENT

The Marine Corps provides that unique and critical capability at an affordable cost. When the nation pays the 'sticker price' for its Marines, it buys the ability to remain forward deployed and forward engaged to assure our partners, reinforce alliances, and build partner capacity. For 7.8% 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 be quickly reinforced to 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.

We are ever mindful of what we provide to this nation and the resources we ask for in order to conduct our missions. We take stewardship of the nation's resources very seriously.

With regard to Secretary Panetta's announcement that he has directed the Department to cut in half the time it takes to achieve audit readiness - the Marine Corps is the first Service to undertake an audit of a major financial statement, the General Fund Statement of Budgetary Resources. We volunteered for this mission because we recognized that a successful audit is critical to effectively managing the resources provided by the Congress, and would further demonstrate our faithful stewardship of the Nation's resources.

Based on the findings to date we are confident that auditability will enhance our readiness posture by enabling better utilization of the funding provided by Congress, and will provide us better data upon which to base future budget development in this period of declining resources. While the audit is not yet complete, the progress we have made has made us confident that our ongoing efforts will ultimately be validated by an audit opinion and continued auditability.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As I testified to the HASC in July, to maintain a ready and relevant Marine Corps for the future, we must address a growing equipment readiness challenge resulting from ten years of constant combat.

We must reset the equipment we have been using for the past decade. This effort is ongoing, but will require continued funding support through the end of operations in Afghanistan and slightly beyond, ensuring that we have time to bring all equipment home and assess its further viability for future readiness.

The other side to our readiness challenge is the modernization of our equipment in order to be more decisively engaged in our traditional role. In terms of modernization, we see the greatest opportunity to maintain operational advantage in four major programs increasingly relevant to readiness in *future* operating environments. These are (1) the F-35B STOVL Joint Strike Fighter to replace our F/A-18 Hornets, AV-8B Harriers and EA-6B Prowlers; (2) a suitable and affordable amphibious combat vehicle; (3) an updated stable of ground tactical vehicles; and (4) available and modernized Navy amphibious shipping and associated support capabilities. These enhancements will ensure Marines remain relevant across the spectrum of potential operations and ready to accomplish future assigned missions.

With Congress' support we will maintain the capability to conduct a managed drawdown of our end-strength so that we can avoid severe 'reduction-in-force' measures that break faith with Marines and their families, and jeopardize dwell times.

In the future, we believe combatant commanders will increasingly call for the unique capabilities offered by naval amphibious forces to meet their ongoing and most likely future requirements. Even today, their demand for MAGTFs significantly outstrips available capacity. After the draw down from Afghanistan, the Marine Corps will continue to be heavily engaged around the world shaping, training, deterring, and responding to all manner of crises and contingencies. In an increasingly dangerous and uncertain world, this Nation must provide for the protection it needs.

The Navy-Marine Corps Team is the first-level investment in that protection because we are always on station and on watch.