

10 Mar 11

STATEMENT OF  
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DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR PLANS, POLICIES, AND OPERATIONS  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

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## **Introduction**

The United States Marine Corps is America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness. After nearly a decade of constant combat and counter-insurgency operations, the performance of the Marine Corps remains unparalleled and reflects the accomplishments and the sacrifices of your Marines and their families.

The pace of operations for the Marine Corps remains high, with approximately 31,000 Marines forward-deployed across the globe. There are approximately 22,400 Marines deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and Operation NEW DAWN. Pre-deployment training programs ensure combat formations, as well as the individual Marine, consistently deploy as the best-trained and most ready force to meet global combatant commander operational requirements. The OEF Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) is trained, resourced, and ready to accomplish its assigned mission. Deploying and deployed units report the highest levels of readiness for their assigned missions. The Marine Corps can sustain this commitment under current conditions for as long as the Nation requires, acknowledging such a commitment comes at a cost to the readiness of its non-deployed forces.

## **Nature of the Current Fight**

Today's Marines are highly trained and combat proven across the range of military operations. Marine units in Afghanistan operate in a rapidly evolving, highly complex environment against a very adaptive, resourceful enemy. Depending upon the population density of a given area, infantry battalions are responsible for anywhere from 50 square miles of urban and rural terrain to upwards of 500 square miles. Within this battlespace, Marine units work to defeat the insurgency along multiple lines of operation which include security, governance, rule of law, and economic development. These multiple, mutually supporting lines of operation and the distributed nature of the conflict are what have required the Marine Corps to augment forward-deployed units with additional equipment and personnel from non-deployed forces and strategic programs.

The posture of the force must be viewed from two perspectives: the ability to meet and sustain known operations; and the ability to respond to new requirements with the non-deployed force. Non-deployed units are in a constant cycle of post-deployment dwell and subsequent training for their next deployment. Sustainment of current operations has reduced the aggregate readiness of the non-deployed force. This increases risk in the timely execution of large-scale contingencies.

For the past several years, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have required the Marine Corps to operate primarily in a land-based environment. High operational tempo and the necessary sustained focus on irregular warfare, stability operations, and counterinsurgency in Iraq and now Afghanistan have degraded the Marine Corps's fundamental core competency – its amphibious expertise. Outside the regular training and deployment cycles of the Marine Expeditionary Units, training opportunities for amphibious operations have been limited due to supporting operations in OEF and the limited availability of amphibious platforms. Accordingly, training shortfalls in amphibious and prepositioning operations affect the Marine Corps's ability to respond to other operational plans, contingencies, and activities.

### **Readiness Assessment**

The Marine Corps' top readiness concern is its ability to simultaneously sustain current operations in Afghanistan and to respond, rapidly, with a cohesive force to an additional large-scale contingency. Unit readiness shortfalls have been the price of sustained combat operations.

- **Personnel:** Units in dwell are heavily leveraged, in terms of leadership and expertise, to meet ongoing operational commitments. Although the operating forces possess experienced leaders, trainers, and planners, a significant number are not available due to sourcing service individual augments, joint individual augments, and Afghan partner mentor teams. While these Marine leaders, planners, and trainers are enhancing the capabilities of Afghan security forces and performing needed functions in forward-deployed joint and Marine headquarters, their extended absence leaves some non-deployed units short of key personnel needed to lead and train Marines. Approximately 35 percent of non-deployed units report key personnel shortfalls.

- **Equipment:** Non-deployed units and strategic programs, such as our pre-positioning programs, have been used to source equipment needs for forward-deployed and deploying units. Reduced equipment sets available to units in dwell present training challenges and an increased risk to immediately responding to major contingencies.

Approximately sixty-eight percent of non-deployed units report degraded readiness in the areas of capabilities and/or resources. Resource shortfalls manifest themselves as capability gaps in individual unit and collective core competencies. The largest contributing factor to unit capability gaps is equipment; approximately sixty-three percent of non-deployed forces report mission essential equipment shortfalls. The reasons for degraded equipment readiness are as follows:

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- The strategic shift from Iraq to Afghanistan required the Marine Corps to hold equipment in theater and identify serviceable assets for movement to OEF – equipment the Marine Corps has been unable to reset and return to non-deployed units.
- The difficult operating environment and distributed nature of the battlespace in Regional Command Southwest are degrading the normal expected service limits of some principle end items (PEIs), dramatically increasing the frequency of preventive maintenance actions. In some cases, the expected service limit of equipment has decreased by up to one-half.
- The Marine Corps has been forced to take mission essential equipment from non-deployed units and strategic programs to help fully equip the deployed and next-to-deploy units. The equipment life expectancy issues mentioned above, as well as battle damage and wear, have necessitated the establishment of a robust forward-in-stores capability and a major equipment rotation program to support deployed forces. This further strains the equipment available to non-deployed forces.
- Many Marine units are, by design, force providers for regimental combat teams and Marine Air Ground Task Forces. If these units were required for a contingency or other operation, the Marine Corps would globally source and organize them into fully capable units prior to their deployment. Due to the commitment of forces in support of OEF, the time required to task organize for a contingency deployment would likely be extended.

### **Reset and Reconstitution**

Operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere have placed an unprecedented demand on ground weapons systems, aviation assets, vehicles, and support equipment. This equipment has experienced accelerated “wear and tear” due to many years of sustained combat operations in exceedingly harsh operating environments. In many cases, the result is that peacetime equipment usage rates have been far exceeded, or items have been destroyed or damaged beyond economical repair as a result of combat operations. Congress’s continued support is needed to reset and reconstitute Marine ground and aviation assets to meet combatant commander requirements and posture the Marine Corps for the future security environment. This will require a multi-year support effort beyond the conclusion of combat operations.

The Commandant has directed that the Marine Corps will reconstitute to a “middleweight force” ideally positioned between special operations and heavy forces, able to rapidly shift across the range of military operations. This will enable it to operate throughout the spectrum of threats – irregular, hybrid, and conventional – or the areas where they overlap. The Marine Corps is currently in the

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midst of a comprehensive reconstitution planning effort to fulfill the Commandant's vision, post-conflict. Building upon its strong traditional foundation and incorporating modern lessons learned, the Marine Corps is confident it will continue to uphold its legacy of being ready and able to immediately respond to the Nation's demands.

### **Conclusion**

As Marines continue to serve in combat, the United States Marine Corps remains the Nation's crisis response force. The Marine Corps needs the sustained support of the American people and Congress to maintain readiness, to reset and reconstitute the force during an extended war, and to modernize to adapt to the future security environment. The Corps is grateful for the support Congress has provided to date and we are mindful of the fiscal realities confronting our nation. We are committed to being responsible stewards of scarce public funds just as are dedicated to serve the nation with honor, courage and commitment as America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness.