STATEMENT

OF

GENERAL JOHN PAXTON

ASSISTANT COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

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Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

On December 15, 2012 General Paxton assumed the duties of the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. Prior to his current assignment he served as Commander, United States Marine Corps Forces Command, the Commander, United States Marine Corps Forces, Europe and the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. He has served as the Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Force, and Commander, United States Marine Forces Africa; the Director for Operations, J-3, The Joint Staff; and as the Chief of Staff for Multi-National Force Iraq in Baghdad. Additional General Officer assignments include Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot/Western Recruiting Region, and Assistant Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps, Programs and Resources (Director Programs).

General Paxton graduated from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York with Bachelor of Science and Master of Civil Engineering degrees. He was commissioned into the Marine Corps in 1974 through Officer Candidate School. A career Marine infantryman, the general has commanded Marines at every level from platoon through division and has served and commanded in all three active Marine Divisions (1st Bn, 3d Mar; 2nd Bn, 4th Mar; 3rd Bn, 5th; 1st Bn, 8th Mar; 1st Mar; 1st Mar Div). General Paxton has also served as an operations, plans and training (G3-S3) officer within Fleet Marine Force units at the battalion, regiment, division and Marine Expeditionary Force levels.

In addition to service in Iraq, General Paxton has operational tours supporting stability efforts in the Bosnian conflict with Landing Force Sixth Fleet (LF6F) and in Mogadishu, Somalia as United Nations Quick Reaction Force (QRF), both while commanding Battalion Landing Team 1/8. Other staff and joint assignments include the Military Assistant to the Under Secretary of the Navy, Amphibious Operations Officer and Executive Officer Crisis Action Team (CAT) at UNC/CFC/USFK in Korea; and in Strategic Plans Branch, Deputy Commandant Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters US Marine Corps. Supporting establishment commands include Company B, Marine Barracks 8th & I as a Captain and Marine Corps Recruiting Station New York, New York as a Major.

In addition to The Basic School, General Paxton's professional education includes United States Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School (non resident), United States Army Infantry Officer Advanced Course, and the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He was a Federal Executive Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution as a Lieutenant Colonel, as well as a Military Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations as a Colonel. He has also been a Marine Corps Fellow at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Seminar XXI.

Introduction

Chairman Ayotte, Ranking Member Kaine, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness: I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the current state of readiness in your Marine Corps and on our Fiscal Year 2017 budget request. We greatly appreciate the continued support of Congress and of this subcommittee in ensuring our ability to remain the nation's ready force.

The Marine Corps has been our nation's crisis response force since our first landing in the Bahamas in March 1776. Two hundred and forty years ago this month the Marines led by our first Commandant, Captain Samuel Nichols, seized weapons and gunpowder for George Washington's Continental Army. Since that day the Marine Corps has been dedicated to being our country's expeditionary force in readiness, chartered by the 82nd Congress to be the most ready force when the nation is least ready. I thank this Committee and the 114th Congress for their appreciation of that vital role, which you reaffirmed in the most recent National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Your Marine Corps Today

2015 was a demanding year, much like any other for your Marine Corps. Our expeditionary forces continue to be in demand and heavily employed in the face of an increasingly challenging global environment. Your Marines executed approximately 100 operations, 20 of them amphibious, 140 security cooperation activities with our partners and allies, and 160 major exercises. In partnership with the State Department, we employed Marines at 174 embassies and consulates in 146 countries, with many posts permanently increased in size to contend with increased threats. Our Marine Security Augmentation Units (MSAUs) deployed 33 times from the United States for short-term reinforcement of posts under particular threat. We remain grateful for your support of our 61 year old mission sets in support of the Department of State as demonstrated by your 2013 NDAA.

Our 22,500 Marines west of the International Date Line continued to play an important role in maintaining stability in East Asia, working closely with America's treaty allies from Japan and the Republic of Korea in the north to Darwin, Australia in the south and numerous other allies, partners, and locations in between. III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) once again

demonstrated why they are the force of choice for crisis response in Pacific Command. Marines from III MEF based in Okinawa and mainland Japan moved directly from a training exercise in the Philippines into a disaster response mission in Nepal. Once there they evacuated 69 casualties, flew 376 sorties totaling 1300 hours in high mountains, and provided 1070 tons of emergency relief supplies. Six Marines gave their lives in support of that relief operation. The Bonhomme Richard Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), one of the seven MEUs that operate at sea in support of all Combatant Commanders, also provided humanitarian assistance after a typhoon struck the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The ARG/MEUs in the Middle East supported our embassy in Yemen, enabled United States special operations forces, and conducted other training missions.

Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC or COCOM) operational requirements also continue to be quickly and capably met by land-based Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (SPMAGTFs). The unit assigned to Africa Command supported the reopening of our embassy in the Central African Republic, provided security at an operating location in Cameroon, conducted high risk site surveys for numerous diplomatic posts, and provided incident response forces from multiple locations. We added a new combined arms capability to the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF), supporting our nation's commitment to security and stability in Eastern Europe. In Southern Command, a tailored unit assisted with the reconstruction of a runway in Honduras and conducted security cooperation in three other countries. Finally, in Central Command (CENTCOM) our SPMAGTF complemented our MEUs and Special Operations Force efforts across the region by reinforcing our embassy in Baghdad. They also reinforced and in February and March assisted with the evacuation of our diplomatic facilities in Yemen. Additionally they conducted training in Jordan, and contributed security forces, quick reaction forces, train, advise, and assist teams, tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) support, and other capabilities to Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).

Seven hundred and fifty Marines established and are still operating training sites at Al Asad and Al Taqaddam Air Bases in Iraq. From there they have been training and enabling the progress of Iraqi forces as they combat ISIS, including their recent support to a successful Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) counterattack at Ramadi. Marine aviation, working from the land base and the sea base, flew over 1,275 sorties in the CENTCOM theater, conducting 325 kinetic strikes

and providing personnel recovery assets for that air campaign. In Afghanistan, more than 100 Marines continue to operate with the ISAF staff and as enablers for forces from the Republic of Georgia. While our large-scale commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan have diminished, today many Marines still remain in harm's way, heavily engaged in the Middle East and around the globe to do our nation's bidding.

Your Marine Corps from Today into the Future

As we continue to organize for, train for, and execute our missions, we are concentrating our near term efforts in five interrelated areas that are vital to the Marine Corps' future success. Our Commandant, General Robert Neller, has directed that we focus on five key areas: People, Readiness, Training, Naval Integration, and Modernization. The three major themes that run throughout his guidance are maintaining and improving the high quality people who make up today's Marine Corps; decentralizing 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 evolving technologies.

Readiness, our focus here today, cannot be considered in isolation from the other areas, which in turn help comprise the five historic pillars that are the foundation of our institutional readiness and responsiveness. First, unit readiness is our most immediate concern. We must guarantee our ability to execute the mission when called. Second, we must have the ability to deploy, aggregate, and command and control our expeditionary capabilities to meet the combatant commanders' requirements. The third, strongest, and most vital pillar of our readiness remains our Marines, the product of a time tested transformation process at our Recruit Training Depots. Fourth, those Marines and units rely on our infrastructure sustainment: our bases, stations, and installations are our launch and recovery platforms and must remain up to that key task. Fifth and finally, we must continuously push forward with equipment modernization, balancing our current and future warfighting needs.

These five pillars represent the operational and foundational components of readiness across the Marine Corps. We know we are ready when our leaders confirm that their units are well trained, well led at all levels, properly equipped, and can respond quickly to the unforeseen. Our nation's leaders may call on us for that response today, next week or next year, but we must be

ready in any case. In the current fiscal environment we have been struggling to maintain that balance between current readiness and projected future readiness. Our 5.6% reduction in Operations and Maintenance funding from FY2015 to FY2016 makes that near term struggle even more difficult.

While we remain grateful for the balanced budget agreement (BBA) and overseas contingency operations (OCO) dollars, we also continue to need a stable and predictable fiscal planning horizon. As I stated last year the possibility of Budget Control Act (BCA) implementation continues to loom over us all. It threatens our planning and readiness. While all of our deployed forces have met or exceeded our readiness standards for their assigned missions, as resources have already flat-lined or diminished, it has been at the expense of our non-deployed forces, and investments in other areas such as sustainment and modernization. As the Commandant wrote in his posture statement, 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. In order to stay ready and to "fight tonight" under current budgetary outlays and constraints, we are continuing to mortgage our future readiness.

Unit Readiness

We will ensure that an aviation squadron embarks on amphibious warships for a MEU deployment or on a Unit Deployment Program (UDP) rotation to an expeditionary base in the Pacific with its full complement of trained personnel and ready aircraft. They must also have a complete block of vital spare parts, which have taken on even greater importance as we work to reset aircraft fleets flown hard over fourteen years of conflict. In doing so that squadron may leave its sister squadrons deficient in ready aircraft and parts as they attempt to train for their own upcoming deployments. Those deficiencies then cut into the number of Ready Basic Aircraft (RBA) available to train. This in turn reduces flying hours for the squadron's pilots, making it more difficult for them to maintain or achieve their own necessary qualifications (eg. overall hours, flight leadership qualifications, night flying proficiency, shipboard landing qualifications). The same dynamic is true in other forms for some of our other units – the communications and engineering battalions that send their best equipment and operators out to support our MEUs and SPMAGTFs may lack the assets to support elements remaining at home

station, inhibiting their ability to train for future deployments and be ready to execute OPLANs or support crisis response.

That same flying squadron struggling to prepare for its next deployment, that communications or engineering battalion with key personnel and equipment already forward, are all a part of our "bench" - our ready force for any crisis or contingency that exceeds our forward deployed capacity. Some enabling units, primarily those located in our Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) headquarters formations that provide functions such as intelligence and communications, are deploying elements in support of sustained missions that were not anticipated by past planning assumptions. The absence of those elements, and the need to reset those elements following their deployments, degrades the readiness of the parent unit at home station. If the MEF were required to respond to a major crisis, they would require augmentation of personnel and equipment to alleviate those shortfalls. In order to retain our home station crisis response capability as well as our surge capabilities for operational plans (OPLANs), our rotational units must be able to quickly regain and sustain their own readiness following brief post-deployment degradations as old personnel depart, new personnel report, and equipment is reset. Under our current resource levels we are accepting prolonged readiness risks and focusing the training of some units to their more limited rotational mission sets vice full spectrum operations.

When our resources fail to keep pace with operational requirements it further exacerbates these readiness problems. In the event of a crisis, these degraded units could either be called upon to deploy immediately at increased risk to the force and the mission, or require additional time to prepare thus incurring increased risk to mission by surrendering the initiative to our adversaries. By degrading the readiness of these bench forces to support those forward deployed, we are forced to accept increased risk in our ability to respond to further contingencies, our ability to assure we are the most ready when the nation is least ready. This does not mean we will not be able to respond to the call of the nation's leadership. It does mean that executing our defense strategy or responding to an emergent crisis may require more time, more risk, and incur greater costs and casualties.

Demand and Capacity to Respond

After a deliberate Marine Corps Quadrennial Defense Review study in 2014, the study identified 186,800 as the optimal force size to address the forecast demands foreseen at that time. World events continue to challenge the assumptions behind that forecast, both in terms of the world situation and capability requirements such as cyber and special operations, and we are reassessing our projected future requirements. As shown by our operations in 2015, your Marine Corps continues to be in high demand from our regional COCOMs. With our stabilization at an end strength of 182,000 we will continue to satisfy many but not all of those demands. That demand signal has not substantially abated due to the emergence of threats in new forms, gradually increasing the strain on our forces.

Along with adequate resourcing, our forces require time to conduct training and maintain their equipment between deployments. We use the term "deployment to dwell" (D2D) to capture the ratio of time Marines and units spend deployed as opposed to resetting for their subsequent deployment. Our ideal D2D ratio is 1:3, which means a deployment of 7 months is followed by 21 months of time at home station. That home station time is required for the unit to conduct personnel turnover, equipment reset and maintenance, and complete a comprehensive individual, collective, and unit training program across all their mission essential tasks (METs) prior to deploying again. Today this timeline is challenged by the increased maintenance requirements of aging equipment, shortages in the availability of ships with which to conduct amphibious training, ensuring personnel fills are in place, and other factors to include school seats, training range availability and even weather.

Those challenges are compounded by the demands on today's force, which have many of our units and capabilities deploying with a 1:2 D2D ratio, which translates to one third less home station training time than we would prefer. In several fields, we are currently operating in excess of a 1:2 ratio for entire units or individuals with critical skills. For example, our infantry regimental headquarters elements are currently providing command and control for our SPMAGTFs in Africa and Central Command, which is limiting their ability to train to other core METs in major conventional operations. While we may be able to develop internal solutions to partially mitigate that concern, there are other challenges that belie simple solutions. Whereas a few years ago we were focused on our explosive ordnance disposal, engineering, and unmanned aerial vehicle units, today our critical ground force concerns are for our communications,

intelligence, and signals intelligence battalions. All of our intelligence and communications battalions and one of our signals intelligence battalions would be unable to execute their full wartime mission requirements if called upon today. While other supporting enablers have scaled down their deployments as the overall size of our deployed units decreased, those three areas in particular are facing similar requirements as in the past in support of our forward deployed crisis response forces, along with increased demands for "reach back" support that further inhibits their abilities to train and reset while at home station. Those units require specialized equipment and highly skilled, highly trained individuals, making them difficult to quickly scale up.

Our aviation community also has elements being stressed by a tempo in excess of a 1:2 D2D ratio including all of our fixed wing and tiltrotor aircraft, while our attack helicopters are being recapitalized and heavy lift helicopters reset as they cope with shortfalls in ready basic aircraft (RBA). Approximately 80% of our aviation units lack the minimum number of RBA for training, and we are also short ready aircraft for potential wartime requirements. We are working hard with the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV), the Department of the Navy, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to find solutions to the RBA issue. Our tactical fighter and attack squadrons (TACAIR), F/A-18 A-D Hornets and AV-8B Harriers, are suffering from shortages in aircraft availability due to increased wear on aging aircraft and modernization delays. The average age of our TACAIR fleet is over 22 years, over two times the average age of the corresponding Navy TACAIR fleet. The impact of reduced funding levels on our depot throughput and the 2013 furloughs of highly skilled artisans resonates today and will continue to resonate into the future. We have increased depot throughput by 44% in FY2015 compared to 2014, returning to pre-sequestration levels. We anticipate continuing to increase depot productivity, but will not fully recover our F/A-18 A-D model backlog before 2019. We have temporarily reduced the aircraft requirement for our F-18 squadrons from 12 to 10 to allow home station squadrons greater training opportunities. For the same reasons, we have temporarily reduced our CH-53E squadrons from 16 to 12 aircraft and Harrier squadrons from 16 to 14. We are essentially increasing risk in one area (forward today in support of COCOMs) to mitigate risk in another (allow home station training for future readiness).

Our tiltrotor MV-22 Ospreys, deployed in conjunction with KC-130J aerial refueling aircraft, have provided previously unthinkable reach and flexibility to our combatant commanders.

Deployment demands have also brought both communities to D2D ratios in excess of 1:2, which is unsustainable in the long term. This is compounded as we continue to field both aircraft. In our Global Force Management allocation proposal for fiscal year 2017, we will reduce the number of those aircraft assigned to two SPMAGTFs in order to move these communities closer to a sustainable path. Our combatant commanders can mitigate this reduction to some degree with judicious use of similar assets from our MEUs when available, but there will be a loss in capacity forward. As we continue to contend with constant or increasing demand, every reduction in resources will force further difficult decisions by COCOMs and sourcing MEF alike.

Personnel

The success of our Marine Corps, the center of our readiness, and our ability to respond to the requests of the combatant commanders and demands of our nation's leaders rests on the high quality, character, and capabilities of our individual Marines. Those Marines are the product of a time-tested yet continuously assessed process of recruiting, transformation at our Recruit Depots, and subsequent military occupational specialty training that provides our units with the trained Marines they need to prepare for their collective missions. Since the establishment of the All-Volunteer Force over 40 years ago through the millennial generation of today, we have successfully recruited and retained the high caliber American men and women we need to operate effectively on today's battlefields. The steadily increasing quality of our recruits is testimony to the solid foundation of our recruiting system. The continual success of our tactical units on the battlefield over the past 14 years validates our transformation and training processes.

Despite our continued successes, we cannot take future success in these areas for granted and must continue to seek ways to maintain and improve the high quality people who make up today's Marine Corps. Some of our most stressed career fields with the longest training timelines, including aviators, intelligence, communications, and cyber personnel are also potentially in high demand in the civilian sector. We most closely track our ability to retain our highly qualified Marines in these areas. Our drawdown from the congressionally approved temporary increase in end strength to 202,000 in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF) to our current force of 184,000 resulted in increased competition for retention, but that drawdown will reach its conclusion at 182,000 Marines this year. We are now

re-emphasizing and re-energizing our leadership's attention on retention to ensure that we continue to retain the requisite numbers of the very best Marines capable of fulfilling our leadership and operational needs.

We also continue to be challenged to ensure we have the correct small unit leaders with the right grade, experience, technical skills, and leadership qualifications associated with their billets. As I stated last year, our inventory and assignment policies of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) has not been meeting our force structure requirements. Our efforts to correctly draw down end-strength have included right-sizing our NCO ranks to provide our Marines the small unit leadership they deserve and which our Corps needs. Concurrent with that right-sizing, we have implemented a Squad Leader Development Program (SLDP) in the infantry, our largest occupational field, to continue to improve the tactical proficiency, the technical skills, and the leadership qualifications of those NCOs. We are studying ways to broaden that program into other career fields, including a deliberate effort to identify and map all of our critical enlisted leader billets. We have also identified approximately 500 non-structured billets for elimination, allowing us to return some experienced Marines to assignments where their leadership will have a greater impact. We will execute these programs in tandem with our continuing efforts to improve the personnel stability and cohesion in our non-deployed units, which our current operating tempo renders difficult. Our goal continues to be ensuring that all units have the right personnel, leadership, and cohesion in place at the right time to conduct the collective and unit training they need to succeed in the face of any mission and to overcome any challenge.

We are also monitoring the implementation of two significant personnel reforms for still undetermined impacts and potential challenges to our personnel readiness. We are already moving ahead with the Secretary of Defense's order of 3 Dec 2015 to implement full integration of all qualified Marines, regardless of gender, into all military occupational specialties (MOSs) and units. Over the past three years we have dedicated significant resources to preparing for the implementation of this order, including our Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCE-ITF) research, training female volunteers at the entry level military occupational specialty (MOS) producing schools for the now open fields, and opening other previously restricted MOSs and units. These lines of effort (LOEs) have provided us with the data we needed to codify

operationally relevant, occupationally specific standards that were previously informal, unclear, or outdated. This will help improve the overall readiness of all of our forces going forward. We have already awarded the appropriate Additional MOSs (AMOS) to all of the exceptional volunteers from our research efforts, and encouraged them to consider applying to move into those combat arms fields as their primary MOS (PMOS). We currently have female officers training in the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course for service in that community, and our Recruiting Command is contacting all of the women in our Delayed Entry Program pool to inform them of their expanded opportunities. As we move forward with our Marine Corps Integration Implementation Plan (MCIIP), we will closely monitor the process and progress to determine the impact on first, our combat effectiveness; second, on the health and welfare of our individual Marines; and third, on our ability to manage and best utilize the talents of all the Marines in our force. These are the three lenses through which we have assessed all of our efforts and recommendations over the past 2-3 years. I continue to have concerns in all three areas, but am confident that our assessment and subsequent adjustments during implementation will help us find the best way forward for our Marines, the Marine Corps, and the nation as we execute these changes.

The Department of Defense is also in the midst of implementing, preparing for, or studying multiple other personnel reforms that may have significant but as yet undetermined impacts on our ability to afford, recruit, and retain the highest quality force. Many of these are outlined in the Force of the Future Initiative (FotFI). The Department's FotFI touches on nearly all aspects of military and civilian personnel systems. In many cases the changes driven by this initiative are welcome, often codifying what has been existing service practices. In select other cases we continue to advocate for service flexibility from any overly prescriptive policies or targets which may dilute the authorities and flexibility the Service Chiefs need to execute their Title 10 responsibilities and in particular reduce our availability of ready and trained personnel. We are preparing to educate our current force on the retirement program changes enacted into law by Congress last year and assess the long term consequences of those changes both fiscally and on our personnel. Ideally those changes will be part of a wider program of reforms including compensation, healthcare, and retirement which collectively ensure we have an adequate, comprehensive, and attractive plan for our force. Finally, the Goldwater-Nichols examination being undertaken by the Congress and the Department includes a look at our joint training,

education, assignment, and availability of our mid-grade and senior officers. We must make haste slowly in all these areas to ensure that our attempts to continually improve upon our current, although sometimes imperfect system do not disrupt a system that has in fact been exceptionally successful since 1986 at improving jointness, integration, and warfighting capability including over fourteen years of continuous combat.

Infrastructure Sustainment

Our installations and infrastructure are the platforms upon which and from which our Marines and units live, train, launch, and recover. They are the platforms that generate our readiness. The Marine Corps' installations provide the capability and capacity we need to support the force. This includes our two depot maintenance facilities, which provide responsive and scalable depot maintenance support. Both depot sites, which were right-sized in 2014, have been vital to our ongoing equipment reset activities based on our past force and equipment reductions in Iraq and Afghanistan. To date the Marine Corps has reset 78% of its ground equipment with 50% returned to our operating forces. We anticipate the depot sites will continue to play vital roles for the Marine Corps even after our expected completion of our current reset efforts in 2019. As we are resetting, we are also conducting a Corps-wide equipment review to right-size and reposition our equipment sets for today's environment as well as future challenges. This includes careful examination of items, such as critical communications equipment, that are having the most significant impacts on our readiness. We have already identified several critical items and components and have requests to address them in our FY2017 budget.

The Marine Corps has infrastructure and facilities worldwide that train, house, and provide quality of life for our Marines and their families. These facilities must be appropriately maintained to prevent degradation of their ability to support our force and its readiness. We are executing our Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (FSRM) initiative, the single most important investment in facilities readiness to support training, operations, and quality of life. We are accepting risk by programming at 74% of the funding level based on the Office of the Secretary of Defense Facilities Sustainment Model. We are focused on meeting the essential habitability, safety, and quality of life requirements while deferring all other activities, to include the demolition of outdated facilities that are no longer needed but continue to incur safety driven maintenance costs. Our FY2017 military construction (MILCON) funding proposal decreases by

$330 million from FY2016 enacted levels. This FY2017 program enables continued progress towards our long term re-alignment in the Pacific, including projects necessary to introducing vital new warfighting capabilities into the region such as the F-35B. We will require future construction funding increases as some of these projects mature, such as on Guam, and to activate additional combat staging locations (CSLs) from which to support forward deployed forces. In addition to these future requirements, the reductions to military construction of the past two years and continuing shortfalls in sustainment funding put us at risk of reversing hard-earned gains in our infrastructure status (with thanks to Congress for their support of our MILCON for the past 5-10 years) as our new construction most likely ages prematurely for lack of maintenance. Left unchecked, this degradation of our infrastructure can be expected to have negative long-term impacts not only on quality of life, but also on our support to training, operations, logistics, and ultimately readiness.

Modernization

We are continuing to press modernization in the most essential areas to ensure the Marine Corps remains ready and relevant in the face of more capable future enemies. We must balance the cost of those efforts against our current readiness. Our first operational Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Squadron, VMFA 121, declared its initial operating capability (IOC) in 2015, equipped with state of the art technology in our F-35Bs. After the second squadron becomes operational in 2016, VMFA 121 will relocate to Iwakuni, Japan in FY2017. From there they will operate with the US Air Force and our regional allies ashore and at sea with our Navy partners. While we are still working to achieve the full operating capabilities (FOC) of these aircraft, even at their IOC status our F-35B squadrons are prepared to conduct combat missions and are much more capable than the 3rd and 4th generation aircraft they are replacing. The F-35B will have a transformational impact on Marine Corps doctrine, providing 5th generation capabilities to support sea control operations (SCO) with the Navy and enable joint forcible entry operations (JFEO) by the MAGTF even in the most contested environments. We look forward to the stand-up of our first F-35C squadron, which will further enhance the capabilities of our Navy-Marine Corps team and our tactical aviation integration (TAI) plan.

Our other major aviation modernization program is the CH-53K Heavy Lift Replacement, which will be critical to maintaining the battlefield mobility of our force, with nearly triple the

lift ability of the aircraft it is replacing. We anticipate our first detachment achieving IOC in FY2019 and the full 200 aircraft delivery being complete by 2029. It will be complemented within our Ground Combat Tactical Vehicle Strategy (GCTVS) by the fielding of 5,500 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTV) with IOC in FY2019 and FOC by FY2022. We will bridge the sea and land with the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) 1.1, using this year to test sixteen each of two down selected models against each other to ensure we receive the best possible capability even as we look forward to developing the requirements for ACV 1.2. The development of ACV 1.2 is essential to the nationally unique ship to shore power projection capability that your Marine Corps provides. We are also continuing with numerous other fiscally smaller programs that are no less vital to our warfighting capability such as the Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar (G/ATOR) and command and control systems such as Networking on the Move (NotM). Programs such as these will help us continue to improve our battlefield awareness and the dissemination of information to small and dispersed tactical units to maximize their effectiveness. Given evolving cyber threats, we also assess an as yet unidentified requirement to properly encrypt all these command and control systems, be they radio, radar, airborne, or ground mobile.

We are balancing the cost of our modernization efforts in those essential areas against our current readiness by extending and refreshing some of our legacy systems. Even as we look to modernize by replacing the F/A-18, AV-8B, and CH-53E with the F-35B/C and CH-53K, we are also working to refresh our current aircraft fleets to recover and maintain readiness and capability during the transitions. We have already completed independent readiness reviews (IRR) of our AV-8B Harrier and CH-53E Sea Stallion fleets, are in the midst a review of our MV-22 Osprey fleet, and will next examine our AH-1Z Cobra/UH-1Y Huey squadrons and aircraft to ensure we restore and maximize the potential readiness of our entire aviation community. With our ground equipment, we are in the midst of a survivability upgrade (SU) to our existing Assault Amphibian Vehicles (AAVs) to maintain essential ship to shore power projection capability and capacity while we work to get the ACV right and fielded. We are accepting much greater risk with our Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs) now with an average age of 33 years, M1A1 tanks with an average age of 26 years, and other critical warfighting assets at this time. While we judge these risks to be at acceptable levels today, they are yet more examples of the trade-offs we are required to make due to fiscal reductions that accompany

operational demand increases. As we have stated before, there remains the potential for unacceptable increases in risk associated with any additional resource reductions or erroneous assumptions, operational or fiscal.

Naval and Joint Force Integration

Amphibious warships and their embarked MAGTFs are the center pieces of the Navy and Marine Corps' time tested and proven forward presence, forcible-entry, and sea-basing capabilities in support of assurance, deterrence, and contingency operations. Although our Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (SPMAGTFs) have been making essential contributions to our COCOMs, their operations have been shore based due to the inadequate size of our amphibious fleet. This represents a compromise of our preferred amphibious basing, with its sovereign launch and recovery status, and of our rich heritage and strong partnership with the United States Navy. Although the SPMAGTFs have been sought after and very successful they are not always the optimal method of employment of our forces. They may require greater resource capacity to produce the same warfighting and power projection capabilities as we achieve operating from the sea.

The availability of amphibious shipping remains paramount to readiness and responsiveness. The nation's amphibious warship requirement remains at a minimum of 38 ships to support a two Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) assault echelon (AE). As the Commandant and Chief of Naval Operations have testified in past years, the number of vessels required to meet the steady-state demands of our combatant commanders exceeds 50 vessels. The current inventory of 30 vessels falls short of the requirement by both measures, and that shortfall is aggravated by recurrent maintenance challenges in the aging amphibious fleet. The current and enduring gap of amphibious warships to requirements inhibits ours and the Navy's ability to train to our full capabilities, inhibits our shared ability to respond to an emergent crisis, and increases the strain on our current readiness.

The Marine Corps whole-heartedly supports the Navy's current build back to 34 L-Class ships by FY22, including the 12th LPD-17 class vessel this Congress has provided, the LHA-8, and the 11 ship LX(R) program based on the LPD-17 hull form. The Marine Corps would obviously prefer to reach at least the minimum requirement of 38 platforms as soon as feasible,

but we understand the Navy's difficult task in balancing amphibious readiness with many other national requirements. We agree that 34 ships, with the appropriate level of availability and surge ability, is a compromise that continues to assume an acceptable level of risk for a brief period. This risk may be seriously exacerbated if the Department of the Navy (DON) continues to be obligated to fund the Ohio Class submarine replacement from within their already pressurized total obligation authority (TOA). We also support our continued DON effort to develop and experiment with alternative platforms including the newly designated "E Class" ships. The value of the Mobile Landing Platform, now designated the Expeditionary Mobile Base (ESB), as an afloat forward staging base (AFSB) is already clear. Our combatant commanders are demanding their employment as fast as they are being fielded. The creative use of these and other existing platforms, particularly on exercises and in experiments, will enhance our capacity for operations in lower threat environments. They may provide enabling support for the operation of our amphibious warships and landing force in contested scenarios. The modernization of our ship to shore connectors (SSCs) is equally vital to this effort, including the programmed replacement of the Landing Craft Air Cushioned (LCAC) and Landing Craft Utility (LCU) platforms. Both the LCAC and LCU successor programs should provide affordable replacements for those aging craft with incremental but much needed increases in capability. These investments combined with our modernization efforts such as the fielding of the F-35B will enable a greater contribution of the Marine Corps to our overall maritime operations, particularly for forcible entry.

While retaining dominance in our traditional domains, the Navy and Marine Corps must also continue to move forward with integration into the total Joint Force as we enhance our capabilities across the entire and evolving five domain (5D) battlespace. We will begin by reinforcing our role as a naval expeditionary force that assures access for the Joint Force. While balancing our own resources, we must also ensure we remain ready to leverage and enable the capabilities of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Special Operations Forces. This includes continuing to develop information warfare (IW) and command and control (C2) capabilities which are required to operate effectively against increasingly sophisticated adversaries. Our Marine Cyber Mission Teams (CMTs) and Cyber Protection Teams (CPTs) are already engaged in real world operations supporting COCOM missions and enabling the functionality of our networks in the face of persistent threats. Their expertise has been sought more than once to

conduct defensive cyber operations in support of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff. By the end of FY2018, Marine Forces Cyber Command will have 13 Cyber Mission Force Teams with approximately 600 Marines, civilians, and contractors. As we continue to develop and assess our requirements in this area, we are challenged to balance them within our existing force structure and resourcing. We must ensure our networks are configured to provide world-wide access in garrison or forward, and are deployable, digitally interoperable, and able to support rapid advancements in technology and combat capabilities. As our adversaries and potential adversaries continue to make advances in the cyber domain, we must ensure Marine Corps Cyber Forces are ready to face and respond to those threats with cutting edge capabilities as part of US Cyber Command. This may require new policies for programmatic flexibility in manning, training, and equipping as we contend with this rapidly changing technological environment.

Concept Development and Experimentation

As we prepare to combat our foes in these new domains and focus on building our maritime based operational capability, we will continue to expand upon a robust program of experimentation embedded within our training and exercise program to push innovation and validate new ideas. While we have been focused and operationally committed to the conflicts of the past decade, our enemies and competitors have been advancing their own capabilities - technically, tactically, organizationally, and operationally. In some cases they have developed new capabilities which now equal or exceed our own. Global instability has also increased in the past few years and the threats to our national interests have evolved. We are confident that the future fight may not be what we have experienced in the past, but will involve rapidly changing and evolving technologies, which will force us to be more agile, flexible, and adaptive. We must continue to push forward and explore new warfighting and operating concepts as we must be prepared for the future fight on the distributed and lethal battlefields of 2025. We must also therefore balance our investment and commitment to experimentation against our current readiness. This creates yet another area of potential risk.

The force we need to succeed against the threats of 2025 will not be a mirror of today's Marine Corps. We expect those threats will require significant and yet unknown adjustments in manpower, training, and equipment. In order to develop the force to operate in new domains and

across the electromagnetic spectrum, we may need to either grow or to rebalance our manpower to ensure we are gaining the capability and capacity we need in new areas while continuing to improve our existing edge. That force may also require command and control, reach back, and lift capabilities that exceed our current capacities. This summer during the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, we will conduct an experiment employing the distributed operations (DO) concept, itself developed and refined through repeated experimentation, in an anti-access area denial (A2AD) environment. We will project a lethal conventional force integrating unmanned technologies from the sea base against objectives deep ashore, then sustain that force for continuous operations. That same unit will continue to experiment with its organization throughout its scheduled FY17 deployment to the Western Pacific. The results gleaned from these and subsequent experiments will be vital as we shape the design of future force 2025 to ensure we are prepared for the next generation of threats.

Conclusion

On behalf of all of our Marines, Sailors, and their families, I thank the Congress and this subcommittee for affording us the opportunity to discuss some of the key challenges faced by our Marine Corps today and providing us the support and resources to win on the battlefield of the future as well as of today. With your continued support, we will strive to carefully and correctly balance readiness with risk in today's force and the force of tomorrow, and to articulate what we require to guarantee our warfighting capability and capacity as we improve our balance across all five pillars of readiness today and into the future. We will continue to answer the nation's call to arms, meet the needs of the Combatant Commanders and national leaders who depend on us, and be prepared to respond to any crisis or contingency that may arise. Your Marine Corps will continue to do as the 82nd and 114th Congress directed: "to be the most ready when the nation is least ready."