

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY  
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

STATEMENT BY

GENERAL ROBERT B. NELLER

COMMANDANT

UNITE STATES MARINE CORPS

BEFORE THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

POSTURE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

1ST SESSION 115TH CONGRESS

JUNE 15, 2017

## **General Robert B. Neller**

General Robert B. Neller is the 37th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Commander, Marine Forces Command from July 2014 to September 2015 and Commander, Marine Forces Central Command from September 2012 to June 2014.

A native of East Lansing, Michigan, General Neller graduated from the University of Virginia and was commissioned in 1975. He has served as an infantry officer at all levels, including command of Marine Security Force Company Panama during Operations JUST CAUSE and PROMOTE LIBERTY; 3d Light Armored Infantry Battalion during Operation RESTORE HOPE; 6th Marine Regiment; and 3d Marine Division.

General Neller also served as Deputy Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (05-07); Assistant Division Commander for 1st and 2d Marine Divisions; and President of Marine Corps University.

His Joint assignments include service in the Policy Division of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Casteau, Belgium, and as the Director of Operations (J-3) of the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C.

General Neller is a graduate of the Armor Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, NATO Defense College, and the Armed Forces Staff College. He holds a master's degree in Human Resource Management from Pepperdine University.

## **The Commandant's Posture of the United States Marine Corps President's Budget 2018**

### ***Preface***

Your Marine Corps remains *the* Nation's Expeditionary Force-in-Readiness, able to answer the Nation's call in any clime and place. In meeting that mandate, Marines are forward-deployed and forward-engaged responding to crises around the world – managing instability, building partner capacity, strengthening allies, projecting influence – meeting the requirements of our Geographic Combatant Commanders. At home, our recruiters are working hand-in-hand with local communities, recruiting the best and brightest Americans our Nation has to offer and consistently achieving our recruiting goals. We appreciate the recent passage of the fiscal year 2017 funding. This is a down payment to improve our readiness and move us forward to recapitalize and modernize the force. That said, the fiscal instability of the past eight years and the continued reality of continued budgetary uncertainty disrupt our ability to program long term activities and directly challenge our efforts to improve current and future readiness. To continue to meet operational commitments and maintain a ready force, your Marine Corps requires fiscal stability.

Both in training and operationally, our Marines are busy; the current deployment tempo is on par with the height of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While supporting requirements abroad, we also continue to invest time and energy in developing the Marine Corps Operating Concept and its supporting Marine Corps Force 2025 initiative. The changes within these institutional efforts will help us mitigate against an increasingly volatile operating environment. Our potential adversaries continue to advance their military capabilities and build capacity; because of their advances in technology and information use, we must adapt both the capabilities we possess and the thought processes we bring to the battlefield. As we look forward, our priorities for this year remain: readiness recovery,

implementation of the Force 2025 initiative, and the acceleration of our modernization initiatives to build a more lethal 5th Generation Marine Corps.

### *Your Marines*

In the past year, your Marines demonstrated the relevance of expeditionary naval forces by executing approximately 20 amphibious operations, 200 operations, and 70 major exercises. A strong demand remains for Marines and tailored Marine Air-Ground Task Forces, driving an aggressive operational tempo. Marines in the operating forces are averaging a two-to-one deployment-to-dwell ratio, typically deploying for six months, then spending 12 months or less at home station before deploying again.

Our Nation has Marines on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria today, and our commitment is growing. We have increased the number of Marine advisors in Afghanistan beyond our partnership with the Republic of Georgia's Liaison Teams. In April, we deployed Marines as part of Task Force Southwest training and advising the Afghan National Army. Additionally, Marine tactical aviation squadrons are supporting operations in Syria, Iraq, and Libya from forward-deployed locations afloat and ashore.

Our Navy and Marine Corps Teams continue to perform as a flexible, agile, and responsive maritime force. In 2016, the Marine Corps deployed more than 11,000 Marines aboard Navy warships. This past year, five separate MEUs supported every Geographic Combatant Commander, participating in exercises and executing major operations. The 31st MEU, our Forward Deployed Naval Force in the Pacific, performed Foreign Disaster Relief (FDR) operations in Kumamoto, Japan, after a 6.5 magnitude earthquake and 7.0 aftershock struck in April.

Our Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (SPMAGTF) remain engaged. Our SPMAGTF assigned to USCENTCOM provides dedicated Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) support to Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, while simultaneously delivering a flexible force for crisis and contingency response. Those Marines continue to work with the 1st and 7th Iraqi Army Divisions advising and assisting in the fight against ISIL. In U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), our SPMAGTF stands ready to support embassies through reinforcement, evacuation, and operations as required. Last July, Marines deployed to reinforce the U.S. Embassy in South Sudan and have remained, ensuring State Department personnel are able to provide critical support to the people of South Sudan. SPMAGTF-Southern Command (SPMAGTF-SC) deployed for a second time to Latin America, primarily focusing on Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) and training in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize. At the request of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Marines from SPMAGTF-SC provided FDR to more than 750,000 Haitians in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. SPMAGTF-SC were the first Marines on scene, arriving within 48 hours of notification, flying more than 250 flight hours, and distributing 290 tons of relief supplies over the course of 12 days.

Marine Corps activities in the Pacific are led by Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, with a forward-stationed Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), III MEF, headquartered in Okinawa, Japan. III MEF contributes to regional stability through persistent presence. Marines remain the Pacific Command's (PACOM) forward-deployed and forward-stationed force of choice for crisis response. The Nation has 22,900 Marines west of the International Date Line, operating within the Asia-Pacific Theater. This past January, the first operational F-35B squadron deployed to Japan, bringing extensive capabilities while simultaneously augmenting operational forces in the area. The Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D), a six month unit rotation, based in

Australia's Robertson Barracks, is in its fifth year of operation. More than 1,000 Marines participated last year, taking part in three major exercises over the course of seven months. This April, MRF-D returned to Australia with MV-22 Ospreys. Of note, this was the first ever Trans-Pacific flight by III MEF MV-22 Ospreys, displaying the operational reach these aircraft bring to the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps maintains a vital relationship with the State Department, providing security at our Embassies and Consulates. Today, Marines are routinely serving at 176 Embassies and Consulates in 146 countries around the globe. Marine Security Augmentation Unit (MSAU) teams deployed 62 times last year at the request of the State Department, executing 19 Embassy/Consulate and 43 VIP (POTUS/VPOTUS/SECSTATE) security missions.

Last year, the Marine Corps, in conjunction with Combatant Commanders and the Marine Forces Component Commands, conducted more than 160 security cooperation activities, including exercises, training events, subject matter expert exchanges, formal education key leader engagements, and service staff talks. The relationships we forge with allies assure them of our commitment, deter adversaries, build partner capacity, and set conditions to surge and aggregate with a Joint, Coalition, or Special Operations force for major theater combat operations. Partnering also trains our Marines for environments in which we are likely to operate. Your support has allowed the Marine Corps to operate globally and reap the benefits of those international relationships.

### ***Marine Corps Operating Concept and Force 2025***

The challenges of the future operating environment demand that our Nation maintain a force-in-readiness, capable of global response. In the strategic landscape, we find that nations compete fiercely for natural resources, extremist groups employ violence to achieve nefarious ends, cyber-attacks are on the rise, and advanced weaponry and weapons of mass destruction continue to spread

across the world. Additionally, due to universal access to information, rapid advancement in robotics, and new weapons technologies, serious threats have emerged with increasing speed and lethality.

In the last year, we invested considerable time and energy formulating the Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) and its supporting Marine Corps Force 2025 initiative. These institutional efforts were spurred by a critical self-assessment that revealed the Marine Corps is not organized, trained, equipped, or postured to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving future operating environment. We arrived at this conclusion after a close examination of the current and future impacts of complex terrain, technology proliferation, information warfare, the battle of electro-magnetic signatures, and an increasingly non-permissive maritime domain on the Marine Corps. The MOC embraces our naval character, expeditionary mindset, and professional approach to constantly improve and build on our foundations of maneuver warfare and fight as a combined arms force. The challenges of the future will impact how we organize our Corps and ultimately fight and win our Nation's battles. This concept is a starting point addressing how we will design, develop, and field a future force. It reaffirms the importance of maneuver warfare and combined arms. In the past, we successfully conducted maneuver warfare employing combined arms from the air, land, and sea. Now, changes in the operating environment and adversary capabilities drive us to increase emphasis on maneuver in a cognitive sense, expanding our employment of combined arms to space and cyberspace.

Concurrent with our MOC design, we conducted extensive collaboration, war gaming, experimentation, and analysis to design a balanced MAGTF optimized for the future in an effort dubbed Marine Corps Force 2025. We continue to identify and, when able, acquire practical, affordable, and effective ways to protect our networks; practice information environment operations; configure capable tactical units; recruit, educate, and train leaders on multi-domain warfare; increase our long-range fires capability; develop reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance forces; leverage

automation and robotics to augment Marines; develop innovative logistics capabilities and systems; and further our warfighting capabilities within the littorals. The Marine Corps must modernize and change to deter conflict, compete and, when necessary, fight and win against our adversaries.

### *Manpower*

The center of gravity of the Marine Corps is its people, and the American people trust us with this precious resource – their sons and daughters. Our core values of honor, courage, and commitment are engrained in our culture. Marine leaders have a moral obligation to ensure the health and welfare of the Nation’s Marines from the day they commit to serve. We take this responsibility seriously and strive to maintain the trust and confidence of Congress and the American people. Taking care of Marines and their families is a key element of overall readiness, combat effectiveness, and warfighting.

Our comprehensive package of services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and their families – body, mind, and spirit. We continue to prioritize support through programs like: Force Fitness, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Suicide Prevention and Response, Behavioral Health, Wounded Warrior Regiment, Personal and Professional Development, and Transition Assistance. The Marine Corps remains focused on solutions to reduce destructive behaviors, particularly sexual assault, suicide, and hazing. We are dedicated to eradicating bullying, degrading, and abusive behavior committed online or in person. The abuse of alcohol is a known factor and contributor across the spectrum of force preservation issues and negatively impacts the readiness of our force. We have to minimize these destructive behaviors. We believe that preserving our commanders’ ability to lead in this area is a vital element to reaching this objective.

We appreciate the continued support from Congress, specifically the most recent end strength approval of 185,000 Marines. We will create the most lethal, capable, and ready 185,000 Marines our



resources will permit. That said, one continuing challenge is that the Marine Corps operating forces are currently averaging less than a one-to-two deployment-to-dwell ratio. This tempo is not sustainable as it does not provide options to train to our full mission sets and it puts unreasonable strain on our Marines and families. Ideally, we seek to be a one-to-three deployment-to-dwell force. A deliberate and measured capacity increase, reduction of our operational tasking, or a combination of the two, are solutions that would put us on the path to improve our deployment-to-dwell ratio. Our Marines want to deploy, serve our Nation, and protect our country from threats overseas. However, we owe our Marines and their families the appropriate deployment-to-dwell time to allow them to learn, re-focus, reflect on their most recent deployment, and train for the next deployment or contingency.

### ***Readiness***

Marines have a unique perspective on readiness. The Congressional intent for Marines 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 a force, we must remain ready to fight and win across the range of military operations within all warfighting domains. Fiscal reductions and budget instability has been the norm for the past eight years and has consequently eroded our readiness. As resources diminished, the Marine Corps protected near-term operational readiness of its deployed and next-to-deploy units to meet operational commitments; this has come at a compounded cost. Non-deployed units, our “ready bench,” can still deploy with minimal notice but, if required, would not be as ready or capable as necessary. More reliable funding and support of the annual budget request must be there if we are to improve our readiness and our ability to respond to crises.

A lack of amphibious warships, ship-to-shore connectors (SSC), and Mine Countermeasure capabilities (MCM) puts the Nation at a severe disadvantage. The Navy and Marine Corps team

requires 38 amphibious warships to support two Marine Expeditionary Brigades and to provide the Nation a forcible entry capability. Our current amphibious warships need updated, resilient and interoperable command and control systems. As a maritime Nation, we need to be fully capable of exploiting the sea as maneuver space in an age when the proliferation of anti-access weapons continues to increase. This includes the ability to operate freely in international waters and airspace. Thirty-eight amphibious warships offer us agility and resilience in an unpredictable and dangerous security environment. Along with these warships, the Navy and Marine Corps team requires SSC that are survivable and reliable. Our current Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) fleet averages 25 years of service and our Landing Craft Utility (LCU) attained Initial Operating Capability (IOC) in 1959 – three years prior to Senator Glenn orbiting the earth for the first time. MCM capabilities are continually underfunded. The Navy and Marine Corps team needs prudent and consistent funding to rectify these issues through multi-year procurement and block-buy of amphibious warships, SSC, and MCM.

Marine Aviation is in the midst of a focused readiness recovery effort. We have developed an extensive plan to recover readiness across every Type/Model/Series in the current legacy inventory, all while we continue to procure new aircraft. We are realizing steady improvements in aviation readiness, but the plan requires sustained funding, parts and supply support, flight operations, and time. Each T/M/S requires attention and action in specific areas: maintenance, supply, depot backlog, and in-service repairs.

The F-35 Lighting II is more than just the next fighter, it brings unprecedented low observable technology, modern weaponry, and electronic warfare capability to the Navy and Marine Corps team. Delivering this transformational capability to our front-line forces as soon as possible remains a priority. The accelerated procurement of this aircraft is essential as our legacy fleet of AV-8B, F/A-18,

and EA-6B aircraft are rapidly approaching end of service life. Though more expensive than these legacy aircraft, the capabilities we receive in return for our cost share in the joint program make it a wise investment. We are aggressively seeking ways to reduce operations, maintenance, and sustainment costs for this program. This aircraft is currently demonstrating its ability to support the MAGTF and is expanding the capabilities of Marine Aviation today.

The CH-53E is another example of an aircraft that needs to be replaced – not extended – as this is the most cost effective solution. Entering service in 1981, the out-of-production CH-53E Super Stallion is 55 aircraft short of the required inventory and cannot meet the lift needs of today’s Marine Corps. Its replacement, the CH-53K, costs approximately 30% more, but provides three times the lift capability under the same conditions, and is the only maritime, heavy-lift helicopter capable of supporting current and future warfighting concepts. The CH-53K is capable of supporting 100% of the MAGTF’s lift requirements for approximately the same projected operating and support (O&S) cost of the legacy CH-53E. The CH-53K will provide increased range, payload, interoperability, and survivability.

The Marine Corps is executing a post-combat reset strategy to reconstitute and increase readiness of our ground equipment. We have reset 92% of our ground equipment, with 65% returned to the Operating Forces and our strategic equipment programs. Our war reserve includes geographically prepositioned combat equipment, located both afloat and ashore. We remain focused on this recovery effort and appreciate your support. That said, our ground equipment is old. Our amphibious assault vehicles were fielded in the 1970s, with many of our other ground systems fielded in the 1980s. Much like our aviation assets, our ground systems must be procured and fielded to our Marines in a faster manner, at lower operating costs and improved capability.

Marine Corps bases and stations support Marines and their families and serve as training, sustainment, and deployment platforms. They provide the capability and capacity to support the force and are integral to combat training. To maintain near-term unit readiness, we have accepted risk in facilities sustainment. While prioritizing deployed readiness, our infrastructure and facilities continue to decline. Taking risk in Facility Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) requirements has resulted in the degradation of our infrastructure, creating increased long-term costs. FSRM is currently funded only to meet the most urgent life, safety, and health issues. Improving the current state of our facilities is the single most important investment to support training, operations, and quality of life. In addition to FSRM, we require investment in military construction to support the fielding of new platforms; facilities necessary to meet improved training standards and operational readiness enhancements; replacement of inadequate facilities; improvement of our safety and security posture, and relocation of forces.

To address these challenges, we have developed an Infrastructure Reset Strategy (IRS). Designed to improve infrastructure lifecycle management and ensure infrastructure investments are aligned with Marine Corps capability-based requirements, IRS supports the warfighting mission and contributes directly to current and future force readiness. Additionally, under this strategy, we will sustain infrastructure and installations as capable, resilient, right-sized platforms to generate force readiness and project combat power across the range of military operations. The Marine Corps service infrastructure capacity is about right; however, the IRS does address reducing excess and aging infrastructure to improve readiness and stability. The Marine Corps supports a Department of Defense request for authorization to conduct a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round in 2021 based on the needs of other services, and to reinforce efforts planned through our IRS to optimize facilities posture to support increased readiness.

Readiness is not just about equipment supply and maintenance, but also the quality and challenging nature of our training through the mental, spiritual, and physical readiness of Marines and Sailors across the force. Readiness reflects through an organizational attitude and confidence, knowing that it can respond to and win in any crisis because it has been properly organized, led, trained, and equipped.

### ***Modernization***

History has not been kind to militaries that fail to evolve, and the global change we are witnessing is rapid and dramatic. Your Marine Corps must be manned, modernized, and ready to meet the demands of a future operating environment as defined by our National Military Strategy. The development, procurement, and fielding of a 5th Generation Fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, is just one aspect of our modernization efforts. We are modernizing our entire aviation force, increasing the lethality of our infantry, and ensuring our combat support and logistics are the most modern and capable. The result we aim to achieve is a Marine Corps that is the most advanced and ready – a *5th Generation Marine Corps*. Capable of dominating the battlefield in all five domains – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace – a 5th Generation Marine Corps will use information, an integral part of each domain that must be leveraged, as the thread to connect them. This requires transforming MAGTF command and control capabilities through a unified networked environment that is ready, responsive, and resilient. The 5th Generation Marine Corps is a modernized force required to meet and prevail against any adversary on the multi-domain battlefield of the future.

The Marine Corps must progress to stay ahead of the current security environment while mitigating future conflict or face becoming a force unable to deter and defeat future adversaries. Budget cuts since the Department of the Navy top line peaked in 2008, coupled with fiscal uncertainty,

forced us to utilize limited resources to ensure the readiness of deployed forces and sacrifice end strength, home station readiness, infrastructure sustainment, and quality of life programs, as well as delay critical modernization. We need to modernize rapidly, to replace “old iron” with new, reliable, sustainable, and affordable equipment across the MAGTF. We need the continued support of Congress to increase the production rate of our acquisition programs while funding future modernization initiatives. Further, 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. Marines will continue working to do what we do today better than ever, while exploring ways these tasks might be done differently. The Marine Corps will persist in developing and evolving the MAGTF through innovation and experimentation, ensuring it is able to operate in all domains of conflict.

The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab leads our experimentation effort to capitalize on existing and emerging technologies and MAGTF level exercises. In conjunction with our coalition partners, the Navy and Marine Corps team has experimented with dispersed sea-based SPMAAGTFs; integrated MAGTFs in heavily defended littoral environments; incorporated emerging digital technologies with aviation platforms and our ground forces; and conducted naval integration with interoperable Special Operations Forces. We will continue to emphasize experimentation and innovation during our exercises as a way to inform the development of distributed doctrine and future operating concepts. Exercises serve as a test bed for experimentation and innovation as we search for faster, cheaper, and smarter acquisition processes and programs. Expect the Marine Corps to continue pursuing technologies that enhance our warfighting capabilities such as unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and robotics, artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing, and autonomous technologies that provide

tactical and operational advantage. We have seen success in some of these initiatives and require consistent funding to better plan our modernization efforts.

Effective planning produces unit cohesion and leadership in our operating forces, and financial predictability for our modernization programs. 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. Modernization is critical to our future readiness.

### ***Our Challenges and Solutions***

Our most immediate challenge is resolving the significant readiness issues that have grown over the past 15 years. Collectively, fiscal inconsistency, spending cuts, and accumulating wear and tear after years of combat operations have depleted our readiness and delayed planned recapitalization and modernization efforts. Though our forward deployed forces are “full up” and ready for whatever comes their way, our “bench” has become shallow – particularly for aviation. We also lack sufficient amphibious lift. Our minimum requirement is 38 amphibious warships and we presently stand at 31, getting to 34 within the current Future Years Defense Plan. Due to this shortage, we have deployed two ground-based SPMAGTFs that have added deployment tempo to the Force.

Over the past year, the Marine Corps dedicated nearly every operational MV-22 Osprey squadron to source its global commitments, and the increased utilization rates on these airframes affect the longevity of their service life. To reduce operational tempo and continue to meet operational commitments, we cut MV-22 and KC-130J aircraft from our SPMAGTFs in CENTCOM and AFRICOM. Additionally, F/A-18 readiness challenges necessitated a reduction of the number of F/A-18 aircraft assigned to squadrons from 12 to 10. Exacerbating our concerns in aviation is a potential exodus of seasoned pilots and maintenance personnel to the commercial airline industry. We ask for

your support for the fiscal resources we have requested to retain the talent in which we have invested. With the continued support of Congress, Marine Aviation will recover its readiness by recapitalizing our aging fleet, while at the same time accelerating the procurement of new aircraft to meet our future needs and support our ground forces.

### ***Conclusion***

The unpredictability of the security environment and unknown future facing our Nation today reaffirms the wisdom of the 82nd Congress – the vital need of a strong force-in-readiness. Marines are honored to serve in this role. We do not want to enter a fair fight; therefore, we must build a 5th Generation Marine Corps that has no peer on the battlefield. As we continue to innovate, leverage technology, and invest in new systems, our current plan includes advanced infantry weapons, the rapid procurement of the Amphibious Combat Vehicle and Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, long-range precision fires, and counter-UAS capabilities. It also increases fielding rates of the F-35B and C, continues the CH-53K procurement, begins research and development of a Group 4/5 unmanned aerial system capable of being sea-based, and continues to build manned-unmanned teaming capabilities. The plan as described depicts a roadmap to rebuild and modernize America’s Marine Corps. With the continued support of Congress in addressing present challenges and shortfalls, we will be better postured to fight and win our Nation’s battles now and into the future. The American people expect and deserve nothing less from their Marine Corps.