

**STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JOHN M. PAXTON, JR.
ASSISTANT COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
READINESS
10 APRIL 2014**

Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Bordallo, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the current state of Marine Corps readiness and our Fiscal Year 2015 budget request for operations and maintenance. We appreciate Congressional support for the readiness of our force.

Today, the Marine Corps, as it has since 1775, remains the Nation's crisis response force. Continuing to fulfill this role is our top priority. We have earned a reputation as the Nation's most forward deployed, ready, and flexible force. The performance of Marines over the past year, underscores the fact that responsiveness and versatility is in demand as much today as it will be in the future. Marines formed the leading edge of the U.S. humanitarian response to the disaster in the Philippines and assisted in the evacuation of U.S. embassy personnel in Juba, South Sudan, all while engaging in combat operations in Afghanistan and providing forward presence around the globe.

Currently, there are more than 6,300 active and reserve Marines forward deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan, a reduction of over 2,000 Marines over the past year. The transition to advisory and mentoring roles has led to successes for the Afghan National Security Forces.

Additionally in 2013, the Marine Corps supported all six Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC) with task-organized units that conducted over 200 Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) engagements including TSC exercises, bilateral exercises, and military-to-military engagements with the armed forces of more than 50 partner nations to build partner capacity (BPC). In short, Marines stand ready and able to respond to future incidents that threaten our Nation's interests regardless of the location or the nature of the occurrence.

Current Readiness

The Marine Corps is committed to remaining the Nation's Force-in Readiness, a force truly capable of responding to a crisis anywhere around the globe at a moment's notice. Readiness is the critical measure of the Marine Corps' ability to be responsive and capable.

Marines are forward stationed and forward-deployed, protecting the Nation's security by conducting operations that defeat and deter adversaries, support partners, and create decision space for our national-level leaders.

We fully appreciate that our readiness today and the ability to maintain it in the future are directly related to the fiscal realities of the Department of Defense's budget. As our nation continues to face fiscal uncertainty, we are making hard but necessary choices to protect near term readiness and place the Marine Corps on the best trajectory to meet future defense requirements. We are protecting readiness with the realization that our infrastructure sustainment and modernization investments will be negatively impacted over the long term as we prioritize limited resources to ensure a ready force now. Such tradeoffs portend future increased costs and risks to the long-term readiness of the Marine Corps.

As America's crisis response force, however, your Corps does not perceive a choice. We are required to maintain an institutional posture and mindset that facilitates our ability to deploy ready forces tonight. Programing for acceptable less-ready unit status is not an option for the Marine Corps. However, as we continue to face the possibility of full implementation of the Budget Control Act from FY 2016 to FY 2021, we may well be forced into adopting some short term or limited scope variations with selected less-ready units over the next few years.

Taking these realities into account, the Marine Corps' principal concerns going forward are the readiness of our non-deployed units and the reconstitution of the whole-of-force after over a decade of unprecedented sustained conflict. The Marine Corps can sustain its current operational requirements on an enduring basis; however, to maintain the high readiness of our forward deployed units, we globally source equipment and personnel from our non-deployed units, or bench. Ultimately, readiness comes at a cost and the high readiness of deployed forces comes at the expense of our non-deployed units.

Our non-deployed forces' principal unit readiness detractor is the availability of key items of equipment at the unit level with which to outfit and train units. Based on steady state operations and emerging requirements, the Marine Corps has accepted risk to both personnel and

equipment readiness of our non-deployed units in order to fully support forces forward deployed. Currently, slightly more than 50 percent of our non-deployed units are experiencing degraded readiness in their ability to execute core missions. Approximately 62 percent of non-deployed units have equipment shortfalls and 33 percent are experiencing personnel shortfalls necessitated by the effort to ensure that forward deployed units are 100 percent manned and equipped. Such realities portray the imbalance of readiness across the Marine Corps. This however cannot be our long-term solution to the whole-of-force readiness, since our non-deployed operating forces serve as an insurance policy, providing a timely response to unexpected crises or large-scale contingencies. If those units are not ready, it could mean a delayed response to resolve a contingency or to execute an operations plan.

In regards to reconstitution, the Marine Corps is not conducting an “operational pause”, whereby we will have the luxury of focusing exclusively on resetting war-torn equipment and reconstituting the force. The Marine Corps’ focus is being ready to respond to unforeseen crises, source rotational units, and meet the ever-increasing demand for theater security cooperation, under the “New Normal.” It should be noted that our reconstitution efforts remain almost exclusively reliant on Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. Overly steep reductions, or the outright loss of OCO funding, will significantly impact the ability to reset equipment thus causing depot backlogs and subsequently placing readiness at risk.

The risk to the nation is too great to allow the readiness of the Marine Corps to be degraded. FY15 funding levels protect current readiness; however, they do so at the expense of the infrastructure sustainment and equipment modernization, which are keys to protecting future readiness. This is a logical choice given the current fiscal situation, but it is not sustainable over time. Ignoring the impact of this required trade-off for any sustained period will adversely affect the force in the long term, and create unacceptable risk for our national defense.

Resetting the Force

Reset is a subset of reconstitution and comprises the actions taken to restore units to a desired level of combat capability commensurate with the unit’s anticipated future missions.

After more than a decade of combat, this requires an unprecedented level of effort. The Marine Corps is resetting its forces “in stride,” while fighting the war in Afghanistan and transitioning to meet Defense Strategic Guidance and “New Normal” requirements.

The Marine Corps’ Operation Enduring Freedom Ground Equipment Reset Strategy, released in January 2012, guides the execution of our reset and divestiture strategy. The reset strategy prioritizes investment and modernization decisions to develop our force. Last year our reset liability was estimated at less than \$3.2B. We continue to make significant progress on resetting our equipment with the help of joint partners such as U.S. Transportation Command and the Defense Logistics Agency. Today, we estimate that our remaining ground equipment reset liability, from FY15 through the end of the reset mission, is approximately \$1B. We anticipate further refinements as we drawdown further and gain a more refined perspective on both the totality of the costs associated with returning our equipment from Afghanistan and the detailed costs associated with resetting that gear after more than 12 years of combat. We will continue to ask for only the OCO funds we know we need to reset our force from OEF, and I note that DOD’s final FY15 OCO request will depend on policy decisions about our enduring presence in Afghanistan that have not yet been made.

The Marine Corps is on track to complete redeployment of people, equipment and sustainment per the established timeline of the Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The Retrograde and Redeployment in support of Reset and Reconstitution Operational Group (R4OG) is a vital element to the Marine Corps’ responsible drawdown from Afghanistan and the successful execution of the Ground Equipment Reset Strategy. The R4OG was formed in May 2012 and represents the largest portion of the Marine Corps’ contribution to the U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element (CMRE) and is tasked with preserving the operational capacity of combat units by shouldering the load of clearing the battle space of equipment, supplies and sustainment stocks. The R4OG is focused on accountability and efficiency within the redeployment and retrograde process. To date, the R4OG has retrograded 25,800 Marine Corps equipment items valued at more than \$576M, repaired more than 2,500 shipping containers, processed more than \$230M of excess/serviceable ammunition, and has facilitated the retrograde of more than 5 million square feet of aviation matting (AM2). Overall,

since the start of OEF retrograde operations in 2012, the Marine Corps has retrograded 77% of its equipment items; over 75% of the supplies, repair parts, and ammunition; and more than 98% of its AM2 matting at the high point of operations in Afghanistan.

Depot Capacity

The bulk of ground equipment reset execution is occurring at our depot. The continued availability of depot capacity at our Marine Depot Maintenance Command, consisting of depots at Albany, Georgia and Barstow, California is critical to our ground equipment reset strategy, and our ability to reconstitute the force by 2017. The Marine Corps' total OEF ground equipment reset requirement includes approximately 71,000 principal end items. About 77% of those items have begun the reset process, and just over 40% of our total requirements are reset complete. With support of the FY15 baseline and our anticipated OCO request, we continue on the path to being able to complete the reset of ground equipment on time, avert backlogs, and return equipment to our Operational Forces as rapidly as possible.

With regards to Marine aviation, the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) provides the Department of the Navy with funding relief to buy down the previous backlog of airframes and engines; however a depot backlog still remains. The Marines Corps' F/A-18A-D depot backlog continues primarily due to increased turnaround time and reduced throughput for aircraft undergoing depot maintenance. The Marine Corps currently has 264 F/A-18's in its inventory, 132 of which are currently Out of Reporting (OOR). Having 132 F/A-18's OOR increases operational risk and creates significant challenges in managing the inventory. Each F/A-18 squadron requires 12 aircraft per squadron to maintain minimum deployable combat readiness (C2). Of our 12 squadrons, 5 are deployed at any given time. The reductions to depot throughput have resulted in non-deployed squadrons having only 6 aircraft available for training and operational support. The long term effect on non-deployed Marines F/A-18 squadrons is the inability of the unit to achieve and maintain minimum deployable combat readiness required for follow-on deployments or contingency response. Continued support for aviation depots, and F/A-18A-D sustainment and upgrade initiatives are vital for achieving aircraft flight line

requirements, and ensuring the platform remains lethal, survivable, and relevant through the transition to the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF).

The Marine Corps requires continued funding to complete the reset of equipment still being utilized overseas, to reconstitute home station equipment, and to modernize the force. Any reduction in the FY 15 baseline request, as well as to the anticipated OCO request, will defer maintenance requirements to out-years, thus increasing the backlog of equipment requiring service. Sustained funding reductions such as sequestration cause a ripple effect eventually leading to a backlog that will adversely affect near and long term readiness. Simply put, training a unit with only half of their complement of equipment is not possible. When these units are called on to prepare for deployment, they will begin with a training deficit that may be insurmountable.

Postured for Steady State and Crisis Response

The Marine Corps has a strategic trajectory to reconstitute to a ready force to meet the Defense Strategic Guidance for both steady state requirements and crisis response contingencies. The FY15 budget contains funding for the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force – Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR) and Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCESEG) expansion that were added in the FY14 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. These initiatives will leverage the Corps' crisis response capability through lighter, more agile, forward-deployed forces to meet combatant commander and Department of State demands across the globe. Additionally the rebalance to the Pacific remains a top priority as reflected by continued resourcing of the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) and operational units based in the Pacific region.

As we drawdown the Marine Corps' active component end-strength from a wartime high of 202,000 Marines, we took the appropriate steps to redesign a ready force by FY17. Our reconstitution efforts will restore and upgrade our combat capability and seek to ensure our units are ready for operations across the range of military operations. Over the past three years, we undertook a series of steps to build our current force plan. In 2010, our Force Structure Review

Group utilized the Defense Strategic Guidance and operational plans to determine that the optimum size of the active component Marine Corps should be a force of 186,800. However under the FY 2012 Defense Strategic guidance and constraints of the 2011 Budget Control Act, we estimated that a force of 182,100 active component Marines could still be afforded, with the realization that reductions in modernization and infrastructure support would be difficult but necessary to sustain optimal readiness levels.

Prior to the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), we came to the difficult understanding that, under the threat of continued sequestration or some variant, an active duty force of 175,000 Marines (175K) is what our nation can afford, when coupled with very steep cuts to USMC modernization and infrastructure accounts. This significantly reduced force is a “redesigned” Marine Corps capable of meeting steady state requirements. We will still be able to deter or defeat aggression in one region, however with significant strain on the force and increased risk to mission accomplishment everywhere else.

The redesigned force is built to operate utilizing the familiar Marine Air-Ground Task Force construct, but it places a greater emphasis on the “middleweight” Marine Expeditionary Brigades and their highly versatile and scalable MEB Command Element or headquarters. These MEB headquarters will be prepared to serve as a ready crisis response flag-level, JTF capable command element for the joint force. The redesigned force will also persistently deploy SPMAGTFs and Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) to provide combatant commanders ready forces for a broad range of missions.

Essential for augmenting and reinforcing our active duty force is our Marine Corps Reserve. As an integral part of our Total Force, our Reserve Marines have, for the past 13 years, been engaged in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in regional security cooperation and crisis prevention activities in support of geographic combatant commander’s requirements. This operational tempo built a momentum among our reserve war fighters and a depth of experience throughout the ranks that is unprecedented in our current reserve force.

Just as we are reshaping our active force, so too are we reducing the end strength of our reserve force. Within the FY15 budget we plan to achieve a Selected Reserve end strength of 38,500 Marines by the end of FY17, down from a current end strength of 39,600. Despite this reduction in end strength, our reserves remain well postured to provide operational capability and capacity to the active force during both peacetime steady-state operations and crisis response contingencies.

Maintaining a high state of readiness within the current and near-term fiscal climate will be challenging for Marines and their equipment. For example, the desired 186.8K force supported a 1:3 deployment-to-dwell ratio to meet emerging steady state demands. The redesigned 175K force reduces our availability to a 1:2 dwell ratio for our operational units. This 1:2 ratio is the same operational tempo we operated under during much of the past decade, while engaged in combat and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is supportable in the short term and midterm, but long term sustainability may need to be revisited.

The redesigned force will retain the ability to generate seven rotational Marine Expeditionary Units, with one deployer from the East Coast, one deployer from the West Coast, and one deployer from Okinawa. Special Purpose MAGTFs will respond to the greater demand for multi-role crisis response forces, as seen in Libya and South Sudan. The Marine Corps also remains fully committed to expanding embassy security by adding approximately 1,000 Marine Corps Embassy Security Guards (MCESG) as requested by Congress.

Lastly, to support the rebalance to the Pacific, we prioritized our Pacific theater forces activities in the new force structure. Despite end strength reductions, III Marine Expeditionary Force – our primary MAGTF in the Pacific – remains virtually unaltered. We also restored Pacific efforts that were gapped during Operation Enduring Freedom, including multiple exercises and large elements of the Unit Deployment Program. A rotational presence in Darwin, Australia also expands engagement opportunities and regional influence. By 2017 we will have approximately 22,000 Marines operating and forward postured within the Pacific theater.

Five Readiness Pillars

To achieve institutional readiness, sustain operational requirements, and be prepared for crisis and contingency response, we must restore and maintain a balance for our Marine Corps across five pillars as outlined in previous posture statements and congressional testimony, these remain:

- High Quality People
- Unit Readiness
- Capacity and Capability to Meet Requirements
- Infrastructure Sustainment
- Equipment Modernization

High Quality People

The recruiting and retention of high quality people are essential to maintaining a highly ready and professional force. We require the right quantities and occupational specialties to fulfill our role as an expeditionary force in readiness. Critical enablers of recruiting and retaining a high quality force are appropriate levels of compensation and benefits; we thank the Congress for its focus on this very important issue. We rely on Congress' continued support for pay and benefits, incentive pays, and selective reenlistment bonuses to meet future challenges and shape the all-volunteer force to meet emerging defense strategies.

The Marine Corps is committed to attracting, mentoring and retaining the most talented men and women, who bring diverse backgrounds, cultures and skills in service to our Nation. The Nation's changing demographics continue to push diversity to the forefront as a strategic issue. The Marine Corps is working toward completion of the first phase of a landmark diversity initiative centered around four diversity task forces: 1.) Leadership, Mentoring and Accountability; 2.) Culture and Leading Change; 3.) Race and Ethnicity; and 4.) Women in the Marine Corps. Recommendations from these task forces will form the basis of a comprehensive

strategy to manage talent and enable the Marine Corps to improve diversity and inclusion across the Corps.

Our Civilian Marines support the mission and daily functions of the Marine Corps and are an integral part of our total force. They serve alongside our Marines in uniform all around the world. This workforce is the leanest of all services, with a ratio of one appropriated-funded civilian to every ten active duty Marines (1:10). Additionally, our civilian labor represents less than five percent of the Marine Corps' total Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget. More than 95 percent of our civilians are located outside the Pentagon at our bases, stations, depots and installations. Civilian Marines provide stability in our training and programs when our Marines rotate between units, demonstrating that our "best value" for the defense dollar applies to the total force. As we move forward we will continue to keep faith with our all-volunteer force of federal civilians.

The Marine Corps' Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) functions as a central pillar of our pledge to "keep faith" with those who have served. Whether a Marine is wounded in combat, suffering from a chronic unresolved illness, or injured in a training accident, the WWR remains committed to providing comprehensive recovery care. For the Marine Corps, recovery care is not a process. Instead it is the holistic approach to the well-being entirety of our Marines and their families. Ultimately Marines and their families, the Congress, and the public at large can be reassured that the Marine Corps, through the WWR, will continue recovery care in times of war and relative peace.

Unit Readiness

This pillar upholds the importance of maintaining and shaping the readiness of the operating forces, to include the necessary O&M funding to train to core missions and maintain equipment. Our focus is on training to our core expeditionary and amphibious mission capabilities, while further restructuring unit and institutional training for emerging security demands. Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Expeditionary Brigade readiness continues to improve with larger scale exercises focusing on honing maneuver and amphibious capabilities

not often utilized over the past decade. We anticipate incremental increases in the core training readiness of units as Marines and equipment flows back from Afghanistan. The availability and readiness of amphibious and Maritime Prepositioning Ships and equipment are critical components in building and maintaining readiness for expeditionary, amphibious operations. We thank Congress for the continued support to funding the needed amphibious and maritime prepositioning ships essential to protecting our Nation's defense and economy.

The FY15 budget continues to support the Marine Corps' Service-level training program by fully funding an Integrated Training Exercise (ITX) program designed to recover full spectrum readiness. The ITX provides training for up to 10 infantry battalions, 5 artillery battalions, 5 logistics battalions, 25 flying squadrons, and additional aviation support elements. Additionally, high altitude and mountainous terrain exercises at our training center in Bridgeport, CA, will train up to 2 infantry battalions with limited flying squadrons and logistics units, and typically will include joint, coalition and special operations forces. Continued funding for service level training is imperative as we drawdown from Afghanistan and prepares the whole-of-force for all manner of crisis and contingencies around the globe.

Capability and Capacity to Meet Requirements

Force-sizing to meet requirements, with the right mix of capacity and capability, is the essence of this readiness pillar. The confluence of the "New Normal" and possible sequestration-level funding, challenged the Marine Corps to adopt its future force posture and generate capabilities adaptable to a variety of operational requirements. The USMC Future Force Posture Plan improves the forward deployed Marine force posture and provides more flexibility in employing the ARG/MEU for Geographic Combatant Commanders. Forward presence of Marines ashore and afloat reduces response times and enables the Marine Corps to better shape the security environment for appropriate crisis response or follow-on joint force operations. Furthermore, the Future Force Posture Plan will provide reach-back capability for additional USMC CONUS-based Crisis Response forces, providing the national leaders with a myriad of crisis response options, while gaining efficiencies in meeting requirements. These

future force posture additive capabilities to meet “New Normal” missions will in time improve the readiness and responsiveness of the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps provides combatant commanders with regionally focused and trained forces to meet their growing demand for theater security cooperation engagements. However, this demand continues to increase beyond the capacity of any single service. The Navy is uniquely capable of using the sea and waterways as maneuver space as well as providing combatant commanders with persistent, self-sustaining, sea-based forces to meet the full spectrum of security cooperation (SC) requirements. The Navy and Marine Corps are executing a coordinated and integrated approach as described in the recently signed Maritime Security Cooperation Policy (MSCP). The MSCP will provide combatant commanders with maritime-specific solutions to their TSC objectives.

We have developed a cadre of Officers and Staff NCOs with a sophisticated understanding of international security environments in order to facilitate engagements with partner nations and assist the Marine Corps on the asymmetric battlefields of the future. These Marines support military operations with an expanding number of coalition partners in a diverse set of geopolitical conditions around the world. Our Foreign Area Officers and Staff NCOs develop professional Language, Regional Expertise, and Cultural (LREC) knowledge capabilities and insights to help MAGTF, Joint, and Coalition commanders understand the complex human environment where Marines deploy. Today's operating environment demands a degree of LREC capability that requires years, not weeks, of training and education, as well as a greater understanding of the factors that drive social change.

Our Corps' future forces will be guided by the principles outlined in our Capstone Operating Concept: *Expeditionary Force 21*. This document is our vision for designing and developing the force that will continue to fulfill these responsibilities. It is however more than a vision – it is also an actionable plan and a disciplined process to shape and guide our capability and capacity decisions while respecting our country's very real need to regain budgetary discipline. True to our expeditionary ethos, we will work with a clear-eyed view of what will be asked of us and seek only what we believe is necessary. Nimble by organizational design and

adaptive by culture, we will rely on open-mindedness and creativity and make the best of what we have. Through *Expeditionary Force 21* we will chart a course over the next 10 years to field a Marine Corps that will be: the right force in the right place at the right time.

Infrastructure Sustainment

Readiness also depends on the availability and condition of real property and infrastructure. Adequately resourcing the sustainment of Marine Corps bases and stations is essential to safeguarding unit readiness as they provide the means by which units conduct training to deploy. The need to be better stewards of our installations and facilities grows as resources become more constrained. The Marine Corps is depending on the FY15 budget to preserve today's facilities at a condition necessary to support those preparing for upcoming missions and deployments as well as support their families.

The Marine Corps continues to accept risk in this pillar, reducing funding for several programs that will affect long-term installation readiness including MILCON and restoration and modernization projects. During FY08 through FY14, Congress generously provided the Marine Corps \$11.4B in military construction for new facilities to maintain state-of-the-art aircraft, improved live-fire training ranges, armories, new applied and academic instruction facilities, physical fitness facilities, child care centers, barracks and command and control buildings. We request Congress' continued support in the protection of these investments and those of facilities sustainment and demolition, family housing, environmental management, energy conservation and essential MILCON funding to support critical programs, units and institutions such as infantry regiments, the Joint Strike Fighter, MV-22 and Marine Corps Security Forces Consolidation. The FY15 budget baseline request supports the Marine Corps investment to sustain facilities and allows us to budget to 75% of the OSD facility sustainment model, returning to 90% in FY16 through FY19.

Equipment Modernization

To bolster investments in personnel and unit readiness, the Marine Corps has accepted the greatest amount of risk in its equipment modernization budget. The Marine Corps' ground and aviation equipment must meet the needs of current and emerging security environments. As the Marine Corps explores options to adjust to changing fiscal realities, there is a clear imperative to upgrade and modernize legacy equipment used in OEF and OIF. Aging ground platforms, such as the nearly 40-year-old Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), underscore the need for investment in modernization and service-life extensions to guarantee dominance over future threats. Aging platforms are becoming simultaneously more expensive to operate and harder to maintain.

Our modern expeditionary force will require fixed wing aircraft capable of flexible basing ashore or at sea in support of our Marine units. The Joint Strike Fighter is the best aircraft to provide that support today and well into the future. Likewise, a core capability of our expeditionary forces is the ability to project forces ashore from amphibious platforms and to maneuver once ashore.

The Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) was envisioned as a "leap ahead" replacement for our current Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV) that would provide high speed, long-range maneuver capability in both the seaward and landward portions of the littoral. Three years ago, we cancelled the EFV program to explore more affordable alternatives for an amphibious combat vehicle (ACV). We established an Amphibious Capabilities Working Group that examined current and emerging intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, strike capabilities, and their integration into potential adversaries' approaches to anti-access, area denial. We noted, with particular concern, the impact of future loitering top-attack munitions and the proliferation of guided rockets, artillery, missiles, and mortars.

From this threat assessment, we concluded that we would either need to expand the scope and duration of our shaping operations, launch our forces from greater range than the 10-25 nautical miles offshore previously postulated, or apply some combination of these actions. Next,

as part of the Marine Personnel Carrier (MPC) program we examined commercial off-the-shelf/non-developmental wheeled combat vehicles and discovered several important points. First, modern wheeled vehicles have substantially closed the maneuver performance gap that previously existed between tracked and wheeled vehicles. These new eight wheeled vehicles have exceptional cross country performance and some limited swimming capability.

We concluded that our concepts for operational maneuver from the sea and ship-to-objective maneuver remain valid, but that we will execute them by evolving a somewhat different “toolkit” than originally envisioned. The current ACV program has been re-crafted to reflect a family of systems approach to the military problem – the necessity to conduct amphibious operations from further offshore while enhancing protected mobility for the mission on land. It leverages experience gained in the EFV program, the MPC program, threat analysis, and combat experience. The ACV program will immediately pursue a medium weight wheeled armored personnel carrier with acceptable swimming capability close to shore. Concurrently, risk over the midterm will be mitigated through a survivability upgrade to a number of our current self-deploying AAVs to extend their service life through at least 2030. In concert with the Navy, we will continue to explore capabilities that better enable us to conduct extended range littoral maneuver from ship to objective via high speed surface connectors.

Informed by our planning for potential and resultant POM15 budget decisions, we have the foundation to conservatively adjust our ground combat and tactical vehicle strategy and yet enhance this core competency across a wide array of capabilities. We will develop and procure the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV), while maintaining critical modification programs for our tank, LAV, and HMMWV fleets, in conjunction with our assault amphibian modernization efforts. We will continue to assess our ground vehicle portfolio in order to inform forthcoming budgetary decisions.

Partnered With the Navy

We share a rich heritage and maintain a strong partnership with the United States Navy. Sea-based and forward deployed naval forces provide day-to-day engagement, crisis response,

and assured access for the joint force in a contingency. The availability of amphibious shipping is paramount to our readiness. The Marine Corps' requirement for amphibious warships continues to be at 38 platforms. However, due to fiscal realities the Marine Corps and Navy agreed to a fiscally constrained minimum of 33 total amphibious warships to support two Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) assault echelons. The Navy's inventory to date is 30 total warships. When accounting for steady-state demand and maintenance requirements we are realizing that far less platforms are readily available for employment. In the near term, the Navy and Marine Corps are looking at alternative platforms that can complement the current amphibious inventory.

Partnered with the Navy, we will continue to pursue innovative concepts for maritime expeditionary operations with platforms such as the Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV), the Mobile Landing Platform (MLP) and the Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB). As new maritime prepositioning force ships are integrated into the Maritime Prepositioning Ships Squadrons (MPSRONs), they will provide additional operational benefits to the Combatant Commanders, such as an over-the-horizon surface connector capability and better selective access to equipment and supplies.

A critical component in building, training, and maintaining an expeditionary forward presence is the availability and readiness of amphibious ships. The combat readiness of our amphibious ships is a foundational requirement for expeditionary force presence, and when required, amphibious force projection. The Navy has acknowledged that low amphibious ship availability and readiness can present a significant challenge to the training readiness of our Naval Expeditionary Forces and is addressing maintenance readiness shortfalls. Since 2010, the average deployment length for a West Coast and East Coast Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit has been 223 days and 274 days respectively. This high duration of deployment lengths combined with a high operational tempo, reduced ship inventory, and deferred/compressed maintenance periods demonstrate the imperative to maintain planned/scheduled maintenance cycles and to build adequate inventory. These have a direct impact on the readiness of the amphibious fleet and on ensuring the ships reach their service life.

An example of the importance of ship maintenance and availability occurred during disaster relief efforts in the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan. Although two forward deployed amphibious ships were able to provide some assistance to Operation DAMAYN, the larger and more capable amphibious ships could not leave port due to maintenance; restricting the amount of supplies and relief that the MEU could provide.

Continued Congressional support for the Navy's shipbuilding and surface ship-to-shore connector plans is vital to the Nation's ability to retain and maintain an adequate fleet of modern combat-ready amphibious ships, which can provide continuous naval expeditionary presence and project power across the globe whenever and wherever needed. In September 2013, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Chief of Naval Operations, and Commandant of the Coast Guard signed the Maritime Security Cooperation Policy (MSCP). This tri-service policy prescribes a planning framework for Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard headquarters, regional components, and force providers with the goal of providing Combatant Commanders an integrated maritime approach to security cooperation in support of national security objectives.

Throughout more than a decade of sustained operations ashore in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, we continued to deploy thousands of Marines aboard amphibious warships around the globe. The Navy and Marine Corps remains postured to provide persistent presence and engagement, maintaining a constant watch for conflict and regional unrest. The Navy-Marine Corps relationship has never been better; we will continue to advance our shared vision as our nation transitions from protracted wars ashore and returns its focus to the maritime domain.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Marine Corps and Sailors who provide this Nation with its versatile, reliable, middleweight force in readiness, I thank Congress for your constant interest in and recognition of our challenges. We are proud of our reputation for frugality and remain one of the best values for the defense dollar. In these times of budget austerity, the nation continues to hold high expectations of its Marine Corps, and our stewardship of taxpayer dollars. The Marine

Corps will continue to meet the needs of the Combatant Commanders as a strategically mobile force optimized for forward-presence, and crisis response. Your continued support is requested to provide a balance across the five readiness pillars, so we can maintain our institutional readiness and, as you charged more than 60 years ago, “be most ready when our nation is least ready.”