

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

ON

MILITARY READINESS AND THE FY2022 BUDGET REQUEST

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Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Lamborn, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss Marine Corps readiness.

While common conceptions of military readiness often center on the current availability of forces, we define readiness as the ability to create a warfighting advantage. The mere availability of Marines and equipment does not equal readiness to compete against our peers, nor does it create the ability to deter or defeat rapidly evolving threats. As such, our readiness focus is not on simple and short-term metrics of availability, but instead on the readiness of the capabilities that will impose significant risks and costs to our competitors and adversaries.

While the Marine Corps, partnered with the Navy, is ready to respond to crisis and conflict around the globe today, we are not currently organized, trained, or equipped to maintain our advantage over a peer competitor in the future. To ensure we remain ahead of our competitors and adversaries, we must consider the tradeoffs between satisfying immediate requirements for available forces with our readiness to deter and fight in the days to come. However, we do not have to choose between current readiness and modernization—this is not a binary decision. We are committed to striking a balance of ensuring our current capabilities remain as ready and relevant as possible while we prepare the Marine Corps for future challenges. We must also consider the readiness impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has affected the force at every level; we continue to assess and mitigate COVID-19 risks as we generate individual and unit readiness.

Staying ready today and being ready for tomorrow will require consistent funding, prioritized and accelerated modernization, and the willingness to divest of capabilities that no longer serve our best defense interests. Your support and oversight of our readiness efforts will

enhance the lethality of the Marine Corps as the Nation's Naval expeditionary force-in-readiness both now and in the future.

Manpower Readiness

Our warfighting readiness—and everything the Marine Corps accomplishes—is enabled by the individual Marine. The Marine Corps is committed to identifying, developing, and sustaining the unique talents of individual Marines because they give us the diversity of thought and action that make us ready to compete, fight, and win. In support of our efforts to expand and capitalize on diversity within our force, we have named a one-star general as the Marine Corps' Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer and reinvigorated our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Review Board. In the last 10 years, we have increased enlisted accessions from diverse backgrounds from 34 percent to more than 43 percent. We have also more than doubled the percentage of officer accessions from traditionally underrepresented groups to 35 percent and increased female officer accessions from 8 percent to almost 14 percent. Additionally, we have taken steps to improve structural equality in our ranks by studying demographic trends in performance evaluations, reviewing grooming and body composition standards, and initiating studies on military occupational specialty assignment and barriers to advancement for minority and female Marine officers.

Retaining a diverse force requires inclusivity, and our readiness depends on an inclusive commitment to our shared mission and to each other. The Marine Corps is committed to holding individuals accountable who, through extremism, racism, sexual assault, or sexual harassment, violate their commitment to their fellow Marines and our Nation. In accordance with the Secretary of Defense's direction, we are leading with our values and are focused on providing

our Marines, Sailors, and civilians with an environment free of extremism, discrimination, hate, harassment, and fear.

Just as we are modernizing our force to retain our competitive advantage, we must also adapt our manpower processes to attract, recruit, train, and retain the Marines who create and wield that advantage. Although COVID-19 force health protection measures affected recruiting efforts and reduced training throughput at our recruit depots, we remain on track to meet our Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) authorized active duty end strength of 181,200. We continue to have strong retention rates across officer and enlisted ranks and are modernizing our manpower management processes to support Force Design 2030 goals and beyond. However, we can do more to identify our most talented and skilled Marines and incentivize them to stay in our ranks. Some of our efforts in this area include implementation of the new Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System, expanded post-partum physical fitness and body composition exemptions, and reviews of parental and maternity leave policies. We are also leveraging “big data” through surveys to better understand, improve, and ultimately help predict Marine satisfaction and retention. Our intent for these and other talent management actions is to identify, develop, and retain the Marines that will best ensure the Service’s readiness today and in the future.

As our technical advantage over peer competitors narrows, it is critical for our forces to maintain our edge in both individual decision-making and unit competence. We are achieving this by reforming our training and education continuum. Over the past year, we elevated leadership of our Training and Education Command to a three-star level, commensurate in grade with leaders of our other Title 10 responsibilities, and increased the command’s budget. We also implemented more rigorous evaluations at our resident professional military education schools, introduced a pilot program that extends the entry-level training time for enlisted infantry

Marines, and expanded the use of force-on-force training and wargaming against a thinking enemy. In support of these efforts, we are modernizing our training ranges with improved instrumentation, feedback, and safety tools; and developing a Live, Virtual, and Constructive Training Environment across the entire training enterprise. These measures, along with others, will help us identify talented Marines, increase their individual warfighting competencies, and build more proficient, lethal, and ready units.

Ground Readiness

Marine Corps ground forces remain ready to support Global Force Management (GFM) requirements and contingency operations while conducting the necessary divestment and activation actions to meet our Force Design 2030 objectives. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Marines remained forward deployed and ready on ships, in partner countries, and at our embassies. While COVID-19 conditions early in the pandemic required the cancellation of several FY20 Service Level Training Exercises (SLTEs) and courses, ground units were able to continue many training and certification opportunities through home station training and distance learning. To enable our most rigorous training to continue, we developed quarantine and restriction of movement plans, as well as event-specific mitigations. These actions facilitated the resumption of SLTEs and other events that provide Marines with our most challenging training and greatest readiness gains. We continue to monitor for latent COVID-19-related impacts to our training readiness and apply risk mitigations as required.

Another requirement for maintaining our strategic advantage is being able to train to and operate in austere environments at sea, in the air, and ashore without unnecessary sacrifices of personnel and equipment. Over the past several years, the Marine Corps has diligently worked to reduce training mishaps. We have taken an institutional approach to improving safety

performance, including a new standards-focused Safety Management System, better reporting and information sharing tools, and service-wide changes based on investigation findings. While we have made significant progress, including reducing vehicle rollovers and achieving historically low aviation flight mishap rates, there is still much work to do. Recent fatal accidents, including the tragic July 2020 sinking of an Assault Amphibious Vehicle, demonstrate that our safety culture must change and Marines at all levels must make better risk decisions. While we can never eliminate all risk, we have to get better at recognizing and mitigating hazards before they cause severe injury, loss of life or loss of equipment. Every Marine must be empowered to assess risk and to speak up when they see something unsafe. Leaders must provide the necessary oversight and guidance to mitigate risk and stop operations when the risk is too high. Commanders must also develop command climates that value and reward hazard reporting because it makes our units better and safer. At an institutional level, we are committed to providing the leadership and resources to make these and other changes to improve our safety performance and readiness.

In terms of ground equipment readiness, we recognize the need to sustain the equipment we currently have while executing significant modernizations, asset transfers, and divestments in support of Force Design 2030. To that end, we have maintained a 92 percent serviceability rating for readiness reportable ground equipment over the past year. In FY20, the Marine Corps activated a Materiel Management Operations Group (M2OG) to facilitate Force Design-related redistribution, storage, and divestment of ground equipment. The M2OG's efforts are currently ahead of schedule, resulting in units spending less time accounting for and maintaining obsolete equipment and fewer unit equipment deficiencies. The Marine Corps is also modernizing our maintenance and supply processes through Condition Based Maintenance Plus (CBM+). By

leveraging data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, CBM+ will enable leaders at all levels to make equipment maintenance, operations, and life cycle decisions based on evidence of need rather than overly prescriptive and potentially wasteful preset milestones. Although we are still in the prototyping phase of these efforts, they mark the beginning of strategic investments that will bring our materiel readiness practices into the Information Age.

Our maintenance depots are also a key enabler of our ground equipment readiness. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused depot production delays, we anticipate full production schedule mitigation by the end of FY21. While COVID-19 had a minimal impact on our major supply chains, our principal supply chain challenge is supporting aging weapons systems with diminishing manufacturing sources and materiel shortages. We mitigate these risks through detailed materiel management, but continued divestment of obsolete equipment and investment in modernization will allow our taxpayers' dollars to contribute to greater readiness gains.

As we look to 2030 and beyond, the investments in modernization we make now will enhance readiness of both equipment and warfighting capabilities in the future. This modernization includes a critical new warfighting formation—the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR). The MLR will provide the Joint Force a low-signature, mobile capability that can sense and make sense, close kill chains, and persist inside the range of an enemy's weapons. The Ground-Based Anti-Ship Missile (GBASM) capability will provide the MLR with the precise, lethal, and survivable anti-ship capability necessary for supporting naval campaigns, closure of the Joint Force, and *National Defense Strategy* requirements. Efforts are underway to modernize a constellation of multi-domain capable sensor technologies to enable GBASM and other long range precision fires in a command and control denied or degraded environment. In order to fully capitalize on these modernization opportunities, we will need to modify Major Defense

Acquisition Programs (MDAPs) that exceed our requirements or are unaffordable to man and sustain. Applying savings from program adjustments into investments such as GBASM and associated capabilities will advance our readiness for competition, crisis, and conflict. While this subcommittee has shown support for this modernization priority in the past, we request your enduring support as we continue to make the case for this and other necessary changes to ensure the Marine Corps is ready for future challenges.

Aviation Readiness

Marine Aviation continues to support GFM requirements and increase readiness while conducting in-stride modernization transitions across multiple platforms. With the help of Congress, we have increased funding to aviation readiness enabler accounts each year since FY17 to facilitate materiel readiness recovery efforts and flight hour generation. Our investments are producing returns, with FY20 fleet squadron aircraft mission capable rates up eight percentage points from FY17 values. This equates to 55 more flyable aircraft on any given day. Of particular note, our materiel readiness in FY20 and through the first half of FY21 continued to improve despite COVID-19, attributable in part to increased Congressional funding in previous FYs targeted at key readiness enabler accounts.

For F/A-18A-Ds, mission capable rates in our fleet squadrons have increased by over 20 percentage points since FY17, reaching a FY20 average of 69 percent—the best performance of all platforms. In the F-35B community, increasing maintenance familiarity, progressive work with industry, and targeted spares efforts with faster delivery times helped us achieve 68 percent mission capable aircraft in FY20 for our three fleet squadrons. This is a significant improvement over the FY18 average readiness rate of 52 percent. We are bridging our transition to the CH-53K through the CH-53E Reset Program, which is generating aircraft with a 10 percent higher

mission capable rate. This program is enabling us to sustain the heavy lift demand across the Marine Corps and the Joint Force as we begin to transition to the CH-53K. Our MV-22Bs benefited from increased spares support in the last year, displaying incremental gains in MC rate. Additionally, we are beginning to accept deliveries from the Common Configuration Reliability and Modernization Program, further improving MV-22B reliability. While initial results to this program show promise, Marine Aviation is reviewing the cost and schedule to ensure affordability and efficacy in performance. Lastly, targeted efforts to increase Marine maintainer effectiveness at the squadron level, including continued use of the Depot Readiness Initiative, implementation of the Maintenance Capacity Model, and improvement to flight line maintenance practices, continue to contribute to the rise in aircraft mission capable rates.

In line with our materiel readiness gains, we strive to provide pilots and aircrew the flight hours required to achieve a competitive advantage over a peer threat. Although we increased our hours per pilot per month from only 13.5 in FY16 to 17.2 in FY19, COVID-19 impacts resulted in 15 percent fewer executed flight hours in FY20 than the previous year. We prevented a decrease in aggregate training levels through increased simulator use and prioritization of unit-level core and mission skill proficiency. However, exercise cancellations cost us the ability to train for our most critical flight leadership and capability qualifications, as well as the integrated and joint exercises that are essential for building a lethal combined arms force. Our return to large-scale exercises in FY21, increasing aircraft mission capable rates, and continuously refined COVID-19 mitigation practices are generating the increased flight hours and training that will produce readiness to face future threats.

Continued stable and predictable funding in support of Marine Aviation flight hour, sustainment, and aviation spares accounts will be critical to our ability to fully capitalize on our

previous investments and continue these readiness gains. However, as we continue to assess the sufficiency of our planned mix of manned and unmanned aviation platforms for Force Design 2030, critical reassessment and adjustment of programs will enable the necessary in-stride changes to provide the right force for the future fight. Congressional support in this area will help us provide a lethal aviation component in competition, crisis, and conflict.

Expeditionary Force-in-Readiness and Naval Integration

While Marines remain postured to meet the challenges of today's operating environment, we must increase our expeditionary readiness and improve naval integration to expand our existing competitive edge and create future advantages. In the last year, the Marine Corps issued two documents that set the course for the Marine Corps to contribute to integrated naval power in support of the Joint Force: Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-4, *Competing*, and the *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*. Additionally, the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy, *Advantage at Sea*, provides guidance for the Naval services to prevail across the competition continuum. In line with these important publications and guideposts, we continue to design and implement the concepts, forces, and capabilities that will achieve forward presence, credible deterrence, and preserve our advantage at sea.

Over the past year, the Marine Corps has made significant progress toward enduring expeditionary readiness and naval integration. In close coordination with the Navy, we are supporting development of the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW), a new class of amphibious warship that will complement traditional amphibious ships. Flexible, durable, and cost-effective, the LAW will provide the MLR with the necessary littoral maneuver, mobility and sustainment to conduct EABO in contested environments in support of the Joint Force. In addition to the LAW, we continue to work in concert with the Navy on traditional amphibious shipbuilding

plans. Our coordination with the Navy on these efforts will ensure the Marine Corps continues to provide the forward presence, assurance, and deterrence that provides a strategic warfighting advantage to the Joint Force. In the Information Environment, we are maturing the capabilities of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Information Groups (MIGs) to create awareness and effects in cyber, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum. These information capabilities will be vital to expeditionary operations across all domains. We continue to wargame and experiment with future capabilities of the MEF, including MLRs and Marine Expeditionary Units—both of which are vital to the Marine Corps remaining a globally employable and ready Naval expeditionary force.

Although we have made significant progress toward enduring Naval expeditionary readiness, there is still much work to do. We must establish a credible and ready long-range precision fires capability with specific programs like GBASM. We must also build more resilient and interoperable networks and data systems that will support the MLR's sensing and communication capabilities, enabling Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) and the "any sensor, best shooter" concept. Enterprise-wide and resource-informed network modernization, and key efforts like Next Generation Satellite Communications and the Networking on the Move program, will help us meet these communications requirements. Lastly, in concert with the Joint Logistics Enterprise, we must develop new methods to sustain distributed expeditionary forces in order to exist and persist in contested areas. This effort will include not only an assessment of how we distribute support within our own areas of operations, but how we can better enable and connect to prepositioned stocks, strategic logistics nodes, and the defense industrial base. To enable these and other capability modernizations, we must continue to invest in GBASM, the Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar, the Marine Air-Ground

Task Force Unmanned Expeditionary Aerial System, and Long Range Unmanned Surface Vessels. Congressional support in these areas, along with other Navy and Marine Corps' modernization efforts, will further our progress toward our unique contribution to the Joint Force and an enduring advantage at sea.

Infrastructure Readiness

Marine Corps installations are more than buildings, ranges, and airfields; they are warfighting platforms that provide vital support for every one of our missions, our Marines and Sailors, and their families. We must consider our infrastructure, like any other capability, in terms of its ability to provide an advantage. We must resource them as such and ensure that they remain ready to support not only today's requirements, but also future challenges.

The Marine Corps' FY22 Military Construction budget request prioritizes funding for projects that support relocation and consolidation of forces in accordance with posture plans; modernizing inadequate and obsolete facilities; and life, health, and safety improvements. The Marine Corps continues to focus its limited restoration and modernization (RM) funds on critical projects that support operational readiness, infrastructure resiliency, and new capabilities. Over the past several years, RM funding has not kept pace with requirements, but the FY22 budget request will provide a significant increase to the RM budget compared to FY21 funding levels. Additionally, we continue to implement FY20 NDAA requirements to provide the highest quality housing for our Marines, Sailors, and their families. The Marine Corps has implemented 14 of the 18 rights listed in the Tenant Bill of Rights and is coordinating with our housing partners on implementing the last 4 rights. Over the past 18 months, the total number of work orders for all housing units, the average completion time for work orders, and the average

number of work orders per housing unit have all decreased, leading to improved living conditions for our Marines, Sailors, and their families.

Infrastructure readiness includes more than the current physical condition of our facilities. It extends to whether our facilities and locations support our optimal force posture, the demands of future requirements, and climate change impacts. The Marine Corps continues to evaluate the locations and facilities requirements of its forces in accordance with the *National Defense Strategy*, particularly in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility. Additionally, in compliance with the FY20 NDAA requirement to gender integrate our recruit training depots, we are in the process of determining the infrastructure requirements and costs to ensure continued success of gender integration and modernization of recruit training. Lastly, we must address the effects of climate change, sea level rise, and major weather events on the resiliency of our installations. As we develop installation master plans that address these impacts, we understand the need for improving the resiliency of our installations' critical functions. The effects of Hurricane Florence in 2018 on our East Coast installations highlighted this requirement. We appreciate the strong Congressional support and resources we received to restore our ability to train and generate combat readiness at affected locations. Ultimately, our objective is to incorporate climate change, severe weather, and lessons learned into every aspect of our infrastructure planning process. We value this committee's oversight, input, and support as we continue to determine the enduring infrastructure requirements that best position Marine Corps forces for mission accomplishment.

Conclusion

On behalf of all of our Marines, Sailors, civilians, and families, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the readiness of the Marine Corps. As stated in the *Interim National*

Security Strategic Guidance, “We cannot pretend the world can simply be restored to the way it was 75, 30, or even four years ago...we have to chart a new course.” Our proactive modernization, balanced with preparations to fight tonight, will answer this call to action and ensure that the Marine Corps remains a Naval expeditionary force-in-readiness today and in the future.