

## ***Marine Corps Readiness***

### ***Discussion***

Today's Marine Corps is healthy and vital to the nation's national security strategy. There are 172,600 Marines on active duty with over 114,000 of them in the operating forces. On a daily basis, nearly 30,500 Marines are forward deployed, forward based, forward stationed, or deployed for training around the world. The 39,600 men and women of the Marine Corps Reserve are key to the success of our total force. They play an important role in augmenting and reinforcing our active forces, and an increasingly more active role in conducting operations usually assigned to active duty forces.

Recent budget increases to improve health care and pay have significantly helped recruiting and retention efforts and stabilized potential degradations to personnel readiness. Over 2,100 Marines will return to the operating forces from "housekeeping" billets beginning this fiscal year to increase readiness. The middle tier of our expeditionary warfighting capability, the Marine Expeditionary Brigades, were reestablished within the past year and they have clearly demonstrated their operational value to the warfighting CINCs.

The Marine Corps' focus is on its operating forces, where our first priority is readiness. The readiness of the Marine Corps rests on four pillars: Marines and their families, legacy systems, modernization, and infrastructure. Balancing limited resources across these four pillars over the past decade of constrained budgets and increased operational requirements has been very difficult. We have had to defer investment in modernization and infrastructure to fund current readiness.

We assess our current and future health in terms of the five elements of the MAGTF: CE, GCE, ACE, CSSE, and bases and stations. Across the MAGTF, the pace of modernization and the reduced amount of infrastructure investment are concerns. We have reached the point of block obsolescence for much of our ground and aviation legacy equipment. Many of our key pieces of equipment have far exceeded their programmed service lives, and some have reached the end of their useful lives. The CE's command and control systems must be modernized to meet necessary Joint and combined warfighting capabilities. The GCE's five-ton trucks and M198 howitzers are one year from the end of their programmed lives. We are doing what we can to extend the lives of our equipment, such as our 28 year old AAVs, until their replacements are fielded. In the ACE, the situation is the same for our aircraft, the majority of which (CH-46E, CH-53D, KC-130F and UH-1N) have exceeded their service lives. Where applicable, we are extending their

service lives through upgrades and remanufacturing designed to reduce life-cycle costs, improve operational capabilities, and resolve safety deficiencies until their replacements are procured. Our CSSE's equipment is aging similar to the other elements of the MAGTF. Despite the importance of combat service support to our forces, we must rely on aged vehicles, trucks, and materiel handling equipment that should be replaced.

The challenges to improving our infrastructure, while maintaining current readiness, are equally significant. Recent budget increases have arrested the growth of the backlog of maintenance and repair at our bases and stations, but reducing the backlog remains deferred well into the future. Additionally, military construction is funded well below the industry standard. Underfinanced infrastructure accounts result in increased maintenance costs and less support for our Marines and their families.

Our Marines are the greatest asset of our Corps and their effectiveness is dependent, in large measure, on the support provided by their families. Consequently, support for our families is vital to any discussion concerning readiness. We must also be vigilant to protect our bases and stations against the many forms of encroachment that threaten to curtail our training and operations. We will remain good neighbors with the surrounding civilian communities and stewards of our environment, without degrading training and the mission effectiveness of our bases and stations.

Safety, both operational and personal, is another readiness concern of the Marine Corps. Accidents resulted in the deaths of 112 of our Marines and Sailors, and injuries to 775 others from July 1999 to July 2000. These alarming statistics include both training and off-duty accidents. Sadly, many of these deaths and injuries could easily have been prevented. Safety must be afforded the attention it warrants, with the goal of eliminating preventable mishaps.

### ***Marine Corps Position***

Acceleration of the pace of modernization and support for our infrastructure are essential to maintaining readiness and to the timely improvement of our capabilities. Despite the challenges that confront us, the Marine Corps, drawing upon our 225 years of expeditionary tradition, is primed for the future. Thanks to a Corps-wide commitment to warfighting, innovation, and experimentation, the Marine Corps is able to execute its mission. It will take the continued support of Congress and the American people, however, to ensure that we continue to remain ready and modernized for the future.