

# Marine Corps Readiness

## Discussion

Sustaining current operational readiness is the Marine Corps' highest priority. The readiness of our MAGTFs rests on four pillars: Marines and their families, current systems, facilities, and modernization. The Marine Corps' readiness concerns continue to be the maintenance of aging equipment and infrastructure, the need to accelerate modernization, and recruiting and retaining Marines. The fiscal trends of the past years are impacting our ability to fully achieve the balance between current readiness and other crucial concerns such as force modernization, infrastructure, and quality of life.

The Marine Corps is placing additional emphasis on the manning of our operating forces. In an effort to reduce the amount of time Marines spend involved in activities that do not directly contribute to combat readiness, the Marine Corps is looking for ways to reduce the time spent in routine "housekeeping" chores. The Marine Corps must find sensible,



economic alternatives to such long-held practices as garrison mess duty so that our Marines can be assigned, integrated, and retained in combat-ready units with minimum disruption. Toward this end, the Marine Corps recently identified nearly 1,200 billets that are good candidates for replacement with civilian or contractor personnel. Manpower savings realized from these initiatives will result in increased manning levels in the units of the operating forces.

The Marine Corps is maintaining its equipment in the operating forces at a high state of readiness. This high state of readiness however, comes at the expense of equipment in organizations that have a lower priority, such as the supporting establishment. Decreased funding for modernization and depot level maintenance over the years is preventing the same level of readiness across the entire spectrum of equipment. The Congressional enhancements provided in the FY00 budget begin to address some of the Marine Corps' most pressing needs. However, the pace of modernization efforts and the investments in infrastructure remain a concern.

The Marine Corps faces considerable challenges in attaining the proper pace of modernization. The majority of these shortfalls are in crucial ground and aviation modernization programs required to overcome the block obsolescence that a number of major ground and aviation weapons are facing today. For example, the 29-year old AAVs had an original life of 10 years, then received a service life extension to add another 10 years of operation to their life, and are now undergoing a rebuild program to extend their service life until the AAV is fielded, beginning in FY06. M198 howitzers average 17 years of age, TOW and Dragon systems are in their early 20s, and 81mm mortars are 14 years old. The 5-ton truck fleet is at the 19 year point of its planned 20 year life, and HMMWVs are well into their second decade of service.

The majority of Marine Corps aircraft (KC-130F, CH-46E, CH-53D, and UH-1N) have already exceeded their service life. The KC-130F, for example, is 18 years past its planned retirement. Our CH-46Es are entering their fourth decade of service, and CH-53Ds are only one year away from that milestone. The "A" and "B" models of F/A-18 force have been in service for 13 years, and CH-53Es are close behind them, averaging 11 years of age. The EA-6B fleet is at the 20 year point now, and many more flight hours have been logged on this airframe this decade than originally planned. Faced with this challenge, the Marine Corps has taken maximum advantage of service life extension programs for both ground and aviation weapons systems to maintain readiness while deferring modernization, but The Corps has reached a point at which it must replace old equipment.

### *Marine Corps Position*

Each and every operational unit in the Corps remains either forward deployed or at the ready to deploy, fight, and win anywhere, against any foe. Modernization plans build a Corps for the 21st Century ensuring that it will meet the requirements associated with being the Nation's force-in-readiness. While the Corps is making great progress in developing new and innovative ways to increase readiness, continued resource support is needed to mitigate the effects that several years of high operational tempo have had upon its units and equipment. The readiness of the MAGTFs rests upon four pillars: Marines and their families, current systems, facilities, and modernization. All need due attention and resources in order to maintain a Corps that will be ready and relevant on the battlefields of the future.

