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Statement to the House Armed Services Committee

on

The Strategic Choices Management Review (SCMR)

September 18, 2013

Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, committee members, thank-you again for the opportunity to speak to you today on the Strategic Choices Management Review and the impacts sequestration will have on our Nation's armed forces.

Sequestration, by its scale and inflexibility will significantly stress our force, degrade readiness and create a significant risk to our national security...all at a time of strategic rebalancing...all done on a world stage that is chaotic and volatile. I urge this committee and the Members of Congress to consider the full range of risks across the joint force...not just for my service, but for all of us, and ask for your continued assistance in mitigating the effects of sequestration.

Our nation expects a force capable of responding to crisis anywhere around the globe at a moment's notice. *Readiness* is the critical measure of our ability to do that. This is our nation's strategic hedge against uncertainty. In times of crisis...forward deployed naval forces provide decision makers with immediate options that can control escalation, buy time, create decision space for our national leaders, and enable follow-on Joint forces.

The Marine Corps' high readiness levels mitigate the risks inherent in an uncertain world by responding with a wide range of capabilities across real-world scenarios. Your Marines remain a constant, effective hedge against the unexpected, and provide the American people a national insurance policy. Our world is a dangerous place and America must always be ready to meet emerging crisis that threaten our national security interests.

As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I am particularly concerned about the long-lasting and devastating impacts of sequestration. The very nature of sequestration erodes both the Marine Corps' readiness and that of the joint force. Scheduled tiered readiness is not an option for the Marine Corps. We must be prepared when crises erupt.

Over the last year, we have maintained our equipment readiness to the maximum extent possible. Maintenance costs are increasing and our Marines are working longer hours to keep aging equipment running. We have maintained the near term-readiness of our forward deployed forces, and next to deploy forces, at the expense of infrastructure sustainment and our modernization programs. This can't continue over the long-term. We are in a "Catch 22." If we are to succeed on future battlefields, we must modernize, and care for our infrastructure and our training facilities.

Sequestration is already starting to degrade our infrastructure. We have been forced to reprioritize infrastructure maintenance and recapitalization efforts on our facilities to be able to sustain a 'ready force'... soon there will be little left within these accounts to offset our readiness requirements.

Over my 43 year career as a United States Marine, I have seen the effects of strategic miscalculations resulting from declining resources and budget driven strategies that resulted in wholesale force cuts. We only need to look back to the 1990's, when our nation executed the first drawdown of the all-volunteer force. Following the Gulf War, we saw firsthand how deep cuts in our military produced unintended consequences and increased risk to our Nation.

During the mid to late 1990's we were challenged by a host of limited conflicts in Liberia, Somalia and Kosovo, along with the bombing of our east African embassies. By the end of that decade, the U.S. military had reduced its active-duty force by 25 percent. Operations and maintenance funds were slashed. Peacetime deployment tempo increased, wearing down the force and wearing down our families. For this very reason, Congress began to require the services to track and report our deployment tempo. The force was overly stressed...and we considered this peacetime.

We see these same problems today. In order to meet the requirements of the Defense Strategic Guidance, we need a Marine Corps of 186,800 active duty Marines. A force of 186.8K allows us to meet our steady state operations as well as go to war. It preserves a 1:3 dwell for our Marines. Our share of the 2011 Budget Control Act's \$487B reduction cut our end strength to 182,000. Based on sequestration, I simply cannot afford that size force.

Sequestration will force us to plow through scarce resources – funding our old equipment and weapon systems in an attempt to keep them alive and functional. We will be forced to reduce, or cancel, modernization programs and infrastructure investments in order to maintain readiness for those deployed and next to deploy units. Money that should be available for procuring new equipment will be rerouted into maintenance and spares accounts for our legacy equipment. This includes our forty two year-old, Nixon Era, Amphibious Assault Vehicle.

In February, we initiated a parallel study to the Department of Defense's Strategic Choices Management Review. Our internal review re-designed the Marine Corps to a force that I could simply afford under sequestration – this was not a strategy driven effort...it was a budget driven effort.

Our exhaustive research, backed by independent analysis determined that a force of 174,000 Marines is the smallest force that can meet mission requirements. This is a force with levels of risk that are minimally acceptable. For instance, assuming that global requirements for Marine forces remain the same over the foreseeable future, a force of 174K will drive the Marine Corps to a 1:2 dwell scenario for virtually all Marine units. Gone six months, home 12 months, gone six months.

Furthermore, the 174k force accepts risk when our nation commits itself to its next major theater war. In plain terms, we will have 11 fewer combat arms battalions, and 14 fewer aircraft squadrons to swiftly defeat our adversary. This is a single MCO force that would deploy and fight until war's end...in other words, we would come home when the war was over. Marines who joined the Corps during that period would likely go from drill field to battlefield.

Across the joint force, America will begin to see shortfalls in the military's ability to accomplish the national strategy. Today we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. Tomorrow's Marines will face violent extremism, battles for influence, and natural disasters. Developing states and non-state actors will acquire new technology and advanced conventional weapons that will challenge our ability to project power and gain access. In order to be effective in this new environment, we must maintain our forward influence, strategic mobility, power projection, and rapid response capabilities that Marines are known for today. We will balance an increasing focus on the Asia-Pacific region with a sustainable emphasis on the Middle East and African littorals.

I will continue to work with the members of this committee to fix the problems we are faced with today. I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you, and I am prepared to answer your questions.