DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

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MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps

Subj: ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

Secretary Panetta, as we explore ways across the Department to adjust to a new period of considerable fiscal austerity, there emerges a clear imperative that our Nation retain a credible means of mitigating risk while we draw down the capabilities and capacities of our forces.

Our Nation faces an uncertain future; we cannot predict where and when events may occur that might call us to respond to protect our citizens and our interests. There have always been times when events have compelled the United States to become involved, even when such involvement wasn't desired; there is little doubt that we will have do this again in the future. Complicating matters is the fact that since the 1990s, our nation has significantly reduced the number and size of our bases and stations around the world.

We are a maritime nation. Like so much of the world, we rely on the maritime commons for the exchange of commerce and ideas. Many depend on us to maintain freedom of movement on those commons; we continue to take that responsibility seriously. Your naval forces are the solution set to fulfilling our global maritime responsibilities.

Naval forces are not reliant on host nation support or permission; in the conduct of operations, they step lightly on our allies and host countries. With the increasing concentration of the world's population close to a coastline, the ability to operate simultaneously on the sea, ashore, and in the air, and to move seamlessly between these three domains represents the unique value of amphibious forces. Operating as a team, amphibious forces provide ***operational reach*** and ***agility***, they "*buy time*" and *decision space* for our national leaders in time of crisis. They bolster diplomatic initiatives by means of their credible forward presence. Amphibious forces also provide the Nation with assured access for the joint force in a major contingency operation. Modern amphibious operations, like the TF-58 assault that seized Kandahar airport 450 miles inland in 2001 shortly after the 9/11 attacks, seek to avoid enemy strengths by exploiting gaps and weaknesses.

When the Nation pays the 'sticker price' for its Marines, it buys the ability to remain forward deployed and forward engaged to assure our partners, reinforce alliances, and build partner capacity. For 7.8% of the total DoD budget, our Nation gains the ability to respond to unexpected crises, from humanitarian disaster relief efforts, to non-combatant evacuation operations, to conduct counter-piracy operations, raids or strikes. That same force can quickly be reinforced to assure access anywhere in the world in the event of a major contingency; it can be dialed up or down like a rheostat to be relevant across the range of military operations. No

other force possesses the flexibility to provide these capabilities and *yet sustain itself logistically for significant periods of time*, at a time and place of its choosing.

"Expeditionary" is not a bumper sticker to us, or a concept, it is a "state of conditioning" that Marines work hard to maintain. Given its mission to be the expeditionary force in readiness, a tiered readiness concept is not compatible with the Marine Corps' missions because its non-deployed units are often called upon to respond to unanticipated and varied crises on a moment's notice.

The Marine Corps fills a unique lane in the capability range of America's armed forces. A *Middleweight Force*, we are lighter than the Army, and heavier than SOF. The Corps is not a second land army. The Army is purpose-built for land campaigns and carries a heavier punch when it arrives, whereas the Marine Corps is an expeditionary force focused on coming from the sea with integrated aviation and logistics capabilities. The Marine Corps maintains the ability to *contribute* to land campaigns by leveraging or rapidly aggregating its capabilities and capacities. Similarly, Marine Corps and SOF roles are complementary, rather than redundant. Special Operation Forces contribute to the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts of the Combatant Commanders in numerous and specialized ways, but they are not a substitute for conventional forces with a broader range of capability and sustainability.

The Marine Corps was specifically directed by the 82nd Congress as the force intended to be "the most ready when the Nation is least ready." This expectation exists because of the costly lessons our nation learned during the Korean War when a lack of preparedness in the beginning stages of the conflict very nearly resulted in defeat. Because our Nation cannot afford to hold the *entire* joint force at such a high state of readiness, it has chosen to keep the Marines ready, and has often used them to plug the gaps during international crises, to respond when no other options were available.

Anecdotally, the American people believe that when a crisis emerges - Marines will be present and will "invariably turn in a performance that is dramatically and decisively successful - not most of the time, but always." They possess a heart-felt belief that the Marine Corps is good for the young men and women of our country. In their view, the Marines are extraordinarily adept at converting "un-oriented youths into proud, self-reliant stable citizens - citizens into whose hands the nation's affairs may be safely entrusted." An investment in the Marine Corps continues to be an investment in the character of the young people of our country.

Finally, in an increasingly dangerous and uncertain world, we must continue to provide the protection our Nation needs and to preserve our ability to do what we must as the world's only credible remaining super power. As we face inevitable difficult resource decisions, I believe that we must also consider how we can best mitigate the inherent risk of a reduced defense capacity…like an affordable insurance policy, Marine Corps *and* the Navy's amphibious forces, represent a very efficient and effective hedge against the Nation's most likely risks

JAMES F. AMOS