

**Statement of Admiral Mike Mullen before the  
House Armed Services Committee  
01 March 2007**

Chairman Skelton, Representative Hunter, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for your continued support of our men and women in uniform and for the opportunity and privilege to appear before you today.

I am honored to join Secretary Winter and General Conway here and consider myself fortunate to serve alongside them at this critical time in our nation's history.

And it is a critical time, Mr. Chairman. As you said, and the Secretary said, we are a nation at war -- a maritime nation at war -- fighting an elusive and adaptive enemy bent on using terror and irregular tactics to spread hatred and fear across the globe.

At the same time, we are confronted by potentially hostile nation-states determined to develop and use sophisticated weapon systems.

Your Navy is ready to meet these challenges. In fact, I argue that it is more ready -- more capable -- than I have ever seen it in my 38 years of active service.

Through the Fleet Response Plan, we continue to meet the demands of the combatant commanders with trained, flexible and sustained forces with six carrier strike groups available on 30 days notice and an additional carrier strike group ready to serve within 90 days.

Indeed, nearly one hundred of our ships and submarines are at sea today and deployed and more than sixty thousand Sailors are forward.

Fully half these men and women serve in the Middle East and almost half of that number are on the ground in combat and in combat support roles. They are performing magnificently, each and every one.

I had the opportunity to visit with many of them over the holidays in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bahrain and the Horn of Africa. I can tell you they are focused, well trained and well led. They are proud of what they are doing, still proud of the difference they know they are making.

The best readiness we have ever seen. The best Sailors we have ever recruited. The very best support from absolutely remarkable families; it's an unbeatable combination.

But we have to work hard to sustain this readiness.

I remain concerned about high OPTEMPO and certain shortfalls among our expeditionary forces -- SEALs, explosive ordnance disposal personnel, our naval construction force, our medical corps, and our naval intelligence community.

And, as I testified to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense last month, the accelerated wear and tear on systems and equipment in a harsh physical environment requires immediate attention -- especially our SEABEE equipment and older models of our expeditionary aircraft.

The sound investments we made in recent years to improve Fleet capacity and capabilities have paid off. We must now re-energize our procurement accounts to maintain those capabilities in the future.

Our fiscal year 2008 budget request helps us do that, calling for the construction of seven new ships -- including a Virginia-class submarine, an LPD and the continued construction of a new aircraft carrier -- as well as the addition of 188 new operational aircraft to the inventory, nearly forty more than we ordered last year.

As you know, we submitted a shipbuilding plan to Congress last year that would produce a fleet of 313 ships by 2020, a fleet sized and balanced to meet the challenges we face at the maximum acceptable risk.

That plan -- submitted again to you with this budget -- has not changed.

Still centered on 11 aircraft carriers and a battle force of 48 submarines and commensurate surface combatants, it will provide the nation more options and more flexibility than ever before -- particularly in core warfighting competencies like mine and undersea warfare and anti-ballistic missile defense.

I appreciate the support we have received from this committee in developing this plan and in building this fleet. It is important that we sustain it.

We continue to evaluate -- as we must -- the impact global developments have had on the plan's original risk assumptions. The security environment is too dynamic and the pace of change too rapid for us not to do so.

But I assure you I remain committed to a stable shipbuilding program and to pursuing, with our partners in industry, and you on the Hill, the efficiencies required to make it affordable.

Three things have definitely not changed, Mr. Chairman -- my priorities to sustain combat readiness, build a fleet for the future and develop 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders.

I know the role our Navy must play in helping win the war on terror, while providing a powerful deterrent and meeting our commitment as a vital element of this nation's strategic reserve.

I know -- and I know you know -- that a maritime nation such as ours depends in great measure on the overmatching capability, global reach, persistent presence, agility and lethality of a strong Navy.

We are that Navy, Mr. Chairman, and with your continued support we will remain that Navy.

Again, on behalf of your Sailors, Navy civilians and their families, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. And I stand ready to answer your questions.