

**Opening Statement of Admiral Mike Mullen before the
Senate Armed Services Committee (As delivered)
29 March 2007**

Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, Senator Warner, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for your continued support of our men and women in uniform and for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am honored to join Secretary Winter and General Conway -- representing the longest-lasting inter-Service relationship in our nation's history: The Navy-Marine Corps Team.

As the Secretary said, we are a nation at war -- a maritime nation -- 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, sir. Thousand-six was a busy year.

We met the demands of Combatant Commanders for well-trained, combat-ready forces around the world -- deterring aggression and combating terrorism while providing international disaster relief to Pakistan and the Philippines revisiting tsunami-ravaged southeast Asia with humanitarian relief from the hospital ship MERCY. Successfully evacuating over 14,000 American citizens safely from Lebanon and demonstrating our surge capability and partner-building capacity in exercises VALIANT SHIELD and RIMPAC.

In addition to that, we monitored missile launches on the Korean Peninsula with our Aegis destroyers, sent a message of hope and resolve with the GEORGE WASHINGTON Carrier Strike Group in Partnership of the Americas, and developed closer military relationships with the navies of China, India and Russia.

Some of our finest warfare officers command Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Navy admirals commanded the Joint Task Forces in the Horn of Africa and Guantanamo Bay.

We also helped strengthen Homeland Security through partnership with the Coast Guard.

Nearly one hundred of your ships and submarines are at sea today, and more than 60,000 Sailors are forward deployed.

Fully half these men and women serve in the CENTCOM AOR and almost half of that number are on the ground in combat and 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 Arabian Gulf, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, 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 prouder of the difference they know they are making.

But we must work hard to sustain this readiness.

Though we continue to meet or exceed almost all of our recruiting and retention goals, I remain concerned about certain shortfalls among our expeditionary forces -- SEALs, explosive ordnance disposal personnel, our naval construction force, medical corps, and naval intelligence community.

Additionally, I am starting to see for the first time in years a drop in first-term retention. I am watching this closely.

As I testified to the House Armed Services Committee last month, the accelerated wear and tear on systems and equipment in a harsh physical environment requires immediate attention -- especially on combat construction equipment for our Seabees and older models of our expeditionary aircraft - the P3, EP3, and EA-6Bs.

The sound investments we made to improve Fleet capabilities have paid off. We must now continue to re-energize 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, 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 maximum acceptable risk.

That plan -- submitted with this budget -- has not changed.

Still centered on 11 -- and eventually 12 -- aircraft carriers, 48 submarines, 88 surface combatants and 55 Littoral Combat Ships, it will provide the nation more options and more flexibility than ever before, particularly in core warfighting areas 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.

We continue to evaluate -- as we must -- the impact global developments have had on the plan's original risk assumptions.

I assure you I remain committed to a stable shipbuilding program and to pursuing, with our partners in industry, OSD and here 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 21st century leaders.

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

I know well our requirement to support those we send into harm's way with the very best medical care, top-notch housing and installations, and a strong commitment to their professional growth.

The 2008 budget we have submitted is not without risk. While other services have seen toplines increased since 9-11, the Navy has experienced a seven billion dollar decrease in buying power over the last four years.

Our budget request represents the maximum risk we believe we can accept in four key areas: manpower, readiness ashore and afloat, procurement and our reset.

When our ground forces return from Iraq and Afghanistan, the nation will increasingly depend upon the core expeditionary capabilities of its Navy and Marine Corps team.

I know -- and I know you know -- that a maritime nation such as ours depends in great measure, as it has for more than 230 years, on the flexibility, reach, agility and lethality of that team.

Indeed, I note with pride that this week -- March 27th, in fact -- marks the anniversary of the passage of the Naval Act of 1794, the legislation that revived the United States Navy and led to the construction of the original six frigates, including, of course, USS CONSTITUTION.

In his annual address to Congress just a few months prior to the passage of that act, President Washington alluded to the young nation's need to defend itself.

"If we desire to avoid insult," he noted, "we must be able to repel it. If we desire to secure peace, it must be known that we are at all times ready for war."

Your Navy today, sir, is still ready to help secure peace and ready at all times to both deter war and to fight it.

I thank you for the support you so generously give us to maintain that readiness, and, again, on behalf of your Sailors, Navy civilians and their wonderfully supportive families, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.