

**OFFICE OF  
THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

**SAN DIEGO MILITARY ADVISORY COUNCIL FORUM**

**REMARKS BY  
GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY,  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

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GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY:

I want to talk to you folks today for a fairly brief period of time about three things. First is where our Corps is today; second is where we think we need to go based on some research; and third, how we're going to get there, and then I might save a little time for a couple of comments on the SDMAC.

The Sergeant Major and I never speak to an audience without talking about our number-one priority, which is our troops in combat. We just returned from the theater, Iraq and Afghanistan in August, and I've got to tell you, folks, it's too early to run up the victory pennant in Iraq, but things are looking better there than anybody ever would have believed at this point in time.

I left there in the fall of '04. It was the deadly, the volatile al Anbar province. Today, it is, in many ways, the model for what's taking place in the rest of the country. The commanders out of Baghdad come see our commanders and say, you're a couple of years ahead of everybody else. How are you doing this?

Well, the fact is we owe credit to rotation after rotation of Marines and Sailors and Soldiers who supported us in the province over time, and some of them are in the room here this morning, I might add. It is a constant theme that has been heard. There's the patience, perseverance, trigger control, all those things that have caused the Sunni leadership out west in the Anbar province to eventually come to our people and say, you're not the enemy. We thought you were. It's the al Qaeda. And if you will join with us, we will slaughter those people – their term – and rid the countryside of them.

And that's essentially what's been happening out there since the fall of '06. General John Kelly, who's out there right now in charge of our troops, would say that his kinetic efforts are about 5 percent of what he does. The rest of it has to do with politics and economics and making sure that the Sunnis are able to enjoy the welfare of the country as it continues to improve. So a pretty good news story right now out of Iraq. You can still get hurt there. We lost a corporal here I guess about a week ago, but it's not nearly the dangerous and volatile place, again, that it was over the past few years.

Afghanistan is not such an encouraging story, if the trends lines on casualties and attacks are down in Iraq, they are up in Afghanistan. And, frankly, I think our Nation is going to be there for a while. You've got drugs in the south that are fueling the insurgency with resources. I just think the terrain, in addition to the safe-haven in Pakistan, means we're going to be in that fight for some time to come.

We've got Marine units that are there. The 24th MEU did a great job as a Marine Air-Ground Task Force in the Sagan River valley. They're coming back home to the East Coast as we speak. Second Battalion, Seventh Marines was put into the mountains along the rat lines that connect up to the drug fields and the safe haven. They've done a great job. They've taken a number of casualties in the battalion, but they're also coming home to the desert now at Twentynine Palms.

We're putting another what we call a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force in to replace 2-7, but I'll tell you, ladies and gentlemen, it hurts, because your Corps has been in what we call one-to-one deployment to dwell for a long time now. That means deploy for seven months and our young Marines and sailors are home for seven months, in some cases, not even that. In some cases, it's only five months depending upon the MOS.

So at the time that the Secretary made that decision with regards to the 24th MEU and 2/7, I sat at the meeting and explained to the Secretary, sir, we're going to have to draw a red line here. If you want more forces in Afghanistan, if you want more Marines in those mountains, we can do that, and we probably should, but the fact is we can't do both. We can't have a foot in both camps. We're just not big enough. So if you want more forces in Afghanistan, they must come from Iraq and you must be willing to accept the risk that those forces simply can't go there without training, if you want them to go to Afghanistan. He's got that.

Third Battalion, 8th Marines was headed to Iraq. We anticipated that was going to happen and we trained them well and we're satisfied they're going to do well, and we really anticipate there will be more Marines there come springtime in order to start taking care of business once and for all in Afghanistan, and arguably, Pakistan.

In regards to this one-to-one deployment to dwell, we realized at the outset we needed to do something about it. We want to get it to one-to-two, seven months deployed and 14 months home, more time with the families, more time to train and do some other types of things as opposed to just preparing for contingencies. There are two ways that you reduce deployment to dwell. One is to reduce the requirement. The other is to grow the force, and we have been given authority to grow 27,000 additional Marines. We've been at it now for about two years.

As we first analyzed the problem, we said it would take us about five years, about 5,000 Marines a year over a five-year period, in order to keep the quality high. Well, I think we even surprised ourselves. In the first year, we didn't get the 5,000. We got 7,000. The next year, was 12,000. We are going to close out our growth about the first quarter of next year. And part of the credit goes here to General Angela Salinas who heads up the recruiting district of Marine Corps Recruiting District West. She has got a counterpart on the East Coast and they're just hitting it out of the ball park. Twenty-seven thousand additional Marines in about a two-and-a-half year period — 96.2 percent high-school graduates. These are great numbers.

Okay. So where are we going with this force? We put our analysts at Quantico to work. What the vision group there tells us, in the period of about 2020 to 2025, we think that's the sweet spot. If you're looking beyond 2025, you're really crystal balling. If you're looking short of that, you're not affecting some of the programs that some of you businessmen know are at work right now. So we think that's the sweet spot.

And what they tell us about that period is really kind of interesting. I'll share just a few of those with you. First, they say that the demographics are going to change. The world, as we know it, as we studied it coming up in school, the industrialized countries are going to get older. The unindustrialized countries, the developing countries, are going to get younger and a lot of

those people aren't going to have jobs. So you've automatically a condition where you can see friction.

Increasingly, people are moving to what we call urban sprawl along the coast. By 2025, they anticipate that 70 percent of the world's population will live within 35 miles of a sea coast, which I think portends some important things for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard team.

They tell us that oil will continue the grease the machines of the industrialized world. We're attempting to find alternative energy sources, of course, but they will not be sufficiently mature by then that we will still be reliant on oil.

But they also tell us that water will be as important as oil, and nations will flat go to war for a fresh drinking supply. By 2020, they think that 40 percent of the nations in the world will be in what is called a water-stressed condition, so we certainly need to pay close attention to that.

They tell us that we could see a near peer arise, a China, potentially a resurgent Russia, but most likely what we're going to see is hybrid conflict. The best example I can point you to, to demonstrate that, was the Israeli-Hezbollah dust-up in '06. Non-state actors who, nevertheless, had fifth-generation systems sufficient to knock out a battalion's worth of Israeli tanks, able to take out a ship on the horizon at 12 miles with some very well trained people operating those systems. They think, for the most part, that's the environment that we're going to see and that we need to prepare for.

The last thing I would offer to you, in terms of their analysis, is that they say the United States will still continue to be tremendously important in the world of 2025, but not as much so, ladies and gentlemen, as we are today. Since the fall of the wall, it's been pretty much a single polar world. We are the power in this world, but by 2025, the economic machine that is China – India is not far behind them – a resurgent Russia, a collective Europe, all are going to cause it to be a multi-polar world.

And the United States will still be important, again, militarily, diplomatically, in terms of our business power, but we'll have to understand how to live in an environment where we are not as much an influence as we are today. We think we can do that, but it's simply going to take some learning in the process.

So how do we get there? Well, folks, we get there first of all through, as Terry mentioned, just the tremendous young men and women that join our Corps today. You know, years ago, some guys that look like me sat back. We were concerned that the next generation might not have what it takes to be good Marines and Soldiers and Sailors and Airmen.

Quite frankly, we were dead wrong. We thought that too much time with a joystick in their hand, not enough time outside, not enough organized sports, those kinds of things, might not make them good Soldiers and Marines. We were dead wrong. We've seen these people in combat. Their raw courage, their sense of sacrifice, their sense of team play is eye-watering. And I would offer to you this Marine Corps, and indeed this Nation, is going to be in great shape

safe for a long time to come, as your sons and daughters and nieces and nephews go to positions of responsibility. So that's the corollary to everything else that takes place.

We think, as a Corps, we will have to be expeditionary, and there are some problems with that right now. Our definition of expeditionary is fast, austere, and lethal. That's what we offer to the Nation. That's the Marine Corps niche in this theory of the armed forces, and quite frankly, we've got some problems about that I'll describe for you in just a moment. We think that's what we need in this world of, again, increasingly hybrid threat. We think that we need to be a two-fisted fighter.

Frankly, there are those in the building where I work, with five sides on every issue, that would have us move further to the right, further towards a counterinsurgency kind of capability. But we offer the significant portion of the Nation's forcible entry capability. We're not going to put a counterinsurgency force onto a nation's shore somewhere. That force has to be major contingency operations capable — big fight capable. So we think we've got to be balanced. We've got to be able to go both ways and we think that we can with the force that we've got if proper training follows.

And that leads then to the discussion of challenges. Our first challenge is that today, we are probably one of the world's best counterinsurgency forces. When you're home for that seven months, you're training to go back again. We've seen the results of our impact in Iraq and now Afghanistan, but the fact is that we have become a second land army. We have grown tremendous numbers of rolling stock. We now own MRAPs that weigh 48,000 pounds that you can't get aboard ship. We have many more heavy weapons in our battalions. We have heavier communication gear. We are, for all intents and purposes, losing our expeditionary capability and we've got to go on a diet in more ways than one.

The second thing is that we've got to get back to those training core competencies that we previously had, as that flexible, lethal, expeditionary force. We don't do amphibious exercises anymore except on a very small scale with our brothers in the Navy. We don't do mountain warfare training except by exception. We don't do jungle training. And maybe most importantly, we don't do combined arms live fire exercises in a place called Twentynine Palms.

Years ago, before 2001, we would do about 10 such exercises a year. Troops would maneuver up to an objective under their own artillery, attack helicopters, and fixed wing air dropping live bombs. A troop would get up on the objective, pick up a piece of steel and it would burn his hand. Folks, that's training, and that's what we've got to get back to. That's what will give our Marines the competence so they can survive in any environment as that expeditionary force.

And lastly, I think to some degree, we've got to get back to the expeditionary mindset. We now have a whole generation of young officers and young enlisted Marines, if you accept that a generation is about four years because that is what they sign up for. We have an entire generation that thinks that expeditionary is living at the forward operating base, sleeping on a cot, and having three square meals a day and Häagen-Dazs for desert. (Laughter.) That is not expeditionary in the old sense. We've got to get it back and we think that we will.

So that's all out there for us to do. Those are the challenges that we see ahead, but if we can get to this one-to-two ratio and start training the force, we will get back to what you expect your United States Marine Corps to do.

Let me shift targets now and simply say it was really interesting to read about the background and the history of the SDMAC. I was out here years ago. There was no such organization. I understand how you split off, and in some ways, I think that your organization is analogous to ours. We emphasize moral courage on the part of our Marines, especially our officers and staff NCOs. I think this organization has exercised a great deal of moral courage in doing what it was that you sensed that you had to do and in going and doing it.

Secondly, you have a significant impact because you represent, I think, a very large population that resides right here in San Diego area: 25-percent-plus of the product that's produced here; 375,000 jobs, a figure that says 340,000 active duty, retired or DOD employees. Those are impressive figures and there's power that's vested, I think, in this organization.

In the case of the Corps, we represent 6 % of the Nation's defense budget. We provide 17 % of the ground maneuver battalions, 19 % of the attack helicopters and 14 % of the attack aircraft — a pretty good buy for 6 % of the budget. We have an enlisted to officer ratio of one officer for every nine. If you aggregate the other services, theirs is half of that. We have 15 civilians for every Marine — the other services are at two or three service members per civilian. And so you can see that we're built, again, to do just what we do — and that is to fight the Nation's wars.

The last thing is I sense that what you do, and you said it, you do it right. We emphasize that with our people: it may be more expensive, it may be harder, it may take more time, but just do the right thing. You folks here, in my mind and my estimate of what I've read, at least, are doing the right thing. We're indebted to you for that, and we thank you for the job that you do.

Let me finish by saying that terrorism lives. It's out there. We have not yet crushed al Qaeda, but I would simply ask that you folks keep those great young Marines and Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen in your prayers, that are out there doing the job. I'll paraphrase a quote by a guy named Orwell years ago, who said that Americans should sleep comfortably in their beds at night knowing that rough men are ready to visit violence on those that would do them harm.

Ladies and gentlemen, a good chunk of those men out there who are ready to visit that violence are United States Marines. Thank you very much for your time this morning.