

**REMARKS BY  
GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY,  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS  
“THIS WEEK IN DEFENSE NEWS”  
INTERVIEW WITH VAGO MURADIAN  
WUSA STUDIO  
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VAGO MURADIAN: Good morning and welcome to “This Week in Defense News.” I’m Vago Muradian. We have a very special show today. For the first time, we are welcoming a service chief to the program. It is an honor to have with us on this Memorial Day weekend General James Conway, the 34<sup>th</sup> commandant of the United States Marine Corps. He will be with us for the entire show talking about the war, modernization, and the tougher, more agile corps he envisions for the future.

First, a quick look at the evolution of the United States Marine Corps. It was founded in Philadelphia’s Tun Tavern on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1775 as America’s naval infantry. Today it is the nation’s 911 force, a self-sustaining, quick reaction unit operating from Navy ships and equipped with its own ground forces, strike aircraft, and cargo helicopters. But since 2001, the Marines have been land bound, America’s second Army. This spring, 3200 Marines deployed to Afghanistan pushing the number of U.S. troops to more than 30,000, the most since 2001. But can the Marine Corps sustain large forces in Iraq and Afghanistan for extended periods? To help ease the burden, the corps is growing to 202,000 Marines by late 2011. That means adding some 27,000 more Marines. And unlike the Army, which has struggled to meet its recruiting goals, the Marines are ahead of schedule exceeding goals.

But the Marines are also at a crossroads. The nation continues to depend on the corps for war needs in Iraq and Afghanistan as the commandant wants his Marines back at sea fully equipped to fight from it in the future. Marine Commandant James Conway, thanks very much for joining us.

GENERAL JAMES CONWAY: Vago, thank you very much for the opportunity to be aboard. Congratulations on the increasing popularity of your show.

MR. MURADIAN: Thank you very much, sir. That’s what we like – yes, to give us compliments. Thank you, sir.

What is the condition of the Marine Corps right now in terms of manpower and equipment?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, it’s good. It is stressed, but I continue to be amazed at the resiliency of the young Marines, their willingness to fight the nations’ wars, their willingness to accept seven months deployed and seven months home as a matter of routine, and then do it again and again. I am concerned about our families. They are very proud of what they are doing, but they are also probably the most brittle part of the whole equation. And so we are taking a special effort to see after their needs while their Marine is deployed and try to enhance or make even better their quality of life.

In terms of the equipment, it is being ridden very hard. We have opted to leave major portions of our equipment in the theatre. We were concerned initially that there could be a sort of a precipice where that gear would really start to show the wear and tear. But what we found actually is that putting the mechanics in on a routine basis, a very good supply line, in some cases, they actually run better when they are run hard. We have been able to keep what we call an amber-green board, which means it is staying at roughly 90 percent or more availability. So we are very pleased with that.

MR. MURADIAN: Your force is the most combat experienced since Vietnam, yet you say you want your Marines to be tougher than they already are. What have you learned in six years of continuous combat that brings you to that conclusion?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, “tougher” is a relative term. I want two things of our Marines, I would say. First of all, one is that we need to get back to our expeditionary mentality. Right now our Marines are living on cots, pretty much having three squares a day. When you move onto an austere environment, such as we are prone to do in our past, you have got to accept that. You have got to adapt to it, you have got to make something out of it. So we need to make sure that we maintain the expeditionary mentality.

The other thing that we have got to get back is our ability to do many more things for the great nation. Right now we are a very tough counterinsurgency force. That is what we train to do – that is what we do when we are deployed. We are not doing amphibious exercises. We are not doing combined arms, live fire maneuver. We are not doing mountain training or cold weather training, and those traditionally have been our core competencies. So those are the things that given time and given a better rotation that gives us more time at home, we need to get back to it.

MR. MURADIAN: You have campaigned to get out of Iraq and take over the Afghan mission. Why is that something that is so important to you?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, things in the Anbar province, where Marines are almost exclusively assigned, are very, very good these days. I mean, there was a time when it was a deadly, the volatile al Anbar. But towards the fall of '06, that changed dramatically. The Sunni sheiks came to us and said, we are tired of the al Qaeda. We now know that they are our worst enemy, not you. If you will join with us, we will help you slaughter them, their term. And that is what has been happening ever since.

So today, sometime after that, we find ourselves in a nation-building kind of role. And the Marine Corps is not manned or trained or equipped to do that. So at some point in time, we would like to turn that over to forces that do have a better capability in that end, and either move to another fight or start expanding on that dwell time, so that we can get back some of those core competencies.

MR. MURADIAN: Do you think that some of those capabilities that you honed in Anbar would be particularly useful though now in Afghanistan given the situation there?

GEN. CONWAY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. We have honed, again, our counterinsurgency skills over and above what we were, say, in 2003. We learned a great deal about tribalism, about how decisions are made and what those key decision points are. We have done a good bit of nation-building. And that is going to be a natural part of any counterinsurgency force. So although the languages are different – there are cultural differences, of course – there is still lots of overlap and lots of carryover that were we to be assigned to Afghanistan in larger numbers, we think it would be very valuable to us, yes, sir.

MR. MURADIAN: Each one of the services have changed dramatically over the past years since the war on terror. Yet Secretary Gates has still occasionally criticized the military – for not having changed enough or sometimes being too wedded to old-time operational concepts saying that the future is going to be much more like today than it is has been. Is the corps changing as fast as he and you would like? And where do you think that you do better?

GEN. CONWAY: The answer is it is changing to the degree that we need to change to be very competent in the environment that we face. But it is my belief – and the secretary and I have had this conversation fairly recently that those rounds that he is firing right now are going over our head. He is not necessarily talking to us because Marines have broad applicability either in a counterinsurgency environment or in a major contingency op. And he and I had the dialogue that we are primarily in play at the tactical and the operational level. We don't do strategic much at all. We don't get involved in space. We don't do ballistic missile defense. We don't have the strategic reserve.

MR. MURADIAN: You are not developing the satellites?

GEN. CONWAY: No, no. I assure you that. And so we have a flexibility that is applicable in virtually, again, any kind of an environment. And the things that we are buying are, again, focused to be able to go both ways.

MR. MURADIAN: You are increasing obviously the size of the force. But do you have enough people to handle Iraq, Afghanistan, as well as start to put more people at sea? The reason they haven't been going at sea is in order to lighten the load on the deployed force.

GEN. CONWAY: Well, we are gaining more people. We have been given, Vago, the authority to grow 27,000 additional Marines. We are in the process of doing that very rapidly. Those additional units are going to help with regard to our numbers of Marine units able to deploy, ultimately, then our deployment-to-dwell. But right now, again, we are pretty well taxed. If there should be a decision to move more Marines to Afghanistan, there must be a reduction of the 26,000 or so Marines that are in Iraq for us to be able to do that. Unfortunately, we routinely have to say no to some of the other combatant commanders who would like our forces out there engaging as part as of the naval force or as just an independent Marine force with some of the nations that they are trying to influence. So we will have more Marines, but we don't have enough right now to satisfy all the requirements, I think it is fair to say.

MR. MURADIAN: We will be right back with General James Conway about the Marine Corps modernization priorities. You are watching "This Week in Defense News."

*(Commercial Break)*

The operational heart of the Marine Corps is its Marine air ground task forces, or MAGTFs. One of those MAGTFs is the Marine expeditionary unit, or MEU. If you parked a MEU at sea just off Baltimore, you could project 2300 Marines and their equipment hundreds of miles north, south, and inland, and sustain them in continuous combat operations for 14 days, enough time for reinforcements to arrive. And with V-22 Osprey tilt-rotors, those Marines can get there twice as fast and go three times farther than with conventional helicopters.

But money remains the biggest challenge. The Marines want the Navy to buy more amphibious ships. They want to buy more joint strike fighters and expeditionary-fighting vehicles to ferry troops quickly from sea to shore. That program, however, is behind schedule and over budget.

Once again, we are joined by General James Conway, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. Sir, are you growing the force too late? There is a school of thought that says that as the budget has come down, as many say it is sure to happen, that you are going to have to cut modernization by several billion dollars a year in order to keep people around.

GEN. CONWAY: Vago, my answer may surprise you. But I think for a garrison-type of environment, 202,000 Marines are too many. We are better disposed at about 175 (thousand) to 180,000 perhaps. But right now the nation is at war. We did not, for whatever combination of reasons, grow our forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines at the beginning of this war. And so I think there is a necessity to have a larger Marine Corps and Army. We are under stress. And I would simply say that this may be a generational struggle. And in that period of time, there can be a lot of uncertainties out there that the nation needs to be able to deal with. So until such times as we are through that and we see our way clear over to the other side, I think it is simply wise to have more Marines and soldiers.

MR. MURADIAN: Do you – we mentioned the V-22 there in the little intro piece. What advantages has the V-22 brought the Corps in Iraq? And when is it going to Afghanistan?

GEN. CONWAY: Yeah. Well, let me answer the first part of your question with facts. The first squadron has just recently come home from Iraq, a seven-month deployment with VMM-263. We were very pleased with the first combat deployment of that aircraft in that squadron. I will be honest. We purposefully downplayed the success they were having throughout the seven months because we wanted to finish the deployment. We wanted to make sure that our initial assessments were correct and that the airplane was going to be everything we wanted it to be in replacing the venerable CH-46 and our CH-53 Deltas. It has done that. The availability rates, the mission performance, the way that all Marines, both aviation and ground, are attracted to the new capabilities of the airplane is just incredible. And we are delighted with the success that we have seen. We now are opening to the media and to the congressmen on the Hill, the success of that deployment.

Let me give you one example of the capability of the airplane. When we crossed the line in '03, I said to my boss, General McKiernan, let me make sure you remember that if you need 1,000 Marines anywhere on the battlefield within 100 miles of where we are located, we will come out of our tracks, into our helicopters, and be there for you in 12 hours. Today if the Marine commander were to make that same promise, it would be anywhere 300 miles on the battlefield. That is the tremendous additional capability that this aircraft gives to us.

MR. MURADIAN: On a vehicular side, you have said you don't want additional – any more MRAPs than you absolutely need in order to do the current mission. EFV, the expeditionary-fighting vehicle, has been on the drawing boards for about 20 years. It has cost you billions of dollars. But it is still not ready. And the language has changed a little bit from saying that the EFV is critical to the capability is critical. What do you mean by that? And what do you do for mobility to replace some of your other vehicles.

GEN. CONWAY: Well, the EFV is absolutely critical. As an anecdote, let me tell you. I just got back recently from a trip to China, where I rode aboard their EFV. So theirs is already functional and in the fleet. We need one dramatically because with anti-access systems that exist really throughout the world now. You saw even Hezbollah used them in a dustup with Israel in '06. Now, the Navy does not intend to take its large and expensive ships and their sailors and my Marines closer than about 25 miles to the beach.

Our current vehicles move through the water at about eight knots. That is a long swim in potentially some very heavy water. We have got to be able to close that distance in a much faster way. And that EFV getting above the water and planing across it at about 30 knots gives us that capability. So it is absolutely essential to us as both a means to close the beach, and then it transitions into our armored fighting vehicle for purposes inland.

MR. MURADIAN: You have said you are seeking more amphibious ships. The Navy has balked a little bit at that. Critics, however, point to your recent deployment to Afghanistan by saying that your Marines flew. Their equipment went on sealift ships, and Nassau sailed alone, the Nassau ESG. Why did that happen? And do you really need as many amphibious ships in the future?

GEN. CONWAY: Yeah, well, I would say that those things you just described more talk to our adaptability to go into a landlocked country than it does the need or the value of amphibious ships. And I guess I would also correct one thing. The Navy has lots of shipbuilding requirements right now; amphib ships are one of them. But last year, an amphib ship was their number one unfunded priority. This year, it is their number two unfunded priority. So I am working with CNO and the secretary of the Navy in order to try to be able to gain, say, more amphibious ships for our needs.

America needs a forcible-entry capability. And we and our brothers in the Navy are essentially it. And we need to maintain that at a minimal level of capability. And right now that represents two brigades of Marines. That is not a lot. If you are going to go across someone else's shore, that is not a lot of Marines when you know that that adversary is going to be

reacting quickly to where you do go in. Now, the other thing that I have got to say is that when you say amphibious operation or amphibious assault, most people visualize Tarawa or Iwo Jima. Today's amphibious operation looks nothing like that. And so it is a whole different tactical and operational evolution that depends on sophisticated things like the EFV and like the Osprey to take down an enemy force.

MR. MURADIAN: We will be back with General Conway, Marine Corps commandant, in just a moment to talk about the future of the corps.

*(Commercial Break)*

We are back with General Conway, commandant of the Marine Corps. Sir, very quickly, what is the Marine Corps going to look like in 2025? And what are some of the terrible choices on the way to the future forces?

GEN. CONWAY: Vago, what I am shaping it to look like is a two-fisted fighter, able to move quickly to a major contingency operation with the force necessary to be successful, but also able to fight these counterinsurgency fights that may be necessary in a counterinsurgency somewhere. We think we can do that.

The terrible choices that we have got to make have to do with our deployability needs. We go aboard ship; we go aboard the aircraft at TRANSCOM. Right now we are too heavy. Right now we are serving very much in a second-land Army role in Iraq. The heavy MRAPs, the additional rolling stock, the additional weapons and communications equipment. We have got to shed in order to be able to meet those transportation means. Along the way, we give away protection for our Marines. And we have got to get that right. And that is the terrible choice that we have got out there is how light is too light?

MR. MURADIAN: And sir, that balance – in your mind, it is not an inconsistency to say you want to be lighter, more agile, but still maintain the 30 ship – deploy 30,000 Marines and their gear requirement or are those two things incongruous?

GEN. CONWAY: No, I don't see them as incongruous at all. We can deploy as many as 30,000 Marines. We can deploy less. But again, if you are going to conduct a forcible-entry operation, it is a race for time. You put a force ashore, and you establish a beachhead. It is only a matter of time before you receive a counterattack. So you can be too small if you are talking about forcible entry across another nation's shore.

MR. MURADIAN: What are the specific kind of threats that you are building the force for in the future? I mean, is there any specific scenarios that are guiding you or are they more generalized?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, that has always been our dilemma as Marines – go anywhere, do anything on behalf of the nation. That is why we teach adaptability and flexibility. That is why we have various weapon systems, sampling of high-end things, but with emphasis on the qualities of our great young Marines, so that we can face whatever foe may be there.

MR. MURADIAN: We have got a little bit of time left. JSF, are you convinced it is going to be okay? The Navy has balked a little bit on the program.

GEN. CONWAY: Well, it has got to be. We have not bought a fighter aircraft now in 10 years. We have skipped a generation of aircraft to get to this fifth generation kind of capability. It is a very high priority for the United States Marine Corps.

MR. MURADIAN: DDX, Navy is building this ship to support your need for precision persistent fires. Does that requirement still stand?

GEN. CONWAY: The requirement stands. It is an asymmetric advantage that we have. I ask two things of the CNO. One, give us those kinds of fires from the sea. And second, be able to protect our Marines in the sea base through his fleet-defense systems.

MR. MURADIAN: One last quick question. You are going to be going to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Belleau Wood, where the name Devil Dogs was founded. Where do you stand on this debate in the Marine Corps about being called Devil Dog?

GEN. CONWAY: Devil Dog is traditional. It is a historic title. It is one that is awarded to combat Marines and everyone should be proud to be a part of it.

MR. MURADIAN: Of being Teufel Hunden.

GEN. CONWAY: Teufel Hunden. (*Chuckles*)

MR. MURADIAN: Sir, thanks very, very much.

GEN. CONWAY: Pleasure to be aboard again. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

MR. MURADIAN: Next up in my notebook, French military power plans clash with its economy. You are watching "This Week in Defense News."

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