

**REMARKS BY
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GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY: Thank you, Legionnaires and family members, great to be with you this morning. And thank you, Marty, for the fine introduction.

I'd like to introduce two people who are on the stage this morning. First of all, Annette and Sergeant Major, would you please stand up? My wife is probably the prettiest girl in Washington, D.C. and the Sergeant Major is one of the finest Marines who ever wore that uniform. Thanks for coming with us.

Folks, Marty and the organizers asked me to talk about three or four things today with you. One is, of course, how our Corps is doing in the Long War in Iraq and Afghanistan. Secondly, the health of the force and they asked if I could talk about some of my concerns as Commandant. Lastly, I'll talk about something of our vision and what we have planned for the Corps of the future. I'm very happy to do that.

In fact, the Sergeant Major and I just got back from Iraq eight days ago. I can tell you that things, at least in al Anbar — where the Marines are almost exclusively assigned — are incredibly good these days. When I left Iraq in the fall of 2004, it was the deadly or the volatile al Anbar. We were in a fight every day. We were losing Marines just about every day. We were always giving better than we got, but we were in a very serious fight. That all changed in the fall of 2006 because at that time, the Sunni sheiks came to our leadership and said, "You know, we have had it up to here with al Qaeda. They have a murder and intimidation campaign that is killing our young. They are showing 15th century kind of Sharia law that we have no interest in, and now they want to intermarry our women."

Maybe that was the last straw, but in any event, they said to our leadership, "If you will join us, we will turn on these people and slaughter them." That was their term. And frankly, that's what's been happening in the province ever since. The surge reinforced success, in that it gave us the opportunity to get to places we had not been. But today, in al Anbar province, it is an amazing thing to see because essentially, the Iraqis have got it. They're in charge. Now, it's still a dangerous place. You can still get killed in the Anbar province but there's just absolutely no way that in 2004 that we would have thought that it would be, in a very real sense, the model for what's taking place in the rest of Iraq.

We went to Afghanistan and I can tell you that as much as the attacks and the casualties are down in Iraq, there's a different trajectory taking place in Afghanistan. Attacks are up and casualties are up. I truly think, ladies and gentlemen, we're going to be there for a while because some of the elements of a long-term insurgency in place in Afghanistan. You have the drug fields, which represent money to the insurgents, and you have a safe haven not far away. We

visited two main units there. We have about 4,000 Marines in Afghanistan, about 400 who are training the Afghan army. We have the 24th MEU and Second Battalion, Seventh Marines. Those two units are both in the south. They are pretty much alongside each other and they're on those rat lines that exist between the drug fields and the safe haven. They're taking the fight to the enemy every day and they're doing incredible work.

Now, the opportunity or the ability to put those numbers of Marines into Afghanistan has kept our Corps at surge through, probably November, at this point, because both units have been extended. I attended a meeting with the Secretary of Defense when he made the decision to do that and I said to him, "Sir, we can do it, but it's going to hurt. We are going to have to take one for the team here. But, I understand the spring offensive, I understand the window of opportunity that exists in Afghanistan, and we will do it. But if you want us to do more, we must have relief."

We cannot continue to ride the backs of these great young Marines and sailors that support us by trying to be in both places, both Iraq and Afghanistan. He's got that. The 24th MEU will leave soon. I don't think that they will be replaced by Marines. Two-Seven, Second Battalion, Seventh Marines – that decision is under discussion as we're here today but I would only hope, and I believe, that if they are replaced, that there will be a commensurate draw-down of our forces in Iraq.

Let's change for a moment and talk, if we can, about the status of the force. The problem that we have is that the war has gone on now for the better part of five years. And what has evolved for our Corps is what we call deployment-to-dwell — that is, the amount of time you're deployed versus the amount of time that you're home are about seven months and seven months. For the headquarters unit, it's a year, but the rotating units are seven months home and seven months gone — that hurts. I talk to Marines routinely, with the Sergeant Major, that now are on their fourth and fifth deployments and that's simply a lot of time away from your family when the old rotation used to be six and 18. Now, we're at war; we accept that. But, it is quite an effort that I'm sure you can understand, as you are service members yourselves.

We think we need seven months deployed and 14 months home. That will give us the opportunity to do a lot. I think it will lessen the difficulties that our families are experiencing and we think we can sustain that for a long, long time — as long as it takes to win this thing and come home. Our families are quick to remind us that in seven months, you can't have a baby. You can be in on the front end of it or the back end of it, but you can't do both – so there's a need to do better and we're working it hard.

The way that you make your situation better is if you reduce the requirement for deployment or you increase the size of the force. Happily, the Secretary of Defense, the President, and Congress have authorized the growth of some 27,000 additional Marines and they are very much needed. We're in the process of growing those folks as we speak. Last year, we needed 5,000 Marines. When we spoke to our manpower people and recruiters, they said, "You know, if you want to keep the quality where it is, then you probably ought to spread it over about five years."

By the way, the DOD standard for high-school graduates is 90 percent. Our Marine Corps standard is 95 percent. Well, last year, our recruiters didn't give us 5,000 Marines, they gave us 7,000 – with 96.2 percent high-school graduates. This year, they are going to give us 9,000. Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to close out that growth in three years — not five — with some great young Americans who want to have the opportunity to fight for their country.

As an example of that, I'll tell you what one of them said. We were in Iraq, and sat down to lunch with a young Marine and I asked him, why did you join? He said, "Well, sir, I'll be honest with you. I was 11 years old when they attacked the towers. I couldn't believe that was happening to our country and I will tell you, frankly, I was scared. He said by the time I got to be 14, I was mad. He said, now, I am 18 and I'm doing something about it." I just want you to know, that's the quality of the young men and women that were joining, really, to all the services out there who want to have the opportunity to defend this great country.

You know, there was a time when — at least, in the Corps — some of the guys like me with silver hair sat back and worried about this young generation. We called them the joystick generation – too much time sitting in front of the tube, not enough time in outdoor activities or team sports. We weren't sure if they would be good Marines and soldiers. I will admit to you today, we could not have been more wrong. I have seen these young people in combat. The raw courage of these young men and women, their sense of sacrifice, and their sense of team play is absolutely eye-watering. And I can assure you, our Marine Corps, our services, and our country are going to be in a great shape for a long time to come as these people reach increasing levels of responsibility.

We do concern ourselves with the resiliency of our Corps as we stay engaged in this long war. At the headquarters, we monitor, maybe a dozen, what we call metrics on a monthly basis just to see how are we doing. Are we starting to reach a breaking point? What I can report to you today is that there is an amazing resiliency out there in these young people for doing what they do. We check such things as U.A. rates, desertion rates, divorces, child abuse, alcohol abuse, and ladies and gentlemen, I can tell you that those figures are the same as they were in 2001. Our captains are staying in this fight — beyond what they were doing in 2001.

Now, to be honest, there are a couple of trend lines that concern me. Suicides are up significantly this year — although, only about 50 percent of the suicides are people who have deployed. Divorce rates, although well below the national average, are creeping up. But again, I'm happy to report to you that the resiliency of these young men and women is just astounding.

There is a brittle part to the equation, though, and that's our families. Our families are very proud of their contribution to this Long War but frankly, they're getting tired. They need more time with their service members at home. They're raising children in about 40 percent of the cases. We visited a young lady down on the East Coast and she said, "You know, Sergeant Sasquatch over there gets tested for PTSD four times during every deployment. Pretty soon, somebody is going to have to counsel my children — and sooner or later, they're going to have to talk to me because this is getting tiresome." So we're doing what we can. We're trying to enhance the quality of life, make it as good as we can for those families out there that suffer in

silence and do such a magnificent job keeping things together while the service member is deployed.

Switching to the third area that the organizers asked me to talk about and those are my concerns as the Commandant. I've got three that I'll share with you this morning. First of all, our Corps has turned into very much a second land army, based upon what we're doing in Iraq. We are heavier than we've ever been, out of necessity because we've got to defeat the weapons that are being employed against us on the battlefield — we have 48,000-pound MRAPs, mine resistance ambush-protected vehicles. We have many more pieces of rolling stock in the battalions than we ever had before, heavier weapons, and more communication equipment. The problem is, what we offer to the nation is the ability to get out of town quick, to be agile and hit hard when we get there. Right now, we're too heavy in order to be able to do that and we've got to go through some filters, some screens, to get us back to what we were in a previous period as the United States Marine Corps.

Secondly, I think that we have to get back to developing an expeditionary mindset on the part of our troops and our officers. Today, if you were to ask a young Marine what does expeditionary mean? He might say to you, "Well, it's living on a forward-operating base, sleeping on a cot, and three squares a day." By the way, you might get Häagen-Dazs for dessert in the evening. Ladies and gentlemen, that is not expeditionary. Expeditionary, to me, means you step off of the plank of a ship or you step off of a helicopter and it's a moonscape and the sergeant says, "Guys, this is home sweet home. Let's start making something of it." That is the mindset we have got to have and, given time, we'll get back to doing that.

The third thing is that, again, we offer to the nation a Corps that is always ready to go — to whatever environment. Quite frankly, today, we are probably the best, if not one of the best, counterinsurgency forces in the world. The problem is, we are not doing cold-weather training, jungle training, only by exception, with the increase in troops going to Afghanistan, we do mountain-warfare training. We are spending precious little time doing amphibious exercises with our brothers in the United States Navy aboard ship.

And perhaps most disconcerting, is that we used to do ten live-fire combined-arms maneuvers a year at Twentynine Palms, California. What that means, is you've got maneuver battalions operating under live-fire artillery and bombs. When we got on the objectives, the shrapnel was still smoking. That, ladies and gentlemen, is great training. We're not doing that anymore. We're not as ready today as we were in 2003 and we've got to get back to doing that. That's the importance, again, of this one-to-two deployment-to-dwell, seven months gone and 14 months home, more time with the family and more time training. Those are my concerns.

So what about the future Marine Corps? What's it going to look like? Well, we've asked a study group at our base at Quantico, Virginia, to examine that for us and a bunch of smart guys and gals have talked to think tanks, they've talked to respective experts in the field, they've talked to retired generals and colonels, and they've come away with a set of observations for us — some of which I will share with you this morning about the world during the period 2020 to 2025. We think if you get too far out in advance of that, you're truly crystal-balling it. If you're

short of that, you're not affecting some of these expensive programs that have to be spread out over time.

So we think that's the sweet spot, about 2020 to 2025. What they tell us, I think is interesting. First of all, they say that the world as we know it, the world as we learned it coming up in school is changing dramatically from a demographics perspective. There is a silent invasion of sorts that's taking place in Europe. The developed countries are gaining an older and older population while the underdeveloped countries have a more youthful population and in a lot of cases, no jobs. That's an incendiary kind of composition.

Secondly, they tell us that increasingly, the world's population is headed toward seacoasts and that by 2025, about 70 percent of the world's population will live within about 30 miles of a sea coast. We think that supposes a lot of activity, a lot of potential for our Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard team. They say that although we will continue to develop alternative sources of energy by that period in time that we will still be heavily reliant on oil as a major means of energy and the grease that runs our machines. But they also say that by that point in time, that water, fresh water, will be as important as oil to most nations on earth. The burgeoning populations, the paucity of fresh water supply, and increasing need could cause nations to go to war simply to be able to provide water to a thirsty population.

They tell us that the threats in that period could be peers — we could go to war against a Russia or a China, but the more likely scenario is that we will see something like we saw when the Israelis fought the Hezbollah in 2006. A non-state actor who nevertheless was very accomplished in their tactics and techniques and using fourth- and fifth-generation weapons systems. They think that is the threat that is going to be out there now for some time to come and one that we will most likely have to deal with by that period in time.

Lastly, for purposes of this discussion, they tell us that it will be a much more multi-polar world in 2025 than it is today. The position of the United States in that world will be competing with a resurgent Russia, with China, with a growing India, with a collective European Union. And although our military, our diplomatic, our business will be very important, it will not be as important to the world as it is today. And we're going to have to learn to live in that environment. Those are the types of things that they tell us that we can expect in the next couple of decades.

So, how do we adjust? Well, we think that we need to get back to being, again, that expeditionary capability for this great nation. Between the Marine Corps and, again, our brothers in the Navy, we both believe in forward basing and forward deployment of forces. If there's a fight, we want it to be well off our shores and the theater commanders, the combatant commanders — if you will — are very much today in favor of what they call simply engagement practices. Where we would aid nations who are not yet as developed as they will be to try to make sure that they are strong enough to defeat and that their populations do not welcome extremism.

In doing so, we can perhaps avoid the scenario that we find ourselves facing today. Should that fail, however, we believe that our Corps has to be what we call a two-fisted fighter,

able to engage in that hybrid kind of warfare against a smaller non-state player, but also able to load up and roll if we have to against another major nation. We have to be able – we have to have the flexibility, again, the training and techniques in place to be able to go either way.

We think we can leverage new technologies. We're excited about something we call the seabase, which is essentially a gathering of ships at sea – different sizes, different platforms – that will ramp together that will give us an airbase and a port at sea for use both in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; it avoids a footprint on another nation's shore; it provides force protection to our people while we ferry required supplies or support inland on a daily basis; or it gives us an extensive capability in time of war. Where we don't have to go immediately for a port and an airfield ashore; we've got one operating out at sea. It gives our commanders ashore tremendous flexibility.

So we're excited about that new concept and lots of others that are going to do wonderful things out there for us. In the end, 2020, 2025, we will still be performing as your United States Marine Corps, however, our legislated mission, which is that of being most ready when the nation is least ready.

Ladies and gentlemen, two closing thoughts and I'll get off the stage. First of all, I was asked to come down again by our organizers today and talk about these things that we've just discussed. I'm happy to do that. But my main reason for coming down is to thank you for the absolute marvelous support that the legion provides to all of our service members on active duty. Let me tell you, it is important. Let me tell you the truth, we absolutely depend on it.

In 2003, before we crossed the line of departure out of Kuwait and into Iraq, I went around as the commander to talk with all of our major troop formations. The most important question on the mind of our Marines and sailors wasn't, is Saddam going to gas us? Does he have weapons of mass destruction? Are we going to see massed artillery strikes? It was, "Sir, we're watching the news, we're reading the papers; is the country behind us?" That was the most important question to be answered in 2003.

Ladies and gentlemen, based on what those great young Marines and soldiers and sailors and airmen have seen now over five years, the question is still out there, but the answer is, too. They know you're behind them and, again, they appreciate it and I appreciate it.

Lastly, there is what we call the Commandant's reading list. It's where you provide a list each year to your great young Marines and ask them to stay engaged, advance their intellect, and read about things that are important to them. The premier book on that reading list, the Commandant's choice — if you will — is a book by one of our long-retired Lieutenant Generals named Victor Krulak. It's called "First to Fight."

The essence of the book, the takeaway from the book is that he says, "We don't have to have a Marine Corps; there's a Marine Corps because the nation loves her Marines. America has a love affair with her Marines, but that could change if one of two things were ever to happen. One would be that somehow as an institution we would systematically abuse the sons and daughters of this great land. The other condition would be if the bell ever rang and there was a

need for us to go forward and, somehow, we weren't ready or we got there and got our butts kicked."

Ladies and gentlemen of the Legion, let me assure you here this morning, neither one of those things are ever going to happen in the case of the United States Marine Corps. Thank you.