

REMARKS BY
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MONDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2007
WILLARD HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you, Michele [Flournoy], for that very nice introduction. Folks, the organizers have asked me to talk about lessons learned coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan, and then, more importantly, post-Iraq and Afghanistan in the instance of the United States Marine Corps. I'm happy to be able to do that, but I think, to be able to look to the future, you first have to understand a little bit about the past and the present. So I'll spend a few moments there.

Before talking about what we see down range, you need to understand that the Congress a long time ago gave us, in large measure, our mission and tasking.

It described our size. We are to be a force, essentially, of three divisions and three aviation wings. We are to have the role to be "*most ready when the Nation is least ready.*" And there's a phrase in congressional language that captures us as "*the shock troops*" of the great United States. It also says that we will perform duties "*as the President may direct.*" Since then, in many national documents and tasking orders, we have been given a forcible entry responsibility along with our counterparts in the United States Navy and our great friends in the United States Army. So I mention it to you only because that shapes who we are and what we do, how we organize, and how we train.

If you look at what's happening today in terms of lessons learned coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan, I would try to keep them at the operational and perhaps strategic level.

First of all, I think it's apparent to us that we're truly in a Long War. I think, if you accept that Iraq and Afghanistan are the first battles in this Long War, that we're in a generational struggle with extremists that are going to take some time to overcome. These folks have shown an ability — even though we have killed and captured a number of them — they have shown an ability to regenerate. There's every indication that this is not going to be over anytime really very soon.

We have also determined what the al Qaeda strategy looks like. We have both taken intercepts aboard as well as seen it, where it's been boldly published on their website. Essentially, it's about five phases.

The first phase is to declare jihad. Well, that's been done. I think we've met that, perhaps with a marginal level of success, but there are probably, we calculated, a couple of thousand hard-core al Qaeda, probably some tens of thousands of fighters. But the fact

is the entire religion has simply not risen up to answer the jihad in ways that the core might have hoped.

The second phase is the one that we're in now. It's their strategy to exorcise all Western influence out of the Middle East, out of what they call the "old caliphate." That's an ebb and flow that's taking place right now. In some places, we're more successful than others. In some places, they're making some headway.

The third phase says that if they were successful to that point in their strategy, they would turn against what they would call those "apostate governments" in the Middle East and take them down — those governments that have partnered with us, that have sold us oil, or that have in some way tried to avoid having the presence of al Qaeda inside their national boundaries. At the same time, al Qaeda will look at some way to capture the oil supply. They realize that it's vital to Western nations. Through destruction of the refineries, which has been attempted, or simply controlling those refineries — therefore determining the cost of that vital resource — they think that they can attack Western economy. They may appreciate that they can't take us down on the battlefield completely, but they seek to do it through wrecking our economy, limiting our ability to deploy, and starting to destroy Western civilization. In this phase, they would, when powerful enough, turn to and destroy Israel — and wipe it from the face of the map.

The next phase is to continue with terrorist attacks both in Western Europe and increasingly in the United States. Phase five shows a map that is entirely their color — it is a world-domination effort that would control all populations. We would believe their religion; we would accept their laws; and we would be under that kind of domination. By the way, they say if it takes a hundred years, so be it; they're in it for the long haul.

Contrast that to some of our strategies, and you can see a distinct disparity. Somewhere in that discussion I mentioned at least two national objectives. So, there is a belief amongst people who wear my uniform that we need to do business right while we're there the first time and not find ourselves coming back.

Another thing I think that we have learned is that we must empower the moderates in the religion. If you look through history, there have been four, arguably five jihads over time. Western influence has meant little really as those things get resolved. It's almost invariably settled from within by the moderates of the religion. So we need to, in our efforts, empower those people to once again take control of their religion and set straight the scenario that we see at work right now.

My view is, therefore, that our strategies must be regional strategies. It does little to settle the problem inside Iraq or even Afghanistan if you aren't taking a look at the entirety of the region. These people don't believe in borders; they don't believe in state governments and those types of things. So it is a much more fluid problem that we face and one that, I think, therefore has to have a regional answer to it if it is indeed going to be solved.

In my billet, I'm the Commandant in one hat, but a member of the JCS in another. I was recently privileged to see an effort towards this regional strategy addressed. *I'll describe it for you because I think it's a classic instance of the DOD functioning — just as it's supposed to.*

Recently, we had the Commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq come to us and ultimately to the Senate with a laser focus on what's taking place in Iraq; his objective was to be successful, to accomplish the objectives of the Nation and accomplish the mission as he sees it spelled out. At one level higher, in the role or in the eyes of the Commander of Central Command, there needed to be this regional approach; he recognized simply solving Afghanistan or Iraq is not the total answer. He was injecting comments that were coming from the leadership in the rest of the region — he put very much a regional perspective on the issues that were being funneled up.

At the JCS level, we invited two other considerations. One is that as force managers and force providers to this flow, we wanted it known that particularly the ground forces are experiencing difficulty these days keeping apace of the demand, of the requirement. Additionally, we made it clear to our leadership that we are accepting risk elsewhere as we provide this number and degree of forces to the Central region. So we wanted to make sure that our leadership understood that.

At the Secretary of Defense level, he [the Secretary] took a yet even more strategic look and said, "You know, I'm an old Cold Warrior. The strength of our Nation back in the Cold War was that administration after administration kept the same strategy. It was acceptable from one to the other, but there was continuity in the approach and it eventually wore down those that opposed us. We need to make sure that whatever we do, it transcends administrations and has meaning to whoever else comes into the White House in months and years to come." It made a great deal of sense to us.

In the process, we were then able, collectively, to offer best military advice to our President, to the current administration, and we were pretty comfortable that everybody along the way had had a proper and appropriate say.

Turning to Marines — in particular in Iraq and Afghanistan. We currently have about 26,000 Marines in Iraq, something less than about 400 in Afghanistan. If you're not aware, we've observed a seven-month deployment policy with our maneuver forces, a one-year policy where it relates to the headquarters and the group, the division, the Marine Expeditionary Force headquarters that are assigned. That gives us some continuity, once again, with the populations that we deal with. It has been criticized; it has been questioned, but frankly, we very much like seven months. It's very close to our culture; it is much more acceptable with our families, and we've grown to that routine and found it effective and efficient over time.

People will ask, "How can you do that?" Well, you have a scenario with the Army deployed now for 15 months and home for 12. "Are you accomplishing the same training as our brothers in the Army?" The answer is essentially yes. In an Army 12-

month dwell time, some of that year — some of that time at the front end and back end — is used moving gear around. We don't have all light Brigade Combat Teams, so if you've got a "Light" relieving a "Stryker," there's an equipment issue there that needs to be solved.

Our battalions are pretty much interchangeable; so we don't have that issue. So within that seven-month period, we've got about five and a half months dedicated to hard-core training evolutions that have to be done to prepare a unit to go in. The Army would tell you that they do the same thing over about a six-month period. So that's pretty much it, and people understand how we can stay at seven month deployments.

The other issue of course is, "are we being fair with our soldiers and Marines?" "Are we being deployed about the same time?" "Is there a level of equity there?" And I think, once again, that the answer is pretty close. If you take a 27-month period — 15 months deployed and 12 months home — a soldier is gone for 15 months or so. If you take a 28-month period — seven on and seven off — a Marine is gone for about 14 months. So that issue is just about a wash. There was a time earlier when we were very concerned about that, but we have a Global Force Management Board that takes care of that now, and it's really not an issue.

Based on that deployment cycle, and based on the fact that some people don't even get seven months at home, some of our MOSs [Military Occupational Specialties] — some of our communities — get about five and a half months at home. We have a need to grow the force. We have had a need now for some time. I consider myself somewhat fortunate that about the time I became Commandant, I was saying to our people, "We either need to reduce the requirement or grow the force." And then we had a change-out of Secretaries of Defense not long after that. In my first session with Dr. Gates, I went in and said, "Sir, I think we need to grow the Marine Corps." He said, "I think you're right." So I put away the brief that I had prepared to convince him and we had a very good discussion on it.

What we have been allowed to do — encouraged to really — by the Department of Defense and by the President is grow some 27,000 additional Marines, and we're in the process of doing that. We're trying to go about it intelligently. We have said that we think we can take chunks each year of about 5,000 Marines a year and maintain our standards. We started this year; actually, we "threw the lever on" in January, so it was a short year to the end of the fiscal year. We decided in January that we needed to grow from 179,000 to 184,000 — and yet, we wanted to keep the standards high. The DOD standard for high school graduates is 90 percent. The Marine Corps standard is 95 percent.

In fact, we didn't grow to 184,000, we grew to 186,000 — with 96.2 percent high school graduates. So we're quite proud of that. It reflects a tremendous job that our recruiters are doing. They have every belief that they can continue with that same growth, and we're going to sustain it over time and continue to provide those quality young Marines out there to the forces that are deployed.

The al Anbar province is encouraging at this point in time. We saw a transition start to take place just about this time last year, just about October of last year. Initially, the sheikhs out west came to our commanders and said, “You know, we really have had it up to here with the al Qaeda. They have a murder and intimidation campaign that is very hurtful to our people. They’re killing our children almost wantonly. They now want to intermarry with our women. And if you will join with us, we will slaughter them,” — in their terms.

That pact was agreed upon rapidly, as you might expect. We have seen that process at work now for the better part of the year, and the transformation that has come over the Province is really quite stark. It is a west to east movement. It has rolled through Ramadi and now Fallujah. It is actually north and south of Baghdad because the Sh’ia are saying essentially the same thing. It’s even in Baghdad, although you have lesser connectivity with the tribes’ sheikhs and imams there. There’s also a belief there, that they’ve got to rid themselves of this scourge because they’ve seen what they offer and there’s just nothing there that they find attractive. So, it is, at least at this point, I think a good-news story.

Now, that’s a security perspective. I’ll be the first to admit: Economics and politics have not stayed abreast of that particular line of operation. But you know and I know that there are people out there working hard to ensure that they do.

We’ve got new equipment going into the al Anbar. We have the MRAP vehicle — Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected vehicles — that are going in to replace our armored HMMWVs, which have been sort of the gold standard. We had an incident the other day where an MRAP was hit with a 300-pound charge right under the engine. Now, I mention the size of the charge because we were testing them at Aberdeen against 30 and 50-pound charges. But a 300-pound charge went off right under the engine. It blew the engine about 65 meters away from the vehicle, caused a complete reversal of direction on the part of the MRAP. Of the four Marines inside, the Regimental Commander put one on “light duty” for seven days and the other three continued with the patrol. So it’s an amazing vehicle in terms of the protection that it gives to our people against these underbody blasts. We continue to get as many to theater as rapidly as we can so that optimally every Marine, some day, will be riding outside the wire in an MRAP type of vehicle. To date, we have lost no Marines or Sailors in the al Anbar province to underbody explosions when they were riding in the MRAP.

Also the Osprey has arrived in theater as of last week — first operational deployment with that aircraft. You know and I know it’s had a fairly checkered past up to this point, but we have gotten it ready over recent months to be prepared to go into its first combat deployment. It’s there now. They’re in the process of doing left-side/right-side turnover with the squadron they’re replacing. We think it’s going to revolutionize the way that we do our helicopter-borne tactics, as I was telling Michele [Flournoy] and the good secretary before we stepped up here.

As an anecdote of capability, in 2003 I spoke to my boss, then-Lieutenant General Dave McKiernan, and said, “You know, we’re about to cross a line of departure. Keep this in your hip pocket: If you need it anytime over the next weeks or months, I can dismount 1,000 Marines from our armored vehicles, put them into helicopters, and have them any place you want them to be on the battlefield within 100 miles in about 12 hours. And that includes planning.” Ladies and gentlemen, I can make that same claim today, except the distance is now 300 miles based on the capability of Osprey. So quite something in the hands, again, of the battlefield commanders.

Last topic before we talk about the future, and that is morale. People ask me frequently, “How are your Marines doing?” “How do they feel about what’s taking place?” “What’s their morale?”

Well, let me say first of all, the most brittle part of the whole arrangement are our families. They feel, frankly, that they’re being ridden pretty hard and that they need some tender loving care. We’re attempting to do that to the best of our abilities. No long ago, I had a young wife down east of here say, “Let me tell you, Sergeant ‘Sasquatch’ is doing fine. He gets four screening for PTSD. But somebody needs to talk to my two sons. And if this keeps up, somebody is going to have to talk to me.” So there is that sensation on the part of the families out there that this is getting onerous, and we need to do something — ergo our 27,000-Marine growth and its ability to build new units to get them into the rotation.

If you want to talk to the best morale in the Marine Corps, you either go speak with a unit that is getting ready to go to Iraq or Afghanistan, or you talk to one who is there. Those folks are just sky high, because they’re doing just for the Nation what they joined our Corps to do.

Again, an anecdote, we had Second Battalion, Fifth Marines recently deployed to Ramadi for its second tour in Ramadi. They had had two other tours in the theatre. In their previous time in Ramadi, they had lost 15 Marines killed and over 200 wounded from that battalion alone. They went home for their dwell. They were in the preparation phase of getting ready to come back to Iraq, and the battalion commander realized he’d just gotten in several hundred new men, but he was losing several hundred of his battle-experienced NCOs. So he put about 300 of them in a theater and said, “Here’s the deal. We’re going back to Ramadi. But we’re doing it without you, by and large. This battalion needs you; I need you; and maybe most importantly, these young Marines in your squads need you.” Out of that 300-plus Marines, 200 of them signed on to go back again without promise of a single cent. That, to me, is a real indication of the morale — of this brotherhood thing that we talk about so often — the camaraderie that exists and the willingness to go back into such a dangerous place. Now, happily, that battalion just deployed back to the States about 10 days ago, and it did not lose a single Marine in its recent time in Ramadi. So it ends, I think, with a fairly good news story.

Okay, let’s talk about the future. As the great philosopher Yogi Berra once said, “It’s tough to make predictions, especially when you’re talking about the future.”

Because there's just a lot of things out there that you don't know. That said, there are some things that we're trying to find out. We have asked ourselves inside the Corps, "what is that future environment that we're going to be dealing with, and how do we shape to it?"

We have formed a Strategic Vision Group of about 25-30 of our best thinkers, and we've asked them about the period of 2020 through about 2025 – and we picked that period because I believe if you're out past about 2025, you're truly looking in a crystal ball. If you're inside 2020, you're not able to influence programs that will reach certainly out that far. So that's sort of a sweet spot, we think, in terms of thinking about what might be out there. We asked them four questions: (1) What is going to be the environment? (2) What is going to be the relationship of the United States to that environment? (3) What will be the DOD responsibility to our great country? And (4) What will be the Marine Corps' contribution to DOD? We felt that if they could answer those four questions, then they would give us a pretty good launch point, in terms of what our Corps needed to look like.

I'll share with you five or six of their perspectives on the environment, because we really found it pretty interesting. First of all they [Strategic Vision Group] said, the demographics are going to be significantly different from what they are today. Developed nations are going to see an older and older population, whereas your underdeveloped nations will be younger by a good bit, and many of those young men are not going to have jobs, because the jobs simply won't be there in the places where the young men are. Now, where these populations are going to be – in about 78 to 80 percent of the cases — is in urban sprawl – their term – somewhere near a coast; 78 to 80 percent will be within 35 miles of a coast throughout the world. So, it starts to point us to a kind of capacity that we need to have.

They said to us that although there's some immature things out there that we're looking at right now in terms of energy replacement, that by 2025, they will not be mature enough to be reliable and widespread so there is still going to be a significant dependence on oil.

They also said, interestingly, that by that time, you'll have nations who are hard-pressed to provide clean drinking water to their populations and that water will be as important as oil. Easily, by 2020, you will have more people dying of unsafe drinking water than you do of AIDS. So you look at it in terms of that scope.

They said that this idea of state-on-state conflict will probably not be as prevalent. What you're going to have is much more regional conflict with non-state actors.

The last thing I'll offer to you that they gave us is that U.S. diplomacy, U.S. military, and U.S. business power will still be significant, but not nearly as significant in 2025 as it is today on the global scale. It will be much more a multi-polar world in 2025 than what we see today. So those were the offerings from this particular group at this point in time in terms of what that environment might look like.

Now, the Marine Corps looks to take a force of 202,000 Marines into that period — we'll have grown our force by then. We've asked ourselves, "What does that force need to look like?" I think these people would orient us, based on their findings at this point, a little more towards irregular than conventional perhaps. I think that's a fair analysis. Again, we don't have their final report, but that's what I sense coming.

That said, we think that we need to stay – what I would call – that "Two-fisted Fighter." We need to have an ability to respond to a major contingency operation, an ability to go across, hopefully, an undefended beach with that kind of force that needs to get us in land somewhere. At the same time, we need to be able to operate inside a counterinsurgency environment very much akin to what we're doing now — perhaps ideally with even an enhanced capability beyond where we are now.

So that's how we're shaping the force at this point. In dialogue with those folks, the point came out that you can have a major contingency operation kind of capability and still do the "lesser included things" to include counterinsurgency. The reverse of that statement is probably not true. So we need to either make sure that we get that balance right — whatever that balance may in time need to be.

We've looked, ladies and gentlemen, at the advisability of creating a professional advisor corps. If you look at where a lot of our young majors, captains, and lieutenant colonels are today, they're not in the headquarters stateside. They're over somewhere in Kabul or up in the mountains in Tora Bora or out on the border on Syria advising a host-nation military or host-nation security forces. If that is to be our future — and I think in large measure, it is likely to be — do we need to professionalize that capability with regard to training, organization, record book tracking, all those manner of things? We thought initially the answer was yes, and we have created a cadre of an outfit that we call the Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group.

We're prepared to put as many as a couple of thousands of Marines against the task, but I'll share with you an experience I had recently at what the Secretary calls, the Senior Leaders Review Group. We had General Brown — who at that point was Commanding General of Special Operations Command — sit with us over an issue that dealt with something else, but he made the comment during the session that he's got a number of what he calls JSETs, which are teams that go out to engage with other nations, and MLEs – military liaison elements that do a lot the same thing. He said, "You know, for every 12 or so engagements that I'll have on my schedule board, only about six will actually execute, because the ambassador would say, "Oh, the timing's not right." Or, the host nation would say, "Well, you guys kind of made us angry with this, so we're not going to do that." So I grabbed him at the break and I said, "Well, tell me more. When we leave Afghanistan and Iraq, is this going to get better or worse?" He said, "Oh, it's going to be worse. I'm going to have more forces without any more requirements to put against it." So it's caused us to reflect some. We're answering the question right now, "does one of his MLEs match exactly with one of our training teams?" We've done that recently in Georgia and some other places with pretty good success. What we are

reluctant to do, of course, is create a capability that sits and waits for the phone to ring and it just doesn't happen. So certainly, if there is a national need, we're going to be there to try to support it. But we don't want duplication to the degree that we overproduce something that may not be fully used out there in the long term. So we'll see how that turns out.

I would tell you that I'm a little bit concerned about us keeping our expeditionary flavor. Quite frankly, if you compared what the battalion table of equipment set is today and what we put into battalions when we first went into Iraq, it's vastly different. We are much heavier than ever before. We're talking about a potential buy of 3,700 MRAPs. Those vehicles weigh 40,000 pounds each in the larger category. Frankly, you can't put them in a helicopter, and you can't even put them aboard an amphibious ship. So, we've simply gotten heavier.

We've become, in some ways, a second land army — and it's okay for now. I mean, there's no second guessing whether or not MRAP was the right thing to do — I still see it as a moral imperative to protect those great troops that we were talking about earlier. But can I give a satisfactory answer to what we're going to be doing with those things in five or 10 years? Probably not. Wrap them in shrink wrap and put them on asphalt somewhere is about the best thing that we can describe at this point — and as expensive as they are, that is probably not a good use of the taxpayers money.

So we're concerned about staying expeditionary, lightening our requirements again — maybe getting back to where we were. But it is a conundrum. Do you go light or do you ensure you have force protection? Whatever you decide to do — to be expeditionary, you've got to be light. You've got to be fast hitting, and you've got to be able to move out pretty quickly. So we've got that as a filter that we've got to concern ourselves with in the time to come.

Our training has suffered some. As I mentioned, we're home for about seven months. That entire time is spent — in terms of training — getting ready to go back to Iraq, training for counterinsurgency. Folks, we used to do about 10 combined arms, live-fire maneuver exercises a year at 29 Palms. All of our battalions were on a rotation through that. Our squadrons were overhead giving the support. Our artillerymen were pulling lanyards and doing the live-fire thing. We don't do it anymore at all. We're not doing that to the degree that we need to be able to do it to be that effective, hard-hitting force on the battlefield. We're not doing mountain warfare training or jungle training to the degree that we used to. It's by exception now. We don't step aboard ship like we used to unless you're assigned to a MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit]. If you accept a generation of officers is about four years, because that's what a lieutenant signs on for — we now have a generation of officers that have not stepped aboard ship except in rare instances. That concerns us, of course, with our naval flavor and the ability to execute what is a very sophisticated operation — that is, an amphibious assault.

We think our doctrine is about right. We've gotten some new doctrine in to supplement, in some ways supplant, the old Small Wars Manual. Our maneuver warfare

doctrine is sound — it's a mindset as much as it is a means of employment, and we're pretty comfortable with that. That said, we are coming out with a relatively new Maritime Strategy that will be announced this week at the Naval War College up in Newport. The CNO [Chief of Naval Operations], the Commandant of the Coast Guard, and I are going to go up and talk about what this new strategy means. Not terribly different from what you have perhaps been accustomed to, but it is good that the Coast Guard is now engaged. It is good that we hang onto certain tenets that are always going to be prominent with U.S. naval forces. But there are some other things that we think we can and should be doing, and that's probably all I need to say about it at this point less I upstage my two counterparts.

There is also a new dimension in terms of Combatant Commands in which we're extremely interested — it's called AFRICOM. If you haven't heard about it, the thought process is that we will establish a new Combatant Command that has exclusive responsibility for Africa. Previously, European Command has [primarily] had that role. It's in the process of being built right now. We're excited about it, because although we see the day when we go back to the Pacific, we also see an expeditionary role in Africa. To get around in Africa, you don't go from capital to capital; you go from capital to Europe and then back to another capital — that's how you get from place to place in Africa. It's also huge in terms of a continent. If you simply overlay a map of the United States, you start to get a feel as to how huge Africa really is. We think that small numbers of Marines in the back of an Osprey have a place in the future of AFRICOM. We've contributed to the initial standup of the headquarters. We fought for and lost the deputy billet, so we now have the J3 assigned, which is also a key billet. We are suffering some “sticker shock” from the initial personnel cost for what they tell us is necessary for the standup — but we'll negotiate that and see where we go from there.

The interesting part about AFRICOM though is that it's intended to be about half military and about half interagency. Frankly, at this point, we do not have the interagency contributions that we would like to see, because I think a lot of what will need to be done in Africa does not have a military flavor to it. It more involves people from the State Department, Justice, Agriculture, or Border Enforcement — or the kinds of people that can do some great advisory work.

I'll tell you, I am not critical of our interagency. Let me assure you up front that I think I have a pretty good feel, having been the J3 on the Joint Staff, as to where these folks are with their capabilities. I don't think they've been properly resourced; I don't think they've been tasked with doing some of this expeditionary work in the past, and we need to take a fresh look, I think, at who they are, how they assign their people, and how we do money and people within those agencies. Then we'll get a [good] product, but I do believe we're not there yet — and this initial standup of AFRICOM is starting to show that.

In order to be able to do what we want to do, we have some key programs out there that are fairly critically important to us. The first I would mention from a ground perspective is the *Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV)*. If you're not familiar with it,

it's basically an armored vehicle that gets up on plane [of water], goes about 30 knots across the top of the water — looks like a bass boat really — but it does move. And we need it now. Right now, today, the Navy assures us that they will not go closer than 25 miles to the beach in an amphibious operation, and there is a reason for that. If you remember what happened last summer with the anti-[ship] missile systems that even a group of terrorists, Hezbollah, had, then they can reach out and touch you if they can see you. So the Navy is concerned about getting too close in, and they're simply not going to go in and drop us along a line of about 4,000 meters from the beach any longer. So we've got to get there, and this EFV gives us that kind of capability. It has had some problems with reliability, admittedly. We'd like to think that the contractors are onto that now, and it's already a better product. But for my money, we simply can't get it too soon, because again, we are at risk to a degree right now with the absolute need for the vehicle.

We also have some aviation platforms that we need fairly dramatically. Again, *the Osprey* is hopefully going to continue to be a good news story with annual buys of about 30 a year. As a Corps, we have skipped a generation with regard to our fighter and attack aircraft. We went from F-18As and Bs, and now we're awaiting *Joint Strike Fighter*. Joint Strike Fighter is going to be expensive, but it's also going to be a tremendous airplane in terms of what it does for us. The STOVL version is on schedule right now — on plan in terms of its rollout, and we're anxious to see that aircraft come to pass. I would also say to you that our *Cobras and Hueys* are getting pretty tired. We've got started a remanufacture [of them] now, it's essentially a rebuild of the aircraft that are going to give us a four-bladed capability in both aircraft, much more power, some enhanced systems, and we're anxious to get those to the fleet as well. Now, they've started to come in with production models and we're watching just what the aircraft will do. The point is there are a number of future [capabilities] out there, and I haven't talked about ships, that we're looking towards for the future. They are going to continue to keep us a modern and very capable force.

All of that is against what some say is going to be a declining DOD budget. Right now, we're [spending on defense] something less than 4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. If you look at what [spending during] previous wars has been, it was something over 9 percent for Vietnam, over 13 percent for Korea, almost 39 percent for World War II. And yet, we're engaged. It's expensive — I'll be the first to say that — but we're engaging in two different fights with less than 4 percent of the GDP. To think that it could go down further is a little bit distracting in terms of what we need to have in the future to stay engaged in what at least many — and myself included — think is going to be a long fight.

I think, folks, that we will have some things that we have to deal with probably in my remaining three years as Commandant that are probably right issues, but they will require some additional effort. I think there will be social issues, like women in combat, engaged in the military that will arise within the next three or four years. Also, I think there is a discussion coming on TACAIR consolidation, as expensive as the aircraft are, and as many as we probably have available to all the services. Not least, there is going to

be a “Roles and Missions” discussion to see if we’ve got it right in terms of which services do what. I would hope that some of these things can wait. They would be distracting in the middle of a fight. So I would hope that there is some grace period here that could be provided so that we could talk about some of these things, particularly social issues, at a time when we don’t have troops deployed and in the fight.

Let me just close by saying that we talked about equipment; we talked about our responsibility — we do it best with people. We continue to be concerned that we have the best qualified young man or woman out there that America can provide to go forward to do what has to be done. So long as we can be successful, continuing to fill our ranks with those great young people that are American patriots and are willing to go fight for their country, then I think we’ll be just fine, whatever else falls out.

Michele, thank you. Thank you very much for listening folks, I appreciate it.

(Applause.)

MS. FLOURNOY: General Conway, thank you so much for putting a number of great issues on the table for us. The commandant has graciously agreed to take a few questions, so the floor is open. When you have a question, I’ll call on you. Please stand up, state your name and affiliation, and wait for the microphone to come to you. Yes, sir, in the back.

Q: Yes, Paul Corson, with CNN. Thank you, Commandant. One report that we had this morning is whether al Qaeda has been crippled. Could we have your thoughts on that, please?

GEN. CONWAY: I can speak to what we have seen in the al Anbar Province, which is where my expertise is, where the Marines are, and where I’ve visited and operated for a time. I think that’s a fair word. I would not say destroyed. I would not say eliminated. But between what intelligence we have gotten — from a very willing population now — to tell us who these people are, where they are, where their caches are, those manner of things, with the great work of some of the Special Operations Forces that have their destruction as a primary mission, I think that they have significantly been crippled. I would also add though that they have shown an amazing ability to regenerate. Although you can argue when you knock out a top-level leader, they are necessarily going to be weaker for the experience, we’ve seen them pull off some fairly sophisticated operations almost in the wake of the loss of a significant leader. So are they crippled? Yeah. Are they still dangerous? Absolutely. And certainly, they are not destroyed.

Q: Hi, I’m Dan Segal. I’m from the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. Two questions. There have been a number of Article 32 hearings for those Marines involved in the Haditha incident in 2005. There have been a number that have been dismissed. Can you tell me what is your assessment of those dismissals? Is justice being served? My second question is I understand you’re a big advocate of having the Marines take over

responsibility for Afghanistan with the Army responsible for Iraq. What are the pros and cons of that idea?

GEN. CONWAY: Okay, and thanks for the questions. I have to unfortunately tell you that I can't talk a lot about either one of them. The situations in Haditha, Hamdania, and otherwise have developed just like they should, in my estimation. We have had charges that Marines have been guilty of wrongdoing. We have not assumed guilt or innocence; we have simply investigated, and then where the investigations proved them necessary to occur, held trials to determine ultimate guilt or innocence for these people. That there are dismissals as a result of that is fine, and in fact, I'm happy because it tells me that Marines were not guilty of doing what they were charged to have been doing at the very beginning. So I have great confidence in our military justice system. I have great confidence in our consolidated decision-making authority, Lieutenant General Jim Mattis, and I'm happy to live with the results of however they come out – again, with the satisfaction that we're holding people accountable if in fact it's believed that they may have done something wrong.

With regard to the other thing, I think it's unfortunately premature to talk about it in a public audience at this point. We have not briefed the Secretary of Defense on any concepts. Until such time as that has happened and he has made a decision, I probably ought to let it alone.

Q: General Conway, my name is Rubin Brady (sp). I work for the U.S. Agency for International Development. My question is regarding Africa.

Most of what I've heard in briefings suggests that Africa will be primarily a non-kinetic combatant command doing various sorts of assistance missions. If that's true, and if the Marine Corps is to maintain its two-fisted capability as you described, can you talk a bit more about what you envision the Marine Corps role in Africa – what the context would be?

GEN. CONWAY: Yeah, I sure can. You know, we think that we have a non-kinetic capability as well. We have training teams that go out all the time when we are forward deployed in a MEU. In some cases we fly them in if the MEU is not the right delivery platforms to work [with] other nations' militaries. We can train at the squad level just as effectively as we can train a brigade headquarters for combined arms and those types of things.

We teach ethics and values while we're there to the extent that they're important to us, and to the extent that other nations' militaries come to understand what drives us and how we conduct ourselves on the battlefield.

Where there is a MEU involved, and based upon the resources that are provided to us by the Navy, if it's coastal nation, often we'll run in what we call MEDCAPs or DENCAPs where we'll treat the people in a local that might not have good access to a doctor or in some cases can't afford doctors, dentists, those kinds of things.

So we just think that there's lots of opportunity there for engagement, exercise, and the ability to allow a nation to be more capable of defending itself against the possibility that extremists could be introduced into their society.

Q: Hi. Gordon Newbold from the Christian Science Monitor.

Quick question: When Admiral Mullen interviewed for his job as chairman for the Joint Chiefs, he specifically said that he was concerned about the Army breaking.

I'm wondering, given what you said here today, how much at all does that concern you — that the debate about resetting the force has been framed particularly about the Army as you struggle for more dollars to resource the Marine Corps.

GEN. CONWAY: Yeah, Gordon, it concerns us all a great deal. You know, people ask me what I learned as the J-3 of the Joint Staff. One of the things I learned was how very small a percentage we have involved in Iraq and Afghanistan compared to the other ground force, the United States Army.

You know, I've always said the Marine Corps wins battles, but the Army wins wars, and if you look at what they are doing, it is indeed difficult. They have been driven to a more significant period on station when they deploy than we have. If you look at mental health assessments and those types of things, it's tough on the soldiers. So anything or everything that we do in terms of force flow has as sort of a modifier: what's the impact? And is this going to help the Army to make sure that we don't see problems in the distant future? Because they are the strength of the nation.

Q: Thank you, sir. My name is Ron Vajens (ph). I'm with Kuwait News Agency here in Washington. You mentioned – or touched on – the notion that the politics and the economics in Iraq was not keeping up with the security gains, and we hear an awful lot about that in Washington. And I just wanted to hear your perspective on how important that is to the mission that that starts to come together better.

GEN. CONWAY: Well, I think ultimately it is the critical factor. I mean, certainly you have to have a level of security before you can have governance. I think you have to have governance and security before you can have a viable economics plan, and those are — there are four or five lines of operation, but I think those are the three most important that we see at work in Iraq and arguably in Afghanistan. But I think that the politics has to evolve. I think we have to see a willingness on the part of the leadership to bring together the various sections of the country. I don't think that we would say that it's desirable to see the country split off into factions; there is strength in the country staying together. I think it's the role of the politicians to bring it together and knit it together through services to all their people, through supporting strong economic plans, through spreading the oil wealth, and those manner of things. So it's simply a line of operation that we need to work hard on. I know Ambassador Crocker is doing that, and

I think when that particular line of operation starts to make significant progress, we will all see the effects of it across the board.

MS. FLOURNOY: Sir, I know you have an exceedingly demanding schedule and we promised you and your staff to get you out of here by 1:30, so I wanted to give you a coin, in true DOD tradition — that is a CNAS coin. I hope you will know that it comes with our thanks for your candor and for your insightful remarks. Thank you so much.

GEN. CONWAY: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

(Applause.)

(End of transcript)