

## **39<sup>th</sup> IFPA-Fletcher Conference on National Security Strategy and Policy: The Marine Corps: America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness**

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**General James F. Amos, Commandant, USMC, Commandant  
Luncheon Address, Day 2**

**GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS:** I'm a little bit surprised the room is this full. I learned as a young brigadier general that you get invited to conferences – and it's always the last day and it's usually the afternoon – and I would prepare for weeks and I would – I mean, weeks! You know, all the big-name people would be there early on and then I'd show up there all ready to go in the afternoon. There would be like three people there because everybody's caught the train and the planes and the buses and left town. So I'm pleasantly surprised.

I am honored to be here. This is our first effort to work with the Fletcher School to bring something like this together. I'm pleased to see so many of them. They've come from all over the Marine Corps. And they're not wasting your dollars; I don't want you to think for a second that they're wasting your dollars.

As we look at the next two decades, we'll be out of Afghanistan. We will come out of Afghanistan the same way the United States Marine Corps came out of Iraq last year. We had, on average, about 30,000 Marines, give or take four or 5,000, for about eight or nine years in Iraq, and we're now out.

That will happen in Afghanistan. I don't know when. You read the same newspapers I do; you listen to the same speeches. It will happen. So we will come out of Afghanistan. So then, where is the Marine Corps going to operate?

We've got a thing we call the arc of instability. And in a nutshell, it's the areas of the world that tend to be growing, overpopulation. Some of the things that you see out there: urbanization. A lot of them are along the littorals.

They start in the northern part of South America and they kind of come across the Atlantic; encompass a big chunk of what is now the continent of Africa; swing through the Middle East, some of the countries you might imagine, areas that are in the newspapers today – headlines. Those are areas that are where we call the – they enter or they become prime – these countries are part of that arc of instability. Then you swing through that part of the world over through Pakistan – Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, India and move yourself right around the Pacific until you get down to some of the areas where we know there's potential issues, and right on up to some of our friends that are called the Marines. So that's the arc of instability.

Interestingly enough, we used to about 10 years ago say that 70 percent of the world's population lives within 400 miles of the littorals. And now that estimation is about 70 percent of

the world's population lives within 200 miles of the sea – of the ocean. So those are the areas where we believe the United States naval forces – Navy and Marine Corps; us as a team – can have our greatest influence. That's also the areas, coincidentally, that are probably going to be, in many cases – not in every case – the most unstable. They're the areas that you read about in the paper today.

It's going to be characterized by urbanization. Essentially, Europe is a declining population right now. And yet in the areas that we're talking about, the population is growing exponentially, and you're going to find a lot of it in the urban areas now. It used to be out in the unpopulated – not the case anymore. It's going to be primarily urban. People are going to be living in cities; they're migrating to cities. It's going to be this overpopulation that we talked about.

And it's really a youthful demographic. I'm talking about young men. It's young males, in many cases uneducated, in many cases unemployed, ripe for attachment to things we would call in East L.A. gangs: kind of a gang-identity mentality.

So that's what we're seeing in these areas. We've talked about poverty; we've talked about competition for resources here. I need to mention that – I was reading an article just – not too long ago that actually said, in one of the African countries – countries, that clean, potable water was more precious than fossil-based fuel.

We've been alluding to that but I actually read it internally. That's what is going to happen, we think, over the next few decades. Natural resources competition; food, whether it's things grown or things raised or things eaten or things that you drink – it's going to be a competition for those resources among those people that are called the have-nots. Extremism is going to be ripe. It can be more than religious extremism – it can be any kind of extremism. But religious comes to mind right now with all that we see around the world.

And then finally, the proliferation of the basic weapons. We see a world where these nations – or really, these organizations, these stateless organizations have the ability and the – and can afford state-like weapons. We see it with Hezbollah; we saw an instance – this is two-and-a-half, three-year-old information with them. And we know it's there; we know they can get it. They have access and sometimes, the extremism in real states feeds those weapons into the stateless, faceless organizations, uniformless organizations, sometimes crime-related, as in our southern borders in Texas and Arizona and New Mexico. It can be a crime.

But we see that's probably what the world is going to look like for the next two decades. A lot more information there, but we think that's going to be our backyard because this is primarily the littorals, because these are kind of the nasty missions and things that, quite honestly, don't require 20,000 Marines on the ground. They may only require a Marine rifle company; they may require a training team to go in and help train border police of some of the nations that we want to help gird up and secure their borders.

We're doing that in [Liberia] right now, today. They've got about 62 American forces on the ground there and – of which the Marines are – have a colonel and we've got about 32, 34 Marines there. And we're training the [Liberians] – two infantry battalions.

That's what we can do in the world of future decades. My sense is, it's going to be a while before the United States of America has the stomach to put 100,000 U.S. forces on the ground somewhere. I'm not saying it can't happen; I'm not saying the world situation may not drive us to that. But my sense is, it will be a while, assuming the decision – we're able to make a decision to not put that number of U.S. forces on the ground. I think it will be a while.

I think the world – the focus for the United States of America will be in areas like this and for the Marine Corps in particular in areas like this. This is what we can – this began to define what my thoughts were with, what can we do for our nation? So, armed with that and believing that we're probably 85 percent correct, understanding that something bad could happen in some of the big-name countries around the world and the United States would step up to the plate and the United States Marine Corps would be an integral part of that, let's set that aside for a moment. So, understanding what we believe the future security environment will be, we sat down and spent a month writing the mission statement of the Marine Corps: what we do for our nation.

I tell folks that I've written a couple mission statements in my life. This is not a pretty mission statement. I would get, probably, a barely passing grade from our training team that teaches us how to do this kind of thing.

We are saying that America has a responsibility to interact around the world. A portion of that is to have a highly deployable expeditionary force that comes with this stuff. There's a lot implied in that. So that's kind of the umbrella that everything below that on that mission statement fits.

I say we are a balanced air-ground logistics team. When we first started writing it, we had a balanced air-ground team. General Gray came in and sat with us and he said, let me tell you something. The thing that makes the difference in the Marine Corps is your logistics. You come with your stuff. You don't have to box it up and put it in 20-foot containers and put it on black-bottom ships and wait for 28 days for it to get there. Crises don't wait. Crises require something to be there now. Logistics are the difference. That's the difference in the Marine Corps.

All of us that have stumbled around in places like Iraq understand that when the force has to stop and pause so we can get our logistics up with us so we can get ready for the next phase, logistics is the heartbeat of what we do. There's no shortage of courage and there's no shortage of enthusiasm, but there can be shortage of logistics. So logistics is important. We are that air-ground logistics balanced team.

We'd like to be forward-deployed and forward-engaged. Right now, we're forward-deployed in Afghanistan, and pretty heavily. We just swapped commands out. We've got a little

over 20,000 Marines and Sailors on the ground in Afghanistan. That occupies about 60,000 Marines: 20,000 there, 20,000 that just got back and another 20,000 getting ready to go.

So, about 60,000, which is about – which is about 55 percent of our operating forces in the United States Marine Corps are narrowly focused on Afghanistan, and rightfully so. That's our number-one priority right now. It's my number-one priority as the commandant, is Afghanistan: to provide whatever is required, to do whatever is required – people, equipment, money – for the Marine Corps to complete its mission successfully in Afghanistan.

But in the future, you take a look at areas like the Pacific. We need to reengage in the Pacific. We're not there. So when I talked about forward-deployed and forward-engaged, that's what we do. We recruit young men and women to live in hard conditions, be willing to give up comforts, whether it be aboard a ship or whether it be in some Third World country. That's what we – that's what we do. We sign up for that. And Marines who want to do that, we need to get back to that. My sense is, we're not there. That's what we do for the nation. You have that forward-deployed force so that when something like Libya kicks off, you've got a force that you can do something with. You may not know what you're going to do with it, but you have an option.

You come down and I talk about, we create options and decision space. That's a critically important piece of this. It became more important the more we talked about it, and Libya is a classic example. You saw in the press, you saw in Congress, you saw folks talking about, why don't we do – let's put a no-fly zone up! Let's do this! Don't do that! No, it's going to commit U.S. forces! We can't afford it! Why aren't we moving fast enough? The Libyans are dying! You know, on and on – Gaddafi's moving out! He's left Tripoli; he's headed towards Benghazi; what are we – you know, it just went on and the rhetoric went on and on.

It's become clear to me that situations are not always clear. It's not always easy to determine what's best for our nation. What's the next move? We don't know. And I think we've got a hell of a good secretary of state and secretary of defense and I'll tell you why. I've got complete confidence in them. If you think it's easy to sit down and try to determine what the next move is...it's always fuzzy around the edges; it's never quite clear.

These forward-deployed forces provides options for our leadership. It gives them an opportunity to go, okay: We're not quite sure what we're going to do. We're not quite sure if we're going to participate in a no-fly zone over Libya. But let's deploy – let's move the amphibious ships with the Marines off the coast. Let's get them through the Red Sea; get it through the Suez and get it off the coast of Libya, and then we'll figure it out.

That's what we bring. That's what we do. We provide decision space. And I can't tell you, the older I've gotten and the more I've – the more I've been fortunate or unfortunate enough to be involved in at least some of the decisions, some of the discussion about, what do you think we ought to do, the more I begin to value, okay, I'm not quite sure: I don't want to really mess this up; can I – maybe I just need to think about it for another day. We buy that time.

And I talked about it in [my Planning Guidance], we respond to today's crisis, with today's force, today. We've been hitting that hard within ourselves. I don't want any Marine to walk out of any discussion about what we do for the Marine Corps, what we do for the nation without clearly understanding that when you respond to today's crisis a week from now, you're irrelevant because today's crisis requires something – we don't know what it is; that may be just movement of ships and forces – to buy the time that we talked about. But we respond to today's crisis, with today's force, today.

President Obama, a year ago in December, on December 1<sup>st</sup> it was announced: They'd plus up our forces [in Afghanistan.] And he spent a lot of time, and his staff, working through, you know, how many. And of course, typical Washington, D.C., we're very critical. I mean, everybody's going, move faster! Make a decision! It's clear!

No, it's not clear, folks. It's not. And when he made his decision and he announced it at West Point on that Monday night, he said I'm going to plus-up the forces – U.S. contribution – by 30,000: 10,000 U.S. Marines and 20,000 U.S. soldiers. Tuesday morning, the lead elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines were airborne in U.S. Marine Corps C-130s, flying into Afghanistan. That was December the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

I arrived on the ground on December the 21st, I think, and the entire battalion was on the ground with all its equipment. Half of the second battalion was there with half of its equipment. The third battalion arrived. That battalion closed by the end of Christmas and the third battalion of the plus up arrived by the middle part of January. We have to be able to do that, somebody has to be able to respond to today's crisis today. Not everybody has to do that because that requires a state of readiness that I'm not convinced our nation can afford. But we can provide that. It has always been our lane. I know General Dunford went back to the '40s and '50s and kind of tapped into some of the language. That's really what we do for our nation. We can saddle up on a battlefield with 90,000 Marines as we did when we crossed the border into Iraq in March of 2003.

We can do that. And if something happens in some of the bad places of the world, the big ticket places, you're going to find Marines there with huge numbers. But that's not why the United States of America buys a Marine Corps. That's an insurance policy. That's one of those "I'm going to get a twofer out of this organization." America and Congress spends money on the United States Marine Corps to respond to today's crisis with today's force today.

I've had a lot of commentary over the last. I saw it happen in the springtime before the change of command. Read about it in the paper, people quoting the second land army. And shamefully, we're the ones who started that language. And then we got our nose out of joint when people were rubbing our nose into it. So I'm going, "Okay, but we're the ones who said it. You know, we're second land army, we've got to get back to our amphibious roots" and then all of a sudden people started using that language. And then they became critical of us. "Well, we don't need another second land army." Well, I tell everybody in here I make no apologies for what's happened in Iraq or in Afghanistan. A caveat is we do whatever our nation asks us to do, whatever the President asks us to do, we will be there.

I don't think I'm falsely arrogant on this thing. I think we've done pretty damn well in Iraq. And I'd ask you to think when was the last time you saw an article in the paper about Fallujah or Ramadi or Habbaniyah or al Qaim. You can't remember the last time. So I feel pretty good about it. I feel pretty good about what's happening in Helmand. It's a tough fight. We don't know, we don't know what's going to happen in Afghanistan. So I make no apologies about that. And we do that because the President directs. But America has a Marine Corps to respond to today's crisis and buy time for the national command authority. They need somebody to be forward deployed, foreign engaged.

Gen Dunford talked about the concept of a middleweight force. That's who we are. We need to be light enough to get there rapidly, but heavy enough to carry the day when we get there. We don't want to just get in some place and then immediately after 24 hours go, "Holy smokes, we need more logistics, we need more combat power, we need help." That's not us. But we sure as heck don't want to be so heavy that when something happens and the President and the national command authority says, "Okay, we need to send some forces in." And it may not be combat. It may be a show of force. It may be something like that. And then for us to say, "I'm sorry, we can't get there." "Why not?" "Because I'm going to have to put all this stuff on black bottomed ships because it can't fit inside a C17s." Or, "I don't have any ships available. I'm sorry, it'll be 30 or 40 days before I can-- I got to put it on railcar and I got to get it there by railcar."

That's where we fit. So when we wrote this mission statement, we wanted to capture that sense of this. We can hand out beanie babies and MREs, we're doing-- not the beanie babies, but we're doing-- by the way, we did hand out beanie babies last year, 75,000 of them, as a matter of fact. We're pretty damn proud of it. But, they fit pretty nicely in your cargo pouch.

The Marines, they carry two or three at a time. But, we can take care of people in a humanitarian disaster. We did it in Haiti a year ago in spades. We're doing it right now just west of Sendai. That airport was cleared, the one you saw when the tsunami came through, that huge tragedy. I remember the wave came over and you saw the jet ways out there. That was a joint force clearing operation. The Air Force went in there with red horse and engineers. We went in there, the Army went in there. It was the greatest joint effort, just like that. And the Marines went up there with a 42 year old Sage 46 helicopters and 550 Marines to help our brothers and sisters in northern Japan. And we've been there ever since. Ever since. We can do that.

We can also recapture the Magellan Star from the Somali pirates. We can do that. That's today's crisis. It fits what we have done in this mission statement. It's not the prettiest mission statement, but it ends with what I think is most important for us. We're going to do whatever the President tells us to do. So when we looked at that, we sat and said, "Okay, well then what does that mean?" To be able to work in that environment and do what we believe our nation asks of its corps, then what does that mean in size, in capabilities? That was the next step.

I know you're aware that in here we started a force structure review effort last September and it went all fall and completed just before Christmas. I'm aware that you were briefed yesterday that the Secretary of the Navy was briefed in January, Secretary of Defense, and he said, "Good." And it's going to downsize the Marine Corps from 202,000 down to 186,800. To

operate in that future security environment, to do the things that we say we believe our nation requires of its Corps, it's a more capable Marine Corps, it's more focused on the things, the lessons learned over the last nine to ten years of conflict and counterinsurgency environments. And it fits the future for us. That's where we're headed.

That requires a certain amount of equipment. We're working through that right now, certain numbers of airplanes, certain number of helicopters, and certain numbers of vehicles. We're working our way through right now. What do we want to have in vehicles? That's weight and cube and it's expense. And we want to be able to fit on amphibious ships and get back to where we can get on C-17s without being outsized vehicles. We want to be able to get back where Marines can carry what they have with them. And we're making efforts.

We've already canceled some programs that we not only didn't need, but were way too big and way too heavy. We're changing some of our weapons systems, going from weapons that weigh 35 pounds with all their ammunition down to weapons that weigh half that with a much more capable system. So we're headed that direction. This is serious business for us. This is not talk. We are going to lighten the Marine Air Ground Task Force. We are going to do it and we're in the process of doing it right now.

Now, lay all that I've just said on what transpired in the last two weeks with the budget. And I'll tell you, it's not a matter of being clairvoyant or prescient, but the reality of what we've seen is about to unfold in front of us over the next-- really the next probably three or four years. We are acutely aware of that. Next week, we're meeting with all the three stars and will be down in Camp Lejeune for three days, and we're going to spend a day and a half on nothing but macroeconomics.

My sense is that when I say we have a leg up, that's not bravado and I don't want my army brothers to go run out and call [General] Dempsey and say, "Amos has said he's ahead of you in the race." That's not it. But because we have been going through this since last summer the defining what is our lane? What is it we do? I don't want it to be fuzzy. I want it to be crystal clear. And then I want it to pass the test of Fletcher conferences. I want you to go, "You're wrong." Or, "We think you're pretty close." Or, "Have you thought about this?" And then we need to lay it across the budget on what it is the fiscal realities of our nation. Our nation can't afford to have all four services be a crisis response force. It doesn't mean we jumped into somebody's lane.

Here's my perspective on this thing, and we thought about it. Remember I talked to you about our lane? We don't have a domain that the Marine Corps operates in. Domains have become kind of the buzzword, and it really is true. Think about it now. Let's switch to the Army. The Army's domain is primarily on the land. We've got the greatest army in the entire world. Bar none. They're heroic, they're tenacious and they're extremely capable. The Army's domain is principally on the land. Yeah, we've got helicopters and we've got ATAC and HIMARS, I understand that. And you're in cyber. But your domain, when you think about the United States Army, is land.

When you think about the United States Air Force, you think about above the ground. And you think about space. And they're into cyberspace, just like all of us are. But you primarily think of stuff above the ground. And when you think of United States Navy, you think of water. You think of the domain of the oceans of the world, on it and below it, and certainly they're above it, I understand. But that's their domain.

But what's the Marine Corps's domain? We don't have one. We have a lane. Imagine all those domains in the shape of a Venn diagram and kind of right in the middle of that is this lane. I'm not interested in getting the Army's lane. I don't want to get in the Navy's lane and I don't want to be in competition in the Air Force's lane. Our lane is pretty narrowly defined and we operate in all of those domains, all three of them, of the big ones in cyber, in space, but primarily those. That's where we fit.

So as we look at money and we look at kind of our nation, our President has said in his speech the day before yesterday, Secretary of Defense's comment on it, we're going to go back as a nation now, as a Department of Defense and take a look at it. What is it we should ask of our Department of Defense? And then what is we have to be able to do as a nation? And then out of that, what is it we can afford to do? And that that you can't afford to do you either figure out how you can afford to do it, or you recognize the risk and you take extraordinary measures to mitigate that risk. That's how this is going to work.

And then you sit down as a Department of Defense and say, "Okay, Army, this is what I want you to do. Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps." So when I say I think we have a little bit of a leg up, it's because we've been working through this. We've gone through the pain of taking an introspective look at just what we do for our nation. And it's not everything. That's not what we're trying to do. We want to be in that lane right there. We think that lane not only is historic, which is important, but not critical for the future, but it also fits.

So that's where we're headed. I think it's exciting. I'm glad they passed the budget yesterday, it's the first of many, many hurdles. We all anticipate that. But I'll stop here and take your questions until you can't stand them any longer or you think I'm lying to you and we'll go from there, okay? Thank you very much, everybody.