

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

April 14 - 15, 2011

**General Joseph Dunford, Jr., USMC, Assistant Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps
Day 1 Morning Keynote Address**

GENERAL JOSEPH DUNFORD, JR.: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks again for being here. And Dr. Pfaltzgraff, thanks for the introduction. I was a little concerned about having you introduce me today. I didn't know that till last night. It was about 20 years ago, almost to the day, that I sat in front of Dr. Shultz and Dr. Pfaltzgraff to defend my master's paper at Fletcher. The situation was in doubt after the first hour of questioning by Dr. Pfaltzgraff. Sweat was pouring from my brow and I thought I was going to have to call Colonel Picarder[?], my sponsor down there at PP&L and say, "Hey, sir, I failed."

But then it was Dr. Shultz's turn to ask me questions, and the first question that he asked me was, "What's your favorite baseball team?" [Laughter] And I knew that Dr. Shultz was a rabid baseball fan. And General Flynn, I'm only telling this story for your benefit because I got an A. [Laughter] And I know you're going to give a couple presentations over the next couple days, and I thought that story would be instructive. [Laughter]

I'd like to express my appreciation for setting up the conference, Dr. Pfaltzgraff, to you and your folks. And also, General Flynn, to you and your folks and the team down at MCCDC. And frankly, in light of the security challenges that we have right now and the fiscal environment, not the least of which was just the President's speech yesterday, the timing could not be better for this particular conference.

Dr. Pfaltzgraff outlined the topics we're going to talk about the next couple days. We're going to talk about the Marine Corps as an expeditionary force and readiness. We're going to talk about the future threat environment. We're going to talk about the Marine Corps' relationship with its

joint, its combined and its interagency partners. And of course, last but not least, we're going to talk about some programs and resources.

And from a Marine Corps perspective, what really we want to get out of this, what General Amos wants to get out of this, is a healthy dialogue that will help us as we refine the capabilities and capacities that we're going to develop to deal with future threats.

In looking around the room at many folks and many friends, I'm pretty confident that we have the right group of people here to have a very productive two days.

Marines, Senator Reed just mentioned it, but Marines are very aware of today's economic challenges and declining DoD resources. We know that our senior leaders in the Congress are going to have some tough choices to make in the future. And once again, almost as an exclamation point on that, was the President's speech yesterday when he outlined the additional cuts that we would see inside the Department of Defense.

And so, to inform those decisions, it really is our responsibility to clearly articulate our role, the capabilities we provide to the nation, and be able to talk at length about the risk and the opportunity cost that must be considered when making resource decisions.

And to that point, what I thought I would do to start this morning is really try to provide some historical context to the United States Marine Corps, to talk about why the nation needs a naval expeditionary force in readiness, and to talk about why that is the unique role of the United States Marine Corps.

I hope what my thoughts will do is really frame the discussion for the next couple days and, again, generate the kind of dialogue that we hope to have.

While today's environment is a little bit unique in the sense that we're already starting to see the decline in DoD resources, even before the war is over, this is certainly not the first time in our nation that we've faced great pressure to reduce the Defense Department's budget. When there's

pressure to cut defense, it's natural for folks to look to eliminate redundancies and perhaps capabilities that are no longer viewed as particularly relevant.

It happened after World War II. It happened after Korea. It happened after Vietnam. It happened after the Cold War and Desert Shield and Desert Storm. And of course, the most drastic cuts were probably seen after World War II, where we experienced an almost historic reduction in demobilization.

And I'd like to begin by talking about World War II, because I think there's some lessons learned from that experience that should be recalled when we deal with today's challenges. The defense reductions after World War II had a profound effect across the entire Defense Department, but a particularly profound effect on the United States Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps was close to 450,000 strong the day that they landed on Iwo Jima. So the Secretary of Navy at the time, Secretary Forrestal, is standing there on a ship, standing next to Howlin' Mad Smith, and he's looking at the Marines raising the flag on Suribachi, and he says, "Howlin', that flag raising will guarantee a Marine Corps for another 500 years."

A little over a year later, the Marine Corps was fighting for its existence. And the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time, Alexander Vandegrift, was giving a speech on the Hill, it was known as his bended-knee speech. And his speech he said, "We have pride in ourselves and in our past. But we don't rest our cause on any presumed ground of gratitude owing us from the nation. If the Marine as a fighting man has not made a cause for himself in 170 years of service, he must go." Pretty dark days for our institution.

By 1949, the Marine Corps wasn't exactly gone, but our end-strength was about 65,000 and heading south. In that year, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson remarked, "There's no reason for having a Navy and a Marine Corps. General Bradley tells me that amphibious operations are a thing of the past. We'll never have anymore amphibious operations. That does away with the Marine Corps."

That particular debate about the existence of the Marine Corps ended in 1950, with the assault of the North Korean People's Army across the 38th parallel into South Korea. The United States at that time became engaged in a major land war in an unexpected time, in an unexpected place. And the initial results were absolutely disastrous.

The first unit that was engaged in the Korean conflict was an infantry battalion led by an individual by the name of Brad Smith. Brad Smith's organization was part of the Japanese occupation army. He had two under-strength rifle companies, a total taskforce of about 500 men.

He got the call to meet his commanding general at the airport, an individual by the name of Dean. And General Dean said, "Hey, Brad, I want you to take your soldiers and I want you to fly to Korea. I want you to move as far north as you can towards Osan, find a good piece of ground and establish a defense. I wish there was more I could do for you. I wish there was more I could tell you. God bless you and good luck." We didn't invent mission orders in the Marine Corps in the 1980s. Brad Smith got one in 1950.

On the 5th of July, 1950, Taskforce Smith faced the North Koreans. In spite of individual acts of bravery by some soldiers, and frankly what appears to be the most fairly competent leadership by Brad Smith, the soldiers were outgunned, their rockers were ineffective against the Soviet tanks. They had 2.36 rocket launchers that plinked off the North Korean's tanks.

The soldiers lacked the critical ingredients to succeed in combat. They didn't trust their training. They didn't trust themselves. They didn't trust the man on the left and right. And they didn't trust their leadership. And their spirits were quickly crushed.

After about seven hours of those 500 soldiers that Brad Smith had, 185 were killed, wounded or missing in action and the North Koreans were headed south. And that pattern repeated itself many, many times in the opening days of the Korean War. In fact, it repeated itself until the First Marine Provisional Brigade arrived in the Pusan perimeter became Walton Walker's fire brigade along the Pusan perimeter, which later enabled the landing in Inchon.

In 1951 and 1952, Congress held hearings to address the need for our nation to be better prepared for the next crisis. They were absolutely shocked at their unpreparedness for the Korean conflict, and they were determined that we would not repeat that mistake in the future, that we would be prepared for future challenges.

After hearing from witnesses and studying the events of 1950, the 82nd Congress concluded that the nation needed a standing force in readiness that was mobile, combat-ready, and able to hold aggression at bay while decisions were being made and the nation mobilized.

The Congress also recognized that our day-to-day interests required forces that could respond to crises before they became wars. Heavily influenced by the performance of Marines in Korea, and because we're, frankly, a maritime nation with an aversion to large forces based overseas, the Congress believed at that time that the nation force in readiness should be sea-based and expeditionary. In 1952, they believed the right force was the United States Marines.

We've served in that role for almost 60 years. And the wisdom and foresight of the Congress has been validated with Marines responding to over 100 crises and contingencies just in the last 20 years. But as General Vandegrift alluded to, we can't stake our claim for resources on what we've done in the past. The leadership in the Department of Defense is not going to allow that to happen, and the Congress is not going to allow that to happen. And we've seen that recently.

In fact, over the past few years, people have once again questioned the utility of the Marine Corps. We certainly saw that a little bit in the last Defense Quadrennial Review, and that picked up steam when the Secretary gave his speech out in San Francisco last summer, the speech that Dr. Pfaltzgraff referred to.

In his speech, he did issue us a challenge. He said, "Define the unique role of the United States Marine Corps going forward. The Marines don't want to be, nor does America need another land army. Nor do they want to be, nor does America need a US Navy police force." The Secretary's words.

That speech created quite a bit of discussion; in some cases, angst. And a lot of people believe that the Secretary was questioning the relevance of the Marine Corps and our amphibious core competencies. After his speech, a number of pundits jumped on the theme that we're a second land army that would be unaffordable after Afghanistan.

Frankly, inside the Marine Corps, where we pride ourselves on one of our key core competencies, which is paranoia, there was some concern about the future. Well, today I would tell you, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the rumors of our demise were greatly exaggerated last summer. Because what they missed were some of the other things that Secretary of Defense said at the time.

In his speech, he told us the plan for Marine Corps that would be at the tip of the spear. He told us to maintain a maritime soul as we reshape the Corps. And he directed in our planning that we consider the Marines' greatest strengths, a broad portfolio of capabilities and a penchant for adapting that are needed to be successful in any campaign.

And then Secretary Mabus issued similar guidance. And General Amos, who was at the time preparing to be our 35th Commandant, actually viewed the Secretary's speech as an opportunity, an opportunity for us to take an internal look and identify those capabilities and capacities that would be most relevant for the future. That's the way he saw, and that's exactly how we attacked it.

In early September, we began a comprehensive Force Structure Review. And as I look around the room, several folks in this room were participants in that Force Structure Review. The group was informed by our own assessment of the future security environment, existing defense planning scenarios, operational plans and current operational concepts.

And then General Amos armed the group with the mission of the Marine Corps. He emphasized the need for us to create a balanced air-ground team that was always alert and ready, a middleweight force that was light enough to get there and heavy enough to carry the day upon arrival.

You all should recognize that language as very consistent with the language of the 82nd Congress when they established the Marine Corps as the nation's force in readiness, the force that should be most ready when the nation is least ready.

And from my perspective, the security environment changes, the tactics, techniques and procedures change, the threats change, but won't change is our role as the nation's crisis response force of choice. And that's, from my perspective, a very important point, and it's integral to our ethos. Crisis response is incompatible with tiered readiness. Marines don't get ready when a crisis occurs; we have to be forward-deployed and forward-engaged to respond to today's crisis with today's force today. That's the most important aspect of who we are and what we do.

And while there's a perception that we have become a second land army over the past ten years, with large contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, that's what the nation needed us to do. And I would offer to you, we don't need to apologize for having been a second land army over the past ten years. We don't need to apologize for being a second land army in World War I. Or in Korea. Or in Vietnam. Or in Desert Shield or Desert Storm. Because that comes in a sticker price of being the nation's expeditionary force in readiness. We're able to do that, we're able to adapt. And at the end of the day, we did all that simply because that's what the nation asked us to do.

What people miss when they focus on that second land army is what else we have been doing. In addition to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we've responded to over 20 other crises since 9/11, the majority of them from the sea, from natural disasters to non-combatant operations to combat operations.

And I would ask you just to consider what we've done in the past seven months, just since the Secretary gave his speech. In addition to the 20,000 Marines and sailors that we have on the ground in Afghanistan, think about what else we've done:

In the same month that the Secretary gave his speech, probably close to the same day, the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit was abroad three ships as the Central Command's reserve. On a

single day, Marines from that MEU conducted humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in Pakistan, 400 nautical miles inland.

Simultaneously, Harriers were flying off the *USS Peleliu* providing support to combat operations in Afghanistan.

Sixteen-hundred nautical miles to the west, Marines aboard the *Dubuque* were conducting maritime interdiction operations and taking down pirates on the *MV Magellan Star*.

Simultaneously, non-commissioned officers from that same organization were ashore in Jordan, training Jordanian non-commissioned officers to deploy to Afghanistan.

Humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, support the major combat operations with Marine aviation, taking down pirates on the *MV Magellan*, capacity building in Jordan, not a bad day's work. And absolutely testimony to the flexibility of naval forces and what the Marine Corps has to offer as that crisis response force of choice.

In October, it was Marines from the 31st MEU and 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade responding to support the Philippines in the wake of a typhoon. They used organic assault support and surface connectors and delivered thousands of pounds of supplies to over 600,000 victims of the typhoon.

Last fall, the 26th MEU was called to relieve the 15th MEU in that role I just described as the CENTCOM reserve. And they had to deploy a month early, missing some of their training, in order to respond to that crisis in Pakistan, which was getting worse at the time. They did, they responded and relieved the 15th MEU on station. They conducted support for the humanitarian assistance for disaster relief effort in Pakistan.

And then in December, after doing that, they went back, assumed the role as the CENTCOM reserve, and then got the call that they needed to support operations in Afghanistan. And within three days of Secretary of Defense signing a deployment order, 1,500 Marines from that MEU

were ashore in Afghanistan with V-22s, Cobras and reinforce rifle companies supporting combat operations in Afghanistan.

That organization had not trained specifically for operations in Afghanistan. They were trained to be a Marine Expeditionary Unit, respond at any time and place. Their training allowed them to be a crisis response force, but again was not the same training we put our battalions through in Afghanistan. They remain on the deck today and they've done fine.

In February, when violence erupted across northern Africa and the Middle East, the remainder of that same MEU was directed to go off the coast of Libya. As we all know, that's recent history. They provided Harrier support to Libya. They conducted a TRAP with the V-22. And by the way, Marines from Camp Lejeune, on 24 hours' notice, flew to Souda Bay to backfill that organization that had gone ashore in Afghanistan.

And then of course, most recently, and we've got General Thiessen here, the Commander of Marine Forces, Pacific, the Marines on Okinawa rapidly responded to our ally in Japan following the devastating earthquake and the tsunami. And within hours, Marine aircraft from Okinawa began transporting humanitarian aid and disaster relief planning teams to the impacted areas. They were quickly joined by Marines and sailors from the 31st MEU, embarked aboard the *Essex* Amphibious Ready Group, and provided support.

We were able to do all those things I just described – and again, that was merely a thumbnail sketch of seven months since the Secretary's speech – because we are forward-deployed and because we are forward-engaged. And because Marines back home on the bench are ready to go and reinforce those units that are forward-deployed and forward-engaged.

Those same forces that conduct day-to-day forward presence and crisis response can quickly and seamlessly shift to provide assured access for Joint Forces. And that's exactly what we did in the wake of 9/11. Just weeks after the 9/11, Task Force 58, under the capable leadership of now-CENTCOM Commander General Mattis, rapidly assembled two MEUs that were already afloat, a total of 4,400 Marines from six ships.

Before the attacks on 9/11, one MEU was conducting an exercise in Egypt, the other was providing humanitarian assistance/disaster relief in Timor. Both raced full speed to Pakistan. All six ships aggregated off the coast and Task Force 58 attacked into Afghanistan in the dark of night, securing three critical lodgments in hostile terrain. And these actions provided the decision space national leaders needed at the time, and they facilitated the follow-on forces, special operations forces, as well as combined and interagency forces into Afghanistan.

That's a good example of what it means to conduct an amphibious assault in the 21st century. Omar Bradley was wrong in 1949. And sometimes we've been advised to change our language, stop talking about amphibious assaults, because it conjures up the Tarawas and the Iwo Jimas. What I would ask you today in the next couple days of discussion, for amphibious assault, you should conjure up the image of Afghanistan and the short access in a number of other scenarios that we can talk about.

In the 21st century, notwithstanding some of the challenges that Senator Reed alluded to, amphibious assaults are not only possible, they're a national imperative. And we need to talk about not whether we're going to do those, but how we're going to do those. That's the critical question over the next couple of days.

We looked at everything that I just discussed when we conducted that Force Structure Review – the strategic landscape, the plans, the concepts, the planning scenarios, and, as importantly, the experiences that I just outlined that we have had over the past several years. And the Commandant Brief, the Secretary, in February, he went back and he said, "Okay, Mr. Secretary, first thing that I want to do is, I want to come back to you and answer your question about what is the unique role of the Marine Corps going forward."

And what he said was that, We are a middleweight force. We are larger than special operations and lighter and more expeditionary than conventional Army units. We're a force that's forward-deployed and forward-engaged abroad Navy ships, deterring conflict, building relationships and

partner capacity. We're a force that can immediately deploy to a crisis and buy time and space for decision makers. And we're a force that can enable joint and combined operations of any size.

And in his remarks to the Secretary he used many of the examples that I just outlined, and of course the timing of his speech, of his brief to the Secretary was fortuitous because many of the things that were going on in the Middle East certainly highlighted the need to have a crisis response force at the time. If the Secretary didn't have an appreciation of the value of that, I think he certainly does as a result of the last couple of months.

I walked into the Commandant one day, I guess it was morning after the TRAP, and I said, "Commandant, given all that our Marines have done over the past several months, if we can't successfully articulate the Corps, we need to get a new we, because the story is pretty compelling."

In any event, the most important aspect of that meeting with Secretary of Defense was that he affirmed all of what General Amos had outlined. And he also approved our detailed plan. And I know we'll talk a little bit about our detailed plan over the next couple days.

But in the end, we will be, as we move forward, optimized for that day-to-day crisis response, but capable of stepping up, as needed, to conduct in a long-term, irregular war, or a major contingency operation.

In closing, we're absolutely convinced as an institution that the Marine Corps offers the nation unique capabilities. And what Congress envisioned back in the 1950s remains absolutely valid today.

We are neither a second land army, nor are we the US Navy's police force. We are a naval expeditionary force, the nation's crisis response force, the force that will remain most ready when the nation is least ready. There's a cost to maintaining that capability, there's no question about it. But let me put that cost in some perspective for you:

Today's Marine Corps, to include all the amphibious ships and support that we get from the Navy, represents 8.5% of Department of Defense budget. For that, you get 31% of the nation's ground forces, 12% of its fighter attack aircraft, and 19% of its attack helicopters.

In an era of tight budgets and uncertainty, we believe we're a reasonably priced insurance policy. And history has shown the cost of not having that insurance policy. There is risk associated with that insurance policy. There is risk, if you go back to Korea, of putting young Americans in harm's way that are unprepared. There is risk of not being able to respond in a non-combatant operation in a place like Lebanon, where American citizens and interests are challenged.

And there is opportunity cost in inability to help coalition partners and allies, like Japan, or Pakistan, or Haiti, or Indonesia in their time of need with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

So I think we can clearly articulate the risk associated with not properly resourcing the Corps, not properly maintaining the nation's crisis response force, and also, as I mentioned, opportunity cost in not having those forces forward-deployed, forward-engaged and prepared not only to do those things that I mentioned in Haiti and Indonesia, and so forth, but not capable of then quickly aggregating and doing the kinds of things that we did with Task Force 58 in Afghanistan in 2001, when a short access was required.

Having put down that marker, I'm prepared to answer your questions and look forward to listening to your comments over the next day-and-a-half. Thanks. [Applause]