

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

April 14 – 15, 2011

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Panelist, Session 5, "Regional Challenges and Opportunities"**

LT. GENERAL DUANE D. THIESSEN: It's great to be here with you today, it's great to see friends and colleagues and acquaintances that I came to know in my many years herein Washington, D.C. Coming from my command headquarters in Hawaii, though, I have to tell you, I don't miss you at all. [laughter]

Listen, in my few minutes, I want to talk to you very briefly about the setting in the Pacific, because I'm coming to you as a Marine component commander in Pacific Command. So I'm going to talk about the setting, I'm going to talk a little bit about confluence and stability. And then I'm going to finish with the character of the force requirement with emphasis on the Marine Corps because of the character of this meeting.

First, a few statistics with regard to setting. It's important when we deal with the Pacific to understand scale. It's huge. It's absolutely huge. Four of the world's most populace nations are in the Pacific. More than half of the world's total population butts up against the Pacific. Eleven of the fifteen largest population centers on Earth are all in the Pacific theater. And you've heard the influence of urbanization over the last couple of days. It includes six of the largest active duty militaries on Earth if you include Russia, which has forces up against the Pacific.

Now, at the expense of sounding trite, I'll just tell you, when it comes down to it, it's the economy, stupid, all right? Asia is one of the major economic engines for the world's economy and it is also key, it is a key player, in the U.S. economy. Nine of the world's fifteen largest economies are on the Pacific Rim, nine of the fifteen largest. So that's most of them. Three nations alone, now listen to this, three nations alone, the U.S., China and Japan, produce 41 percent of the world's GDP. Now, I hope you understand that statement. That is huge. Sixty

percent of all U.S. exports go to APEC countries. So, the U.S. also has treaty allies in the Pacific; we have five, three of which are represented here today. We have Japan, we have the Republic of Korea, and we have Australia, we also have the Philippines and Thailand. These are treaty allies.

Stability in the Pacific has been the factor that has allowed the economic miracle in Asia over the past 60 years. It has been 60 years of stability and that's what's produced this amazing context for the Pacific Rim. Now, there's a corollary to that. The corollary, as you would assume, or would guess, is instability is going to have a negative impact on a very large scale. Now, it's in the text of this security and this stability in the region that we have as a country and as a Marine Corps and as a combatant command, we have both our challenges and we have our opportunities.

Let me start with the challenges, and I'm going to get back to the size of this thing. The Pacific AOR is absolutely massive. If you take off, and most of you know this, if you take off from the west coast and you fly at 450 knots for five hours, you're halfway there. Now, put that in the context of trying to do everything from the United States on ships with a speed of advance that is going to be somewhere between 10 and 20 knots, all right? This is a massive, massive area. It's also roughly half the world's surface.

These huge populations in this AOR and the geography combine to create a fiction that is going to influence us and the world for a long time to come. Asian prosperity sits on top of a confluence of irrefutable needs. It's a resource and geography friction. Now, let me build that a little bit. Let me start with a very simple formula for stability in the rim. Stability is very simply jobs which are primarily manufacturing jobs and that manufacturing requires resources which are largely not available to the manufacturing nations. And then the products of those manufacturing efforts are then exported. Let me simplify it. Check the tag in the back of your shirt, check where your shoes were made, check where most of your automobiles were made, or the components in that automobile. Check where all of your entertainment issues were made, and you will start to get a sense if you multiply that by billions of people who participate in that kind of dynamic.

Now, in the Pacific, access then to resources unimpeded trade across all of this contested water is key. It comes down to trade and freedom of navigation. Those two elements are going to be

pivotal for a long, long time. Now, I said it's the economy, stupid, and that's true of any government anywhere, ours and everybody else's. History is going to be predominantly a human dimension and it's no different in the Asian Pacific Rim. Governments need to protect their economies and if they want to retain sovereignty and power, it means that they have to insure adequate natural resources and access to markets. It's that simple.

Any insecurity in Asia, whether it's caused by competition on the sea lines of communication, any historic stressors or competing ideologies, is going to be disastrous not only for the country involved, but it's going to have a global impact because risk itself is going to produce more risk very rapidly.

Now, let me see if I can put this in a tangible context for you now. Consider what would happen if trade were impacted negatively in the Straits of Malacca or in the South China Sea. The Straits of Malacca are only a mile and a half wide at one narrow juncture. Roughly one-fourth of the world's trade goods, traded goods, all of the traded goods, one-fourth of it pass through those straits in the South China Sea going one direction or the other. Roughly one-fourth of all the world's oil carried by sea passes through the straits primarily from the Persian Gulf to China, Japan and South Korea. In fact, 90 percent of all the oil used by South Korea, Japan and China, goes through that strait and through the South China Sea.

Now my point is those countries, including China, are going to act in their own interests to insure that they have the access, the unimpeded access that they desire. This, I think, needs to be a major factor in the way we look at the future. I think it needs to be a major concern for all of us. I guarantee you it is a concern to our treaty allies who are on the Pacific Rim.

Secretary Clinton recently noted that the South China Sea and freedom of navigation, international law, is a national interest for the United States, and she's absolutely right. So I hope that in this room there's at least tacit agreement that we depend on stability in Asia. Now, so how do we go about shaping and deterring in this region and it comes down to two words, only two: it's presence and credibility. Now, I hate to break it to you this way, but in this area of the world,

virtual presence is absolute absence. There's no merit in it whatsoever. You have to be there in order to be creditable. You have to demonstrate routinely that you can be there and be creditable.

So, we have to forward deploy. The distances involved from the continental United States, the character of the terrain, the importance of the area, requires us to be there. Now, you have to have the right capability at the right place at the right time in the quickest possible way in order to have the credibility required to shape or stabilize in that area. Now, this presence, I mentioned, had to be tangible and so it has to be there when the countries need us. And that goes across the full realm. If it's crisis response, it isn't "I'll be there in a couple of weeks," we have to be there very quickly. If it's training that they desire, we need to be there in order to do that. If it's exchange officers or exchanging and meetings, or if it's HADR, the most effective HADR, the most effective crisis response, is going to be the quickest that you can get there.

Now, terrain dictates the strategy and the terrain there is maritime over large distances. So, if you're going to do this on a protracted basis as opposed to a period basis, you're going to require surface vessels. The amount of sustainment and the amount of men and equipment, forces and equipment that you can move on vessels at sea cannot be equated any other way. This, in turn, demands forward basing, it demands mobility, it demands expeditionary character, force projection and sustainment, which is that niche that the commandant was talking about, General Amos here, a few minutes ago.

So, what are the requisite elements for this kind of force? Well, it comes down from my perspective and in my responsibilities, down to three points. The first one you heard the first day, that being one of readiness. It doesn't do me any good to get ready for what happens, I have to be ready for what happens when it happens. Readiness is a key factor all the time. The second one is basing. Bases in the United States are absolutely mandatory. So are bases on the Pacific Rim or near the Pacific Rim. If I am going to be able to assemble and organize and train, I have to be able to do that in a timely manner, in a proximate manner in order to do this. I also require main bases for warehousing and for maintenance. These are critical issues. The third one I mentioned a little while ago is strategic lift. You have to have strategic lift in order to respond within that theater in a forcible or in a rapid manner.

So let me just talk about bases for a little bit here, because bases have received a lot of attention in the press, especially when it deals with agreements with Japan and with Guam. Number one, Okinawa is an absolutely wonderful-- it's a magnificent, it is a strategically significant, base and station for the United States Marine Corps. It is ideally suited for our nation, for any response relative to northeast Asia. Let me shift to Guam, there's been a lot of discussion on Guam. Guam, while it may not have the ideal position relative to northeast Asia that Okinawa does, it starts to get to an issue that we need to address as a nation and as a force. If you take a line and you go from Guam to the west across the top of the Philippines to Thailand, then go down to Australia, then come out across the Pacific Ocean islands back to Guam, you cover an area that's roughly the size of the United States, continental land mass. We are woefully short in our presence in that area that includes the South China Sea. That butts up against the Straits of Malacca.

The South China Sea is one of the most contested waterways, one of the most critical waterways in all of Asia. We have to be engaged with those countries, they are asking us to be engaged. I have requests from nations, an assortment that you wouldn't believe, that I can't fill because of time and accountability. I have requests from Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, East Timor, Australia. I also have requests even from Cambodia and from Vietnam for presence, for training, for mil. to mil. for exchanges and they're asking for this not because they want a Marine Corps base Cambodia or a Marine Corps base Malaysia, they want this in order to validate them, they want this in order to participate with us in what they believe is a critical area. They want to avoid becoming irrelevant in the shadow of a hegemon should that occur. They are seeking our leadership, they are seeking our participation, they're seeking our expertise. I am ready, willing and able to do that as long as I have those projection bases, the strategic lift and the readiness is my job.

And I'll just leave it that that. Our choice, I think, is to do this correctly now or have to do something the hard way later.