

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

April 14 - 15, 2011

**Lt Gen John E. Wissler, USMC, Deputy Commandant for Programs and Resources
Panelist, Session 4, "Supporting and Enabling the Force to Meet Emerging and Future
Challenges"**

LT. GENERAL JOHN E. WISSLER: You heard earlier on there was a talented panel. There was one minor exception. You're going to hear from him first and then we'll get on to the professionals to talk about this. Thanks for that introduction, Dr. Perry. Dr. Davis, thanks for having this with the Marine Corps. And thanks to everybody who's out there and still participating, because it really is a pretty day out and there's a lot better reasons and things to do in Washington, D.C. than this.

I think It's kind of ironic that we're here on what traditionally is tax day, from my perspective, to talk to-- and if I scared anybody, it's really on Monday-- to talk about potentially what is the tax that the nation has to pay, or should pay, to keep the nation's expeditionary force in readiness? It's also duly ironic, I guess, that only Washington, D.C. could postpone something that's been traditionally on the 15th of April a couple of days, and that fits perfectly with the delays we've already seen in getting our FY '11 budget. So all those things considered, I think we're here at a timely time. And, of course for Lieutenant General Flynn's planning, we got to do it right on the heels of the President's discussion about, I think, and I'll touch to a little bit later, how we're going to get after finding out what capabilities we do need to source as a nation.

Yesterday's program really set me up, took a lot of the kind of boiler plate out of what I needed to say, just to make sure we all had a common reference. And I know Lieutenant General Flynn touched in very good detail on where we are with the force structure review, kind of what it got after. What I'm going to talk to, I think, is summarize, really, those capabilities. And then talk a little bit about what are the factors that you have to consider in designing that middleweight force? In other words, what does it need to bring to the table, and then what does it cost to bring

those capabilities to the table? Not in exact dollar terms, but to talk comparatively to what it's cost us to field America's expeditionary force and readiness in the past.

So what does that middleweight force have to do? I've broken it down, really, into four bullets. And I think these were kind of the focus areas for the force structure review, but I've broken it down that way because I think it contributes most specifically to the lecture, or the discussion, I guess, that we've had over the last couple of weeks. It has to respond to today's crisis today, with today's force. And a great number of examples over the past two days of how we've done that in the last year, and certainly even within the last seven months.

It also has to be able to conduct forward engagement and security force assistance, and I had a great panel on that yesterday. I was back working some budget issues as we were trying to sort out what '11 was really going to mean to us. The investment there saves further investments down the road, and I'll break that down into a little bit more detail. It has to be able to project power, both hard power and soft power, and it has to assure access. And assuring access is not always a hard power decision either.

And then finally, this middleweight force has to be able to fight up a weight class or two. It has to be able to conduct major combat operations and counter irregular threats and be able to do that with the skill that we've seen our marines and sailors deployed in Iraq and now Afghanistan be able to do over the last ten years. So the real question is can we afford that force? I think the answer is yes, but I would also offer that we have to change the way we think about funding national defense if, in fact, we're going to be able to afford that as a nation.

So take them one at a time. Responding to today's crisis with today's force today. Crisis response is the sweet spot for the middleweight force. If you look at the range of military operations, and I think General Flynn touched on this yesterday, we took some risk at the high end, meaning that kind of major combat operation force. Not that we've divested ourselves of that capability, but we haven't focused there. We put some of those capabilities where we could get a hold of them, where we could employ them, where we could-- if you want to put it in that boxing terminology-- where we could train, put on a little weight and fight at the heavier end.

But that crisis response sweet spot requires us to have expeditionary capability in everything we do. It's in our mindset, it's in a commitment to readiness. You can't be expeditionary and have tiered readiness. You have to be ready to go when the bell sounds.

General Dunford yesterday touched on first battalion second marines leaving Camp Lejeune with 19 ½ hours of being notified falling in to a new command element that they had never trained with, and then executing tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel on the ground in Libya days after they got ashore their naval ships. You cannot do that with tiered readiness. You can't call somebody, tell them they need to deploy in 19 ½ hours if they haven't trained to those missions already.

You also have to think about austerity and efficiency. And I'll touch on efficiency a little bit later, but it's being able to operate in austere environments, taking with you all the things you need to be able to fight when you get there and sustain your fight.

Conducting forward engagement and security force assistance. General Jones just touched on the fact that he was a little bit concerned about the massive kind of retrenching, if you will, of American forces back. I would offer that the nation's insurance policy against the potential debilitating effects of bringing forces all the way back is in fact that forward engagement and security force assistance policy. The military relationships that are made by our marines and sailors around the globe in places that are not that, at least don't seem that important right now, may actually be critical as we face the enemies of the future.

It's about preventing crisis, it's about being on the ground before the crisis becomes a war. And you can do that if you have a forward engaged force focused on security force assistance. Because in the end game, it's about friendships, it's about cultures, it's about relationships, not only between individuals but between organizations. Secretary England used to say there's no such thing as a nation to nation relationship, they're all people to people relationships. They build, perhaps, into nation to nation relationships, but it starts with individuals.

I know that some of my fellow panel members are going to touch on this, but to be forward engaged, at least from our perspective, you have to leverage our naval character. You don't do it by flying into their airport. Sometimes, they don't want big formations on the ground. Sometimes, they want a smaller footprint that builds larger. And you do that with a naval force. And a naval force can access parts of the world that you can't get to by other means. There may not be an airport or an air facility to put you where you need to be. And you need that naval capability.

And then the feedback piece of that is by doing that, you do become culturally attuned to how decisions are made in the various places and parts around the world where you end up. Some of them good, some of them bad. It is bad that we're not pulling liberty in Marseilles and other places, as General Jones said. But, the value of those relationships are not nearly as good as the value of relationships-- I know as a young guy, I sailed around the western Pacific, that we made in places like Sri Lanka and in Pakistan and in other parts of the world.

To project power and assure access in the littorals, as I said, it's not just hard power, it's through soft power and that soft power is forward engagement. But you also need to have the capability to do it with hard power. If they don't want you there, you have to have the ability to get there. And as General Dunford commented in his opening remarks, don't think Tarawa, think Afghanistan 2001. It's being able to put the force where you need the force to do what it needs to do as an enabler as just mentioned in that joint and sometimes interagency capability on the ground.

Some people have said that amphibious power projection is no longer a capability. I would offer that what's just taken place in Libya, what's taken place in Pakistan, what's taken place in Afghanistan with the marines, the third battalion, eighth marines who went ashore from amphibious shipping proves that wrong. And a lot of times, the arguments are that there are anti-access area denial capabilities that would keep us from going there. What I would offer, that there are high tech weapons in all of the domains; land, sea, air, space and cyber. We talked a little bit about cyber yesterday while I was here. I don't know how much of it was touched on after I had to go back and count beans. But we can't simply cede-- we as a nation cannot cede

any terrain in any domain just because of a technology that someone wants to present to keep us from going there. And so what we have to figure out is how we defeat those anti-access or area denial capabilities in order to retain that capability as that middleweight force.

Amphibious power projection insuring access in the littorals are definitely unique features of our naval character. But the interesting piece about that is with the ability to do it when they don't want you to do it, and doing it on a daily basis when they would like you to come and be a partner, you create a capability across the entire range of military operations, a very flexible tool for the nation and for the national leadership. What that force brings, that ability to project power and assure access is decision space for the national leadership. So that's what you're buying when you buy that kind of capability.

What does that mean for marines? We have to be able to insure that what we buy fits and is capable of being employed from those amphibious ships. And there's a cost in that. Finally, conduct major combat operations, counter irregular threats. I don't think anybody needs me to touch on that. But I know that General Flynn probably mentioned we traded some capabilities, put some things in the reserves, took some very heavy kind of major combat things and put them where we could get them, where they would be trained and ready to go, but where we wouldn't have them in the numbers or the quantities that maybe we would have had over time if we had kept this 202,000 marine force at all times.

And certainly countering irregular threats, we've done that over the course of time. That isn't something new. I would offer that's perhaps why, although we had to relearn some of those lessons, our experience in the small wars is really what got us, I think, the successes we've enjoyed as a service and service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, if we had unlimited resources, it would be easy. We now know what the problem is. I kind of put the problem out there for you. We would just lay all the money out there and I know that the Department of the Navy would love to increase our share of the budget and give us a whole bigger chunk. But the reality of things is we have to maintain all of these capabilities within the desired capacities within a new fiscal reality. And that is we are now at a point where we're

going to be seeing declining budgets, I would offer, for the next 8 to 10 years, at least for the Department of Defense. President made that crystal clear, I thought, on Wednesday. He said \$400 million has already come out of defense and we're going to take another \$400 million over the next 10 to 12 years. That's not going to increase the DOD top line.

So the central challenge in all this is how we as a nation, and then certainly we inside the Marine Corps, how do we prioritize limited funding? And I would offer it goes on two-- you have to think of it in kind of two areas. One, we have to come to grips with the way we fight and the way we will fight in the future has fundamentally changed in the last ten years. And then we also have to tie that fundamental change in the way we fight with what will become our national security. And I think the President and the Secretary of Defense were fairly clear in their discussions on this topic when they said we were going to conduct this strategic review. Because they understand that you don't do more with less, you do either less with less or at best you do differently with less. And they will define the differently and then we will execute the missions that are deemed most appropriate for our country.

I think our discussion today has made a good case for the nation's need for an expeditionary force in readiness. General Jones said he's not backing away from the table, he's not embarrassed to say that's a national capability we should have, and that in his opinion formal presence is critical to our future. We have to have that dialogue at the highest levels to determine our strategy, but I think we're on good footing.

What do I mean by we have fundamentally changed the way we fight? Before 9/11, and I would offer even through 2003, when many of you in this room, I know myself when we crossed the berm out of Kuwait into Iraq to liberate Iraq, we literally were fighting in that kind of counter-Soviet very linear battle that we were all very comfortable with. We identified enemy formations, we went after enemy formations, we went after their capabilities. And in a time frame, and nobody really remembers this, but in a time frame people thought impossible, we were inside Baghdad. Against what was, depending on how you look at it, the fourth largest army in the world at the time. Perhaps not the fourth most capable, but they were the fourth largest. And we dealt with them very, very effectively.

In those days, everything had a frontage; marines, a rifle company of 150 marines defended 1500 meters of terrain. They attacked on 300 meters of terrain. In Golestan a year ago, we had a platoon, 60 marines, just outside of Golestan. Their nearest partner was 45 miles away, 45 miles between them and the closest. Their company commander saw that platoon every five days, not because he was lazy. It took him five days to get to each one of his platoons. That platoon was doing things that battalions had been doing before. They were engaging with the locals, they were conducting security patrols, they were fusing intelligence, they were coordinating fires, they were planning and conducting logistics. The battalion that they belong to was spread across a distance that would reach from here to Frederick, Maryland, and from here to Baltimore, roughly a thousand marines covering that size of terrain.

They were spread out over 52 combat outposts. It's expensive to support a force that is that distributed. But that's the way we're going to fight in the future. Pushing command and control logistics, intelligence and fires is not going to change. And pushing it to the lowest levels is the way we will fight now and into the future.

We can't afford simply to equip the force that we have today, we also have to think about how we modernize that force against this expanded and different capability. I mentioned earlier we're in a period of reduced resources. So how do we get after this fiscal challenge? How do we balance reset and modernization? The reset bill alone for the Marine Corps is around \$11 billion. To be precise, as best we figured it out, \$10.6 billion. Five billion of that will not-- we won't be able to even get after until we come out of Afghanistan. In the bill that was just passed yesterday, we got \$2.8 billion of that \$10.6 billion. But at the end of the fight, when we stop the fight, there will still be a \$5 billion bill. We've asked for an additional \$2.5 which will not be re-ratcheted to \$2.8 billion to get after that \$10.6. That's just to reset the force we had. That's not to modernize the force into a capability of tomorrow. A significant fiscal challenge in and of its own.

But in this period of declining resources, if history is any judge we won't go to the levels we were at today. Historically, normed over time, the defense budget falls to a level of around \$460 billion. It's without overseas contingency, about \$460 billion. That's over \$130 billion less than

FY '11 request. It's a lot for us to get after. FY '11 request that was passed was good, but we're starting off 9 percent in procurement below where we thought we were going to be as a Marine Corps. Now, that's both in overseas contingency procurement and in our baseline procurement. But when you start from a 9 percent deficit, looking at what are declining resources over time, you have to make hard decisions.

So the framework within those decisions, or the framework wherein those decisions are made is going to be critical. Our priority is to reset the force so that we can respond to today's crisis with today's force today. But also to modernize, but to balance that such that we invest in future readiness at the same time we're maintaining current readiness. And the line blurs. Why does it blur? Well, we've already achieved some levels of modernization since we've been in Iraq, or Afghanistan. Our M16 rifles and our M4s have gone from iron sights to everybody being advanced combat optics. Everybody now is shooting with a much better weapon system. Our counter IED capabilities of taking things such as off-leash dogs and ground penetrating radars added to our capability, we're now on average about 30 percent. We're finding 70 percent of the IEDs, 30 percent of them we're still having difficulty getting to. But it's through those technological developments that we're saving marines and sailors lives on the battlefield.

I talked about pushing intel and communications down to the lowest levels. That costs money. Battlefield mobility costs us five to six times what it cost when the fight started in 2003. The price of a Humvee was around \$50,000. The cheapest price we're seeing right now, predicted for JLTV, is somewhere around \$300 to \$320 thousand dollars. Individual equipment just for a marine, the gear, the kit that the marine wears when he goes to combat has risen five times. In 2003, it cost us about \$1,500 per marine to outfit a marine. It costs us over \$7,500 a marine to outfit a marine these days. All improvements that we're not taking away from that marine; improved body armor, helmets, night vision capability. All of the things essential on the modern battlefield, five to six times the cost.

And then just battalion equipment sets. If you looked at it separately, not the cost of those individual marines, not the cost of that 2 ½ to 3 times what it cost to outfit a battalion of marines. So you can see it's an expensive proposition. The risk is not achieving the proper balance

between reset and modernization, because significant risk on the back end will make us a less ready force to feed the emerging threats that we have to meet. And we've all seen how radically the threat has changed just in the last five years. Some modernization is going to have to be deferred, there's no doubt about that. The question is finding the right balance.

Inside the Marine Corps, we've taken an entirely new approach to how we've developed our budget and our programmed objective memorandum, the POM. For the first time, we have scrubbed every single program across the Marine Corps at the three and four star level to assure that we're buying what we need to be that middleweight force. We currently have an ongoing evaluation of the force structure review to make sure that we have uncovered all the hidden costs, not only in things, but in doctrine and organization and training. The entire DOTMLPF look will give us the total cost of the force structure review. And I've touched on just some of those costs already.

And we've taken some steps to balance reset against modernization. Some things we will not reset to their previous condition because we're going to bet on replacing that capability with a modernized capability. We will not spend money to simply get something up to standard, even though we know we have a requirement to do that. And this programmed objective memorandum, POM 13 which takes us through fiscal year '17 is balanced, if you will, nestled inside a ten year investment plan. You see, because most of the challenges as we've looked out over the next ten years in that declining cycle, most of them sit right on the horizon, if you will, right outside this current five year plan. But if we're not prepared, if we don't make the decisions now, we won't be able to react, if you will, when the reality of those fiscal years '18, '19, '20, '21, stare us in the face.

General Dunford mentioned we're a frugal force, we pride ourselves on that. We think we get a great bang for the buck. He mentioned 8 ½ percent. That includes every bit of funding that we get from the Navy, our airplanes, and we even included the average cost of buying amphibians as though we were the ones putting the price for amphibians in that 8 ½ percent. So we think that's a pretty good bargain. But even given that, the strategic review is going to decide what are those

vital capabilities we have for our nation? And we will have to fund whatever our piece of those vital capabilities are.

I think if we do that, we do have and can achieve both reset and modernization in the Marine Corps. It will facilitate a capabilities-based discussion of funding rather than the one we've had in the past, which has been simply a fair share amongst the departments. And, of course, within the Department of the Navy, I would offer, there hasn't necessarily been a fair share of the resources inside the department. And I don't mean that it's been unfair, I just mean to tell you we don't get half of what the Department of the Navy gets.

The strategic look will eliminate any redundancies. It will minimize risk to the national security. It will define the tax code, if you will, for how we pay for national security. The discussion today has shown what America's expeditionary force and readiness brings to that table. I talked about the capabilities. I also gave you a little hint of how expensive it can be based on the new nature and the way we fight. I think the Marine Corps is well worth the investment. We are an insurance premium, if you will, that is well worth the investment.

As I close, I would like to just say this one last thing, however. Lots of talk about budget by me, lots of talk about capability. But at the end of the day, the young sailor and marine who are deployed in Afghanistan or Iraq or a bunch of other places around the world, Japan, the Mediterranean, small countries nobody's ever heard of, they're the ones who will benefit, hopefully, from a new way of looking at resourcing this national capability. Because at the end of the day, they're the ones who have to operate with the capability that we buy them in Washington, D.C. I look forward the comments of my fellow panel members and will take questions later. [applause]