

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

**April 14 - 15, 2011**

**The Honorable Robert O. Work, Under Secretary of the Navy**

**Opening Speaker, Session 3, "Meeting the Demand: Responding to Crisis and Applying Force"**

**THE HONORABLE ROBERT O. WORK:** –I would like to begin with a short story that happened to me recently. I was up in New York at LaGuardia and all of the flights on the East Coast were disrupted. And we were all standing in line, waiting to get waited on, and this one gentleman comes rushing up to the top of the line and goes, "I absolutely have to get to New York. And I have to be put on the next plane. And I have to go first class!"

And the young lady behind the counter, she just looked at the guy and said, "I'm sorry, sir. Everyone in the line is in the same boat as you. You're just going to have to get back in line and you're going to have to wait your turn."

And he said, "Look, you just don't understand! Tomorrow is one of the most important meetings I'm ever going to have, I have got to get there and I can only travel first class because I have to be able to get my rest."

And the lady looked at him again and said, "Sir, I just can't let you do this. You're just going to have to be patient."

And he leans over and looks her right in her eyes and says, "Do you know who I am?" And without missing a beat, the young lady looked at him and said, "Attention in the terminal, attention in the terminal! We have a person who doesn't know who he is! [Laughter] And we need you to help us try to identify him."

Thank you, Doctor Davis, for that kind introduction. Before I start, let me say I am a big fan of the Fletcher School and am thankful for its long and continued support of the Department of the Navy. I have been a participant in several Fletcher Conferences – the last was in the 2007 event which was a launching platform for the Maritime Strategy. That was a super event and I expect that his program will be just as successful. Please extend my thanks to Dr. Pfaltzgraff and the entire Fletcher Team – not just for this event – but for all you have done for us.

And to you, the audience, thanks for supporting this conference and its timely discussion over the future of the U.S. Marine Corps – America’s expeditionary force in readiness. I know you have had a long day, but I hope that we have saved the best for last, and your patience will be rewarded.

Now, my mission this afternoon is to set the stage for the next panel, which explores issues related to crisis response and applying force in the increasingly fluid and uncertain geostrategic environment we find ourselves in.

And an easy mission it is. We couldn’t ask for a better panel to discuss these issues. We have two Service Vice Chiefs, General Phil Breedlove, VCSAF, and Admiral Jon Greenert, VCNO; the Army Combat Integrator, Lieutenant General Mike Vane; and veteran Marine and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Bing West.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that Bing West is also a widely acclaimed author whose writings include no less than four bestselling books. In fact, he has a fifth book out. It looks something like this,

Bing, leave that bottle of Scotch you promised with my Aide.

Now, the best thing I could do is just get out of the way, since I know that you really came to hear our panel members. But I would like to make a few brief opening remarks that might stimulate follow-on discussions after the panel speaks.

I'd like to start off by talking a little bit about the current fiscal environment and what it portends.

The Marines have always been frugal and good stewards of scarce resources. They have traditionally been “penny pinchers,” a trait articulated in the late Brute Krulak’s classic, *First to Fight*.

This frugality is reflected throughout the Corp’s history – the Marines are experts at converting other people’s ideas or extra gear into usable combat capability. In fact, the Marines are not overly worried about or necessarily respectful about where resources come from – they have made *institutional scrounging* into an art form. They like to borrow from “OPM” accounts – “Other People’s Money” and “Other People’s Machines.”

As you might have deduced from the President’s speech on deficit reduction, this art form will be a required core capability in the years ahead. Although DoD’s topline is not the source of current economic troubles, it must certainly be part of the solution. As both Secretary Gates and Chair Mike Mullen have stated, we face few national security problems as grave as our mounting national deficit.

So frugality and penny pinching will be in fashion for some time to come – not only for Marines, but for Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen, too.

But to be perfectly honest, we’re not talking about pennies here. We are simply talking about reductions to the rate of growth of DoD’s topline. Making our fair contribution to deficit reduction will require DoD to pursue real change-pinching “*Benjamins*” and not just pennies.

However, it is important for everyone to note what the President said yesterday in his speech. While he said that DoD could not be exempt from efforts to bring federal deficit spending under control, he also said that any reduction in defense funding would be shaped by strategy and discrete policy choices.

After the speech, Secretary Gates issued a statement, part of which I would like to repeat here:

“The President acknowledged that the Department of Defense has been at the forefront in paring back unneeded, duplicative, and obsolete programs and administrative overhead. He wants us to continue this effort with the goal of significant additional savings over the coming decade. By the same token, the Secretary has been clear that further significant defense cuts cannot be accomplished without reducing force structure and military capability. *The comprehensive review of missions, capabilities, and America’s role in the world* will identify alternatives for the President’s consideration. The Secretary believes that this process must be about managing risk associated with future threats and national security challenges and identifying missions that the country is willing to have the military forgo.”

So, over the next several months, our department is going to grapple with these weighty issues. The Marine Corps, and all Services, will need to approach this coming review with real creative thinking and a willingness to make tradeoffs and critical calls between what is strategically necessary from what is simply desirable or tradition.

We are definitely entering an age in which new challenges and uncertainty demand we closely scrutinize past practice or old habits for their continued relevance.

With this as background, I would like to offer some preliminary observations and judgments:

Despite our economic troubles, the United States will continue to be a world leader, and will act to protect its interests and their international order when and where required.

Our ability to predict the future absolutely sucks. We will respond to crises.

The cult of the quick, to which so many joined in the 1990’s, which described *strategic* speed as a means to an end, will lose its allure. We will likely be more deliberate and selective in our strategic actions. We will necessarily be focused on protecting only vital national and important national and global interests.

When we ultimately pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of U.S. combat power will reside either on U.S. soil or sovereign territory. Absent the compelling threat of the Cold War, basing U.S. troops on foreign soil will be the exception, not the rule. The practical result is that most U.S. major operations will involve transoceanic maneuver and movement, often into austere theaters of operation.

Although we will likely be more deliberate strategically, when the order is given, we will want to retain some operationally responsive forces capable of rapid closure to areas of interest. As Secretary Gates said:

"The strategic rationale for swift-moving expeditionary forces, be they army or marines, airborne, infantry or special operations is self evident, given the likelihood of counter-terrorism, rapid reaction, disaster response or stability or security force assistance missions."

Whenever and wherever we deploy—regardless of whether we send rapid reaction or follow-on sustainment forces-- we must be increasingly aware of the proliferation of guided munitions and battle networking technologies. At the low-to-mid portions of the conflict spectrum, we will increasingly deal with hybrid warriors hiding amongst the peoples and employing both low tech but lethal capabilities like IEDs and suicide bombers as well as more sophisticated guided rockets, artillery, mortars, and missiles.

We must be prepared to operate against near-peer adversaries in the guided munitions regime, who will work to deny access to forward operating bases or areas of operations, or deny our freedom of action once there. These types of operations form the basis for new Air-Sea Battle doctrine.

We have to be prepared. We're a global power projection force. We have to be prepared to create access if necessary in both permissive and uncertain and hostile environments. Now, I take a little bit of issue with the Marine Corps saying permissive, uncertain and hostile because, to me, uncertain and hostile is the same. You have to be able to inject a ready-to-fight combat force, or

you can afford to inject not-ready-to-fight forces, and those are the two kind of rapid reactions that I see.

The first, the rapid reaction in a permissive environment, can be accomplished by any force in our force structure, almost. It's applicable in HA/DR missions. You're not going to have to fight your way forward, you're not going to have to worry about establishing a lodgment. It involves movement of goods and services and forces rapidly. We're very good at that.

But the latter, going into uncertain and hostile environments, in my view, you can only accomplish that by injecting ready-to-fight combat forces involving maneuver, the operational maneuver from strategic distances. And that's the key: ready-to-fight; not-ready-to-deploy or land.

And if we as a global power lose the ability to inject ready-to-fight forces in all corners of the ROMO – range of military operations – we will cease to be as powerful as we have been. Now, there are ways to conduct operational maneuver from strategic distances – aerial maneuver, airlanding ops, airborne ops, or amphibious ops. I don't include air assault, helicopter, because if you're close enough to put helicopters there, you've got the access and you can elect to drive tanks if you want. But if you're going over transoceanic distances, you can only do it one of those three ways. And the best way to scale, in my view, is with amphibious and airborne forces working in tandem.

It's very, very difficult to do airlanding operations of the scale to put two brigades in over a coherent period of time, especially against someone with guided weapons. And I think we have to keep the capability to inject three to five combat brigades, ready-to-fight combat brigades in hostile and uncertain environments. If you want them to do an amphibious assault, they can do that. If you want them to go in and do an opposed NEO, they can do that. But the key part is, they must be ready to fight on arrival. And three to five brigade-sized units out of an 80-brigade-sized force is not a capability that I think is too expensive, and it's certainly a capability we don't want to lose.

Regardless of the size of the force, however, operational maneuver from strategic distances is going to be a deliberate, joint operation. It will involve the Air Force, the Army, the Marines, and the Navy.

But I don't believe we can afford duplication of effort. So I would argue that the Marines should focus on amphibious assault and the Army should focus on airlanding and airborne. And we shouldn't try to get in each other's lanes. The Joint Force is big enough for both of us. Both the Army and the Marines should be prepared for rapid reinforcement from the sea.

And finally, I think this is self-evident to everyone in this room: We can talk about tanks, we can talk about BCTs, we can talk about B-22s, the number of JSFs, we can talk about DDG-1000s, but the one thing we cannot lose is the martial spirit that I know that Bing is probably going to talk to you about. The ethos of our fighting forces is what sets us apart. On top of all those other gaudy capabilities that we have is the greatest military force in the world in terms of their dedication and skill and ethos to serve and fight if necessary.

But every time I visit the Force— most recently I went on ICEX, and I was under the ice with the crew of the *USS New Hampshire*. It was humbling to see the quiet professionalism that they have, and there's no doubt in my mind, if they had to go to war tomorrow, they'd be ready to rock and roll.

So with that, I thank you all. I look forward to your questions. I thank you for supporting this wonderful event. Again, I'd like to thank the Fletcher School for assisting the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy in this endeavor. And I look forward to the comments of our great panel and to your questions afterwards.

Thank you. [Applause]