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The Marine Corps: America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness

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Day 2 Opening Keynote Address

DR. JACQUELYN K. DAVIS: Using the words of his cousin, Charles Jones, who described him and two other Marines, Ray Smith and Marty Steele, in his book, *Boys of '67*, borrowing from a quote from Winston Churchill. "The only guide to a man is his conscience. The only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through this life without this shield because we are so often mocked by the failure of our calculation. But with this shield, however, however the fates may play, we March always in the ranks of honor." I'd like to introduce General Jones.
[applause]

GENERAL JAMES L. JONES: Jacque, thank you very, very much for that very kind introduction, and good morning everyone. It's a pleasure to be here, a real honor to be here with you for this very important conference that the Marine Corps has had the good judgment to participate in for so many years.

One of the things that you learn in life, I think, as you transition from wearing the uniform to the civilian world is how different things are in the civilian world. I thought after being commandant and a NATO commander that as I transitioned a couple of years ago that kind of knew what to expect, particularly as it relates to my own personal retirement, things like that, medical care and the like. And I was working on energy with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and I had a visit by the HR person in the Chamber. And she came in and she said, "You're about to be 65 years old in a few months and you have to register for Medicare." And I said, "No, no, no, I don't have to do that. I have

TRICARE for life. I'm set. Thank you very much.” She says, “No, no, you really have to register for Medicare. And by the way, there's a premium for Medicare.” And I said, “Okay fine, thanks very much.” Didn't pay any attention thinking, “I'm covered. I've been doing this for 40 years, what does she know?”

So this goes on, this little back and forth for several months. And so finally, I pick up the phone and I called the medical officer of the Marine Corps and I didn't get a complete answer but I thought, “Okay, I'm still okay.” And then I kept getting this pressure to register for Medicare at 65. And she tried to tell me that not only do I register, but they were going to take a certain amount of money away from me based on my income. And then that it would start at 65. And I kept saying, “Oh no, that just can't be right. I've been in the Marine Corps for 40 years. I know I'm covered, I know for the rest of my life. That's what TRICARE for life's all about.”

And anyway, long story short, she was right, I was wrong. So for those of you who are thinking like I did for a long, long time that you're covered, this is probably the best piece of advice you're going to get from me this morning. When you get to be 65, look a little bit deeper because things are not always what they appear to be.

But there are certain things that are really good. You get to go out to Bethesda, you get your annual physical and all of that. So I went out and got my annual physical a couple of months ago. As I was getting the results, I asked the doctor for an opinion. I said, “You know, my wife, I think, is losing her hearing and it's a delicate subject with her because she doesn't want to talk about it. And she's very concerned about having to wear hearing aids and the like.” I said, “What's the technology look like?” And so he rolled out some miniature hearing aids and things like that, and where they go outside the ear, inside the ear. He said, “Well, look, before you do that, go home and conduct a very simple test and call me back the next morning.” He said, “When she's not facing you, stand about 20 feet behind her, and say something in a conversational voice. And if she doesn't answer, then cut it in half and then tell me roughly when she reacts to what it is you're saying.” I said, “Okay.”

So that night I was at home and my wife was fixing something in the kitchen and I was about 20 feet behind her. I said, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No answer. So, I cut it to about 10 feet and I said the same thing. Still no answer. So I cut it to five feet and still no answer. So I cut it to two feet, right behind her. I said, "Honey, what's for dinner?" And she said without turning around, "For the fourth time, spaghetti." [laughter]

So it's a great pleasure to be here. And what I'd like to talk about a little bit, and then I would to leave some time for Q&A because I think that's always more interesting. I'd like to talk a little bit about this period that we're going to enter into, budget cuts, reductions, and the like. And some of us here have been around long enough to have gone through these cycles once or twice in our lifetime. We have grown accustomed to living from the horn of plenty for over a decade. And we are about to experience the payback for benefiting from the economic largesse of our national treasure as we fought two wars.

The overriding comment that I would make is that before you start worrying about roles and missions, before you start worrying about things that are the immediate concern, tactical things, you really do have to understand, we all have to understand, a little bit more about the environment that we're in. Countries are a little bit like businesses. If you don't understand the environment that you're in, you're not going to be able to compete. And you're not going to be able to adjust yourself or do the things that you must do if you're a business to be successful. So you have to understand the nature of the environment, the possibilities, the good news, the bad news. You have to understand who your competitors are. And you have to understand, you have to basically be clear-eyed about what it is you're trying to achieve and what the possibilities are in that particular environment.

I am convinced that we are just now understanding the nature of the environment of the 21st century. And so I start from the position that the question that we ought to ask ourselves nationally is where do we want to be in the year 2030, 2040, I'll even say 2050. And I believe that even though we've had a decade of the 21st century already that we are

still pretty much at the crossroads of this still new century; a crossroads in terms of understanding it and crossroads in terms of figuring out how we're going to understand the environment of this new century, and what are the fundamental adjustments we're going to make strategically, and then operationally and tactically? And then at the end of the day, how does this impact the Marine Corps, the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, the Coast Guard, the armed forces of the United States?

So the environment of the 21st century is, I think as anybody who even thinks about it remotely, is very, very different than the 20th century. I believe that the entire concept of what constitutes national security is completely different. In the 20th century, we lived in an ordered world, black and white world; borders, good guys, bad guys, ideologies that were conflicting; democracy, communism. And as you look back, you almost miss the good old days because they were a lot simpler. And we created a whole lot of institutions in the 20th century after 1945. They were designed to serve us well and functioned well in a bipolar world. The United Nations, we created NATO, we created all kinds of organizations, even our own government was organized in such a way as to successfully compete in the 20th century. And we all know how that ended.

Following the end of the 20th century, we struggled a little bit, there was a lot of-- little talk about the United States being a hyper power. By the way, which was a French term for us. The people worried about it being a unipolar world with the United States being so strong that everybody else would never catch up. And then we figured out over the course of the last ten years that it's not unipolar after all, it's multipolar. And we also know now, I think, and it's emerging with some clarity that we have a world of extremes; extremes in ideology, extremes in theology, extremes in culture, extremes in education. We have an emerging awareness-- I call it the world of the have nots-- but young people who know that if they don't successfully change the way they're governed, that the likelihood that they will ever provide for themselves and their children, or that their children will have better lives, is not going to happen.

And this whole world of internets and Facebook and Twitter and the like has basically caused a massive education across the world of the have nots because now they are aware of what it is they're missing and they are aware that they don't have to live like that, and they don't want to live like that. And so all of these phenomenons that are going on from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya, Yemen, wherever else it might go to, are all expressions of a desire for a better future.

The world of the 21st century is linked in ways we could only imagine in the 20th century. The Earth is still spinning at roughly the same rate, but the activities on the surface of the globe are spinning at a rate that is astounding. Change is happening every single day. And when you're sitting in the National Security Council of the United States and you're used to balancing maybe a half a dozen plates to make sure that these six or seven things stay in relatively good order, and that six goes from 6 to 12 to 18 to 20, the system tends to tilt. And what happens is that you wind up becoming more tactical instead of strategic because you just don't have time.

I mean, I jokingly said that we need two National Security Advisors; we need one to be on duty from 12 midnight to 12 noon, and then another council to come in at 12 noon to work the other 12 hours just to keep up with the pace. And not only keep up with it, but understand it.

The portfolio of what constitutes national security is also different than it used to be. It used to be that national security was really the province of the Defense Department, a little bit of the State Department, the National Security Council and everybody else was kind of on the outside looking in. Today, what constitutes national security is economic. You've heard about cyber security yesterday, that's certainly a major issue. It constitutes the traditional litany of things that we've gotten used to in the 20th century. But it also has to do with things the asymmetric family of threats that are not going away and are becoming even more intense from year to year. Energy is, in my view, a 21st century international security issue.

I think the other thing that I would mention is the idea that any one country is going to be able to fence itself off from the rest of the world is ludicrous. The idea of energy independence in a globalized world where economies are linked, where our security concerns are linked, where our science and technology is linked, is absurd. So the trend lines for more engagement are clear. The trend lines for more interaction with the rest of the world is clear. And the question is in this new world order, where does the United States want to be in the year 2050, and I use the kind of 50 year model because we've all studied what happened between 1945 and the year 2000. And I dare say that in 1945, there are very few people who could have predicted what the world was going to look like in the year 2000. But thankfully, we had some great thinkers and we managed to handle the world events in such a way that it worked out okay by the end of the 20th century.

The other thing that worries me that in our country, there's a kind of expectation that simply because the United States has always been, at least in our memory, a nation of great global influence that somehow we're destined to be that way forever. And that is not the case. That is not the case. We got to where we are on the 20th century on the backs of the greatest generation and I dare say it's going to take another greatest generation somewhere along the line. It'll be different, but to make sure that the United States remains a nation of great influence by the year 2050. And there are many people out there that are talking right now about the fact that it's over. Now, I've been around for a long time, and every decade of my professional career, I heard some people say the United States has peaked. I heard it when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, I heard it when we got mired in Vietnam, I've heard it when Japan had its phenomenal economic rise, I've heard it over and over.

But this is the first time that I've really been worried. And it has nothing to do, really not much to do, with the armed forces of the United States. It has everything to do with who we are and how we handle the things that we must tackle. No civilization, no empire, no nation of great consequence has ever survived in history with a chaotic internal budgetary situation. And so I would side with those who think that the deficit and our economic

house has got to be put in order. And I would tell you that I think the greatest threat to the security of the United States and its position among nations in the 21st century is our competitiveness.

One of the most important things that the President asked me to do as National Security Advisor was not, interestingly enough, to help develop a strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan or how to exfiltrate from Iraq. It was to go up to the Hill with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce and the U.S. trade rep to argue that we need to overhaul our export control system. It's about economics. And because it's about economics, what you are gathered here to do is to talk about what the future, the near future holds, in terms of what you're going to have to work with.

So the good news is that we've been there before. And where the Marine Corps is concerned, we're used to that kind of paucity of assets and that kind of adversity. I mean, the lesson learned, if you look at our own history, is that we've done some of our best thinking under pressure, under economic pressure and other kinds of pressure. And there's no reason why that should be any different. And there's no reason to think that just because we're going to-- the word roles and missions is being uttered that that's necessarily something that we should shy away from. To the contrary. I think if you are good, and you have a product that's valuable and it makes sense in this new world order, and it's cost effective and efficient, then you have nothing to worry about. What you do have to worry about is how do you market it? How do you sell it? And thinking is what's going to sell it.

There's no question, no question whatsoever, that the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard are going to have to find ways in which any duplication of missions has to be reexamined. And you might have to work on some sort of agreements whereby you come to kind of a common sense approach as to who does what. But I have no doubt that there is great opportunity here to think our way through this problem. And as we sort out our economic disorder and get order back into the

system, and it'll take a while, eventually we'll come out on the other side and be all the better for it.

And this is why even though I'm worried about our national direction in the long term, I'm still optimistic. I'm optimistic that we can do this. Americans have always done this. In the face of great pressure, we inevitably find the right leaders in the right way in which to sort ourselves out. It's one of the great treasures of our society in that we're flexible and we're adjustable and we're adaptable. But it doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

So the world that our men and women in uniform, our marines, our sailors, our airmen, our soldiers, Coast Guard men and women, are going to operate in is going to be a different world. It's going to be a world that needs leadership. On the positive side of the ledger I would say to you that my experience around the world has-- and most recently as National Security Advisor in which I stayed in close contact on a daily, if not weekly basis, with national security advisors all over the world, that American leadership and participation is absolutely one of the most valued assets that they put a high premium on. In other words, most of the world wants America to be America. They want America to live up to the high ideals and expectations that were formed in the 20th century but carry over, perhaps in a different way, in the 21st century. They want us to be an example. They do not want to confront a world, frankly, in which America plays a declining role.

They want a country like America to be a force for values, for democracy, for opportunity, for human rights. And they don't want to be disappointed by the fact that we might some day fail to lead, or be able to lead. And we have a lot to say about whether that day comes or doesn't come.

Energy is a particularly interesting subject for me because it really strikes a-- it's a good example for what I think ails us most as we try to analyze this new century and what are the changes that we need to make in order to be competitive. Energy has been something that has been discussed in this country since 1973 where President Nixon said never again will we be held hostage to foreign oil. Those were hollow words then, and they've

been hollow words ever since. We have never achieved a true national strategy for energy. We've had pieces of it, we've had flashes of it, we've had periods of great intensity where people are concerned and the concern goes directly with the price of a gallon of gas at the pump. If the price of a gallon of gas is low, then the pressure's off. If it goes up, the pressure's on.

We created a Department of Energy that is not a department of all of energy, it's a department of nuclear energy. That's what it does, and that's what it does today. So when the President of the United States looks at the Secretary of Energy and wants to talk to him about hydroelectric power, he's saying, "Well, I can talk about it, but I don't have any responsibility for it." Energy is scattered around nine major departments and agencies in the executive branch, and that has spawned over 30 committees and subcommittees on Capitol Hill who have oversight on our energy policies.

Clearly, we need a strategy for energy. And it's got to be not just a national strategy, it's got to be one in which the United States takes on a position of a global leadership. We're one of the biggest consumers and producers of energy. But, our approach to energy has been somewhat a la carte. For three or four months, we'll all these ads from Boone Pickens about gas, about wind. Then you'll hear three or four months from the electrification side of the House. Then you'll hear a little bit more from coal and oil and so we're left with a fragmented image. We're not left with a strategic path that's been well articulated. And we need that, we need that as a national security priority.

I think that one of the other phenomenons about change in national security is a global development is now a very important part of national security. In this divided world that we have, the haves and the have nots, the United States and other developed nations have got to think really hard about how this world is going to progress. And it can go either way right now, in my view. How Egypt comes out is strategically extremely important. How all of these problems in these developing countries who've struggled for years under autocratic leadership and how they emerge from that is extremely important.

Libya is riveting right now, but what's happening in Egypt is more important. What's happening in Syria is more important. Iran is skating under the radar. You can be sure that Iran is trying to affect the outcome of each one of those conflicts, or each one of those problems in a way that benefits them. So, it's important that we understand the world as it is, what are the trend lines, what are the fault lines, and what do we do to try to fix it?

It isn't going to be simply about using the military forces. We have in the 20th century been given a gift. And that's the gift of forward presence. And I make no apologies for being one of the most ardent supporters of anything we can do forward of our shores is worthwhile. Frankly, Secretary Rumsfeld and I have different views of that. In my day as a unified commander and a NATO commander and as a commandant, we used to have discussions about forward basing. There was a view that forward basing was not an asset, that too many countries could tell us when we could deploy, whether we could use their air space, whether we could use their rails. And some people didn't want to be held-- their words, not mine-- "hostage" to those kinds of restrictions, believing that if we brought everybody back to the United States, we wouldn't have a problem. We could send our forces wherever we wanted to.

My answer to that is if you want to create a vacuum globally, you can do that. Vacuums will be filled generally by people who don't have our best interests at heart, and you will be left with fewer options, except to use military force, from our continental shores. I'm very concerned that we still are drifting away from a significant forward presence. I feel particularly strongly about our European presence. I think that the amount of influence that the United States has in terms of building the cohesion and the interoperability of all of our NATO allies and non-NATO allies, by the way, is benefited measurably by having a United States European command that is robust. I do not agree with the fact that we should downgrade the leadership. If you're a lieutenant general or a vice admiral and you're in charge of EUCOM, you will have access to lieutenant generals and vice admirals of our NATO partners. We need access, the access that we've had before, to

heads of other militaries and in many cases in the past, national leadership, political leadership in the countries that we seek to influence and work with.

So you can rationalize reductions any way you want, and as many of you have heard me say this before, but I believe this. Virtual presence is actual absence. And sure, communications is better, sure you can do video teleconferencing, sure you can get on a plane and fly quicker. But day in and day out, there is no substitute for boots on the ground, airplanes taking off, ships coming into your ports. And the image of the United States as a result of this being a positive one that gives the populations of the world where they see us a sense that their security is enhanced by the fact that the United States is nearby.

And I would say that there are two other things we have to concentrate on to make sure that the three legs of this new triad in the 21st century are understood and that their governance and rule of law is going to be enhanced by virtue of our influence and that we also bring a package of economic development that will make their lives better in the future.

Most of our institutions in the 21st century were-- and I'll use NATO as a prime example-- were conceived to be reactive, defensive, static. That's the whole *raison d'être* of NATO. We were never going to attack first. But we were going to respond with overwhelming response based on the philosophy of mutually assured destruction. The new NATO, which is developing before our eyes, but created, I think, most recently in Portugal, had the NATO members agree to a new strategic concept. And the elements of that new strategic concept are that for the militaries of the world, ours included, to be effective they're going to have to be more proactive. You have two choices strategically. You can wait until the next Afghanistan presents itself and then have another ten year war. Or, you can proactively figure out where you want to play, and through a combination of security, economic development, governance or rule of law, which is the three legs of the triad that I believe in, you can maybe alter the destiny of certain

countries that left without that kind of influence or that kind of engagement, would wind up as a future Iraq or Afghanistan.

I would give you a contemporary example of Nigeria, for example, as a country that has all the classic signs of economic difficulties, corruption, a religious divide, north and south, between Muslims and Christians. Amazing, incredible potential economically, but in my view is on a slippery slope down towards a future major problem. And if Nigeria goes down, there's about 10 or 12 other African countries around it that will witness the same fate.

So yes, is it difficult to proactively engage and get people to commit forces and assets to do that? I would say it's more difficult in the 20th century to do that. But with the 21st century new mindset, it should be less difficult and it's certainly a lot cheaper. And so in order to do that, we're going to need military forces that will be a component of that that can do the security piece, training, aiding, assisting, being present, helping the militaries understand the subordination of military to democratic values. We need an economic piece that can be led by the United States and other developed countries; Brazil, India, China, Europeans, to help restore economic vitality. And you need obviously assistance on governance and rule of law. You also need a willing nation to be able to go through this, to be willing to go through that.

And there are quite a few of them, actually, quite a few of them. It's a question of understanding of readjusting your think cap so that you become more proactive. And by the way, that would include touching base on things like energy, on climate, environment, all of those things. On energy alone, for example, we have a number of countries who are now developing and getting to that point where they would enter logically the pollution stage of their development, fossil fuel burning and the like. So the question for the developed world is what are we going to do about that? Are we just going to sit back and let them do that, or are we going to help them technologically by saying, "Look, we can help you build nuclear reactors, we can help you with this and here's how you do that." And you help them skip that generation.

In a world where popular opinion about people like us is at an all time low, there is a bridge, in my view, properly done and strategically thought out and with the leadership of the President of the United States and the whole of government approach to the 21st century where you can reverse that. You can reverse that popular opinion. We're done with the period, I think, where we support oppressive regimes simply because that's the fact and we took rationale that, well, if they want to live like that, they must want it that way, so we support them. We're going to pay the price now because these people that have been oppressed are now rising up and they're saying, "You, the United States, supported these guys that oppressed us for so long and you're bad guys, too." That doesn't have to be that way. We can turn this thing around, I think, with enlightened leadership, a visionary appeal as to how we shape ourselves and present ourselves and how we involve ourselves in the 21st century.

The military component will play an important part of that. And where the Marine Corps and the Navy is concerned, I would say that by thinking this through, you can be an important part of that as well. There's a certain amount of robustness that's required, there's a certain amount of agility and working with not only other services, but other agencies in our government, NGOs. There's a certain amount to be said for the fact that the majority of the problems that we're going to face are going to be littoral problems, problems on the coastlines.

And I think that the maneuverability of naval forces and the robustness of their capability argues well for an important role in this as we sort out our way and establish ourselves for the engagement in the 21st century. But for all services, I think the role of the unified commands-- I use that term because I do not like the word combatant commander. I was in Europe when the-- and we proposed the creation of AFRICOM, but we also proposed that you don't call them a combatant command if you ever hope to get them in Africa. I mean, how do you do that? How do you walk into an Africa country and say, "We'd like to put a combatant commander in your country. Would you like that?" Not so.

But I think the unified commands are a gift of the 21st century. It's not guaranteed that they're going to always be there. It's not guaranteed that they're always going to be welcome. It can be, but you should never take it for granted. And I think you should never do anything to reduce their value by bringing too many forces at home. There's a delicate balance here, and I don't know what it is, but I think we're getting close to the point of-- the tipping point. And once you give it up, you will never get it back. So that's, to me, a very, very important thing.

Now, I think the unified commands can continue in their transformation to be more reflective of the whole of government concept. I deeply believe in that. One of my big lessons learned in Europe and Africa was that we had so many countries to be responsible for, 83 I think in all, that we developed a regional approach. It was easier to understand our AOR by thinking regionally instead of soda straw down to country by country. So we divided Africa up into five regions and Europe up into three, so we had eight regions. And then we organized ourselves to meet with the ambassadors from each one of those regions on a regular basis around the year. And by organizing ourselves and our thinking that way, I think we were much better able to deal with the world, our world as it was, and not as we hoped it would be.

And I think that's one of the big weaknesses in the State Department. There's never been able to have a regional coordinator of-- we've tried different things. We've tried special envoys, we've tried desk officers, and the like. But that middle regional tier of leadership is something that we struggled with in our foreign policy for a long time. Fortunately, we do have that in the Defense Department with the unified commands. And I think it's something that other agencies in our government can become more and more a part of and that's how you get to the whole of government expression, I think, of our foreign policy and our national security strategy.

So I think in closing that this is a moment of great opportunity. And I don't think we should gnash our teeth and wring our hands and cry woe is me. I think it's time for a new thinking, a deep understanding of what the world is, as it is not as we wish it were or as it

was. Lot of lessons to be learned from the world as it was, but that's the world that's gone. We have to deal with the present and the future and organize ourselves accordingly and take advantage of the fact that while we go into this economic bathtub for a while, you want to be ready when you come out. And rest assured, we will come out of this. It'll take a while.

But in the meantime, it's that creative thinking that all of you can bring to the table that will make sure that our armies and navies, air forces, marines, come out of this in a much better position. And better able to deal with the world that we face, and better able to answer that question that many Americans should be asking themselves, is where do we want to be in the year 2050? Thank you very much. [applause] Be happy to take some questions during the time we have left. Yes, sir?