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Panelist, Session 5, "Regional Challenges and Opportunities"

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL D. JONES: Well, first, thanks for the opportunity to join you here today. It's always great to be amongst a terrific group of warriors and I count myself fortunate to have the opportunity to spend some time with you. I have to admit that when I got the invitation, I was a bit taken aback. I grabbed my XO, who's a Marine lieutenant colonel and gave it back to him, said, "This was obviously meant for the General (Retired) Jones, the Marine person, and not for me." He had to come back and tell me to read the invitation a little bit more closely before I understood why you might want me to join you here today. But if the Commandant is right and most of you feel like you do have to leave before the end of the last panel, I can assure you you've had the best presentation you're going to get by a Jones today. So it's okay. [laughter]

Let me start by just saying that we've been very blessed at U.S. Central Command to have just an absolutely terrific Marine component command. They have executed along with large numbers of marines, operations across the full gamut of military requirements and the obvious ones that everybody sees are what you've done in Iraq and Afghanistan. But I can assure you all the capabilities that our marines bring to bear have been used in the Central Command area of responsibility from VBSS teams and on up, humanitarian assistance, NEO and the like. And they've always performed magnificently.

As we look at the future in the region, I think that we can, say that our Marine component has demonstrated that the capability that it's brought as a command is essential. If anything, it's not only a great model for the future, but it also sets a path up so that it will develop the capability to transition rapidly to a joint task force. Frankly in the age that we live in of unpredictability, it is

a requirement for all of our components, that we have to have the ability to have them transition and take on missions very rapidly.

Now, as I thought about what might be useful for this discussion today, I tried to look into the future to answer two questions. One, what's the environment in the CENTCOM area of responsibility going to be like? And then number two, what capabilities do I think are going to be necessary for our marine forces in the future? And again, I acknowledge that I'm terrible at predicting the future. As a great man once said, "I know that I won't be right, I can only hope that I won't be too wrong." So Commandant, I appreciate that, and I hope that we won't be too wrong. But also in trying to be too right, we have to be a little careful, because understanding that we won't get our predictions about the future right can help prevent us from becoming too narrow a force that can't respond to the unexpected.

The nation does have enduring security interests in the Central Command region. So I think it's prudent to plan to deploy forces there for what are going to be our requirements in the future. It's a combination of not only the global energy importance, but the centrality of the global maritime trade that passes through the region, under-governed spaces that will continue to be hospitable to violent extremists. And, frankly, the potential for friction and miscalculation between a number of regional players are going to cause us to have important, and I think broad, and very deep interests in this region for as far as I can see.

Now, we as we at CENTCOM try to plan for the future, it's important to understand this regional environment. I'm almost tempted to say for the rest of my remarks about that what the Commandant said. But I wanted to kind of go through what I think are going to be some of the dynamics in our region. First, we should just absolutely expect it's going to continue to be a stressed region, a dynamic region, and probably a volatile region at least as much as it is today, and maybe even more for a variety of factors. The events of the last few months demonstrate just how quickly changes can occur, where a few months previous to that, we might have called those unlikely or even unthinkable changes. It is a very dynamic place.

The traditional frictions between states that have occurred in our region are going to continue, I think. But they'll be exacerbated by a number of factors; everything from water shortages that upstream nations interdict in order to use that water for their needs, to the failure to control migration across borders of certain malign actors, and on and on, things that may not have been as big an issue in the past but will contribute to the traditional frictions that have existed there.

I think the disparity between haves and have-nots, not only between nations, but even inside of nations, will continue to amplify frictions. We'll see the region become increasingly urban, as has already been mentioned. And that creates a whole new series of security challenges. The countries in the region will continue to be well armed, both the state actors and, frankly, a number of the non-state actors who continue to acquire more sophisticated and larger numbers of weapons.

I think that our military to military relationships with many of our partner nations are going to continue to be very strong, but there'll be great sensitivity to the presence of foreign forces on their soil. As nations become more representative, public dissatisfaction, if it grows out of other events that are going on in the world, for instance the lack of progress on Israel-Palestinian peace, that internal dissatisfaction could cause leaders to have less flexibility to accommodate foreign presence in their soil, especially a U.S. presence, inside their country.

And then as Afghanistan transitions in terms of security responsibilities, what we may find is that there will be even less domestic support in many of the countries in our region to provide access or endure the presence of foreign forces. Those bases where we do maintain access and a presence will require us to be sensitive to host nation concerns and that we keep our footprints very light.

Finally, the mission sets that we'll need to be able to execute will vary widely, in my view, from operations that help partner nations defend themselves against other nations' aggression to rapidly providing humanitarian assistance in response to national disaster, and everything in between along that gamut of conflict that can occur. And I believe the one constant that we

should expect in our region is going to be unpredictability. That will be the one consistent thing over time.

So if I'm approximately right about the environment, or maybe just not too wrong, it seems to me there's certain fundamental characteristics that we'll need in our marine forces in the future in this area of responsibility. Now many of these characteristics are traditional strengths of our marine forces. Some are more recent strengths that will develop over time. But as we look at the environment, it's important, to look from that point of view as being informative to how you develop the future forces.

First, we will need over the horizon forces that will be able to be on station very quickly, but without necessarily a footprint in host nation. Again, it goes back to part of the environment that we'll be operating in. These forces will need to be expeditionary and capable of horizontal as well as vertical envelopment from the sea. They will have to be able to operate for significant lengths of time independently with little further support and will need significant operational reach to get to the places where we might need them employed.

Because of the unpredictability of the mission set, we're going to need marine forces that are capable across the spectrum of conflict from combat to noncombatant evacuation. And they'll be able to operate across a large spectrum of terrain, from the maritime domain amphibious assault to combat in urban areas. They are likely going to need to be increasingly modular to allow for tailoring for unpredictable missions. Also, in order to fit into what will sometimes be political restraints that are imposed due to the political realities of the environment. I think they'll have to be adaptive and creative to work through the many dynamic situations that they'll face, with adaptive enemies who can increasingly share information and rapidly adapt themselves.

They will have to continue to be increasingly joint, where we have to move past interdependence to be able to have full integration, and in order to provide joint task force commanders the maximum amount of tactical flexibility that they'll need to cope with the challenges that they face.

And then finally, we'll need a higher, and I think an unprecedented level of cultural understanding and language skills, to be able to operate successfully in the kind of combined operations that we're likely to do, and in countries where our interactions with the population offer both significant risks and significant opportunities.

So I doubt that any of this is surprising to most of you. In fact, I'm really heartened having listened today to a lot of the thought that's gone into the development of what the future corps is going to look like and the preparations that you're making. However, I hope it does give a little food for thought for a discussion later and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.