

Not public until
Released by the HASC

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

BEFORE

THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

On

A COOPERATIVE STRATEGY FOR 21ST CENTURY SEAPOWER

13 DECEMBER 2007

Not public until
Released by the HASC

Chairman Skelton, Congressman Hunter, and Distinguished Members of the Committee; during my confirmation and in subsequent hearings and conversations, I have pledged to provide you forthright and honest assessments of your Corps. I welcome this opportunity to report to you today on the future of the Marine Corps as a Naval service.

Your Marine Corps is fully engaged in what we believe is a generational struggle against fanatical extremists; the challenges we face are of global scale and scope. This Long War is multi-faceted and will not be won in one battle, in one country, or by one method. Your Marines are a tough breed and will do what it takes to win — not only in these opening battles of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the inevitable conflicts that will continue to arise.

Congressionally-mandated to “*be the most ready when the Nation is least ready,*” your Corps is committed to fulfilling this responsibility across the full spectrum of conflict. As an integral component of our national security, maritime forces provide our Nation unrivaled flexibility and options for deterring war and responding to crises. The recently published *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* provides for unprecedented partnership of Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard capabilities that advance the interests of our country. As a joint document of our Naval Services, this new maritime strategy articulates the integrated application of our Nation’s seapower.

This maritime strategy re-affirms the naval character of the Marine Corps, re-emphasizing our enduring relationships with the Navy and Coast Guard. Implementation of this strategy will strengthen the security of our Nation for the Long War and beyond; however, the demands of current operations limit the Marine Corps’ ability to aggressively commit forces to the strategy’s implementation at this time. As we reach our authorized end-strength increase and as security conditions continue to improve in Iraq, the Marine Corps will transition our forces for other battles in the Long War — ultimately realizing this new era of expeditionary operations called for by our maritime strategy.

This strategy also incorporates hard-fought lessons from our current battles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Combat casualties have in a very real sense become a center of gravity for America — no matter what the cause or conflict. Therefore, “increased risk” and “slower response times” must always be calculated in terms of their real costs — loss of life and materiel on the battlefield and then, potentially, the loss of support of the American people.

Strategic Context

The United States faces a complex mix of states who sponsor terrorism, regional and rising peer competitors, failing states that undermine regional stability, and a variety of violent non-state actors — religious extremists, insurgents, paramilitary forces, pirates, and other criminals — all serving to destabilize legitimate governments and undermine security and stability of the greater global community. We see this global security context as a persistent condition for the foreseeable future.

Our Nation and its international partners are engaged in a global struggle for influence at the same time our access to many areas is acutely challenged — diplomatically, militarily, and geographically. In the past, the United States has maintained large forces on a significant number of permanent bases beyond our shores. Today, however, we have far fewer installations overseas. When conflict is imminent or crises occur, which may require land-based forces, we must conduct extensive diplomatic negotiations to acquire basing rights. Because of local and regional political, social, or economic pressures, even countries friendly to the United States decline to host or place conditional restrictions on basing U.S. forces.

Our national interests increasingly require us to operate in remote, developing regions of the world where infrastructure is either insufficient or rendered useless by natural disasters. Our rapid response to conditions in Bangladesh reinforced the advantage of providing robust humanitarian aid without overwhelming infrastructure ashore or creating misperceptions of our intent.

The growing trend of violent, transnational extremism is especially prevalent in many of these remote areas. In addition to ethnic and religious intolerance, many developing regions are troubled with economic challenges and infectious diseases. These problems are especially severe in the densely populated urban centers common to the world's littorals, resulting in discontented populations ripe for exploitation by extremist ideologues and terrorist networks.

We estimate that by the 2030 timeframe, more than 75% of the world's population will live within just 50 miles of the ocean; alternative energy sources will not be mature, so industrial and, increasingly, developing nations will depend on the free flow of oil and natural gas. Fresh water will be as equally important as petroleum products; during the 20th century, while the global population increased 300 percent, the demand for water increased 600 percent.

Demographics and the aging of the population in industrial countries, accompanied by a youth bulge in developing countries, will literally change the face of the world as we know it. The U.S. technological advantage, economic power, and military might still exceed that of other nations, but will not be nearly as dominant.

U.S. Maritime Forces

Given these strategic conditions, the requirement for maritime forces to project U.S. power and influence has increased — and will continue to increase. With its inherent advantages as a seabased, expeditionary force, the Marine Corps can reach the key areas of the globe in spite of challenges to U.S. access. The Marine Corps and its naval partners will expand the application of seapower across an even wider range of operations to promote greater global security, stability, and trust — key objectives for winning the Long War. Our seabased posture will allow us to continue to conduct “Phase 0” operations with a variety of allies and partners around the world to ease sources of discontent and deter conflict. We must increase our capacity for these operations without forfeiting our warfighting prowess in the event of a major regional conflict. The role of maritime forces is to provide unique expeditionary capabilities with utility across a wide range of operations. These include:

- Enabling multinational partnerships to address existing regional challenges and mitigate the conditions that allow irregular threats to proliferate;
- Responding to crises, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief;
- Conducting proactive Phase 0 security cooperation activities to build partnerships, positively shape events, and contribute to winning the global struggle for influence;
- Where and when applicable, isolating, capturing, or destroying terrorists as well as their infrastructure, resources, and sanctuaries; and
- Providing the Nation’s primary power projection capability, remaining capable of overcoming challenges to access, conducting forcible entry operations, and facilitating the introduction and sustainment of joint or combined forces.

The basic premise of our newly-published maritime strategy is that the United States is a force for good in the world — that while we are capable of launching a clenched fist when we must,

offering the hand of friendship is also an essential and prominent tool in our kit. That premise flows from the belief that preventing wars is as important as winning wars.

Regionally Concentrated, Credible Combat Power. The maritime strategy advocates *credible* combat power as a deterrent to future conflict. The Marine Corps supports this capability through the flexibility and combat power of the Marine Air Ground Task Force embarked on amphibious warfare ships. By far the most complex of our congressionally-mandated missions, amphibious forcible entry requires long-term resourcing and a high-level of proficiency. It is not a capability that we can create in the wake of a threat.

The characteristics of amphibious ships (their command and control suites, flight decks, well decks, air and surface connectors, medical facilities, messing and berthing capacity, and survivability) merged with the general-purpose nature of embarked Marines, make them multi-mission platforms — unbeatable in operations ranging from humanitarian assistance to amphibious assault. These forces have brought hope and assistance to peoples ravaged by tsunamis, earthquakes, and cyclones — even hurricanes in our own country. They have provided a powerful combat force from the sea as evidenced by the opening days of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM when Marines provided the first conventional forces ashore in Afghanistan. An equally powerful force assaulted from amphibious ships up the Al Faw peninsula in early weeks of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. In spite of the proliferation of anti-access technologies among state and non-state actors, Navy-Marine Corps amphibious capabilities have answered our Nation’s “911 call” over 85 times since the end of the Cold War. Many international navies have recognized the value of amphibious warfare ships — as evidenced by the global renaissance in amphibious ship construction.

Joint Seabasing. The maritime strategy makes the case for seapower as the United States’ asymmetric advantage. For Marines, that asymmetric advantage translates into Joint Seabasing, which allows us to maximize forward presence and engagement while “stepping lightly” on local sensitivities, avoiding the unintended political, social, and economic disruptions that often result from a large American presence ashore. It allows us to conduct a broad range of operations in areas where access is challenged, without reliance on ports and airfields. Given diplomatic, geographic, and infrastructure constraints, Seabasing is absolutely critical to overcoming area

denial and anti-access weapons in uncertain or openly hostile situations. The combination of capabilities that allows us to influence events ashore from over the horizon — amphibious warfare ships, innovative Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) ships, Joint High Speed Vessels, surface connectors, MV-22s, and Expeditionary Fighting Vehicles — play a key role in surmounting access challenges.

Seabasing is not exclusive to the Navy and Marine Corps — it will be a national capability. In fact, we view Joint Seabasing as a national strategic imperative. Just as the amphibious innovations championed by the Navy-Marine Corps team during the 1920s and 1930s were employed by all U.S. and Allied forces in every theater during World War II, we believe that the Seabasing initiatives currently underway will expand to become joint and interagency capabilities. Our control of the sea allows us to use it as a vast maneuver space — 365 days a year. Seabasing allows us to project influence and expeditionary power in the face of access challenges, a distinct asymmetric advantage. These capabilities allow maritime forces to support our partners and to deter and defeat adversaries in a complex and uncertain future. Today, another generation of Naval planners continues to envision how our amphibious capabilities can evolve into more fully sea-based operations and better meet the Combatant Commanders' varied and competing requirements.

Global Presence. The maritime strategy describes the need for a distributed and persistent global presence to conduct those Phase 0 and Phase 1 activities that will counter extremist ideology and deter conflict. The implementation of this maritime strategy necessitates an energetic discourse with our joint, interagency, and multinational partners. In recognizing the value of integration of our maritime services for deterrence and security cooperation, it advocates the full participation and integration with agencies across the U.S. government.

Recently combat-tested in the Middle East and historically engaged in the Pacific, the Marine Corps will seek to further enhance its operational capabilities in the Pacific theater. Some areas like Africa offer unique challenges and opportunities for significant U.S. engagement. The sheer breadth and depth of that great continent present their own challenges, but given the operational flexibility afforded by Seabasing and the extended reach of the MV-22 and KC-130J, the future bodes well for the ability of dispersed units of Marines — with interagency partners — to extend our partnerships within the continent of Africa.

Generating the right capabilities to maintain a persistent presence and effective security cooperation requires creative task-organization of current and emerging Navy / Marine Corps / Coast Guard capabilities. This exemplifies what we mean by adaptive force packaging — where the unique capabilities of each Service are brought together to create new capabilities or increased capacity. Further examples include: maritime security and riverine operations; operations to counter terrorism, weapons proliferation, piracy, and other illicit activities at sea and in the littorals; and Marines aboard Global Fleet Stations for a variety of theater security cooperation activities. Our Marines are adaptable and possess cultural understanding and tactical skills that can be applied afloat or ashore — as part of the additive combat power of a Marine Air Ground Task Force operating as part of a joint force. Our Sailors have very sophisticated capabilities for identifying and tracking threats in the maritime domain, imposing local sea control, and delivering striking power. Our Coast Guardsmen maintain extensive inshore expertise, established legal authority, and strong international partnerships based on maritime security and safety issues of common concern. Rather than requiring one Service to bear the manpower and resource burden of recreating these capabilities for specific missions to the potential detriment of other missions, the more pragmatic course is mix and match the expertise of each Sea Service to increase our overall joint capacity.

Our Marines Give Us the Advantage. In our Nation’s history, the demand for Marines, as a seabased expeditionary force in readiness, has consistently increased. With the maneuver space of the seas and the strategic context of the future, the requirement for maritime forces is inextricably linked to our Nation’s future security. The growth of the United States Marine Corps to 202,000 Marines will provide rapidly deployable and multi-capable forces to address taskings that vary from partnership building to the inevitable contingencies that will arise.

Everything we read about the future indicates that well-trained, well-led human beings with a capacity to absorb information and rapidly react to their environment have a tremendous asymmetric advantage over an adversary. That advantage goes to us. Our young Marines are courageous, willing to make sacrifices, and increasingly capable of succeeding in complex environments. They are out there now, forward-deployed, ready to respond to crisis, and daily putting a human face on American naval diplomacy. I am confident our Corps, and indeed our

Nation, will be in great shape for a long time to come as these young men and women continue to grow and assume greater positions of responsibility.

Strategy Implementation

As America's Naval Services implement this new strategy, several factors bear in consideration. This strategy calls for both Phase 0 conflict prevention missions as well as regionally concentrated, credible combat power; the capacity to operate across the spectrum of Naval force missions drive our amphibious ship requirements.

Based on strategic guidance, in the last several years we have accepted risk in our Nation's forcible entry capacity and reduced amphibious lift from 3.0 Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) assault echelons to 2.0 MEB assault echelons. In the budgetary arena, the value of amphibious ships is too often assessed exclusively in terms of forcible entry — discounting their demonstrated usefulness across the range of operations and the clear imperative for Marines embarked aboard amphibious ships to meet Phase 0 demands. The ability to transition between those two strategic goalposts, and to respond to every missions-tasking in between, will rely on a strong Navy-Marine Corps Team and the amphibious ships that cement our bond. The Navy and Marine Corps have worked diligently to determine the minimum number of amphibious ships necessary to satisfy the Nation's needs — and look forward to working with the Committee to support the Chief of Naval Operation's shipbuilding plans.

A key factor of the Marine Corps' ability to implement this maritime strategy is the flexibility and combat power of Marine Aviation. It enables the Marine Air Ground Task Force to fight and shape the single battle while generating greater tempo than our adversaries. Throughout history, this combined arms team has proven unequalled across the spectrum of conflict. Our priority is to replace legacy aircraft — some of which that have been flying since Vietnam. Introducing vastly more capable aircraft — such as the Joint Strike Fighter, MV-22, H-1 upgrades, and CH-53K — will ensure that the Corps maintains its warfighting advantage for our Nation in the years to come.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you on behalf of your Marines. They remain committed to their mission and know that the American people and its government support them in their endeavor. Quiet in their duty and determined in their task, they are telling us loud and clear in other ways that they know that there is a job to do and they will continue to shoulder the burden. More than 332,000 Marines have either enlisted or re-enlisted since September 11, 2001, and over 184,000 have enlisted or re-enlisted since March 2003. Make no mistake, they joined or decided to re-enlist knowing they would go into harm's way, and your Marines have made a positive and selfless decision to stay resolved. They are performing magnificently.

They are equally committed to stand ready as the Nation's Force in Readiness — to serve in any clime and place. Your continued support remains a vital and appreciated foundation to this service.