

**OFFICE OF
THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

MEDIA ROUND TABLE

**REMARKS BY
GEN. JAMES F. AMOS,
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

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GEN. JAMES T. AMOS: Try not to bring more than two cups a day here. I figure that somewhere along, I got to make sure I got to take care of my health.

MS. : (Inaudible) – two cups a day doesn't seem enough.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. How we all doing?

MS. : Excellent. Thank you for making time for us.

GEN. AMOS: You are more than welcome. It's Saturday, and I got to tell you, we left Washington on, I guess, Thursday about noon and flew to Norfolk to speak to the birthday ball down there for Marine Corps Command. Pouring rain, cold, just kind of East Coast yucky weather, and then left there yesterday, it was still raining, and flew into Miramar yesterday morning and landed there, and then short briefing, then jumped in a Hornet and flew out to Reagan and just, not a cloud in the sky. The water was just smooth as can be. So it's just beautiful out here. I'd forgotten how pretty it is out here.

MS. : Did you take the long way around to the ship and enjoy the nice day?

GEN. AMOS: Well, we did a couple of passes around the ship and cruised around the warning areas off the coast, just to kind of reacquaint myself from my days flying the Hornet, so it was good.

MR. : Do you get to fly if you want?

GEN. AMOS: I do, but not a lot. I mean, I can fly as often as I want to, but it's just the job. So what happens is, I fly with HMX-1, the president's – or, if I come out here to visit 3rd MAW or 2nd MAW, I'll generally jump in an airplane and fly with the boys – (inaudible) – out there. But it's not nearly as much as I'd like to. That's the plight of my job.

Anyway, it's good to have everybody here. Thanks for coming down on Saturday morning. You got a beautiful view, so it can't be all that bad.

MS. : That's true.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. What can I do?

MR. : Yes, sir. I think what we'll do is go around the table, but I think if you could just tell them in a few sentences, general, a little bit about yourself, and then we'll roll back around and start.

GEN. AMOS: Okay.

MR. : We'll start with you, sir.

Q: I'm Gretel (sp). I work with the San Diego – (inaudible) – I just got back from Afghanistan. We were in Helmand Province with – (inaudible, background noise) – six weeks.

GEN. AMOS: Good. Okay. When did you get back, Gretel?

Q: We got back a few weeks okay.

GEN. AMOS: Okay, good.

Q: And I actually met you once, briefly, years ago when I flew out to Lejeune just as a wounded warrior at the time. I was getting stood up –

GEN. AMOS: That's when we were just standing it up?

Q: Mm-hmm. I was working for the Dallas Morning News at the time, so Lt. Col. Maxwell – (inaudible) – that new program, and it's great to see how it's grown since then.

GEN. AMOS: Right. Yeah. It's good to see you again, thank you.

Q: (Inaudible) – Fuentes (ph), New York Times.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. We met when I was a colonel down MAG-31 out of Beaufort. She doesn't even remember; she's so young. (Laughter.) That was a long time ago, so good to see you – (inaudible).

Q: And you, sir.

Q: Mark Walker, North County Times. Been with the paper for about 10 years, covering the Marine Corps and the military for about five years now. (Inaudible.)

Q: I'm Elliott Spagat, the head correspondent for AP in San Diego. We have four journalists at the bureau, one of whom covers military affairs. She couldn't make it today, but I'll guess she'll see you in December, probably, or – (inaudible).

GEN. AMOS: Thanks – (inaudible). Absolutely.

Q: Tony Perry with the L.A. Times. I believe, General, we met in '03 in Kuwait as everybody was waiting to cross the line and you were waiting to deploy your folks.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah, those were exciting times. When I look back on that, I think of all the effort that went into that and all the coordination – it was good host, to be honest with you. The Kuwaitis, the government of Kuwait was, when you think about all those military sources and all that coordination, so good to see you again.

MR. : So if you want to just go forth with a –

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. I tell you what, I'd be happy to answer your – has everybody had a chance to look at that? That charts the way ahead for the Marine Corps, certainly for the next four years. It does not mean there won't be adjustments. In any plan and in any effort, there are always adjustments as things unfold. We don't know what two years, or what's going to happen two years from now. But this was the best guess, looking at this future security environment, of – and we spent a lot of time working on that future-security environment.

When Gen. Conway was the commandant and I was out at Quantico, we began to write his vision, and we spent probably a year, almost a year and a half writing that. And in that period of time, a span of about 10 months, going around the world and across this nation – not just with military. I'm talking corporate America and everybody else to try to determine what they think the next two decades are going to look like.

So when you start talking about some of these major corporations whose livelihood depends upon the economy, global economy and that kind of thing, so – in security. So that, based on what we feel is the reasonably accurate account of what the future may hold, then how will the Marine Corps operate and what can we do for our nation and how best to operate in that environment?

When we did this, we sat and thought about the environment. My guidance to the guys, to the team was, we don't have to get it exactly right, but we sure as heck can't afford to get it exactly wrong. And that was how we saw, is you look at that and you think about, what do we think our nation, and specifically the Marine Corps, is going to be operating in?

I think we got it pretty close. Doesn't mean there won't be other things, but – and by the way, historically we've not done very well predicting what the future holds – (laughter) – militarily and as a nation, so I want to caveat my comments with that.

So that's that, and based on that, how does the Marine Corps operate in that environment and what can we contribute to our nation's defense? I mean, that truly is the essence of it. There was no arrogance of, the Marine Corps is going to own the future. There's none of that. It was, how best can the Marine Corps contribute to our national security based on that kind of likely environment?

So that's what it's about. And then we crafted – the Marine Corps took a look at what the Marine Corps looked like today. And by the way, I'm pretty prejudiced, but I think it's pretty doggone good, and I think we have kind of proven that we can operate in difficult environments and be successful. Gretel, you saw that down in Helmand Province. We are meeting with success down there. I told everybody, there's reason to be encouraged about what's happening in Helmand.

So I think the Corps is in pretty good shape. I want to make a few adjustments. I want to adjust – I want to increase our professional military education. That's important. We're asking

young men and women now to make decisions that maybe 10 years ago they wouldn't have been required to make.

What do I mean by that? I'm talking about our noncommissioned officers, our corporals and our sergeants and our lieutenants, are out, are distributing fashion on the battlefield by themselves. They're there with 28, 35 Marines, and they've got – they're representing the United States government. And you know what I'm talking about. If they make – they're making decisions on issues of global importance. I mean, it could be some kind of catastrophe. It could be some great military decision they make that saves the day.

But I want to educate them. I want to educate them more. So education is important to me. Obviously, keeping faith with our young men and women, both our wounded, the families of our fallen Marines, is very, very important to me. In there, you see where I mentioned that diversity is important. It was important under Gen. Conway, and I'm going to add new energy towards that. ‘

I think the Marine Corps needs to look like the face of America. I don't believe we were successful there yet. I'm not sure how we'll do it, precisely, but I'm confident we can do it. And so I have some very smart Marines that are going to help us figure out how to make that face of the Marine Corps. When you look at a formation, how – what does it look like? Does it look like the United States of America? And that's what I'm looking for.

So there'll be no quotas, there'll be no lowering of standards. We don't have to do that. We just have to figure out how we can take the world's greatest fighting force and appeal to all the cultures of our country. And we're going to do it.

In there, the very first priority is, of course, full support and continuing dedication to the – (inaudible). I absolutely want to make sure that the Marines that read the articles that you write, that read this planning guidance in Afghanistan, that it became crystal clear for them that their commandant believes that the number-one priority of the Marine Corps is to be successful – continue the mission in Afghanistan. Do whatever's required to complete our mission and responsibilities in Afghanistan. And I want that to be crystal clear to everybody. So we will dedicate whatever personnel, equipment and money and effort is required to make that happen.

And then of course, the second major muscle movement in this planning guidance is the Force Structure Review Group, the rebalancing of the Marine Corps coming out of Afghanistan. That effort's underway right now. It's very labor-intensive. We've got smart, I mean, a lot of smart folks working on it, and we're looking at 100 percent of the Marine Corps. We're not carving out a portion of the Marine Corps and saying, okay, we're not going to look at that.

We're looking at everything, to include our civilian personnel, to include our entire 39,400 reserve Marines. We're looking at everything. And the idea, in its simplest terms, is to figure out, what should the Marine Corps look like post-Afghanistan? When we come out of Afghanistan – and we will someday, we know that – when the Marine Corps comes out of Afghanistan, then how big should it be and what should its focus be and what are the capabilities it should bring to the – (inaudible)?

So we're looking through that. So that's a summary of what's in there, and I'll be happy to answer any questions. Gretel, anything that comes to mind?

Q: Sure. I mean, I believe there's roughly 10,000 troops from the first MAF – you know – (inaudible) – and other supporting bases that are over in Afghanistan. What is the next year going to look like for them, the tempo? Are there any changes in store based on the Afghanistan mission?

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. First of all, I think the mission in Afghanistan for the Marine Corps will stay – a lot of what – will stay the way it is right now for probably at least the next year. We're meeting with success. I said that earlier. The town of Nawa. I was in Nawa at Christmas last year. I was there the year before.

A very dangerous area a year ago. Christmas, it had improved significantly. I was just reading some reports earlier this week that the Marines are backing out Nawa. They've got a wonderful district governor there, and the Afghan national army are in there and the Marines are kind of back – because the local government, there's enough security there; the local government is taking charge.

So I see the Marine Corps continuing to do and support the army, the Afghan national police in turning over those areas back to the Afghan people and then just continuing to move around the Helmand Province. And our area has expanded over the last six months. It has almost doubled in size. So there's plenty of areas for the Marine Corps to operate in, and I see us doing that for the next – easily for the next year.

So what's life like for us? It's austere. There's not a lot of what we saw in Iraq. Gen. Conway made a pointed effort to not do that in Afghanistan, and I am in his course. So this is pretty austere, and we're going to keep it that way, and we're going to be highly mobile. I think there's still a dangerous place, and we spent last Saturday, my wife and I and Sgt. Maj. Kent and his wife spent eight hours in Bethesda last Saturday pinning on Purple Hearts and visiting our wounded. So I'll tell you, it's still a dangerous place.

Q: So no Burger King?

GEN. AMOS: Pardon?

Q: No Burger King, no pizza parlors?

GEN. AMOS: I was there at Christmas, and I'm going to spend Christmas there this year, and I didn't see one Burger King. I didn't see – I won't name some of the other places that have the franchises, but you're not going to see that down in our area.

Q: (Inaudible) – obviously, this force structure – (inaudible) – how are you – what’s your thought and how are you going to approach that in the environment – (inaudible) – Marine Corps. Possibly, you talk about – (inaudible) – to be the chairman.

GEN. AMOS: Right. I think there’s – in my mind, assuming that when we come out of Afghanistan and assuming that our nation is not committed heavily in someplace else in the world, like we had been in Iraq or like we’ve been in Afghanistan, my expectation is, the Marine Corps will come down in size. I think it should. I think we don’t need a 202,000-size force once we come out of Afghanistan. We need it now so that we can serve to dwell in the units, the deployment to dwell, which I know I you’re familiar with, is stabilized at one to two so that – when we deploy for six, seven months and you’re home for 14 months.

We are just getting that. We’re getting close to that in some of – like an infantry battalion. We are about one to 1.75 with the infantry battalion. We were almost one to one with them for a while. We’ve got some other skillsets, MOSs in units that are still pretty close to a one-to-one. And so the build to 202,000 was to give the Marine Corps enough elasticity such that we could have the Marines home twice as long as when they were deployed.

So as long as we’re in Afghanistan, we need to stay at 202 K. But we are going to come down, and then the question is, okay, how many of what kind of units? How big should those units be? And also, to capitalize on the lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. For instance, we’ve used – let’s talk about one you’re familiar with: Explosive Ordnance Disposal. When we started the war, we crossed the border in March of 2003. The Marine Corps had, I think, a little bit more than 120 EOD personnel on active duty.

When we settled into Iraq and saw all of the massive amounts of explosives lying all over the battlefield – I mean, you saw it, it was huge – we started training and bringing more Explosive Ordnance. So today, we have about 730 EOD personnel on active duty.

So then the question is, how much will we need post-Afghanistan? If you look at the environment that I said we’re going to be operating in and against some of the enemies here we’ll likely be operating against, we’re going to take some little lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan like IEDs, explosives and stuff – they’re going to use that. This could become the weapon of choice in fourth-generation warfare, the ID.

So we will need EOD personnel, but how many? Is it 750? Is it some number less than that? It’s probably more than 120. And then, so we size that capability and then we take some of that capability and we build it into our research establishment, because we’ve got the most experienced EOD personnel, along with the Army, Air Force and Navy, on the face of the earth. Nobody knows more about EOD than the Department of Defense does right now, I guarantee it.

So how much of that do we want to put in reserves so that we can call them up when we need to? Law enforcement personnel. You know, Tony, we’ve used a lot of LAPD, Boston, Chicago police detectives. We brought that talent in to help us do the forensics and help us do the investigation on the criminal element in Afghanistan, the insurgent element.

So how much of that do we want to hang onto and how do we keep that under? We've never had – we've had military police, but they do traffic investigations and convoy escorts. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a cop. I'm talking about a cop that does investigations and know what they're doing, they can follow the trail of the evidence and they've got that sixth sense that helps them go and find a bomb-maker, and find the criminal element that's taken all the poppy resin and turning it into, you know cocaine – it's not cocaine, but heroin.

So how do we keep those people, and where do they fit in the Marine Corps? So these are some of the things we're working on. But we are going to come down in size, but that'll be post-Afghanistan.

Q: Do you expect that that'll be something – (inaudible) – next four years, depending on how long you're in Afghanistan beyond –

GEN. AMOS: Right, I think it will. My suspicions are that sometime during the next four years, the Marine Corps will begin to dial itself down. I can't tell you what rate – I truly don't know what the ultimate target is, from 202,000 down to what, I don't know what that is yet. We began at about 178,000 when we began to grow the Marine Corps, and so we grew that 27,000, as you know, in two-and-a-half months. But I suspect it will begin to dial down sometime during my commandancy.

Q: During what, sir?

GEN. AMOS: During my commandancy.

Q: I'm going to cheat a little bit and crank a few questions in. The first part about – (inaudible) – we saw 13 troops of dogs from Camp Hamilton – (inaudible) – we know the Marine Corps wants more dogs. Do you have enough resource now in Helmand Province and is there a taskforce – (inaudible) – effort being made, number one? And number two, what keeps you up at night? What keeps you up at night?

GEN. AMOS: Let me answer the first one. Gen. Conway, on his last visit out there, looked around and said, you know, we don't have enough dogs. We had a lot. We were – I'm not talking about attack dogs, I'm talking about bomb-sniffing dogs. The Marine Corps was the first service to do that, and they hired labs and we started it about four years ago. That was – (inaudible). Very successful. We started with, I think, 75 dogs.

But he looked around and said, we don't have enough, so we are going – our goal is – I'll tell you what, we'll get Joe (ph) to give you the ultimate target goal. So I'm going to say a number, but don't print this number until Joe gives you the real number. But we're going to something like 800 dogs. Yeah, and it's just pouring out of my memory bank. It's significant. So we are – that effort is underway right now.

I talked to the Marines at Bethesda last Saturday and I asked them, I said, did you have a dog with you? And most of these Marines are in there, almost without exception, as a result of

IEDs. And about half of them had a dog with them. But I'll tell you, the Taliban are very clever, and they are probably more clever than we would have expected with regards to hiding IEDs and putting multiple IEDs in the ground, and placing them in places where they think the Marines will go to avoid IEDs. So there's a lot of – they're pretty wise at this thing.

So the answer is, I don't think we've got enough dogs right now. We will. I don't know if we'll have enough dogs in the future, but I'll tell you, we're putting a great effort to get more dogs in. Dogs are not the sole solution. We started about years ago this thing called Combat Hunter, which is teaching observation skills, looking at the environment. It's things that policemen do – good cops. They're watching, they're paying attention to what's going on in their environment, what's changed.

Q: Do you have enough overwatch, aerial – (inaudible) –

GEN. AMOS: Overwatch is part of it, but it's really the observation skills to include the use of binoculars as patrols were moving through an area. So it's dogs, it's observation skills. We're meeting with success now, to some degree, with the local people telling us where the IEDs are – not in every case. It depends on how secure they feel with the military in with them, both the ANA and us – versus the Taliban. If they think the Taliban are going to eventually rule their district or their town or their village, then they are less apt to probably come to us and tell us where these are.

So I will tell you that my sense is that we don't have enough dogs. We're headed in the right direction on it, but the fight we're in is a tough one right now. And we are in kind of the northeastern part of Helmand right now, in what might be for us kind of the last stronghold area where the Taliban really rule and have ruled for a long time. It's up in Sangin and up at the Kajaki Dam area.

And we're going in right now. That's the fight we're in right now, and we're going to go in and clean them out. There's just no question about it. So there have been – Mark, there have been casualties. This is tough. It reminds me a little bit of Ramadi and Fallujah in the earlier days, and then all of a sudden, one day things settled down and you could walk through the town without body armor on. We'll get that way.

Nawa and Nawzad a year ago, you could walk through without body armor on, and yet I spent Christmas there with the district governor and he was bragging about the new school, took me to the new school. We didn't have body armor on, we didn't have anything. That will happen in Sangin. We're just not there yet.

And what keeps me up at night? I tell you, I spend a lot of time thinking about two things: Number one is, are we doing enough for those men and women that are forward-deployed? You remember, in the planning guidance I talked about a red cell, and I used that when we went back in Iraq the second time very successfully when I had – (inaudible) – wing up here at Miramar, and we went back in and formed a red cell.

And the whole purpose of that was to have a team of about 13 or 14 folks – and they weren't all Marines. I mean, this is kind of the – we brought in some folks from other services and some civilians to help us think like the enemy. I wanted to know what the enemy was going to do. That's what I want to do with Sangin and Kajaki Dam and these kinds of – I want us to always be thinking, what's the enemy going to do to kind of thwart our efforts, in a sense?

So that's what – I worry about that. I want to make sure that we're doing everything possible so that when I look moms and dads and wives and brothers and sisters in the eyes, I know that I've done everything humanly possible.

And the second thing that keeps me awake is the reset of the Marine Corps. Right now, we've paid a pretty healthy price, equipment-wise, to make sure that we have everything we need in Afghanistan. And we do, I promise you that. There is nothing that I'm aware of that they need that we haven't provided, or will provide once we find out.

But I'll tell you, a lot of our equipment at home station – Pendleton, Twentynine Palms, Camp Lejeune – is in Afghanistan. We've got about 60 percent of the equipment that we rate at home station over in – excuse me, we've got about 60 percent of the equipment that we rate at home station onboard the bases right now. The other 40 percent is in Afghanistan.

And that's a lot of money, Mark. It's not just a matter of bringing the equipment back, and rehabilitate it, which we will, but that's a lot of money. And we are going into a tightening economy. So I worry about resetting equipment. Okay.

Q: So I wanted to ask about the “don't ask, don't tell” policy, how that's unfolded in the last months since the federal – (inaudible) – ordered that the policy be lifted. Just your thoughts and how things have unfolded since then, what kind of feedback you've been hearing from the ranked – (inaudible) – officers.

GEN. AMOS: You know, we're back. The judge lifted the ban and then the appeals court reinstated it and said, okay, let's leave this policy, let's leave the “don't ask, don't tell” policy right where it's been and let's let the Department of Defense and the president – the secretary of defense and the president and Congress work their way through the survey in there.

So as we sit here today, nothing has changed with regards to how we're doing business on “don't ask, don't tell”. I went on the record – when I testified in front of the – for my confirmation hearing in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I was asked, you know, what is your opinion?

And I told the Senate, I said, I'm concerned right now. First of all, I don't support the repeal now of “don't ask, don't tell”. That's what I told them. And I told all the folks that I interviewed with as I was coming up. And then I told them why.

The Marine Corps has got 20,000 Marines on the ground in Afghanistan right now in some pretty serious combat, very tightly focused. We have 20,000 Marines right now in the queue preparing to go and we have 20,000 that just came back. We've got, at any one time,

60,000 Marines very tightly focused on a very dangerous area, dangerous mission. We fill their entire time when they're home with getting ready to go.

If you take a look at the operating forces in the Marine Corps, that's about 40 or 50 percent of the total operating forces were all focused. I don't know what the effects of the repeal would be. That's the part that – and I truly don't. The Marine Corps – for instance, the Marine Corps billets what we call two-by-two. We put two Marines in a room. The DOD standard is one person in one room, a shared bathroom facility and another single person. We don't do that.

We don't do that because we want Marines looking out for one another. We want to build that sense of unity. And so we have a waiver from the Department of Defense to put two Marines in a room. Well, what does this mean? How will this affect our ability for the future? I don't have the answer to that, by the way. There is nothing more intimate than combat. And I want to make that point crystal clear. There is nothing more intimate than young men and young women – and when you're talking infantry, we're talking our young men – laying out, sleeping alongside one another and sharing death and fear and loss of their brothers.

So I don't know what the effect of that will be on unit cohesion. I mean, that's what we're looking at. It's unit cohesion, it's combat effectiveness. So I've got questions, and that's part of the reason why I'm very – not part – that's the reason why I'm very supportive of Secretary Gates' efforts to do the survey.

The survey is done, the results are in. They're being collated right now. I've had a chance to look at the early returns, and towards the end of this month I'll have an opportunity to provide the chairman and the secretary of defense my best military advice on what I think the results would be when “don't ask, don't tell” is repealed. So that's my position.

I just – there's risk involved. I'm trying to determine how to measure that risk, and my risk is not – this is not a social thing with me. This is combat effectiveness. That's what the country pays its Marines to do.

Q: And early – could you share those early results. You said –

GEN. AMOS: I can't talk about it, because it just – I would not – first of all, I brought a briefcase that's about eight inches wide and about – you know, it looks like a small overnight bag that you take on an airplane full of information that I'm going through right now. So it's too soon for me to tell. And that information, when the secretary of defense decides to make that public, it'll become public. But I can't talk about that right now.

Q: Can I ask a little follow-up on that, sir?

MR. : Please go ahead.

Q: Just on that same point, is there anything culturally about the Marine Corps that would make that transition more difficult? I've heard – (inaudible) – talk about the macho kind of war-fighting ethos.

GEN. AMOS: I think – and I mentioned that during my confirmation. I said, look. The Marine Corps recruits less than one-tenth of one percent of the entire population, approximately. We recruit, and we have for a long – 235 years – on a warrior ethos. I don't want to – I'm not going to try to compare us to other services, because that would be unfair. But I know what we do and I know what our focus is, and young men and women join the Marine Corps not for an easy life, not for a life that's not full of danger. They're attracted to that.

So I don't know what the effect on recruiting will be. We do. But the fact is, we recruit on that warrior ethos, so I don't know what the effect of that – if you wanted to join the Marine Corps – but here's the interesting thing. We're going to bring in about 36 (thousand), 37,000 Marines this year. We're going to recruit them. We are so far ahead today of our recruiting.

We're closing down recruiting efforts at our recruiting stations about halfway through the month. I mean, that's unheard of. Young men, especially young men, that want to join the Marine Corps today want to join to be an infantryman. And if you think about that, you just – Mark, think about the question you asked with the 11 casualties at Camp Pendleton. Think about what I said about visiting the Marines this last Saturday. This is a tough life.

And yet young men are coming, and if you sign up today – if you went to a recruiting station today – it would be eight months before you could find yourself on the yellow footprints at San Diego or at Parris Island. Think about that. So those are the young men, rather, that come – and add young women – that come to the Marine Corps based on that warrior ethos, so I don't know what the effect – I don't know what the effect will be.

Q: I don't think anybody at this table doubts the success the Marines have had in Anbar and are now having in Helmand. That said, it does seem to me that the secretary of defense has asked you a very difficult question: Why do we need a second land-based force? We have a very large and competent Army. We have Air Force; we have Navy air. Why do we need a second land-based with its own air wing? Tough question.

GEN. AMOS: Well, I'll tell you, Tony – just so you know I've done my homework, I read your article coming out of Secretary Gates's speech. And just so you also know, I got a chance to view that speech about two days before he gave it, and I like it and didn't find anything wrong with it.

The issue of the second land army is interesting because that term came from us. We started, in public remarks – some of our senior officers started saying, you know, we've got to get out of this thing about being a second land army. You know, we've got to get out of – we're too heavy. You know, we've got to get back aboard ship and the equipment we have is too heavy to get back aboard ship.

All of that drumbeat started about a year-and-a-half, two years ago, and so we're getting some of those soundbites played back to us. And we don't like it. And I don't like it. Here's the truth from my perspective, Tony: Throughout our history, there have been times when our nation has asked and when our government has asked the Marine Corps to become a second land

army. Korea's a good example. Vietnam's a good example. Iraq is a good example, and where we are right now is a good example.

We went to Belleau Wood, as you know, in France, and we became a second land army and saved the day for – saved Paris. So there have been times when that happened, and I don't – and I tell people I'm not ashamed of that and I don't have to defend that. But the difference is – and this is the part that's in here, when we get to the role of the Marine Corps and that's why this is so important – is the nation doesn't buy a Marine Corps to be a stagnant second land army.

It buys a Marine Corps to be what I believe to be an expeditionary force in readiness. That is not a cute bumper sticker; what that means is that a decision can be made today to deploy a force either to help people like the Haitians, you know, this past May. And by the way, we just sent a ship with 500 Marines to Haiti today, or yesterday. We're doing the same thing.

We sent, yeah, the USS Iwo Jima and 500 Marines, and helicopters and AAVs and MTBRs and water purification units – and Joe can give you the figures on that – to Haiti today. We can also send a force in, put them off shore – or put them ashore – to kick the door down if we need to. That's what a force in readiness does.

The only force that can do that in the Department of Defense, with any time of rapid deployment, highly expeditionary capability, is the United States Marine Corps. I'm not talking about special operations forces, now. They can go in the dark of night, get on the C-130. I've got that. I'm talking about a sizeable force with an air-ground logistics capability. It's the Marine Corps. And to get that, we have to maintain a high state of readiness. There's a cost to that.

In other words, the president can't call and say, when can you get a force into Afghanistan, or when can you get a force into – you name it, some place in the world – and you know, it'll be about 90 days. The president wants to be able to look at the Marine Corps and say, hey, when can you get a force to country XYZ? And we'll go, we'll start moving tonight.

When the president stood at West Point last fall – I think it was early December, and he made his major policy statement, and he said he was going to support McChrystal's request for more forces and put 30,000 forces into Afghanistan – I believe that was on a Monday, Tony – it may have been on – but regardless, he gave that speech that night and he said, I'm going to put 10,000 more Marines in Afghanistan.

The next day, the lead elements of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines were airborne in Marine Corps C-130s flying to Afghanistan. I arrived two weeks later for Christmas, and the entire battalion was on the ground. And the lead elements of 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines were on the ground. So do we do land-army stuff? Sure, when we're required to, we will. And by the way, we do it pretty damn good. But that's not why America hires – that's not why we have a Marine Corps. We have a Marine Corps to be this ready force, to do whatever the president directs.

And I've got it quoted here: I just said, we respond to today's crisis with today's force today. And that's the truth, and that's why we have a Marine Corps. And to be able to do that, you need an air-ground logistics team, so that's why we have aviation.

That 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit that's down here, from up at Pendleton, on the Peleliu, was very stiff, very muted. You saw those heavy-lift helicopters flying up, doing the Pakistani flood relief efforts. They're 400 miles inland. The ship is off the coast of Pakistan. They're 400 miles inland, and they're carrying aid. They're rescuing people in some of the most dangerous parts of Pakistan, by the way.

And at the same time, they're flying their Harriers off the Peleliu, flying combat strikes into Afghanistan in support of Gen. Petraeus's force on the ground. I feel like that bamboo wind chime commercial, you know? And as if that's not enough, they went west with a ship and they rescued the Magellan Star from the pirates. So that's what an expeditionary force in readiness does, Tony, and it requires several things. I think you absolutely have to have a balanced air-ground logistics capability.

You can't go and say, okay, I'm going to be ready. Oh, I need some logistics. I'll be ready when I get logistics. The Marines from 1-6 couldn't have flown to Afghanistan the next day, had it not been on Marine C-130s. They might have gotten there two weeks later on other transportation, but the next day it was on Marine C-130s. It requires that, and it requires a very high state of readiness, which means – that's money, that's training. I mean, that's the essence of a force in readiness.

Q: Does that mean the EFV?

GEN. AMOS: It could. It absolutely could. You know, I've been asked that question – as the assistant commandant, I've been doing all the, kind of, like the executive officer of a unit. You know, I've been doing all the other stuff in the Marine Corps while the commandant was in and the requirements guys were working on the EFV.

I am absolutely convinced that we have to have an amphibious tractor, and I said that to Congress. We absolutely have to have an amphibious tractor to go from ship to shore. It needs to be a fighting vehicle. It makes no sense to just have an amphibious tractor that drives up to the beach and the Marines disembark.

How do they get inland? How do they go 60 miles inland, or 120? They need to get in there with it, so it's got to be a vehicle that can do that. And it's got to be a vehicle that I consider to be a fighting vehicle: a gun; it's got to have communications and a situational awareness system inside that a commander with Marines, a squad, or however big, knows what they're doing and can fight that vehicle. So I'm absolutely convinced.

I get asked often – okay, well, narrow it down to the EFV. And I'll tell you the same thing that Chairman Murtha, when he was alive, and I talked about in one of my hearings – which is to say, look, we are watching this program very carefully. You know, it's got those five

knowledge points on it. We've got knowledge point one right now, which is the engineering, the reliability and all that stuff – the maintainability in there.

It's passed that. I want to see what it does with the rest of the knowledge points before I make a determination of just how enthusiastic I am about that specific vehicle. I am ragingly enthusiastic about the requirement for an amphibious tractor.

Q: Okay, when will we know if the –

GEN. AMOS: I think, you know, just looking at – again, I've been in this job for two weeks. I'm trying to get my arms around a whole lot of things. But my sense is we're probably talking after the New Year. I think January, February, as I recall, we should have some sense of how it's doing with regard to the second knowledge point. And I think we're all kind of waiting to see what happens with that.

Q: You mentioned earlier that pretty much everything is going to be on the table with regard to the – (inaudible, cross talk) –

GEN. AMOS: Right.

Q: You know, we've been through this 20 years ago – you know, questions about, should there have been tanks, artillery; we're looking at – (inaudible). What do you think of those – (inaudible) – to start thinking, you know, are we even going to fight another conventional war? We're going to need – (inaudible).

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. I'll tell you, I think it's a great question because there are going to be wars where tanks just work. You know, we've found that tanks are pretty intimidating. We used them in Kosovo, when we went into Kosovo with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit. We used them in Iraq. And when a tank rolls around a corner in a neighborhood and points its main tank gun at you, all of the sudden, a lot of things settle down very, very quickly.

So I think there will always be a place for tanks. You know we just bought the new, lightweight 155-millimeter gun. That seems to be performing very well in Afghanistan. We've got ammunition that we're shooting out of that that's very accurate, precision-guided accuracy. We've got rockets now. We've got HIMARs in there. I think there's always going to be a place on the battlefield for that.

The beauty about the Marine Corps is we task-organize depending on what's going on. Let me give you an example. MRAPs have been hugely successful in saving lives. And I'll tell you what – these young men we visited last weekend that were in vehicles that were blown up wouldn't be alive today were it not for the M-ATV and the MRAP.

So hugely successful, but it doesn't take a lot of imagination to think that there are going to be places in the world where a 30-ton or a 20-ton MRAP probably won't work – not because we wouldn't like the air conditioning, or not because we wouldn't like the coms suite – they don't ride particularly comfortably, so I'm not going to say the ride – but because of the terrain.

How about some of the jungle terrain some of the places that we might operate? So I think we're going to adjust the Marine Corps. We are going to become lighter. It's in my planning guidance.

And we are going to look at every new piece of equipment we buy with a view on how it will help us in our expeditionary equipment. You probably saw, in the tasking section at the back, I put Joe Dunford, my assistant commandant, who you guys know, and gals know here, and I love. I put Joe to chair the final clearing authority on all new equipment before we slap the table and buy it – and put money down and buy the equipment. It's going to have to have – it's going to have to be light.

I wanted to introduce my wife – my wife, Bonnie. That's right, Tony Perry.

Q: Hi, Tony Perry.

GEN. AMOS: That's right.

BONNIE AMOS: Tony, it's nice to meet you.

GEN. AMOS: Elliott.

MRS. AMOS: Elliott, nice to meet you.

GEN. AMOS: Mark.

MRS. AMOS: Mark, very good.

GEN. AMOS: Gidget (ph) and Gretel, my wife Bonnie.

MRS. AMOS: Very nice to meet all of you.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. Sit down, here. They were just saying bad things about me, Bonnie, and I brought you up so that you could protect me.

MRS. AMOS: I'll be glad to reinforce those bad statements. Let's hear them.

Q: Role for the Marine Corps in Yemen? Could you roll a MEU in there real quick if Gen. Mattis needs help?

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. Well, you know, we are certainly off the cost of Yemen right now with amphibious ships. You know, we're doing some – we're supporting that operation in areas that I can't really talk about right now. And we are prepared to help train some of the Yemeni ground forces, and I know there's been some discussion about, you know, what can the Marine Corps do to help train them?

So that's where we are. We're committed, and we'll do whatever – we'll do whatever we're asked to do, with regard to helping that country stabilize itself. And some of that is still in the developmental stages and some of that is in areas that I can't talk about.

Q: Sir, could you talk about –

MR. : Sir, I think we have time for about one more question. Then we have to get you off to –

GEN. AMOS: I'll get you. I'll get you, Mark – no, I'll get both of you. Go ahead.

Q: Could you touch briefly on where you think the Corps is at now on PTSD, suicide rates and any nontraditional type of methods that might be brought into the – (inaudible, cross talk) –

GEN. AMOS: Well, I'll tell you, as the assistant commandant, I paid a lot of attention to suicides – what I'm trying to categorize as behavioral health. And I don't mean it to sound too clinical because this is real. First thing, suicides – all the services are working hard on this thing. We have worked very hard in the last 18 to 24 months. Last year was a terrible year, 52 suicides – the highest rate of all the services. Now, think about that, though, because we also have the highest percentage of the most-risk people.

Q: Age?

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. We recruit 17, 18, 19-year-olds. Something like 36 percent of the Marine Corps is not even old enough to vote yet. So we are a young – and if you take a look at the risk-category ages of the majority of the folks taking their lives, it's between the ages of about 18 to about 22, 24, somewhere right around in there. That's the Marine Corps. That's 65 percent of the Marine Corps right there. So we have, more than any other service, the highest percentage of at-risk population.

That makes sense. So it would make sense that we would probably also find ourselves struggling pretty hard with this. Here's the good news. I think it's good news – too soon to tell – through great efforts of never leaving a Marine behind, our NCO suicide prevention training that we started a year-and-a-half ago – we are taking that effort and now doing a similar effort for our second lieutenants and first lieutenants and our privates to lance corporals – two separate, more highly focused efforts.

But where we are today, as we meet here today – we are, as compared to where we were last year – we are markedly below. Now, I don't anybody to walk out of here and say we're turned a corner, and boy, the Marine Corps has figured it out. That is not the case. This is hard. And I'll let you know how we've done at the end of December. Suicides are tabulated by calendar year, not fiscal year.

PTS and TBI: I think we have begun to understand what causes TBI – beside the explosion – or what happens physically to the brain with TBI. We've been working with UCLA

medical on this thing. David Hovda there is their TBI guy for the NFL. We spent a lot of effort. I think we understand this. The question now is, okay, when the explosive event happens, what do you do about it to try to prevent – try to help the brain heal and have less potential for PTS down the road?

Not every TBI event causes PTS two years later, but some of them do. So if you understand what's physically happened to the brain during the explosive event, then can that be treated immediately? And the answer is yes. So we've put a protocol in there. Pete Chiarelli and the Army and I worked this thing, spearheaded this effort for the Department of Defense. It's now in theater.

When a kid gets blown up, the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant, the corpsman, the doc, have to follow a very specific protocol. He or she – excuse me – is not allowed outside the combat outpost for a specified period of time. There are examinations that take place. And we've even gone to the point where, at Camp Leatherneck – and I don't know whether you saw it, but we have set up a –

MRS. AMOS: Combat care –

GEN. AMOS: It's almost a – pardon? Yeah, what are we calling it?

MRS. AMOS: Combat care –

GEN. AMOS: Combat care – hey, I don't want to make it sound too soft. You know, it's not a spa.

MRS. AMOS: Concussion restoration facility.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah, restoration facility. And the whole idea, then, is to take these kids that have got it, and then fly them from Nawa, from Musa Qala, from – you know, Kajaki Dam – fly them in there. And now we've got our combat operational stress guys, the guys who will look them in the eye. We can give them exams and hold them, and get the brain to heal.

Okay, the next piece is the PTS piece. We haven't solved it. It's probably the most – the hardest thing that's coming out of this war. We know how to treat amputations. We know how to treat gunshot wounds. PTS affects everybody differently, and the therapy and the treatment to help heal PTS is different for every single person. I'd like to tell you, Mark, that there's an enormous effort underway right now.

There's recognition that it's real. It's very real with me. And so we're going to make an effort to build resiliency in the Marines early on, so that when an event happens, they're more apt to be able to deal with it – to include things that might trigger suicide down the road as well. Brett, you had – you get the last question –

Q: My question is actually about the suicide rate, and I think you covered it. So could I ask you, please, how old are you, sir?

GEN. AMOS: I'm 22. (Laughter.)

Q: I thought so.

Q: You look great for that age.

MRS. AMOS: We got married when we were two, and we've been married for forty years. So you can do the math on that.

GEN. AMOS: I'm 63. And I looked at that and I thought, well, maybe I'm too old to be the commandant. I'm in pretty good shape. I work out pretty hard; have to keep up with the youngsters. That's one of the things the commandant has got to be able to do. He's got to keep up with the young pups.

But I looked at that, and I went down – right around my office in the Pentagon, you go down the hallway, down – corridor, I think, seven – and it's called the Hall of the Commandants. And it's got the pictures and portraits of every commandant, and it's got their bio and all that. So I went down there when I was getting asked about this job, and late one night, I just wandered down and looked at every single commandant.

I looked at when they were born, when they became commandant, how old they were, and I came out of there and I went, you know, I'm going to be one of the older guys here. I don't know whether that's good for the Marine Corps. This is a true story.

And I won't tell you who I made mention of – made that to, but one of the senior leaders in the Pentagon – when I was being interviewed, I said, you might want to pick somebody younger because I went down the Hall of the Commandants last night and I looked, and I'm going to be not the oldest, but I'm going to be one of the oldest. And that very senior individual pulled a piece of paper, went over to his desk, went to his inbox – pulled a piece of paper out, laid it down and he said, take a look at number six.

I looked down there, and number six – and I can't think of who it is. You'd think I'd know. But the sixth commandant of the Marine Corps took the job at 67 and left at 76 years old, or something like this. And he said, what do you think about that? And I went, okay, I'm your man. But I'm 63.

Q: Can I ask what your – do you have an exercise routine – (inaudible) –

GEN. AMOS: You bet. I'll tell you, when I found out I was going to do this job, I went up to the Semper Fit coach. First of all, I've always worked out and always run. And I've always done aerobics and lifted – not heavy weights, but lifted. So I already had a program. But I figured I'm going to have to really get serious.

So I went up to Henderson Hall, to our Semper Fit coach up there, and she was a former trainer for the Cleveland Browns. And I said, okay – and I won't tell you her name, but I said,

okay, here's the deal. I'm really, really going to need all the energy I can have every day for the next four years. I've got to stay up for the young pups. And I said, will you design me a program? She turned me every way but loose. And I mean, I would go up there for about 35 minutes and she wore me out.

And it wasn't in there on bench presses, on – it was all the stuff that you do on the floor, I mean, all this – the balls, yeah, we have medicine balls. You get on a 15-pound medicine ball and do push-ups. You get on a one-arm push-up and lift weights while you're in a push-up, you know. She had me working out. And I'll tell you what, it's great. I mean, I feel better about things. My uniforms fit better. So that's the program I'm on.

MRS. AMOS: We're both doing it, actually. I've worked out for years as well.

(Cross talk.)

GEN. AMOS: How about a Marine what?

Q: A Marine Medal of Honor. Are we close to getting a Marine Medal of Honor?

GEN. AMOS: We have a nomination that Gen. Conway signed and forwarded to the secretary of the Navy in his last week as the commandant.

Q: Living?

GEN. AMOS: Living. Yeah, and I read the – I read the whole paper. I mean, you can imagine, for something like that, we're talking binders. I read it cover-to-cover and it watered my eyes. So this, right now, is in the process, outside the Marine Corps and up through the Navy secretariat, and will find its way up to the secretary of defense and eventually to the president. So I can't tell you what the decision is. We made the recommendation for the Medal of Honor. And I'm not at liberty to tell you who it is, but it's a great, young, courageous young man.

Q: And is he West Coast?

GEN. AMOS: Pardon?

Q: A West Coast Marine?

GEN. AMOS: You know, I can't remember. I can't remember, Mark. I'm not trying to be deceptive; I can't remember.

Q: For an action in Afghanistan or Iraq?

GEN. AMOS: Afghanistan.

Q: Living?

GEN. AMOS: Living. Pretty exciting. I'm going down in about two weeks – in fact, next Saturday, down in Florida, to commission the USS Jason Dunham. Pretty exciting.

MR. : Sir, I think we need to get you to your next appointment.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. Bonnie, have you got anything you want to say?

MRS. AMOS: No, no, just thank you. Thank you for your interest in the Marine Corps and what we do. This is wonderful.

Q: Thank you. Congratulations.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Will you be making a next trip out? Will you be making another trip out here?

MRS. AMOS: Oh, absolutely. We're back out here in December.

GEN. AMOS: We are. We're here in December. We're coming back out here sometime like the second week of December to spend time with all the Marines out here.

(Cross talk.)

MRS. AMOS: Sounds good, I like that. Did you get all these presents today?

GEN. AMOS: No, they're not mine. (Laughter.) In fact, I'm going to take these and flush them all down the toilet.

Q: And sir, I didn't mean to question your age. We just ask everyone that. I didn't mean to question your age to suggest –

GEN. AMOS: That's okay. I'm very comfortable in my skin, and I think –

MRS. AMOS: Albeit old.

GEN. AMOS: I think I can outrun, outperform a lot of the youngsters. So I feel pretty good about where I am in life.

Q: I was wondering if you went to the portraits and compared your – (chuckles) – your –

(Cross talk.)

GEN. AMOS: Well, I did. Some of the portraits are pretty scary-looking, so I feel pretty good about some of the portraits. But I did. I really – (inaudible).

(Cross talk.)

(END)