

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

MEDIA ROUND TABLE

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

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GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS: First of all, does everybody have a – whatever you want to drink? I'm going to get – I'm going to get a cup of coffee, but thanks for being patient. I was – I got – please, everybody, sit down. I had an opportunity to have breakfast down at Quantico with The Basic School and with Echo Company, which is our – they graduate on Friday of this week from The Basic School.

And so these are new lieutenants as of six months, but – and so I had all 253 of them – I think – and they were asking good questions. And I don't get a chance to see them again until some of them are out in fleets, someplace like Afghanistan or WESTPAC or whatever, again, so the questions kept coming, kept coming. And I said I got another engagement at 9:30 and they kept coming, so thank you for waiting and I apologize.

Let me make a – if you don't mind, an opening statement. And I'll be happy to give a copy of this opening statement, so you don't – you don't have to copy it down and – unless you're just dying to. But this will – I think this will kind of frame some thoughts, maybe, for some discussion here and then we'll have a –

Sergeant Major Kent and I just returned from a visit to our West Coast – by the way, I don't like to read things like this, but this'll probably be the cleanest way to do things. Sergeant Major Kent and I just returned from a visit to our West Coast forces' bases stations. And there, we met with our Marines and their families so that I could introduce myself as their new commandant, tell them about my planning guidance, and answer their questions.

I told them of my four top priorities which are first, to provide the best trained and equipped Marine units to Afghanistan; two, to rebalance and posture the Marine Corps to meet future challenges; to educate and train our Marines to succeed in distributed and increasingly complex environments; and to keep faith with our Marines, sailors, and their families.

With the weather as cold as it is now, I'm questioning – this morning – I'm not sure – questioning my sanity for even coming back to D.C. It was 75 degrees in San Diego when I left. I want to begin today by telling you about Afghanistan.

Your Marine Corps is operating primarily in the southwest of the country in Helmand province, as you're aware. Up and down the Helmand River Valley, our Marines are making significant progress in providing security and building the capacity of the Afghan military and police forces so that we can responsibly transition to full Afghan control.

Let me take you back to a year ago, when we first landed in the middle of Marja and pushed out. After some hard fighting there, many people, including the press, started to ask if we could win in Marja. They asked if it was too tough – if we were in over our heads. Now, you don't hear a thing about Marja at all.

When was the last time anybody in this room can remember anybody saying anything about Marja short of Major General Mills' comments that he made towards the end of the last week. You can go down into Marja today, right now in the uniform I am in – without body armor. I'm planning that we'll be there at Christmas time. Sergeant Major Kent and I will be there at Christmas and we plan on walking down in Marja just the way I'm dressed today.

It's made great strides. As Major General Mills said last week, the battle for Marja is over. Marja, like Fallujah and Ramadi, arguably two of the most feared places in Iraq is quiet, reasonably speaking. When was the last time you heard anything about Fallujah or Ramadi? You can't think of it and neither can I. That's good news.

Helmand province is coming along, and I'm encouraged by that. A recent poll conducted taken amongst the Afghan people found a notable shift in public opinion in Helmand where we have been conducting extensive counterinsurgency operations. The number of people in Helmand who described their security situation as good jumped from 14 percent in December of 2009 to 67 percent today. This poll is reflective of the progress we have made in Helmand province and is one indicator that things are beginning to change positively there.

Throughout Helmand province, the story of your Marines is one of heroism, of courage, of fidelity and of sacrifice. It is the essence of what *semper fidelis* – the Marine Corps motto of “always faithful” – is all about. The Marines throughout Helmand are encouraged. Their morale is high and they know they will prevail.

Okay, shifting focus with me just a little bit. I also want to talk to you about the future of the Marine Corps when it comes to the Joint Strike Fighter. In 1998, the Marine Corps decided to transition from three aircraft to one – specifically from the F-18 Hornet, the AV-8B Harrier and the EA-6B Prowler to the single-type model series, the F-35B STOVL Joint Strike Fighter.

The forecast is, is that we will save \$1 billion per year in operations and maintenance alone by having a single type of aircraft. That was a good business decision then and it remains so. We also decided in 1998 to skip a generation of aircraft, to skip recapitalizing our fleet of TACAIR with a fourth generation aircraft, in favor of the fifth generation F-35B.

In doing so, we saved billions of dollars over the last decade by avoiding spending money on third- and fourth-generation aircraft in anticipation of fielding a single fifth-generation aircraft that can perform the many missions inherent in the F-35B. For the record, our F-18s and Harriers will begin running out of service life around 2018 to 2020.

We currently have four F-35Bs undergoing testing at Patuxent River down in Maryland. I'll visit the team at Pax River on Friday of this week. Flying-quality wise, the aircraft is flying fine in horizontal flight and well in purely vertical flight.

We do have some matters dealing specifically in mechanical design related to the transition from horizontal flight to vertical flight, but I am told that we have engineering solutions for these issues. I want to emphasize these are mechanical fixes. I am confident that the engineering expertise resident in the program will solve these matters.

The programmatic health of the STOVL variant of the F-35 is a matter of great national interest. Right now, we have 11 carriers – aircraft carriers and 11 big-deck amphibious ships. So our nation effectively has 22 carrier-type capital ships to do our nation’s bidding. We need to put fifth-generation aircraft on all 22 of those ships if we are to maintain operational flexibility for the National Command Authority and the combatant commander.

The dilemma is that while the F-35B can land on both aircraft carriers and big-deck amphibious ships, other models of the F-35, namely the A and C variants, cannot land on the big-deck amphibious ships because they are not STOVL-capable. This means that, without the F-35B, our nation will only have 11 capital ships instead of 22, capable of carrying fifth-generation aircraft. This is a 50-percent reduction in capability.

I want to leave you with this final thought about the role of the Marine Corps in our national defense. There has been much discussion of late about the Marine Corps conducting sustained ground combat operations ashore. I make no apologies for responding to our nation’s call to serve in this capacity when asked to do so.

Throughout our 235-year existence, your maritime-based Marine Corps has been asked by our nation to come ashore periodically to fight protracted land battles. It was the fifth and 6th Marine Regiments that attacked forward through a retreating allied army line in Belleau Wood 40 miles east of Paris into the, quote, “unbeatable German Army,” unquote, only to soundly defeat the Germans and the advance on Paris and thus turn the tide of World War I.

It was your Marine Corps who MacArthur landed at Incheon in the enemy’s rear and who fought their way south to help liberate Seoul. It was these same Marines who faced the nine Chinese divisions 60 years ago last month on November 17th at a place called the Chosin Reservoir, all as part of an extended land campaign directed by our national leadership.

From Vietnam to Desert Storm, to Iraq and now to Afghanistan, our nation’s leadership has turned to the smallest of its services and uttered the timeless words, send in the Marines. We are our nation’s crisis response force. That’s why we exist.

In preparation for my assuming command of the Marine Corps, I wanted to clearly define where the Marine Corps fits in our nation’s defense. The following mission statement is the product of our efforts and clearly articulates what we do for our nation. The Marine Corps is America’s expeditionary force-in-readiness – a balanced air-ground logistics team.

We are forward deployed and forward engaged – shaping, training, deterring and responding to all manner of crisis and contingencies. We create options and provide decision space for our nation’s leaders. We respond to today’s crisis with today’s force today. We are our nation’s middleweight force. We are light enough to get there quickly, but heavy enough to carry the day upon arrival.

We are capable of operating independent of local infrastructure when required. We operate throughout the spectrum of threats – irregular, hybrid, and conventional – and the shady

areas where they overlap. Marines are always ready to respond whenever the nation calls, wherever the President may direct. We protect the American people by defeating our nation's enemies.

Now, I'd like to open the floor to your questions. And I'll provide that, make sure everybody has a copy of that when I leave.

STAFF: Yeah, what we'll do is we'll just start – go clockwise around the table.

GEN. AMOS: I'm going to sip coffee while you ask.

Q: Sure. General, given the progress you mentioned in Afghanistan, in Helmand, do you expect that the Marines will be able to begin reducing forces in July 2011?

GEN. AMOS: You know, I don't know the answer to that question. I support – and I always have – the president's decision to begin some type of withdrawal in July 2011. I think it's – I think it's the right statement, the right posture. I just don't know whether it's going to be Marines or not. It's too soon for me to tell.

Q: General, General Cartwright mentioned last week that he expects a shift or has seen a shift in NATO in Afghanistan from counterinsurgency operations to counterterrorism operations. In other words, moving way – while still trying to the clear, hold, build, but then focusing more on the special operations, night raids, things like that. Is this something that the Joint Chiefs are talking about? Do we expect to see practical implications of that in Helmand province?

GEN. AMOS: Yeah, I don't – in Helmand, just narrowing down to our piece of the country, I haven't seen that. We've always had some counterterrorism operations going on in Helmand, but I think that's always been going on throughout Afghanistan. And that's usually the special operations forces, as you imply.

I think what I've seen – and I'll see, I think, when I go here next week is kind of a nice balance between what we call, you know, counterinsurgency operations, which is really what, predominantly, what's occupying the Marines' time, is counterinsurgency operations and some type of blend between that and special ops, you know, things. But I can't – I can't comment on whether we are, as a country, beginning to make that shift or not.

Q: Thank you.

Q: General Cartwright talked about the budget initiatives and efficiencies and expressed less confidence that the Pentagon will be able to keep the savings from the services have found over the last several months.

I'm wondering, you know, I assume that the Marine Corps didn't go into this naively, but I wonder if you could kind of talk about how the possibility – that money, some of these savings that you guys have worked on, identified, could get swallowed up outside the Pentagon. And also, is the Marine Corps going to stay at 202?

GEN. AMOS: Yeah, you know, when Secretary Gates began the efficiencies effort, which, from my perspective, was absolutely the right thing to do and it wasn't because anybody was foolishly spending their money, it was a function of we had a lot – a lot of priorities and we had an opportunity to have a pretty robust budget and we've had that for some time. But it was the right thing to do, to tell us to look inside ourselves and say, okay, where can you find efficiencies?

So all the services began to – and I was the assistant commandant when that effort began. So in that capacity, I was deeply involved in it as kind of the head budget guy for the Marine Corps. So we found some pretty significant efficiencies that were all the right things to do. And I can't comment on those because as you're aware, those things have not been released in public yet and that will come out of the secretary of Defense when he sees fit to do so. So I support it. It was the right thing to do.

I will tell you, one of the – one of the things that it allowed us to do was to focus on recapitalizing earlier on in the next couple of years some of those equipment shortfalls that we have back at home station. You know, we've got everything you need plus some in Afghanistan and for us, that – part of the bill has been paid, but some of our home station equipment.

So as we looked at efficiencies, assuming that we're able to – and the secretary of Defense approves these, then our intention is to take some of those efficiencies, a large percentage of them, and actually begin to recapitalize some of our equipment back home. So back to the issue of are we going to be able to keep it?

Well, I'll tell you. I hope so. I know – I mean that was always the intent and too early to tell, but we certainly – every service went into this thing – as did our secretary of Defense – with honorable intentions that if you find efficiencies, you can keep them. So that's where I sit today and I hope I'm not the most surprised person in the room down the road. I hope we get to keep them; we need them.

Q: Two hundred and two – quickly? Two-hundred-and-two thousand? Do you expect the Marine Corps to shrink?

GEN. AMOS: I think it – I think it will. It will be post-Afghanistan. It'll be some – you know, when you think about where we are right now and how we got to – how we grew from basically a hundred – roughly 180,000 which is really what we were when we were sitting at when we grew to 202,000.

We did that for two reasons. One, so we could get to dwell – deployment-to-dwell in balance. We were – in many of our combat units, were 1-to-1. You'd go seven months, home seven months, go seven months, home seven months. So we wanted to – we wanted to grow the number of units and we did that.

We grew – number of what we call flags, you know, three infantry battalions, numbers of squadrons, numbers of combat logistics battalions. We grew a lot of what we call enablers,

which are things like human intelligence, COD, military police, truck companies, some of the unique types of capabilities that are found in the intelligence. Well, we grew those.

And we did them so that we could get to dwell to 1-to-2. So home, gone seven months, home – 14, number one. Then number two, it allowed us, then, to be able to do some of the other things, get back to some of the combined arms training, Twentynine Palms, get back to some of our amphibious roots and that kind of thing.

So both of those have helped. So if you take a look at our infantry battalions right now, they sit at 1-to-1.7. So they're gone seven months and they're home right around 11, okay? In a perfect world, what we would all like to see is gone seven months and home, 14. So to begin drawing down prior to coming out of Afghanistan would probably just, again, to pressurize that dwell. So we will come down, but it will be after Afghanistan.

Q: When the president – the co-chairs of the president's deficit panel came out with a list of recommendations in November. They, among other things, proposed or suggested cuts to expeditionary fighting vehicles, the STOVL as well as, I think, stopping production of the V-22 1649.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah.

Q: How concerned are you that these capabilities which provide the Marine Corps with that kind of forcible entry, for instance, in the case of – (inaudible, background noise) – would under – in the crosshairs of the deficit planners?

GEN. AMOS: You know, of course when I saw that, I – I wanted to invite them up to the Pentagon, my office and sit down and talk with me for a little bit and try to explain the significance of what they just suggested. No decisions have been made on any of those programs, as you're aware.

That is just input for the president. And I just like I do when I go out to folks outside – both internal to the Marine Corps and external, when I ask opinions. I have small groups of people that I – whose opinion I highly regard and I ask for their thoughts. Downsizing the Marine Corps is an area where I've asked for some opinions. So I respect that. No decisions have been made.

I'll tell you, our nation needs a forcible-entry capability. We need to be able to come – when you think about the world's population – 70 percent, I think, is the figure they tell me. Seventy percent of the world's population lives in the littorals, in other words, right along the coastline. And it doesn't have to be a wealthy country, it's just people that live along the coastlines. And it's just – it's a fact.

We are a maritime nation and we know that. If you take a look at the trade routes and you take a look at the shipping routes that come off of our country and come into our nation, we are significantly moving people and mostly equipment, exports and imports as a maritime nation.

So we need the ability to be able to do – to interdict in a maritime role sometime down the – in the future when things – when things are necessary.

I think we tend to just focus solely on the forcible-entry piece of this thing when in fact, if you go back to Haiti in the May-June time frame. And so here's our neighbor. Huge tragedy. And we ended up with 10 Navy amphibious ships – 10 of them. Now, we've only got 33 of them. So at one time, we had a third of our naval amphibious ships, two complete Marine expeditionary units, about 5,000 Marines and down off of Haiti.

And how were they going ashore? They were going ashore with our amphibious tractors, you know, the kind of the forerunner of the EFV. They were going ashore in helicopters. They were going ashore in the LCAC, the air-cushion vehicles. They were going ashore in other kinds of layage and bringing water and food and Marines, medical care, and all that – you know.

So we tend to think that if we buy a capability, we can only use it in this thing, so therefore, it is a narrow window and a very expensive capability. That's not the case. Everything, whether it be a V-22, whether it be a new CH-53K heavy-lift helicopter, whether it be some type of new amphibious tractor, can be used in Haiti.

It can be used off of 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, which is just coming home this week, flying 400 miles north into Pakistan to help our Pakistan brothers and sisters, fly food and water in there. I remember when Katrina hit and I was on the West Coast – excuse me, I was at Camp Lejeune. I was the three-star commander down there.

And I watched the Katrina – watched the tropical storm build and then – and watched the weather prognostications that it was going to go into a super hurricane. And saw it come across the southern tip of you know, Key West and kind of roar into the Persian – into the Gulf of Mexico.

We had just had a Marine expeditionary unit – the 24th – had just come back home from a deployment in the Persian Gulf. We reconstituted that unit, left all the weapons home; we didn't need them, put the Marines on board, the Navy sailed the ships to Morehead City. We put trucks, we put front-end loaders, we put bulldozers, we put water, we put food, we put communications equipment and we put amphibious tractors on those ships.

So as that amphibious force – I think the QSR (ph) was, as I recall, was the lead element on that plane. Rounded Florida and came up behind the hurricane. That was the – one of the few and only ways we could get ashore in places like Gulfport and Biloxi because the roads, Highway 10 was completely torn up.

And we could come across in amphibious vehicles. We've got pictures of what we now – our amphibious tractor – in the parish that's just south – I'm not sure which parish it was, in New Orleans, the one that was completely flooded. And you all remember that. It's the one that had water in it for almost – seemed like months.

And there's this amphibious assault vehicle with Marines in there, taking people out of their homes and stuff. So it's more than just – that may be a narrowly defined mission but the capabilities we've run whether it be the B-22 or whether it be the heavy-lift helicopters or whatever has applicability across the range of all those military operations. So probably a little bit more information than you wanted but I mean that's why it's so important to have – that you get the forcible entry capability that our nation may need. We may need that someday but in the meantime you get a range of capabilities that can be used from combat to humanitarian assistance. Yeah?

Q: Afghanistan question for you. After July, after the drawdown begins, if there is the decision that more forces need to be moved from the south and southwest to the east, are the Marine Corps, is it – are you open to splitting the Marines between Helmand and some territory in the east or would you prefer the Marines to remain in the southwest?

And slightly broader, do you think that the Marines have been hurt by not having any of the three-star commands in Afghanistan or Iraq during the course of these wars? And would you – would the Marines benefit from having a (shot ?) of putting one of your generals at the IJC next time that position opens up?

GEN. AMOS: Okay. Remember that last question so you can remind me when I answer that – after I'm done answering the – (laughter) – first. First of all, I have great confidence in the leadership on the ground in Afghanistan right now. I've known Dave Petraeus for a long time. I have enormous confidence in him.

I've known General – Lieutenant General Rodriguez since his days in the Pentagon and I have enormous confidence in him. And of course, General Mattis is a classmate of mine and for all intents and purposes, a blood brother and so I have – we've been to war twice together, side by side, and so I have enormous confidence in him.

So if the commanders on the ground look at the situation in Afghanistan and say, look, we need to put some Marines here or move some Marines there then we'll do it. It's as simple as that. We will do that. What they will take into account, though, is you're going to take into account, okay, the synergy of logistics. In other words, we're now going to cut Solomon's baby in two and so wherever we go we're going to end up having to have some type of logistics and supply and support there which we can do, by the way, and we will do that.

So there's a synergy for being where we are with regards to everything kind of comes into where we are, centrally located, and then it goes out in, kind of, the hub-and-spoke concept. We could probably still do something like that and depending on how the effort was weighted, but absolutely. What I would want to see in – which I think, probably, is the deeper question is, is that we'd be employed as a Marine Air-Ground Taskforce.

In other words, what the – the unique things the Marines bring – it's like my opening statement. You know, I kind of talk about the mission of the Marine Corps – is we bring – we bring a lot of the kit with us. It doesn't mean we don't – we don't need or want support or use

our allies and our coalition partners, because we do, because they have some unique capabilities that we don't bring. But we come with an awful lot.

So if we – if the Marines move around Afghanistan what I'd like to see happen – and again, I've got the competence in General Petraeus and Mattis that they'll do this – is, is that we go as a Marine Air-Ground Taskforce. So when we've got Marines on the ground and that we've got the capabilities to support them logistically, that we've got the capabilities to support them for an aviation perspective. So I mean, I think – I think you're going to find team players in anything that happens, any decisions that are made in Afghanistan with regards to where Marines go.

I was there when we transitioned from a – back to your second question – when we transitioned from a three-star headquarters to a two star. I was actually the three-star headquarters that was going to go in and take General Sattler's job at Iraq and then it was downgraded from a three to a two star. That decision is – that decision was a good one then. I mean, would I have liked to have gone in? There's not a Marine three star out there that wouldn't – wasn't chomping at the bit.

But as you look back over history, now, and you think about how it's all – you think of all the great three-star Corps commanders the Army has put in, into Iraq. I mean, just – they're Ray Odierno, Pete Chiarelli. They've had some great ones there – Tommy Metz – and the Marines have worked for them well. So it's not been an issue and you know what happened in Anbar and we have worked for the Army three star in Iraq and therefore the Army four star in Iraq, as well, for all those years until we left.

Would I like to see a Marine three star in Afghanistan, in charge? You bet I would. Is that my decision to make? No it's not. Will I support that if someone asks me? You bet I will. That's not a parochial decision on mine. I just think we have a lot of skilled commanders right now. I think all – both services, both the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps has an awful lot of skilled commanders that could do that. So I'm open to whatever the best military decision is on that, okay?

Q: Thanks.

MR. : Dave (ph)?

Q: Has anyone asked about F-35 yet? Or am I going on a (roll here)?

MR. : Go ahead, yeah.

Q: How concerned are you are – are you about the state of the F-35 preparing for the Marines? Are you satisfied with where the F-35 is? And I saw the U.K. made a decision to order less of them.

GEN. AMOS: Where the whole program is? No, I'm not. I'd like it to be farther along than it is. I came into Marine aviation in the Pentagon at 2000 as the deputy head of Marine

aviation and so I was there after the decision was made to neck down going from three type, model, series down to one at then when the F-35B was just PowerPoint slides. And so we – you know, I had hoped that it would be farther along right now.

I think all the – well, I'll just speak for myself. All the – we all would. But I'd like to see it farther along in the test program but we are where we are. This is a complicated airplane and we're going to work our way through the issues with it. I mean, I'm absolutely convinced of it. You know, we've got that – I'm very parochial, we've got the best engineers, I think, in the world, in this nation, and they're working on this – on this program and these airplanes to fix the fixes. To fix the things that need to be fixed and they will. I'm absolutely determined.

So I'd like it to be farther, what I call, to the left but we're not. So it's – we're approaching 2011, we are where we are and so we just need to make good decisions at this point and to bring the air plan and the capability in.

Q: Does concern you or startle you about the U.K. ordering less of those?

GEN. AMOS: I don't think so. You know, I read that and it get awful lot of traction and I don't – and it was big in the news but I tell you what, the idea behind the requirement for the Marine Corps for the STOVL, the F-35B, is – hasn't changed one bit because of the U.K. decision. I mean, like I said in my opening statement: I mean, this is bigger than the United States Marine Corps. This is a national capability when we start talking about 22 capital ships with fifth-generation airplanes versus just 11. So I'm – our requirement stands.

The other thing I'd say and then I'll – then I'll move on is that there's only one of us at the table here that could – and I don't mean this to sound arrogant – that can really appreciate Marine expeditionary aviation. When I was a wing commander in Iraq and we ended up with about 15,000 Marines and I think when you included at the UAVs, as I recall at the end, somebody was adding up the number of airplanes and I think I had somewhere – I think I peaked at about 410 or 420, somewhere around there, and that was F-18s and Harriers and C-130s.

And I mean, there was a period of time where owned almost the big chunk of the Marine C-130. We didn't have enough ramp space for all the C-130s – UAVs, helicopters, six big-deck amphibious ships, six of them in the Persian Gulf. I went out and in 24 hours flew every one of them. I've got pictures of all six of them in formation – stunning. So why am I saying that? Because we worked our way all the way through Baghdad and up to Tikrit and the way we were able to do that, to support General Mattis and to support General Conway, was Marine expeditionary aviation.

I've got pictures in my office of Harriers sitting on Highway 1 at Sheik Hantush just before we made the turnoff of Highway 1 and came in the backdoor of Baghdad. I got pictures of me sitting out in the CH-46 – on the highway with Joe Dunford, who was a colonel then, is now the assistant commandant. He had 5th Marines and I said, I want you to clear this highway so we can land C-130s tonight, tonight and start bringing fuel in and ammunition for General Dunford – then Colonel Dunford. Brought Harriers in, flew our helicopters off of there. We flew off of bombed out runways, taxiways all the way to Tikrit.

So I've got a real – I mean, I got pictures. I've got a real sensitivity for the value of the expeditionary piece of Marine aviation. That's what – that's what we bring. We bring that capability. Nobody else has that and we'll operate off of roads. We built a runway in the desert in Kuwait just before the war started and housed the overflow of C-130s there and 53 helicopters there in the desert. I mean, there wasn't an ounce of matting on there. It was in the sand.

So that's what we bring and that's why STOVL aviation, the ability to fly these is so critically important. More information than you wanted, I apologize. It's exciting. I got to tell you what, you see – when you really see the pictures it comes to life. Yes ma'am?

Q: General, in “don't ask, don't tell” testimony earlier this month Secretary Gates said that one of his big concerns was – I think he called it his worst nightmare – was the idea that the courts could overturn the law before the military had a chance to implement it. I'd just like to get your thoughts on that. Is that a big concern of yours? I mean, obviously, you've spoken about your reservations about overturning the law. But you know, I'd like to, you know, find out your thoughts on that.

And then also, too, beyond that I was just wondering if there was anything in the report that you find surprising once you read through it? Anything that sort of changed your thinking on overturning the ban?

GEN. AMOS: First of all, you all have been very kind to me this morning. You waited this long to ask that question. (Laughter.)

MR. : She beat me by one – (cross talk).

Q: Halfway through – (laughter).

GEN. AMOS: I'm surprised. I don't – I don't know how dangerous the court matter is versus the legislative matter. I know that there's been a lot of discussion about it. There was discussion in the hearing that came up a week ago last Friday when the services chief testified – service chiefs testified. I can't speak to that because I don't know – I mean, I truly don't. That's out of my lane.

I tell you what, when I – when I was preparing for that testimony I spent a lot of time – this was not, there was nothing – and I – I think every service chief – this was not a – there was no flippant rush-right-in preparation. This was very, very deep, thoughtful – I read the report, the survey over and over again. I had the opportunity, early on, before it became public, the service chiefs had an opportunity to see the early draft versions of it and I spent a lot of time thinking about it.

And here's where I – I took comfort in the – at the end of the day that I was being asked, as the commandant of the Marine Corps, to provide my best military advice. I know that sounds kind of corny but it really was the truth and I think you saw that, if you watched the testimony, because even though my recommendation – and you know what my recommendation is.

Even though my recommendation was counter to the direction, I think, some folks had wanted me to go – to a member they thanked me for being willing to give my best military advice. They thanked me for my honesty and that's why I say – I mean, I take great comfort in that. No words – you know, I'm – that's what I'm paid to do. I'm paid to command the Marine Corps, you know, lead our nation's Marine Corps and then when asked, be honest and give the best military advice.

And so I – you know, when I walked out of there I felt good about that. I mean, I – my opinion was regarded, it was listened to. Nobody said – nobody threw their arms up and said, oh, how can you feel that way? You know what, there was none of that. It was – it was thank you. You know, they may disagree with it but thank you. So I – I felt good about that aspect of it.

And again, I want to emphasize, this was – this was a very thoughtful, introspective period of time for me to make sure that I was representing the Marine Corps and setting aside any personal – any of that personal stuff. You had to absolutely set it aside because that's not what I'm paid to do. I'm paid to be the commandant of the Marine Corps – back to the report.

There were – you know we asked the questions – and I said this in my opening statement – we asked the questions and the Marines answered and I have to listen to that and that's where I came in on it. I wasn't sure how it was going to go. I truly didn't. And there was no predisposition in my mind as to which way the Marines would come in. I was – I mean, I really took note of the fact that the combat forces said, listen, this is going to be a distraction now and so that's where I – I mean that's where I came in on it. So I was – I don't know if I was surprised at that but I certainly took – I took note of that.

Q: And you'd said it was a struggle for you. I mean, in what way – you know, what parts of that did you really struggle with (at that time ?) ?

GEN. AMOS: I wanted to first find out what the Marines were thinking about it. I mean, that was important to me. This is not a democracy that we run in the Marine Corps we just support democracy. And as – and as has been said, and I completely agree with it, this is not a referendum. You know, we don't – in the Marine Corps you don't – everybody in favor raised their hand and if we got 51 percent then we march off, that's not what we do.

But as a commandant of the Marine Corps I wanted to find out what my Marines were telling me so that was – that was – that was – I mean, I spent a lot of time reading that. Okay, what are they really saying? What are the – what are the – the Marines – the noncombat Marines, what are they saying? And the noncombat Marines I think, by and large, said yeah, we can deal with this. You know, we can – this is something we can deal with.

My combat forces which right now, of course, are primarily focused on what we got in the ground in Afghanistan. We've got some noncombat forces in Afghanistan but not a lot. I mean, just about everybody that's on the ground in Afghanistan gets in a convoy, goes – now, you may be a logistician or you may be a, you know, a supply Marine or you may be an admin

Marine but you're a rifleman first and I mean that both sexes – I don't mean that – that's not a sexist comment – and you're going to find yourself putting your gear on and you're going to get into a convoy and you're going to join your fellow Marines and you're going to be outside the wire.

So I look at all those young men and women that are in Afghanistan for us right now as combat Marines. So I think for them, you know, they – not I think, they did. They came out, what I consider to be – they sent me a very strong message. I think the rest of the Marine Corps was telling me, sir, we can – if this changes we can get on with it. That's what I got out of it.

Q: Keep it going on exactly on that point.

GEN. AMOS: I thought I answered all the questions on that? (Laughter.)

Q: A little deeper. You know, we heard a lot that the worry, the concern is unit cohesion, especially combat groups and especially in Afghanistan. And what I've never heard come from at least, you know, your level is exactly what – thought would happen. What does that mean? Explain to, you know, a lower rank what's going to break down that would put them at risk, put the war effort at risk should repeal happen? How does – what does that mean? Unit cohesion – (cross talk).

GEN. AMOS: I don't have an answer to that. You know, I don't have an answer to that. I mean, there's no – you know, they didn't – they didn't come back and say, okay, then describe – if you're worried about unit cohesion then describe it, tell us. There was none of that. I mean, it wasn't in there. It was simply asked about unit effectiveness, it talked about cohesion.

You know, it certainly questioned whether have you been in combat before? I think you've seen all the questions. Have you been in combat before? And if the answer was no then you began to answer a series of other questions. If you've been in combat then you begin to answer another set of questions that focused on that experience.

So I don't know what they expected. But I – here's what – here's where I came down on this thing, is that – have you been out with Marines in an intense firefight?

Q: No.

GEN. AMOS: You, personally. Okay. And I'm not – that is a unique experience. And when that happens, there is no margin for distraction. There's no margin for thinking about anything other than working as a cohesive unit, whether it be a fire team with roughly a half-a-dozen Marines, whether it be a squad with a little bit more than a dozen, 13 Marines.

They are like an amoeba. So when – if you're sitting around the – you know, quote, the campfire, unquote – that's a different story. But when you're – when you are – when your – when your life hangs on the line on the intuitive behavior of the young man – and this is predominantly what we're talking about right here – young man that sits to your right and to your left. You don't want anything distracting that.

So when I say they're like an amoeba, it means they flow and they think alike. That doesn't mean – I mean that in the most positive sense. They live and breathe with one another to the point where they know precisely what the other one is going to do. They don't have to ask. They don't say – they don't say, cover me. They don't say, do this, do that – it just happens. That comes with intense training.

And that's what's happening in Sangin right now. That's what's happening up in the northeast corner of our zone. So the Marines came back and they said, look, anything that's going to break or potentially break that focus and cause any kind of distraction may have an effect on cohesion. I mean, that's how it – that's how I – that's where I came down to. I don't want that – I don't want to permit that opportunity to happen.

And I'll tell you why: If you go up to the Bethesda hospital – and I'll be up there tomorrow afternoon; he was up there just a little bit ago – Marines are up there with no legs. None. We got Marines at Walter Reed with no limbs. So mistakes and inattention or distractions cost Marines' lives. That's the currency of this fight – is the young 18- and 19-year-old male Marine. That's the currency.

So I take that very, very seriously. I don't want to lose any Marines to the distraction. I don't want to have any Marines that I'm visiting at Bethesda with no legs be a result of any type of distraction.

So that's where I come down on this thing. So I can't answer what kind of behavior – I just know that in that environment, which is different than the environment, perhaps, at Camp Lejeune, at Pendleton, when you're home on leave – but in that environment, there's no margin for – and I'm not willing to accept that.

Q: Okay.

Q: Tough one to ask – and Joint Strike Fighter, again, if and that – that was pretty eloquent – (inaudible). The Joint Strike – were you given a two-year reprieve by OSD early this month to prove out the capability of the plane?

GEN. AMOS: Well, let me ask you – because I read in the newspaper last week when I was traveling out at Camp Pendleton and Miramar that you quoted that – so where did you get your source? (Laughter.) So where did you hear that from?

Q: I heard this from several, so actually – for the record, I just want to ask you a straight-up question on that, if that's – if it's true that you were given another two years to prove the thing out. Then I have just a follow-up.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. Here's what happened about 10 days ago. I sat with the secretary of Defense. And I had an opportunity because of all the – of all the headlines and all the stuff that we just kind of talking about it – about the program and other issues – mechanical issues with the airplane – and delays and lots of speculation about cost and whatever.

I had an opportunity to sit down with the secretary of Defense – you know, 10 days – two weeks ago – and tell him about the importance of STOVL aviation to the United States Marine Corps. I had that opportunity. And I related to him some of the stories that I – that I shared with everybody around here about going all the way to Tikrit and runways and roads. And I said, that’s what this airplane brings. And we – and it’s easier to overlook that if you’re not familiar with it.

If you’re just thinking about it as a program – okay, this is the “A”, the “B” and the “C.” And that’s why I said it’s bigger than just the Marine Corps. So I had an opportunity to explain that to him. I have a discussion with him. And it was a great discussion. I think it was an informative discussion. And to the best of my knowledge, it was received very positively. But I can’t say that the secretary of the Defense has made his final decision on this thing. That’s why I asked you where you got your information from.

I know that I had my day in court. I was very appreciative of that. It was well received. And I’m optimistic. But to date, the secretary of Defense, to the best of my knowledge, has not come out and said, okay, this is – these are my decisions on this program or that program or that. That’s not happened, to the best of my mind.

Q: Those are the PBPs and the various resource memos that you’re going to get in the next few weeks. What does this aircraft have to prove in the next couple of years to avoid cancellation? You’re pretty sanguine about it, but – you almost sound too sanguine, given the issues. But I don’t think you want to come off as Pollyannaish. But what does it need to prove?

GEN. AMOS: I think what has to happen is we have to – we have to be able to prove to some folks. I mean, I don’t – you know what – some of them may be sitting around this table – that the issues with – the mechanical issues – those fixes of the – you know, there’s an aux-door issue on the airplane. There is a – it’s a – it’s a shaft, a thermal expansion on the shaft –

Q: And a crank issue.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah, that’s right. And it’s all part of the transition from horizontal flight to vertical flight as it transitions to the lift fan. We have to prove to people that those are – and folks both inside and outside the Pentagon – that those are doable, that, that – those are fixable, that it can be done – and that we have the technology.

And then – and then once that’s done, then we have to say, okay, how’s the testing of the airplane coming – well, we’ve fixed that. Will there be other issues? Well, sure, there’ll be other issues. I mean, by the way, there’ll be issues on the “A” version and there’ll be issues on the “C” version. We only have one “C” variant – the carrier variant over Pax River right now. The “A” version has been flying out at Edwards.

So with each one of those – both the “A”s and the “B”s have been the predominant one. They’ve learned off of one another. The “A” and “C”, with exception of the lift fan, are about, I think – the number I heard – are about 80 percent similar. In other words, if the flight qualities

and the software for flying an airplane – if things are informed in the “A” model, okay, they go back in, software engineers change the software program, and then they come back and they fix – they fix it. It goes into “B.” So – vice versa – same thing will happen with the “C.”

So I think we need to prove, number one, that you can – that the engineers can fix it. I have been told that they already have the fixes designed. I have been told that they already have at least two of the three fixes perhaps even in – even in the airplane. But I – but I’m not positive about that. I’ll know more about – that’s why I’m going over on Friday.

So mechanically, can these – are these things kind of, part of the normal progression of an airplane development of something of this nature? And the answer is, yes. The next question is, then, is the juice worth the squeeze? In other words, if we fix these – yeah – is the value added out the backside worth it? And that’s when I go back to my expeditionary experience on this thing. And the answer is absolutely, yes – it is worth it.

So I – and the other thing that has to happen is that – I mean, costs are important. So how can we control costs, you know, within program for all three variants? And how do we keep the program moving along to test the – those are all things that have to happen. You know, each airplane is designed to fly so many sorties a month of test sorties. When I checked, the last – aircraft number three and four – as I recall last week when I asked the question – are at or they’ve either met or exceeded their monthly test sorties.

The first two versions – the first into the – aircraft number one and aircraft number two were the ones that were having issues. So we need to get back on the test profile so we’re flying numbers of sorties, and the airplanes are flying and discovering things. I mean, that’s why – that’s why it’s called “test.” It’s developmental test – is where we are right now.

Q: I got to ask you. Are you going to abandon the 2012 IOC? (Inaudible) – I don’t see how you can do it, but –

GEN. AMOS: I don’t think so. I don’t think so. I think we will – we will have an IOC after that. And people ask me that all the time – like, oh my gosh. And the answer to that is, well, we’re going to IOC the airplane when the airplane’s ready to go. IOC, for us, is defined as one squadron fully stood up – by the way, we’re going to have a training squadron already stood up and all that stuff – but one squadron of 10 jets fully stood up, aircrew fully trained to go to combat.

In other words, if the phone rang and said, launch the F-35Bs from this squadron, that’s what I would say – we can send them. We wouldn’t have to go, you know, I’m sorry, they’re not ready yet because the crews are still in training. That’s what IOC means for us. You know, with everything moving along to the right, then the IOC naturally will look to the right. I don’t know when it’ll be. I’m really not wringing my hands over that. I just want to get to – because it’ll be when it’ll be. Go ahead, next –

Q: Thank you.

MR. : Go ahead.

Q: General, I got to return to your comments, if I can, about “don’t ask, don’t tell” and the importance of not allowing or introducing any distractions to Marine-combat units. And you spoke eloquently about the intensity of those firefights and how, you know, you can’t tolerate any issues or factors that might understandably lead to casualties.

But to follow up on that – maybe this sounds like a dumb question – but why would allowing gays to serve openly in the Marines put Marines at risk like that? What would happen in combat that – I mean, are Marines going to start to wondering about the loyalty – or the people serving next to them? And to follow up – as you know, the survey showed that the Marines, more than other services, were – substantially more than other services – are opposed to repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Why do you think that is?

GEN. AMOS: I can only speculate on that – on your second question. You know, we – the Marine Corps has – we recruit a very, very small percentage of the population across our country. And I – it’s probably less than one-tenth of 1 percent of people across this nation who would even consider stepping into a recruiter’s office – and let alone putting up with 12 weeks of boot camp or basically 10 weeks of Officer Candidate School. They would – they would – they just wouldn’t do it.

We recruit on what is historically been – what I would call, and I don’t have any other way to say this – but a warrior ethos. We have. And I don’t think anybody that has either been around us – and this is not a – I’m not trying to be a macho thing here, I’m just saying this is why – this is – this is what, you know, the nation hires – we’re the smallest service. The nation hires its Marines to be that – to be that crisis-response force.

And we live hard. We train hard. We live in hard conditions. We do tough things. And so we recruit young men and women for that kind of ethos. I think it’s – I think it’s – and this is an important point because if you take a look at our recruiting – just go to all the things that you see on TV, you know, when you’re watching sports and whatever – it’s never, you know, we want to give you – if you join us, we’re going to give you a college education. And when you leave, we’re going to – we’re going to give – or if you sign up, we’re going to give you a \$40,000 bonus. We never say that.

We say, if you think you’re tough enough to join us, then throw your hat in the ring. And by the way, we’re not one bit interested in joining you. You have to join us. And then we put them through 12 weeks of boot camp which is – I mean, it’s arguably the toughest, I think, probably, in the world. And if you’re good enough to come out of the backside of that, then we’re going to put you through about another 30 to 40 days depending on whether you’re going to be a grunt or whether you’re going to do something else in the Marine Corps – 30 to 45 days more training. It’s called the School of Infantry.

And then we’re going to put you in a unit and deploy you someplace where people probably want to kill you. So –

Q: But are you saying that gays can't do that?

GEN. AMOS: No, I – (inaudible, cross talk). No, that's not what I'm saying.

Q: Because surely you know that there are gay Marines that are already in the service, right?

GEN. AMOS: Right, I do. That's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying – you asked me – you asked me why would – why wouldn't Marines – you know, what is it that would cause Marines to be worried in a combat situation? And I'm – and I'm responding with the fact that we recruit on a warrior ethos, so we already have a young man or woman that comes in with an expectation. Okay? There's an expectation as to what kind of organization they're going to join.

And that same – or a segment of that group that are deployed in combat have come back and said, General, this is a concern of ours. I mean, I can't – I can't explain what the expectations are. I can't explain, you know, what they think might happen. But what I can do is refer to what they – what their answers were when we asked the question.

So it's not a matter – will a gay or a lesbian fight in combat? That's not what I'm saying. We asked the question of our combat forces, and they came back and they said, we have concern with – now, whether you agree with it or not, or whether somebody else agrees with it or not, that wasn't the question. The question was, what are your concerns? Cohesion, unit effectiveness – and that was the answer. So I can't dig into it and figure out, okay, well, what is exactly your concern?

Q: Well, with all due respect, why not? I mean, I think you yourself have said that it's inevitable things are going to change. So at some point, the Marines are going to have to deal with that, right?

GEN. AMOS: Actually, I didn't say that.

Q: I apologize then.

GEN. AMOS: Yeah. I didn't say that. And I'll tell you the reason why I said what I did – my position was on my – on my military advice was is that – was that this right now is a very intense period of time for a pretty healthy slice of the United States Marine Corps. This is not training. This is not get on a ship and go to the Western Pacific on what we call a unit deployment. This is what I call the real deal. And the forces that wear this uniform that are in the middle of what I call the real deal, came back and told their commandant of the Marine Corps they had concerns. That's all I need. I don't need a staff study. I don't need to hire three Ph.Ds. to tell me what it – what to interpret it.

I've got – I've got Marines that came back to me as their commandant and said, we are – we have concerns. So if they have concerns, I do too. That's as simple as that.

MR. : Sir, we're going to have to get you to your next – your next appointment.

Q: Can I follow on that – just the last – well, give – well, let him follow. I mean, he was – he was pretty – impassioned comments, so I think –

GEN. AMOS: No. I'm just telling you the truth. It's not – I mean, it's –

Q: Just to follow that. Are you a – that line seems to contradict the line of all the chiefs saying if repeal happens, our guys will do it as order – as they do everything else – because they're the best. And you just – you opened up this whole session by saying, the Marines are not a democracy. Yet you're telling us, but that's what they want, so I'm going to listen to it.

It seems like – to me, is this a leadership issue in your mind? I'm trying to just – to just gel the two lines of, they say they can't do it, but if they – if we have to, we'll tell them they'll do it, and they'll do it. It seems – I don't know if it's trust – or I don't know what's – (inaudible, cross talk).

GEN. AMOS: That's actually – yeah. No, don't make it too hard – because at the end of the day, I have the greatest respect for the civilian control of the government. In fact, I'm probably the biggest fan of civilian control of the government – or the – excuse me, of the military – of the military. And that's exactly what I told the Senate Armed Services Committee. That's exactly what I've told the senior leadership.

I said, if you change this – and should it be changed a week from now, two weeks from now, three weeks from now, then it's not a matter of, well, let's reconsider it. No. It's a matter of, yes sir. And you'll see that Sergeant Major Kent and I – right out in front – and it's exactly what I told the lieutenants when I left this morning when you were punctually waiting for me here, when I was late – was one of the final things I looked to the lieutenants because one of the questions came up – similar – you asked about “don't ask, don't tell.”

And they said, sir, what happens if it changes – if it becomes law? And I said, well, that's actually easy. I mean – I mean, well, we'll work our way through the issues on how we do that. We'll figure that out. But if you're asking me what are we going to do about it as the Marine Corps? That's easy. I'm going to get in step and do it smartly.

And that's not trite. I mean, that is – you will get – you will – you will see if this law changes, you'll see the commandant of the Marine Corps in public forums, probably in videos, travelling around the Marine Corps as rapidly as I can, looking at my commanders and looking at my senior Marines in the eye and say, this is law. This is what Congress has told us to do. And if Congress says this what they want us to do, then we're going to do it.

And you go, well, that's a – no, it's not a dichotomy. That's not – that's not truthful at all. And it's – that part is actually very easy for me. I just – I look at – and I – you know, I can look at my senior leadership – and I've said it to them. We'll do it. I got it. Okay?

Q: Thanks, General.

GEN. AMOS: All right. Thanks, everybody. We'll get – do you want to – how do you want to get the copies of them? Do you want to just send it to them electronically – (inaudible, cross talk)?

MR. : I've got – I got paper. And I'll – and I'll send them an email, sir.

GEN. AMOS: Okay.

(END)