

# **Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps**

**Address to the Center for Strategic and International Studies  
(Remarks as prepared)**

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Commandant  
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GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you: Dr Hamre...Kim Wincup...& Trustees and Members. I've been looking forward to coming here for the past several weeks. Thanks for the opportunity to speak about our Nation's Crisis Response Force...its Marines.

I note that it has been about 50 years since the founding of CSIS. If you think back to the security environment of fifty years ago... you really get a sense for the timeless nature of our security challenges. Back then, a long counterinsurgency effort in Algeria was drawing to an end. The number of U.S. counterinsurgency advisors was dramatically increasing in a little known place called... Vietnam. Colonial nations in Africa were just gaining their independence. China and India were clashing over disputed borders. State conflict threatened... as cooperation between Cuba and the Soviet Union escalated into the missile crisis. Whenever we think we have reached an end to instability and conflict... whenever we think we can predict with certainty the nature of our security challenges... we probably need to spend a little more time reviewing history.

We've got a little bit of an anniversary of our own this week. Many of you know that this Saturday... we celebrate the Marine Corps birthday. We've been doing what we do since 10 November 1775. That makes this year our 237th (...I don't feel a day over 100.) I won't go into the stories of how the Marine Corps was launched in a Philadelphia tavern... but there was a lot happening in those days too.

The British Empire struggled with a messy counterinsurgency campaign in the American colonies, and soon the French, Spanish and Dutch sought to chip away at British hegemony... in a globalizing world. Competitors everywhere sought to take advantage of the perceived weakness of an overstretched superpower. You know... taking stock of where you have been seems like a good way to figure out where you might be going. I'd like to talk to you just a little bit about where YOUR Marine Corps has been over the last couple of years. I think that will help shed some light on where we are today as a Corps... and where we are going over the next few years.

Today we have about 6,800 Marines remaining in Afghanistan... down from about 21,000 at our peak. I am not going to give you a play-by-play of the last three years in Helmand province, but the results have been very encouraging. The Marine Corps has served shoulder-to-shoulder with some great heroes from the U.S. Army, the UK, Australia, Georgia, and a host of other allies. We have worked closely with special operators from all services... with the U.S. Air Force overhead... and our ever-present Navy' comrades right there with us on the battlefield.

As a team... we've effectively pushed the Taliban out of the ribbon of civilization that runs through the Helmand River Valley. In Helmand Province... we've established an economy and decent governance in our wake, and have made major progress in replacing opium poppies with other cash crops. Most importantly, we've left an accomplished and well-trained 215th Corps of the Afghan Army as our relief force. These men are tough. They are disciplined. They are well-trained, and they are absolutely dedicated to freedom and just rule inside their nation.

They will not willingly allow the return of a Taliban state...they have come too far for that. Our accomplishments have come at the expense of a lot of hard work, battlefield courage, long deployments and wounded young men and women. In some cases... our successes have come at an even greater price... the life of a young Marine or Sailor.

We honor the service of the 1,223 Marines who have been killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan...memories of their service & courage will live on in our Corps for another 237 years. But, while we've been fighting hard in Afghanistan, Marines have also been operating around the globe... protecting our citizens... our allies... our interests. These Marines, working in close partnership with our Navy brothers and sisters... have been operating behind the front page of the papers, but very much on the front lines of crisis.

Marines have been continually forward deployed and at sea for decades as the nation's ready expeditionary force...the last several years have been no exception. It was Marine aviation that provided the initial strikes and initial airspace control for the NATO force that responded as part of operation ODYSSEY DAWN. Marines in MV-22s, operating from amphibious ships just off the coast conducted personnel recovery operations of the Air Force F-15 pilot on the ground in Libya.

Other Marines responded from the sea to the massive floods 700 miles deep into northern Pakistan. When Japan suffered a triple-catastrophe from its earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant disasters... forward deployed Marines responded immediately with heavy equipment, aircraft, personnel and precious life saving supplies.

Just in the last year, Marines have shared exercises, training and partnership building in over 100 nations. We even showed-up in New York and New Jersey this past week, helping folks recover from the devastation that Sandy left behind...as we gather here this morning...nice and warm and dry...Marines are still helping our fellow Americans in need. Marines are daily engaged in everything from reinforcing our embassies with FAST teams, to supporting Joint Special Operations, counter-piracy and counter-terrorism missions around the globe. Marines are purpose-built for exactly the kind of security environment that we are living in today. In that regard, I'd like to talk briefly about the role of the Marine Corps in today's security environment.

First, let me reiterate that Marines are an inherently naval force. I know that does not sit comfortably with some whose context for warfare is strictly tied to physical domains. There may be added complexity in the idea of a force that operates comfortably on land, air, and sea... one that specializes in those cross-domain seams. Some would like to see us branded as 'ground forces', or as a 'second land army.' We are not!

The Marine Corps fills a unique lane in the joint fight... one that leverages the sea as the primary conduit for global power projection. The sea provides the primary global commons through which American power is projected... and Marines ...with the amphibious warships that carry them... are purpose-built for exploiting this avenue.

But, while we are not a second land army, we are still able to contribute to a land campaign.

We've done that many times over our nation's history, and in each case we have acquitted ourselves well. From Trenton to Belleau Wood, from Anbar to Helmand province... when the nation has needed to throw us into the breach, we have been there. You'll get no apology from me for our broad utility and flexibility for our national leaders. But that should not serve to confuse anyone about our primary role.

Our nation pays for a Marine Corps to be its principle Crisis Response Force...a force that is in such a high state of readiness that it can respond to today's crisis...with today's force...today. Not tomorrow...or two weeks from now...but today!

Amphibious forces provide a range of capabilities from the sea. We can loiter unseen over the horizon or provide a visible deterrent. We can temporarily work ashore building strong partnerships, then swiftly re-embark that same force to respond to a distant crisis.

With modern aviation, we can provide kinetic strike or responsive maneuver from hundreds of miles out to sea. We can influence events ashore and return to the sea with the same swiftness we arrived. That broad-based utility makes amphibious ships with embarked Marines... the ultimate Swiss Army knife of the Joint force. Instability is an enduring feature of a rapidly globalizing world. At CSIS, you see it every day. Because of our forward engagement around the world... we see it too. Changing demographics and competition for resources breeds violence and extremism.

The Marine Corps provides the force able to swiftly intercede in crisis. Our readiness buys time and decision-space for our national leaders, probably their most valuable commodity when things have gone bad. Our readiness and strategic mobility gives our leaders time to assess the situation and formulate a more deliberate response. As a nation, we desire peace, but there are times when our enemies compel U.S. intervention. Because we operate from the sea and forward deployed locations, we provide an effective initial crisis-response capability when our citizens, allies or interests are threatened.

Third, Marines provide a stabilizing forward presence that deters conflict. Forward presence builds trust that cannot be surged when conflict looms. Forward presence matters. I've heard folks talk about virtual presence, and I understand what they are trying to say. But from our allies' perspective, virtual presence is actual absence. Actual presence demonstrates shared commitments and shared dangers. These are critical as we bolster national credibility and deterrence through persistent forward naval engagement. Virtual presence says something much less powerful. Virtual presence would not have helped in Sendai. It would not have helped in Pakistan, and it would not have helped in the Philippines. With dispersed expeditionary units afloat near likely crisis areas, and prepositioned equipment stationed forward aboard deployed shipping, the Navy/Marine team is a visible and tangible reminder of our nation's resolve.

Fourth, Marines build strong partners. Marines build trust. I get the sense at times when I am speaking publically that some folks think that investment in building partner capacity is 'charity

work.’ It is not! It is an investment in collective security throughout the global commons. If our national grand strategy has an element of collective norms and collective security at its core, then partnerships are incredibly important. Marines have long been a security partner of choice. Sea-based Marines tread lightly on host nation infrastructure and sovereignty, making our presence less onerous to host governments. Most of the nations we deal with have defense forces that are much smaller than their US counterparts. Because we’re sized more-closely to the security forces of many other nations, the U.S. Marine Corps provides a model of a tightly integrated air-ground-logistics force. That’s something they are eager to achieve with their own armed forces. The scalability of Marines resonates with them, as does our warrior ethos.

Fifth, Marines assure access ashore. Nobody likes to think about this one... but I think we take great risk if we discount the capability to project our national power at the place and time of our choosing. There are times where the US must create access to protect our citizens, defend innocents, and intervene in dangerous situations... even when that access is not freely given. Our power projection capabilities enable the U.S. joint force to push open the door of access where we need to. This ability to ‘go where the nation is not invited’ fundamentally underwrites the deterrent value of the joint force, and provides strategic decision-makers options that complement precision strike or nuclear capabilities.

This doesn’t mean amphibious assaults like you’ve seen in the movies. Those images of past successes sometimes cast a long shadow. That isn’t how it is done in the modern day. It is not how we do it as part of the Joint team. Modern amphibious operations seek to achieve ‘precision maneuver’ that creates and exploits seams in forces that might oppose a landing. Uniquely, Marines operate without the requirement for nearby land bases, and can sustain themselves from the sea without intact and secured ports and airfields. The fact that you can accomplish that mission with the same forces that are out there daily building collective security partnerships and responding to crisis... makes Marines a pretty compelling security investment when money is tight.

And, let’s talk quickly about how Marines respond to human disaster. Although amphibious capabilities are built for war and maintained to fight, their application to relieving human crisis is a natural extension of our multi-domain utility. In this increasingly globalized age, one where every natural or manmade disaster draws the attention of the world, the U.S. cannot be silent in the face of humanitarian crisis. I absolutely believe that timely U.S. responses strengthen the credibility of our security promises, and increase the effectiveness of our deterrence. The ability of amphibious forces to provide air, ground, and sea response in times of humanitarian disaster... without imposing burdens on already stressed infrastructure... makes us a unique contributor to US capability and influence.

That’s a short list of some of our major roles. I may be a little biased, but I think when you look at the numbers, Marines are a pretty compelling security investment. The Marine Corps provides significant return on investment for every security dollar. When the Nation pays the ‘sticker price’ for her Marines, she gets not only the least-expensive force in the DoD arsenal... she

also gets one that's highly skilled, forward deployed... and able to operate across the full range of military operations.

Perhaps our most important role is the Congressional mandate we have carried proudly since 1952. For over half a century, the Marine Corps has met the mandate of the 82d Congress to be, 'the most ready when the nation is generally least ready.' Perhaps Jay Leno said it best 3 days after the attacks on 9/11 when he said..."Now it's time to send in the Marines to settle the score!"

Let me talk briefly about fiscal constraints, as that's what's on most everybody's mind today. We know the Department will continue to be challenged in the coming fiscal environment. While impacts will be significant... I am confident we will weather this storm too. My measure of success is the quality and ethos of the individual Marine. My most important measure is not how many Marines or items of equipment we have, but how ready we are to accomplish our mission. We have to be ready when the nation calls. Protecting our readiness is probably the number one concern on my plate. Being our nation's expeditionary crisis response force... there is no effective substitute for readiness. A hollow force is not an option for us.

I'm also concerned about impacts to our investment accounts. The Marine Corps spends ~14% of its budget on modernization. That means we have a lot of small programs that suffer disproportionately when funding is restricted...even when cuts are proportionally applied. For us that means a diminished ability to equip Marines with the things that give them a qualitative edge over their opponents on the ground. We've been able to sustain our nation's defense strategy with smaller numbers of well-trained and well-equipped individuals. I think there is a moral responsibility to continue to do that.

The Marine Corps is a young force and a lean one. There is not a lot of overhead for the Marine Corps... we're mostly just muscle. To me that implies another mandate to invest in those individual Marines...and to care for them and their families. We live in the day of the 'strategic corporal.' Our young men and women are making decisions of consequence on the battlefield every day. We are gearing our training and educational establishment to ensure that the level of knowledge, confidence and skills that make these young Marine leaders so successful does not erode or atrophy.

OK enough...let me close by telling you 'thank you' again for your time, your attention, and for what you do to help preserve the security of our great nation. I wish each of you a happy 237th Marine Corps birthday on Saturday! I look forward to your questions.

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