

A Conceptual Framework for the Future

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The following article is based on extemporaneous remarks made by the Commandant during his appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 16 March 1988.



I would like to take just a few moments to expand on some thoughts with respect to strategy and our conceptual framework of the future.

It is my view that it's more important than ever to take a hard look at ourselves, at the military forces that we have today, and the capabilities that are inherent therein. We need to examine where we are and, more importantly, where we must go in the future. There have been gradual changes in the international security environment and less gradual changes in the impact of domestic issues on defense policy. We need to recognize them. We need to focus on what's best for the country.

This is really another way of saying that I don't believe we can continue to have all of our general purpose forces organized, trained, and equipped for the most difficult type of war in the conventional sense; that is, for a global war with the Soviet Union. And when we look at the declining budgets in the last three years and at the resources they provide, recognition of this becomes even more critical. Everybody says, "Sure we can continue to do what has to be done," but I would like to state for the record, clearly, that the risk is going up not just today, but in terms of risk in the years ahead.

If you really think about strategy, it doesn't change all that much. Our national grand strategy today is not too different from the one we had when we emerged from World War II—nor should it be. Just about everything that we need to know about strategy we can take from the most enduring part of our great heritage, and that's our Constitution. When we talk about common defense, we talk about raising and supporting armies, about appropriating money for them a couple of years at a time. We also talk about providing and maintaining a strong Navy because clearly, even at the time of the Constitution, the leadership understood that we need to have a seapower strategy for a maritime nation

So what we have done, Mr. Chairman, in the last several months, what your Marine Corps has done, is go over very carefully what your Marines and Sailors that serve with them can do to prepare for tomorrow's conflicts and tomorrow's confrontations. We see that you have to have a balanced number of striking fleets to protect the sea lines of communication if we are to do what must be done to support NATO or

other common defense requirements. We know that a balanced fleet must have in addition to an air, surface, and subsurface capability, a balanced power projection amphibious force capability. We have that today—not as large, not as flexible, not as strong as we would like to see, but it's there. And our efforts in the recent budget decrement drill have gone all out to try to protect that capability as it exists today because it will be essential in the future.

To meet the major security defense requirements in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the like, we need strong air power, land-based air power, from our U.S. Air Force and our allied air forces; and a strong land power capability—a good, tough Army, not just the U.S. Army but allied armies as well. We know, too, that we have to have flexible seapower in order to sustain any battle, be it Korea, Europe, or both. But there is more to the defense requirement than that. It is the Third World regions where many of our vital interests lie, and where conflicts are going on right now. And here I would say that the Sea Services should be the predominant Services, the Services of choice in meeting most of these contingency requirements. This is so because within the capabilities that the Nation needs to protect its sea lines of communication also lie the capabilities needed in the Third World. With the Sea Services, you need not have basing rights or political rights or that type of thing. The Sea Services can provide the kind of military support that is essential for any master plan in terms of stability, nation building, or increased security in any region, and they can adjust that military support and power as required. For example, Sea Services can come out as quickly as they go in, should the political situation dictate.

And so to me, the best thing that we Marines can do for your Marine Corps is make sure that we can be operative, that we can be useful, throughout the entire spectrum of conflict, remembering that we're a naval expeditionary force. We should be mean, lean, and tough, and we should reflect two simple ideas: What you see is what you have, and what you have will be ready to go tonight.

We believe that we can do a lot of things that should please this committee, and doing them isn't going to cost much in the way of money. We're going to train hard—make our training tougher; get better stability; turn on the brainpower and develop

ideas like we did in the late 1960s and early 1970s when we went through a long, disastrous period of declining strength. We're going to be looking at concepts and ideas. We're strengthening our capability to do that now at Quantico. We're going to upgrade our standards of training and education, set higher standards of excellence, and toughen up the recruit training process. We are going to make sure everybody is a warrior first and then, after that, make sure he can fix airplanes, drive tanks, or operate radios. This is essential because in this Third World region, in these mid- to low-intensity conflict environments, there are no frontlines. You must be ready everywhere, all the time.

We continue our time-honored tradition of being on the forefront of using technology. That idea, of course, goes back even prior to World War II and has been seen since in the helicopter, V/STOL aircraft, light armored vehicles, our family of small arms. Now we need to be able to conduct operations over broader areas, further distances at sea, over the horizon. The MV-22 Osprey program within this budget submission is a continuation of this tradition, and it remains important to our continued evolution.

We see, then, a Marine Corps that's fit for service today and that's going to get better in the months and years ahead; a Marine Corps that will be streamlined for the kinds of rapid responsive missions and tasks that clearly are at the heart of every contingency and general war plan maintained by our unified commanders. Our whole campaign approach to training and everything that we do is aimed at making sure we are as responsive as we possibly can be to our unified commanders. In the FY89 budget submission, we have met all but a handful of their requirements, and that handful are only incomplete because items are in research and development.

In summary, the Marine Corps provides combined arms forces, Marine air-ground task forces, to serve as critical components of well-balanced fleets. It stands ready to support naval campaigns across the spectrum of warfare and ready for mid- and low-intensity warfare and contingency crisis response as necessary. The country needs and demands the best trained, best equipped, best led forces in the world to defend our way of life. Your Marine Corps is good now, and with your support and assistance, we'll get better.

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