

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH GENERAL JAMES CONWAY

SUBJECT: GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY, THE U.S. MARINE CORPS COMMANDANT, WILL SPEAK AT A NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON ON JUNE 11, 2009 TO DISCUSS HIS SERVICE'S FUTURE, LOOKING FORWARD TO 2025.

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**DONNA LEINWAND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter for *USA Today* and president of the National Press Club.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to a future of journalism by providing innovative programming and journalism education, fostering a free speech worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

On behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching us on C-Span.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible.

And for our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Gordon Lubold of *Christian Science Monitor*; Michael Bruno of *Aviation Week*; Tom Vandebrook of *USA Today*; Lolita Baldor of AP; Barbara Ferguson of Arab News and a part-time trainer for the Marine Corps; Jeff Dufour of *The Washington Examiner*.

Skipping over the podium, Andrew Schneider, associate editor of Kiplinger and member of the NPC Speakers Committee. Skipping over our guest for a moment, John Fales, also known as Sergeant Shaft of *The Washington Times*, and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you very much, Sergeant Shaft. Jane Watrel of NBC Four; Ron Baygents of the Kuwait News Agency; Jim Michaels of *USA Today*; and finally, Bob Madigan, Man About Town from WTOP. (Applause.)

When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, our guest today was the lieutenant general in charge of the first Marine expeditionary force with 60,000 troops under his command. Two combat tours later, he comes to us as 34th commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, a post he has held since August second, 2006.

General James T. Conway, an Arkansas native who worked his way up from infantry officer to general, has a reputation for candor. When questioned about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, he told the media his soldiers had searched every ammunition dump from Kuwait to Baghdad and found nothing. General Conway recently told a Senate panel that a planned transfer for 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam as part of a May, 2006 agreement with Japan to realign the U.S. military presence in Japan by 2014, would cost more than double what was originally estimated.

And earlier this month, General Conway again visited Iraq, making a whirlwind tour of Anbar province. We look forward to hearing his assessment of the situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

In forty years of military service, there are few places he hasn't seen and few skills he hasn't learned, among them teaching, combat, and politics. He served as commanding officer of the Marine Officers Basic School, president of the Marine Corps University at Quantico, and senior aide to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is where he learned those politics.

But General Conway today wants to talk about the future, how will the world look in 2025, and what military challenges The United States might face

and how the U.S. Marine Corps might prepare today to meet those future challenges. Please join me in welcoming, Marine Corps Commandant General James Conway to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

**GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY:** Thank you, folks. Donna, thank you for the introduction and for the invitation to be here with the Club today. I really welcome the opportunity. I was here last in 2007. And so it's certainly good to be back.

I will say, that to say what I'm going to present to you today is a speech is maybe being a little gracious. I've got a series of talking points I'd just like to hit with you in the prescribed period of time. And then I really look forward to your questions. I hope that as I did this last weekend, you folks watched the celebration, the 65th anniversary of the landing on Normandy beaches, just a tremendous day. It was great to see those old warriors there, and our President to be there. There's a true story that goes back to that day in 1944 that I would share with you. And I would preface it by saying that, you know, today, military relations between the services are really probably at an all-time high. That was not always the case.

In this particular story, the three-star operational planner for General Eisenhower made a call to the captain of the battleship U.S.S. Texas. And he said to him, "I understand that you're going to land your 60-man Marine detachment tomorrow on the beach. Is that true?" And the captain said, "Well, yes sir, it is." He said, "I'm ordering you now not to do that." And the captain paused for a minute, but he said, "Aye, aye sir. I will comply with your instructions. But may I ask the question, why?"

And the General said, "Well of course you can. It's like this. I understand how these damn people work. We're going to put 73,000 soldiers ashore on the continent starting tomorrow. But if just one Marine goes ashore, the next day the headlines will read 'Marines Storm Ashore at Normandy' and I'm not going to stand for it."

Folks, again, I want to talk, as was specified, about where we are in Iraq and Afghanistan. I want to talk with you some about Pakistan. I want to talk about the nature of our force, how we see the future, and maybe just a little bit about the QDR. But then I do look forward to your questions. Let's start with Iraq.

My number one priority as a commandant are those troops at the point of the spear. We've been in Iraq now for quite some time. This last February, we had a transfer of authority in Iraq. We had a major general, Rick Trian(?) take over command. The three-star Army commander of the Corps was out from Baghdad and he made the remark at the ceremony that he believes he is witnessing the last

turnover of Marines in Iraq. We agree with that. There will be sort of a mid-summer rotation. We do seven-month rotations. I'll talk with you a moment about that. But we think that in the Spring of 2010, that General Trian will close the door, turn out the lights, and end Marine Corps presence in Iraq. We think we're coming out under a victory pennant, that we have done essentially what the country asked us to do, serve in many ways as a second land army, a long way from a salt sea in Iraq. But we're very proud of what our folks, working with the Army, working with those great sailors who support us, have done, rotation after rotation in the country of Iraq.

You know, as was indicated in the introduction, we didn't find weapons of mass destruction. But I would offer to you that we did do something there. We, and again, every other serviceman and woman that have served in Iraq, have done something there that is perhaps as important, maybe more so. And that is, we have crushed the Al Qaeda in the nation of Iraq. It wasn't long after we crossed the Kuwaiti border before we started seeing these people. And in conjunction with the efforts of the Sunnis and eventually now really all over Iraq, Shias and the Kurds, we have turned on those people with a vengeance. And, for all intents and purposes, the movement has been destroyed. There's still a rear guard action there, just still trying to make more of their presence than I think really exists.

But the beauty of it is that other countries in the region have seen that they can and should be defeated. The moderates are starting to reassume a level of control over their religion, which is the way that these things must end. And so we're pleased with the outcome, and pleased as well that the loss of life and injury that's been associated with our presence there is being rewarded again by success.

Afghanistan is somewhat another story. The trend lines, the casualties, the numbers of attack and so forth are on the rise in Afghanistan. You have seen the recent actions of the Department of Defense and President Obama's Administration in terms of how we intend to deal with that. The Marine Corps portion of that is some 10,700 Marines who have now reported to Afghanistan at the end of last month. We'll be operating in the South as a Marine expeditionary brigade, but as important, maybe more so, as a Marine air-ground taskforce. We'll have responsibilities for the province of Helmand. There's a particular issue in the Helmand province that we are going to have to be able to deal with that troubles us greatly. And that is that 93% of the opium that is harvested in Afghanistan comes from the Helmand province. That represents 95% of the opium that is sold then throughout the world.

I'll admit to you that the last time we went into the theater that we went under a misperception. We were concerned that the drug control effort there didn't have a holistic approach associated with it. There were eradication teams,

but their efforts were spotty, in some cases arguably political. We thought that that was just a disaster for-- a recipe for difficulty.

What we found when we got there is that indeed they get it, that it is an Afghan-led effort, that the intent is to provide alternative crops and the education associated with how those crops must be managed, that after harvest, there is a need to build the infrastructure to get those crops to market so that the farmers can get their pay.

The problem is that the solution set is like this. The problem set is like this. So it's a matter of volume. They understand how to do it; it's just that there has to be much, much more effort put against it if we're to take away those resources from the Taliban. And we were told when we were there last time that the estimates vary between \$80 million dollars a year and \$400 million dollars a year in terms of resources going to the Taliban, and indirectly then, I believe, to the Al Qaeda.

So in any event, our Marines and those additional soldiers that are being sent in are there to bring a level of security about so that we can have a good and solid and representative national election. We would like to see more Kandak battalions, more Afghan army, if you will, in the south so our people can partner with them. That's our process. The Afghan army probably needs to grow some in order to be able to do that, or, more immediately, there needs to be some realignment of the Afghan national army so that more of their forces are in the South.

But we're working those things and we have a high level of optimism, that between General McKiernan's most recent directives and General McCrystal going in, we're going to see some of these things come to pass.

I should stop talking about Afghanistan without giving a real tip of the hat to the British. They have been operating, predominantly in the South, in the Helmand province, operating out of the bases at Kandahar and a place called Bastian(?). They've been absolutely magnificent in absorbing our forces, the early detachments, if you will, that provide for the follow-on of the main force, and even the main force, in joining them in locations that already have a level of infrastructure that will allow us to operate out of these bases, build our own, expand our element of control, and be much more effective on a much more rapid basis.

Another issue that we have felt in Afghanistan is that we and our Army brethren could be wildly successful on the ground. But in the end, we would not have solved the problem, the problem being Al Qaeda. If in fact there were not parallel efforts and sufficient progress being made on the other side of the border.

I, again, want to take the opportunity to salute the efforts of the Pakistani military, our counterparts on what we have all recently seen taking place across the border now in that country.

In a very real way, I believe they achieved operational surprise, which is really difficult in this day and age with constant media coverage and the speed of the Internet. But I think they achieved operational surprise because they did what they're doing now from a standing start. There was no threats. There was no build-up of military capability. There were no warning shots provided. With the forces they had in the field, they simply started going at the Taliban and the Al Qaeda in the swat, and they have continued now to sustain that effort over time. They've sustained it with forces off what they would call their eastern border. And General Kiyani would say, "I am recognizing that we're accepting risk here. But this is an existential threat." And he's doing something about it. I think they've done masterful things with regard to the information operations effort that must be in place when you take these people on. You see the villagers siding with the army now, conducting independent operations, or being relied upon, the army, to assist them in what they're doing.

It all is very wholesome. We wish them continued success and salute them for what, I think, again, has been a masterful military maneuver at this point based on what we've seen.

Let me switch gears and talk about the resiliency of The United States Marine Corps after arguably now seven or eight years at war, really in two locations. I will tell you that on the whole, it is good. We are pleased with what we see. There are stressors. There are strains of course. You would have to expect that. But we track about a dozen indicators each month to tell us just how the force is doing. And in virtually every instance, probably save two or three, those statistics are as good or better than they were in 2001.

Our young officers are staying with us, 91%, past their original contract of service. This last year, we closed out our reenlistment opportunities at the midway point through the fiscal year for both our career Marines, those second- or third-term Marines for reenlistment, but also our first-term Marines. The opportunity is now very restricted for them to be able to stay as we get into the second half of the fiscal year.

Our recruitment has been little short of just incredible. We were given the authority in late 2006, early 2007 to grow the Corps some 27,000 additional Marines. When I was here in 2007, we were in the inventory efforts of starting to put that plan together. Based on several factors, I believe the quality of our recruiting effort in the field, the support of our families, some incredible, again, retention results that we're seeing, but not least the fact that there's a steady strain

of great young Americans out there who want the opportunity to defend their country in wartime, we have accomplished what was a five-year goal in about two, two and a half years.

It's a remarkable effort. Our standards have stayed right where they always were. The Department of Defense standard for high school graduates entering the services is 90%. Our Marine Corps standard is 95%. We're recruiting at about 97% high school graduates. So the fact is, there's a great young generation out there that we have a right to depend upon coming through for us really in gangbusters.

We very much favor the seven-month deployments. A Marine unit is gone for seven months and it's been home, at least up until recently, for about seven months, a one-to-one deployment-to-dwell, if you will, before they were turning around and heading back. Based upon this growth that we have experienced, based upon what we think will be reduced numbers required in Afghanistan, we see that getting fairly dramatically better, hopefully by the middle of 2010, even to the point where we're able to achieve one-to-two, seven months deployed and 14 months home. That's going to be very helpful, we think, for our families. We think that young Marines who maybe haven't had a chance to meet someone are going to be afforded that opportunity. We're going to take some of it back. We're going to have to accomplish some training that we have not been accomplishing with our specific focus on counterinsurgency. But we think we'll be able to do that. We think that that one-to-two is, generally speaking, our sustainment factor. And we think that those indicators that I spoke to you about are only going to stay strong or perhaps even get better when we're able to see those kinds of deployment-to-dwell.

Our families, I think, understand that we appreciate their problems. We are resolved to do something about it. And we're putting our money with our words. I think that psychological is as important as the tangible, because our families are a major part, we believe, in some of these reenlistment rates and their willingness to stay on, to stay with us. We have gotten some very good reports as we go out and talk with the families about things we have done. We've always got the opportunity to make it better. But the key point in it all, I think, is they understand that we believe they're an important part of this whole equation. And we're making some very sincere and extended efforts to try to make sure that their quality of life is met, and that they're taken care of while their Marine is deployed.

Last, but certainly not least, I would say that our wounded warrior program has achieved levels that even we didn't expect would be possible, largely through the generosity and the support of the American people. We have some volunteer organizations out there that have gone through tens of millions of

dollars at this point, ninety-seven cents on the dollar going to the wounded warriors and their families, in an effort to try to make sure that all their needs are met. Our wounded warrior regiment, headquartered at Quantico, has gone about a massive effort, not only to satisfy the needs of the warriors coming out of theater now, but to go back and find every one of them that has been injured in OIF or OEF, and simply to place a call, ask, "How you doin'?" And at this point, ladies and gentlemen, that number is almost 9,000 today. At this point, they've contacted about 92% of those people. In some cases, they've been able to direct visiting nurses onto scene or turn those Marines back to other people that might be able to give them assistance.

But the fact is, we are accomplishing something that is not just a bumper sticker. And that is that Marines take care of their own, so. (Applause.)

We've got new equipment headed in the theater. The Osprey was a frog. It is now officially a prince. And we're delighted with the success that we're seeing with that airplane. It's had three operational deployments, two Iraq. It is currently aboard ship with the 22nd MEU. We had our expectations, really, I think it's fair to say, exceeded with the performance of the aircraft in a very harsh environment, in a combat environment, in these first three operational deployments. Now we have to answer some questions for ourselves about shipboard life and that aircraft, maintenance kinds of concerns. What will be the effect of salt, sea, air, and so forth? Is it still headed into theater. It will op-chop(?) into theater later this month, it's fair to say.

But the fact is, we're going to have this particular squadron aboard ship. The squadron that follows that will be going to Afghanistan. It'll be a magnificent airplane in Afghanistan. And it will be there as long as Marines are there doing the things that it is equipped to do. So we're delighted that that aircraft continues to challenge us really, in terms of, how do you incorporate use of the aircraft beyond just thinking of it as a helicopter. Because it's much, much more than just a helicopter.

Similarly, we need a different type of MRAP in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is simply different terrain from what we've experienced in Iraq. And you do have to get off the roads there much more than before. There is an effort by the Department of Defense, a very right and helpful effort, to come up with an Afghanistan version of the MRAP. The fact is, we're not waiting for that. We have a vehicle simply called a Seven-Ton. MTVR is the acronym. But it's a seven-tonner. Right now, the armored version of the seven-ton is the most popular vehicle in Afghanistan with troops that are there. It gets off-road. It provides good protection. It's got an elevated system that helps diffuse the blast.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're putting the suspension system off that MRAP onto our CAT-- off the LTVR, onto our CAT-1 MRAPs. We've tested the vehicle. It's tested very well in initial tests. Even as we sit here today, it's being further tested before we send it to theater. But we're very optimistic it's going to work. It's going to give our Marines the off-road kind of mobility, and, more importantly, the protection they need in a 38,000-pound vehicle. We're going to get it there faster than waiting for the development of the MRAP series, designated for Afghan use. And we're going to do it at a fraction of the price.

So we're charging ahead on that program with great expectations. And our Marines are going to be making great use of the vehicle in what we consider to be the very near future.

I mentioned to you earlier that we have challenges. And we do as we look about the future of our Corps. We have not done a lot of amphibious training by virtue of our focus on Iraq and Afghanistan. But we've got to get back to it. That's what our Corps offers this great nation in terms of its niche kind of capability, that opportunity for forcible entry. We're not doing cold weather training. We're doing mountain training only by exception, jungle training only if you're assigned to Okinawa. We're not doing combined arms live fire maneuver like we used to. We believe very strongly in this capacity of the Marine air-ground taskforce. It's core competency is maneuvering under its own fires and then rolling up on an enemy just as the smoke lifts.

We used to do ten of those a year at 29 Palms. Today, we do none. And so we've got to get back some of that 14 months out there, with the opportunity to put those young Marines that are joining us in record numbers, again, in that type of training to build their confidence and their competence, lest we be called to go someplace else for another kind of conflict.

Lastly, just a shot or two on the QDR. It is an ongoing process. It's happening even as we speak. The Secretary of Defense wants to build a balanced kind of military for the future, not knowing what might be the challenges out there. We believe we're pretty close to what he is attempting to create today in the Department. That's not to say we won't be taxed. That's not to say that we won't have to pay our part of the bar bill when it comes to programs and those types of things. But it's a great discussion.

Part of the discussion is the amphibious nature of what we do. The Secretary has asked the question openly: "Do we have too much amphibious capability?" We would reverse that just slightly and say, how much is too little? Today, we have a capacity to put two Marine expeditionary brigades to sea. Ladies and gentlemen, that's two regiments across a beach. That's not a lot of capability if you're going to invade another nation. So we would argue, if you

start getting below that kind of capability, that in fact, the risk could be too great to launch an amphibious operation. And this nation could lose its forcible entry capability. We think that's a worthy discussion that needs to be had in the QDR.

Almost as important is that, on a day-to-day basis, the combatant commanders out there, the geographic combatant commanders have needs for security cooperation, theater engagement, and those types of things. Almost uniformly, they would say that the best means for doing that is an amphibious ship. It brings helicopter platforms to move back and forth. It brings medical capability that can be put ashore if need be. It provides the opportunity for enhancements, if you will, with host nation training opportunities that Marines are embarked, all those types of things.

So what's interesting to us is if you tally up those requirements that the combatant commanders have, work in a Navy rotation of ships in order to be able to do those things, and compare the numbers against the requirement for an assault and forcible entry capability, there's an interesting intersection of the numbers. And they're about the same. So we have a pretty strong agreement with the chief of naval operations on what his amphib fleet needs to look like. We'll take those discussions into the quadrennial defense review. And we will anxiously await the results.

With that, let me close, Donna, if I can, and happy take aboard any questions that you all may have. (Applause.)

**MS. LEINWAND:** Someone once told me, I think a Marine once told me that on-time for a Marine is five minutes early. So well done, General. Okay, first question from the audience is on Iraq. How do you expect the conduct of the war to change under General McCrystal and what appears to be an expanded special operations influence?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Think the question pertains to Afghanistan, but the answer would probably be the same. I think there's going to be some meeting in the middle, frankly. General McCrystal is an old Iraq warrior. He also has a lot of ground time in Afghanistan. And frankly, I think as the Department and as the Administration arrived at what our strategy ought to be in Afghanistan, there was discussion that it would be what's commonly termed a counterterrorist strategy, that it would rely in great measure on the effects of our special operations forces, augmented by host nation capability, and by a size force that could support it, but that force, much less than what it would take for the other option, which is a counterinsurgency strategy.

The Administration has decided that we will execute a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, ergo the increased numbers that you see going in Afghanistan,

ergo the numbers that we see being added there. That has to do with bringing about a level of security, close cooperation and partnership with the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police, trying to enhance the economics, the governance, those types of things that are a natural part of the counterinsurgency strategy.

So I think General McCrystal, in some ways, will have to shift colors a little bit to meet that strategy. But I think at the same time that you may see an enhancement of the counterterrorism aspect of what we're doing there, because you now have an old special operate at the helm. Okay?

**MS. LEINWAND:** One of the historic objections to reorienting the U.S. military toward counterinsurgency, particularly in the years after Vietnam War, has been that doing so would hamper its ability to engage in conventional combat. Now that the U.S. is putting serious emphasis on counterinsurgency to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, how will the Marine Corps balance the demands on it to be equally effective in counterinsurgency and conventional warfare?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** It's a great question. And whoever asked it, it's exactly our problem. If you simply look at what's happening today in Korea, we got some people that are spending late nights in this city, concerned about what are the potential follow-on activities there? What might the supreme leader do that would constitute something that would cause us somehow to respond?

The Marine portion of that would, one, be conventional operations, and, in all probability, amphibious operations of some sort. We're simply not there today. When I step into an audience and ask a group of Marines, "How many of you have been aboard ship," I'll get ten or fifteen percent that'll raise their hand. "How many have participated in a CAX," ten or fifteen percent. So it does concern me greatly that there is always the possibility out there, god forbid the probability, that we could be asked to go do something like that and we're not trained up to do it.

Now, there are methods in place. We will rely on some of our old hands to get us through. We would eventually accomplish the mission. But I would simply argue, we can do it better when we're trained to it. And that's the value of this one-to-two deployment-to-dwell to give us the opportunity to give those young Marines more time with their families and more time to, you know, again, relax at home, but also to get onto some of these training fields and get back some of our core competencies that have started to wither over time.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Do you see the latest uptick in violence in Iraq as a temporary rise prior to the June withdrawal from the cities? Or does it represent a resurgence in sectarian strife?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** That glass is half full. And for that reason, I do believe in the Iraqi security forces. Every indication, as I visit, and from our commanders in the field, is that they are better with each passing month. I think that there is a residual presence, of course, in Iraq on the part of the Al Qaeda. I think that they're trying to get back where they were in some places, get back to the former strength that they had between themselves and what we could call the Sunni Nationalists, if you will, the people who fought against our presence there.

But I think the country is tired of fighting. It's a country that's got a tremendous future once they get past the nonsense. I had an old professor tell me one time that a successful nation needs five things. It needs arable land, a fresh water supply, an intelligible population, an exportable product, and a seaport. I would probably add leadership to that, but I think we just described Iraq. And there are new oilfields out on the Syrian border that are larger than anything they have that they're exploring to-date. And so it's going to be a tremendously rich country one day. And I think the people of the country understand that. They, like we, want a better quality of life for their children. And I think they're going to demand that of their security forces.

So I think that with the extended presence, if you will (we don't know how long it will be) but with the extended presence of these Army advise and assist brigade combat teams, and, again, the continued professionalization of the Iraqi army, but increasingly the Iraqi police, that the country will be able to settle its problems and move to these levels of prosperity that they haven't seen in decades now.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How many Marines are in Anbar now? And are they all out of the cities? What level do you see them at by the end of this year?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** At last count, I think the number was down to around 16,000. And we are, at this point, moving out equipment as the commander will deem appropriate to do so. But we pretty much have an understanding with General Odierno that we will await the election, and even some few weeks after that before we start the further reduction of men and the last of our equipment.

I think by the Spring of '10, as we talked about-- I wouldn't put an exact month on it at this point, but I think by the Spring of '10, that we will see Marines ending their presence in Iraq. We have said all along to the Secretary and the Department of Defense, if you want a larger Marine presence in Afghanistan, there must necessarily be a reduction in Iraq. We simply can't do both. And frankly, 2009 is going to be a tough year for us because now have a foot in both

camps. And those people, the combat support, combat service port(?) Marines have always been the groups that-- and the MOSs that have been most ridden hard and put away wet in some cases, for short periods of time, before they were asked to go back.

So those are the very people that are being stressed by the movement of men and equipment, by the requirements to support really combat forces in both places. But I see the numbers going down, essentially to zero in, I think, sometime the Spring of '10, the exception to that probably being 30 Marines or less who would work with this fledgling Iraqi marine corps who have security responsibilities down in Basra and Um Qasr for some of the oil platforms that are in the south of the country.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What are the top two major differences in the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters? And how do they impact strategy and tactics?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** There are several. But I think probably the top two are, one, the terrain, the environment. It is dramatically different from what we've experienced in Iraq. And I'm talking now beyond just the Marine Corps's area of operations. Ours, for the most part, in the South, is high desert. There are some mountain ranges that start to appear in sort of the northern portions of our sector in the South of Afghanistan.

The terrain up in RC(?) East is just incredible. There's nothing in our country that you can compare it to. We flew over the Rocky Mountains from a recent trip out to California. It may start to get close, but it does not equate to sheer granite mountains that rise up at 90 degrees to the surface of the Earth and go to twelve, thirteen thousand feet. So it's incredibly rough terrain up there. And that's causing us to adapt our tactics and our recovery, our MediVac capability, those types of things, as you might anticipate. So I think that's probably the first thing.

The second thing I think is probably just the culture itself, you know, different language, different tribal affiliations, if you will. The tribes in Iraq, I believe, had more centralized kinds of structure, decision making resting in the hands of a few sheikhs than what we're experiencing in Afghanistan. And it is much more decentralized. It's almost village to village. And in that regard, it's a little tougher, I think.

That said, we have done the analysis. We're still doing the analysis in terms of, what are the carryover capacities that we have from our experiences in Iraq that will apply to Afghanistan? We think it's about 75%, maybe approaching 80%. But our focus is on the delta. What are the differences? And that's where we're working to better understand the culture, to learn the language, to

appreciate how decisions are made. What does it mean in terms of the history of the land? You know, that's our value in having Kandaks work with us. They've had a lot of invading countries and armies roll through there. And I think in the wise words of one of our colonels in Kabul, without those Afghan national army troops, we're just another invading army. We stand the potential to be seen that way unless it's seen as a national effort, based through the direction of their government, that we're in support of. We're simply trying to do it ourselves. We're pessimistic that it's going to be nearly as effective.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What type of cultural training are you doing to deal with these differences? And how important would you say the continued cultural training is, like that being conducted by the Center for Operational Culture and Learning, to success in Afghanistan?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Well, it bleeds over to the question and the answer to that last question. And we think it's extremely important. One of our lessons, I won't say learned, it's just a lesson reconfirmed in Iraq is that when you have the support and the confidence of the local population, very positive things follow. You will gain intelligence. You'll gain support. They will point out to you the IEDs. They will make it tough, as best they can, for the bad guys to come in and start to take root in that society, even to the point, in some cases, of arming themselves and moving actively against these folks.

So you've got, I think, believe, to understand that culture. It helps if you can speak with them, although, you know, you're never going to learn the language as well as they know it. It is a difficult language. Just that you're trying, once again, I think starts to get you points. And so the more you understand that culture, the more effective warrior you're going to be in a counterinsurgency environment. So we're stressing it. We're talking to our commanders saying, "Hey, we know you're busy. Your workups are intense. But you've got to set aside time to learn the language. We can't get you to the school in California. Okay? But what we can do is get instructors to your bases and stations." We're doing that. "We can get you Rosetta Stone." That's not an advertisement, but it's a pretty good product. And, "We'll do what we can to assist you in learning the language before you go. And then it should only get better, thanks to your interpreter and the people that you're going to be dealing with."

**MS. LEINWAND:** What would you say is the number one threat to Marines in Afghanistan? And what are you doing to deal with it?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** To-date (and I don't think it's going to change)-- It could because we think that the Taliban are coming off the poppy harvest and are going to amassing in larger numbers. That could cause more direct contact with the enemy forces. But 80% of our casualties to-date have been

caused by IEDs, and for the most part, it's pressure plate IEDs. Thankfully we have not seen the explosively formed penetrator that worked its way into Iraq, we think in large measure from an adjacent country there. We have not seen the level of sophistication in some of the IEDs. But we have still had casualties as a result of these buried IEDs with some fairly homemade, but nevertheless effective pressure plate devices that tend to be pretty dramatic, especially when you step on them. And of course we don't allow dismounted operations in Afghanistan.

So IEDs is the answer. Now, what we're doing about them, of course we've got organizations that are very well resourced that continue to work the problem. We're looking at every link in the chain to see if there's some way that we can move left of blast and try to do something about that. Money, equipment, the materials that make it up, the bomb-makers-- The Brits have always felt, if you go after the bomb-makers, that you will at least help to diminish the effects. We're attempting that. Sometimes, oftentimes I would offer it's a different person that lays the device maybe than that arms it. So we're looking certainly at patterns on the battlefield, where these things are prone to occur, where we think they're emanating from. And we put snipers and overwatch teams to try to prevent the laying.

And, of course, we're trying to protect our Marines. And we're doing that through the MRAPs, trying to get them as speedily as we can to theater. We're also, however, having to weigh sort of a terrible balance out there. You know, in Iraq, we absolutely overburdened ourselves with personal protective equipment. I mean, the average Marine out on patrol was probably carrying 80 pounds.

In Afghanistan, this terrain that we talked about, and the conditions of summer will simply not allow us to do that. So we've made some adjustments to how we see business in Afghanistan. Previously the MEF(?) commander cited the personnel protective equipment that will be worn by his forces. We have delegated that authority down to the battalion commander. And it would not upset me if they delegated it to the company commander.

We are demanding of our R&D people at Quantico, "Don't give us sort of shotgun patterns against the wall in terms of this equipment. Give us a family of equipment that starts with little more than a utility jacket and a soft cover if the commander believes that's what his ambush team needs that night," all the way over to the heavy kit that you might want someone to wear on a roadway that's seen a lot of IEDs. In-between, we need a vest that will maybe just give shrapnel protection, maybe just wear the front SAPI plate. Maybe it's both SAPI plates and a cummerbund that will then be added with side SAPI plates.

We have very good news on a new helmet that we think is going to be very effective against enemy fires that we're rapidly producing and getting to the

field as soon as we can. So this whole issue of what our Marines wear in the environment I think is necessarily going to be different from what we saw in Iraq. And we think it's the right thing to do.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Just to follow up a little bit on the IEDs, what should the Joint IED Defeat Organization be doing more of?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** You know, that's a tough one. And I don't have a good answer for that question, quite frankly. I visited. They've got some wonderfully intelligent people over there that wear uniforms and that don't wear uniforms. They realize the importance of what they're doing. They're looking at every aspect of it that you can imagine, and I would offer, more. You know, I still hold out hope that some day some guy with curly red hair and glasses and a pocket holder is going to come running out of his garage saying, "I got it! I got it!" and we're going to have a device that will detect and destroy at distance.

But we're not there yet. That magic device has not occurred. And so we continue to work as we can to try to get at the elements that wind up with that explosion. So I can't fault them for anything they're doing. They're making progress. They're putting things in the field as rapidly as they can for experimentation. And so I think they're doing a very good job. We just hope someday that they find that answer, and the weapon becomes obsolete.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What steps are being taken to cut the flow of small arms and ammunition to the Taliban?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Well, most would suggest that that has to come in from a cross-border type operation. That's different from Iraq. In Iraq, you had these huge compounds, bunker systems that had ammunition going all the way back, we believe, to the Iraq and Iran war. And a lot of those weapon systems were taken from those bunkers, used against us. And there's still, as many caches as we have found, probably still a supply of those things in Iraq.

That is not so much the case in Afghanistan. There is some left over from, I think, the Russian experience there. But for the most part, we believe that these weapon systems are coming in across the border, and, for the most part, from Pakistan, from what has previously been called at least safe haven in Pakistan. I'm encouraged that that safe haven could be going away, that those rat lines, what we call rat lines, men and equipment coming in from Pakistan, can be disrupted, to say the least, and perhaps eventually closed.

I think the introduction of additional troops, U.S. troops into Afghanistan are going to give us the opportunity to get out and work closer with the Afghan border patrol units and help to strengthen their ability to control their borders. But

that, Donna, I think is the final answer, is that there has to be a more stringent border control to try to stop these things before they get into the country.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What is your opinion of the Taliban movement in Pakistan? Does this group have close ties to Afghanistan? And if they do have close ties, how do you differentiate in that border control policy?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** I think that for the most part, they are closely connected. I think the border is meaningless to them, for all intents and purposes, except that they know, if we're on the Pakistani side, there's an element of safe haven, again, in the past at least, has existed there. And that's been a part of the problem, so.

We do think that there's a direct connection between the Al Qaeda and the Taliban. We think that-- Well, in fact the major purpose for us being in Afghanistan is to eliminate any concept of safe haven in that country, so that our nation is not, once again, threatened by disastrous attack. But we think that-- again, that it has to be taken across the border. And the Pakistanis have to be able to do similar types of things, make parallel progress, if you will, if we're to totally eliminate that threat. And that's what makes us so happy, I think, about what we've seen over the last several weeks.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How long do you think U.S. Marines will be in Afghanistan?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** That's a tough question, you know? We say-- We do windows. And that's what made the Marine Corps, for all intents and purposes, a second land army in Iraq. The Army has a very difficult rotation right now. I suspect, if my good friend, George Casey, were talking to you today, he would not be quite as optimistic about the condition of his soldiers and resiliency factor.

So we need to help them. We need to pull our share, if you will, of that load, to try to make sure that all American servicemen and women are able to get these deployment-to-dwell figures. And so we're going to be there as long as we're needed. We do think that, again, if we stay at a number that is somewhere not beyond 15,000, arguably 18,000, that we can achieve this one-to-two. So in some ways, a number is as important as how long we stay. Because again, we believe, based on the turnover that we have-- Our Corps is, by and large, lance corporals. I mean, our average age is down around 21. Sixty-seven percent of our Marine Corps is E3 or below.

We have a steady turnover of great young people that come in. They become Marines. They fight for their country, and they go out to become quality

citizens. And so that turnover, although it requires consistent training and preparing people for what they face, is also an advantage in terms of your sustainability over something of this duration. So we think that we'll be there for awhile. We're going to be there as long as anybody else if fighting is to be done. When it becomes a nation building role, as it has we believe in Iraq, then that's not a core competency of the Marine Corps. And at that point, we would probably start saying, "Is there a better use for us elsewhere?" And our national command authorities would make that determination.

**MS. LEINWAND:** As the U.S. military role in Iraq winds down, what do you see as the key strategic role in the U.S./Kuwait relationship going forward?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** I think it's going to be important. What's going to have to be answered is how long the Iraqis will want to have a U.S. presence on Iraqi soil. You'll get both perspectives. They take polls on such things. But I think the Iraqis who are running the country believe that an additional U.S. presence, through these advise and assist brigades, for some time to be determined, is still helpful, more almost for an external threat, defense against an external threat than internal. I think they really believe they can handle the internal threats themselves.

But I don't know how long those advise and assist brigades will be there. I don't think it's like a situation we had in Germany or Japan after the war. These are very proud people. In some ways, we're still infidels to them. And in some ways, it is, I believe, a national embarrassment that they continue to have international forces inside their country. So I think it will be as soon as the Iraqis feel that their military is strong enough to protect them against both external and internal threats. And we'll be politely asked to leave.

Now whether to not we will need to retain a force in Kuwait beyond that, whether or not the Kuwaitis will want to have us there-- Because we would hope that with what's happened in Iraq, that the perceived threat to Kuwait is now very much diminished. Whether or not, again, that force presence would be there is something I think nations are going to have to negotiate. I think we will continue to have interests and a presence in the Middle East. We have the opportunity to do that from a sea base. And whether or not that'll be sufficient, again, will be a conversation, I think, for well on down range. But a lot of uncertainties out there I think now as far as how long that we'll go and what the reaction of those nations will be.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Would you please clarify the Marine Corps's position on moving to Guam?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Let me say that the Marine Corps emphatically supports the move of roughly 8,000 Marines to Guam. My title ten responsibilities

as the commandant is to examine it in its full measure, and to hopefully resolve any issues that we may have. We think that we're getting great cooperation from the Department of Defense in looking at those issues. Most of them are internal. But the move to Guam is going to happen. And we are going to be there on that island for some time to come. And we're in the process of trying to make sure that it's a great duty station and our families have a quality of life, that we have the opportunity, and, in fact, the ability, the responsibility to continue to train Marines out there, and to be able to respond in the event of a national crisis.

So it's been reported otherwise unfortunately because the bold text of what we say as a Corps is that we support it, but we want to work out the issues. We're emphatically behind the move to Guam.

**MS. LEINWAND:** You mentioned to the Senate that it was going to be more expensive than originally predicted, and that there were some delays, some issues that might cause delays. Could you tell us a little bit about those issues?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Well, the existing infrastructure on Guam is going to need some work. The training opportunities on Guam, as we have assessed them to-date, suits probably a company-size operation. And that is simply not enough for some 8,000 Marines. So again, in conjunction with the folks in the OSD policy, we are looking at expanding opportunities, perhaps with the agreement of other nations in the Pacific Basin, to be able to put Marines aboard ship and go to those place, train with host nation, and do the theater engagement things that the Pacific commander deems to be important.

We think it will be more expensive than the \$4 billion dollars that's been estimated. But I think folks are onboard with that. This issue of training is dependent upon environmental studies that have to be accomplished. And those environmental studies are soon to be underway, but don't necessarily extend to all the places where we might have the opportunity to train. So we're encouraging the department to join with us in examining what might be available on some other islands in the immediate vicinity there.

We want to make sure that we've got mobility for our Marines when we get there. We've got pretty good mobility to get off island up in Okinawa right now. There are amphib ships that are assigned there. There are no amphib assigned to Guam at this point in time. So some things like that that we do have to look at, I believe, to make sure that when we posit 8,000 Marines out there in the middle of the Central Pacific, that they're not essentially unable to do the things that we're going to require them to be able to do based on our presence.

**MS. LEINWAND:** The Marines will end the fiscal year 2,000 Marines above its authorized end strength. Why are you still recruiting so many Marines?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Well, the fact is, we're not. Fact is, if any of you ever want to go on recruiting duty, now's the time. Okay? Because it's better out there than it's ever been. And in fact, we have had to curtail our recruiters and those shipping numbers that they would traditionally be shipping at this point, just because, again, of our tremendous retention and the fact that they've made such good numbers previously.

We have what we call recruiting pools, which are young men and women who have indicated that they want to go to Pass Island or San Diego, but they can't ship immediately. So our staff sergeants and gunnery sergeants work with them at these recruiting station locations, get them in shape and get them ready for sort of life in the Corps. One of our biggest challenges right now is motivating the pool, because they want to go in June. When we tell them, "You're not going to go until October," you know, then that becomes, in some ways, a leadership challenge that our recruiters haven't had to face.

And so it's a good problem to have, but nevertheless, it's uniquely different from what we had before. We are going to skid slightly beyond 202. I think this morning, we were at 202,124. We can, without any additional authority, go up to about 204,000. I've told our people, "Don't do that." Okay? "Let's show some management skill here and regulate this thing. A little past 202 is okay, but not much, because we don't have the money, really, to go beyond 202,000." And there's no tangible reason to do so.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What's the Marine Corps doing to prevent suicides among active duty troops?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Let me give just a word of background so everybody understands what's been happening here. I think it's fair to say, up to last year, we were running kind of a sine wave. The numbers would be a little higher one year than they might be the next, and then back down. And they were all below the national average. One is too many. But, you know, we had efforts in the field, but not the focus that we have today.

And the reason for that is that last year we had 42 suicides in the Marine Corps. And that number puts us right at the national average. We think we're better than that. We think that the things that we inject into our young men and women make for better young citizens, and the realization that there are other ways to tackle your problems. The resources that we have available, immediate available, the leadership that we think ought to be in place should make that all better.

And so we were distressed last year that we had those kinds of numbers. Of the 42 that we had, 35 were as a result of failed relationships, either a spouse or a significant other. And so we think we understand what's at work primarily with the trend. Half of the others were because of job performance failure in some form or fashion. And so we think we know what's causing it. What we don't know is what's causing the cause.

People have asked us, you know, "Is it a result of the stress and strain from deployments?" Well, not strictly speaking, because we have more people in this number committing suicide who have not deployed than we have who have deployed. So that tells us that it's not necessarily related to deployment. But, you know, there are second and third order effects from deployments. Are these deployments spoiling relationships, which in turn cause the suicides, is something I think that we're asking ourselves. And we're trying to get after that.

We're also going back to say, are there other things that we've missed? We get a lot of Marines from broken families. Do we have Marines who have been on some drug, you know, to settle themselves or increase their focus or whatever before they join the Corps? Are there other patterns out there that we're missing? And so we're going back with the recruiting service and the manpower service to really scrutinize, not only those who have killed themselves, but those who have attempted to, to say, "Okay, is there something else here that we can seize on and try to get after?"

What we're doing in the meantime is focusing the effort on our NCOs, our great young corporals and sergeants out there who are the first line of leadership with-- The majority of our problem is with our youngsters, people on average between 19 and 23 years-old. So are our corporals and sergeants in a position where they can identify the indicators and then immediately seek help or immediately provide counsel or leadership or whatever it takes to get this person through that depression that they're experiencing? We think that's our first line.

There are studies, there are universities that are helping us to try to do the research and come to grips with this, come to answers that we can then turn to and work. But we really believe that with the strength of our young NCOs, that we can help solve this problem and reverse the trend right now. So we're in the process of developing the training. We're in the process of developing films and handouts and those types of things. It's said in our Corps that what the old man pays attention to, the troops will take care of. You know? We hope that that's one of those paradigms that really work for us in this case because we're paying a lot of attention to it.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What is your opinion of efforts to repeal the "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" policy on gays in the military?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Well, it's a matter of law. We're watching the law closely to see if it changes. And of course we will follow the law. We're pretty busy these days. There's a lot of things going on. And I would hope that there's some consideration given to all that is taking place before there's perhaps further efforts to make adjustments to what we think at this point is a pretty fine-tuned military.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Please address the question of Miranda rights on the battlefield.

**GENERAL CONWAY:** I guess I need some amplification on that one.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Let's see.... It says, is it true that there is a new Administration policy requiring captured terrorists to be Mirandized or told of their rights? Are Marines en route to Afghanistan being taught Miranda speak?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** Not that I know of, okay? You've raised a question in my mind now obviously. If someone knows something I don't know-- But we've had no such indication that there have been changes to the rules of engagement or how we detain. What-- You know, it's been awhile since I've been there. It's been about six days since I've talked to my commander there. But that'll be a question I ask him today or tomorrow.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Well, we are almost out of time. But before I ask the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members of our future speakers. On June 25th, Stan Kasten, president of the Washington Nationals, will be here. On June 26th, Robert Herz, chairman of the Financial Accounting Standards Board, will address regulatory reform in the financial markets. And on July first, Wayne Clough, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, will address a luncheon.

Second, I'd like to give our guest the traditional NPC mug. So now you should have a matched set.

**GENERAL CONWAY:** I do. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

**MS. LEINWAND:** And for our last question, what would you tell the parents of an 18 year-old who wants to be a Marine?

**GENERAL CONWAY:** I would look the mother in the eye and say, "Don't worry. The safest place in the world is somewhere inside a battalion of the Marines." (Applause.)

**MS. LEINWAND:** I'd like to thank you all for coming today. Thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman, for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

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Thank you very much and we are adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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