

Remarks by Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
Worldwide Conference of Marine Leaders
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General Conway, Marine Leaders, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here.

This is a very timely conference, given the attention that Marine and Naval infantry forces have received in recent years.

Today I would like to discuss how the U.S. Marine Corps has evolved to its present state, and offer my views on why the model we have developed over time could serve as a way to enhance the military capability of other nations and increase maritime security across the globe.

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Marines have a very long history in the United States, with origins dating back to even before the birth of our country.

These forces were, from the beginning, distinguished by their service on both land and sea, and they first made their mark during the American Revolutionary War period conducting amphibious raids against the British in the Caribbean.

Marines later gained widespread public attention for their operations against Barbary pirates along the “shores of Tripoli” during the 1790’s and during the first decade of the 19th century.

They quickly established a reputation for their bold and daring tactics, setting an early standard that Marines have always lived up to.

Our Marines continued to add luster to their reputation during the Battle of Belleau Wood in World War I.

Indeed, the “Devil Dogs” of the 4th Marine Brigade are still celebrated today for their heroism on the battlefield, as General Conway can attest.

Just a few weeks ago, he participated in a ceremony in Belleau, France to mark the 90th anniversary of the epic confrontation between our Marines and enemy forces on the fields of eastern France.

After World War I, Navy and Marine Corps planners designed the sort of amphibious operations that would have such a decisive impact in World War II.

It was during the Pacific campaign of World War II that the Marine Corps became associated in the minds of the American public as an elite fighting force second to none.

The incredible courage and tenacity of our Marines at Tarawa, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and elsewhere across the Pacific help explain why the Marines enjoy such a prominent position in our military.

The successful amphibious landings they made there, and later at Inchon, Korea, have come to define our image of United States Marines.

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Today, the Marine ethos is the same, but the Marine Corps continues to evolve its roles and missions to reflect new conditions and challenges.

Marines are no longer primarily engaged in the classical amphibious operations that won them fame in World War II and in the Korean War.

Today we see the Marine Corps conducting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—operations that leverage the inherent flexibility of sea-basing, but are conducted many miles inland.

This flexibility is reflected in their training and doctrine, and in the way the Marines are equipped.

With 70 percent of the earth's surface covered by water, and 80 percent of the world's population within a few hundred miles of the sea, sea-based Marines possess tremendous geographical flexibility for access.

That access is enhanced by aviation, allowing us to provide support further inland.

Take, for example, Task Force 58, forward-deployed Marines who were inserted into the Afghan desert from ships 441 miles away during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

The two Marine Expeditionary Units that executed that operation conducted an amphibious mission as in the days of old—but without a beach landing.

My personal view is that the great leverage the Navy and Marine Corps provide to the Joint fight is rooted in our ability to project power from the sea.

Access from the sea also has the advantage of allowing us to operate with fewer

local and regional political constraints, avoiding a dependency on large, fixed bases on foreign soil.

Furthermore, the absence of those bases allows us to operate with a small footprint, thus minimizing the cultural and environmental impact we might otherwise have on other countries.

This independence of movement limits possible political constraints on operating where needed, when needed—and with a flexible and scalable response that is most appropriate to the situation.

The Marines can deploy units as small as a special operations company or as big as a Marine Expeditionary Force.

Flexibility of response from both a geographic and mission perspective permits engagements across the entire contingency spectrum, from humanitarian assistance to opposed amphibious landings.

The Marine Corps' operations today remain expeditionary in nature, as they have been historically, and they demonstrate the many advantages of sea-based forces.

Marines are engaged in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response operations, with recent examples as diverse as the rescue of people from mud slides in Leyte, Philippines, and sea-based Marines posted offshore from Burma, who were standing by to assist cyclone victims.

Today's Marine Corps is also called upon to conduct sea-based, Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations, most recently in Lebanon in July 2006, where they provided both security and direct assistance to those fleeing an unstable and threatening environment.

Today, we also see the Marine Corps conducting operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, engaged in everything from counter-insurgency to civil affairs to reconstruction.

Although they operate sometimes hundreds of miles inland, they still receive their principle support from the Navy at sea and retain the expeditionary component of the force.

Of note, Marines in all of these operations—even those stationed hundreds of miles inland—are dependent on support from the sea.

The expeditionary advantage remains applicable across the spectrum of operations, and highlights the essential role our Marines play as an integral partner on the

Navy-Marine Corps team.

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This partnership provides us with a model for expeditionary forces in support of our maritime strategy, a strategy that now places great emphasis on cooperative engagement.

We believe that the United States and like-minded nations have a vested interest in security in the maritime domain.

Furthermore, it is evident that the U.S. cannot itself provide security to the 860,000 kilometers of coastline worldwide, and we need other nations to assist with this mission.

We are eager to engage with other countries at the appropriate level.

We recognize, however, that we cannot achieve a secure maritime domain just by being at sea.

We must extend our reach ashore as well.

Our engagement with other nations often takes the form of training, which we are conducting with the navies and marines of many nations.

Highly trained and disciplined naval infantry forces can provide an advantage to any country, in our view, even one with limited resources.

A nation does not need a Marine Corps of 200,000 troops or a fleet of large amphibious ships to benefit from a highly trained, disciplined, agile force that is sea-based.

We emphasize the importance of discipline and professionalism.

The level of professionalism that we expect from our Marines is very, very high.

The advantages of having such a professional, flexible force that is sea-based are, to my mind, indisputable.

These are advantages that I urge all of you to consider as you lead your forces in your own countries.

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In closing, I salute you for your service as leaders of your nations' Marine forces, and I commend you for the work your countries have already done and hope to do in collaboration with our Marine Corps.

You have much to be proud of.

The discussion sessions you are taking part in during this conference will help us to partner better in the future—and can serve to broaden our mutual respect and understanding of each other.

We rely on our counterparts to maintain regional stability, and without your partnerships, our efforts cannot achieve their maximum potential.

It is my hope that we can build upon the friendships and relationships built this week to further our common goals, and to foster a more secure international environment.

Thank you, and Semper Fidelis.