

Remarks by
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Admiral Smith, thank you for that kind introduction. I am very pleased to be here, and I would like to thank NDIA for hosting this very important and timely conference.

Expeditionary warfare has been and will continue to be a core mission of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. Indeed, it has distinguished us from other nations, as we have always put a particular emphasis on this component of our military power.

But expeditionary warfare is changing. It is changing because the threat environment has changed dramatically.

The certainties of the Cold War—a Soviet Union with a fixed geographical location, understood doctrines, and known capabilities—have been replaced by a world of great uncertainty. Our enemies today obey no rules of warfare. They could strike from anywhere on the globe. No method of attack, no tactic, however barbaric, is beyond their consideration. The logic of deterrence has been replaced by the logic of the suicide bomber. All this adds up to a changed world in which uncertainty is the only certainty.

The nature of expeditionary warfare is also changing in ways that necessarily leverage the skills and knowledge of Sailors and Marines as much as if not more than our leveraging of technology.

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This is a time of unprecedented change in the Department of the Navy. We are executing a major transformation of the force at the same time that we are executing an array of operations in the Global War on Terror.

This transformation—about people as much as equipment—is shifting our focus from blue water to green and brown water as the demand for operations in the littorals increases. This movement towards a balance between blue, green and brown water also

includes a greater use of Special Forces and Joint Forces across a wide range of ongoing activities. I would note that shifting our focus does not mean that traditional roles and missions are no longer vital. They are, and will remain so.

We are transforming because we must position the force to best meet future threats across a broad spectrum of operations—from Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief to the Global War on Terror to Major Combat Operations. We must win today’s war, and we must be prepared to defend America against future threats.

The scope of the Navy and Marine Corps transformation is truly massive, given our hardware-intensive nature. Our platforms are made to last 30 to 50 years, so it naturally takes time to fully implement transformational change within the entire Department—and yet time is of the essence.

This audience is quite familiar with the many areas in which new platforms are being developed. But just think about the number of major new platforms being developed simultaneously—both on the shipbuilding and on the aviation side: the Littoral Combat Ship and SSBN conversion to SSGN, which I will talk more about in a moment. Virginia class submarines, DDG-1000, CVN-21, Joint Strike Fighter, and MV-22, to name some of the major programs.

There are also elements of transformation that we are taking advantage of immediately, and our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan is helping to crystallize what some of our real needs are. The use of unmanned air vehicles is a compelling example, but the Navy’s role in guarding oil terminals in the Arabian Gulf is another illustration of how traditional missions such as maritime security and freedom of transit are also crucial to the war effort.

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In fighting today’s war while executing a wide-ranging transformation of the force, there is, naturally, enormous attention being paid to technology. We are accustomed to many decades of warfare, where technological breakthroughs were capable of giving one side a decisive edge.

Think of the development of nuclear weapons and rocketry. They are clear examples where technology was the critical factor. Whoever had the latest technology had the superior force.

Speaking as someone who previously was directly involved in the intense competition between superpowers to develop a technological edge, I have a profound respect for the ability of America to compete with anyone in the world.

In many ways, the great rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union turned on the many scientific wonders our premier research laboratories such as Draper, Los Alamos, the Naval Research Labs, and various industrial laboratories regularly produced. But things are different today, and we are fighting a very different kind of war.

Today there is a basic set of advanced technology that is available to virtually everyone—cell phones, computers, micro-electronics. That is why we are increasingly seeing that Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures—and the people who utilize them—are more important than the technology itself.

The real challenge today is: How do we find people who are capable of adapting to constant change, and what do we need to do to best support them? In LCS, for example, I have great confidence in the technology that supports the program. The focus of our attention must be on the true innovation of LCS—the application of that technology, and what that means for the crew.

The bigger questions we are grappling with include: how will we use the platform? Can a crew of only 40 operate LCS across a full range of missions? How do we use and maintain the various mission modules?

Take another example of a transformational platform—the conversion of SSBN's to SSGN's. There are no technology breakthroughs in this new platform, but with SEAL team insertion capability, SSGN now has mission flexibility and an ability to take the initiative in missions against a new kind of enemy.

The contrast between the two missions is striking. SSBN was a cornerstone of our strategic deterrence, with very precise, scripted procedures that all but eliminated independent actions. SSGN reflects exactly the opposite qualities. SEAL's, as our enemies have come to learn, write their own script. SEAL's have transformed a stealth platform into a lightening-fast shore insertion vehicle, able to project a new kind of power in response to a wide variety of situations.

SSGN is a transformational platform for the threat we face today. In the Global War on Terror, those waging war against the United States have chosen the kind of battles we face—irregular warfare.

Our technological prowess is one of America's greatest strength. But the unfortunate fact remains—there is no technological breakthrough that is likely to change the course of this war.

What will win this war is the human factor. Because we face a leveled playing field in terms of widely available technology, winning the Global War on Terror will increasingly turn on our people and their ability to develop and employ effective Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures.

The Sailors and Marines being trained at Fleet Training Concentration Centers are central to these transformation efforts. There is also a clear trend towards putting greater responsibility on younger personnel, with junior officers commanding Masters-at-Arms at ABOT and KBOT, and 24-year olds leading Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure Teams in maritime interdiction operations.

As we develop a Riverine Force, this trend will continue, again suggesting that our investments in the people side of transformation are increasingly critical. Clearly we are investing more budget dollars in personnel and training, but we must not frame the budget debate as a trade-off between people and investment accounts, let alone one of picking and choosing individual programs.

I will repeat here what I have stated before to many audiences—the Department of the Navy's budget is very tightly wound. Changes to our plans can cause significant disruption to the overall effort. Programs are intertwined, and we are following an integrated approach—integrated to include the people side of transformation—in moving the Department from a blue water Navy to a Navy that also embraces green and brown water.

To ensure that our transformational platforms and systems live up to their potential, Sailors receiving significantly broader training will have to make the real difference in building the most capable force the world has ever known. Our ability to compete at this level, I submit, is another strategic advantage of the United States.

Warfighters in this new war will need greater support in terms of highly specialized training, and an ability to carry out a wide range of missions.

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There is little doubt that the world entered into a period of enormous instability and uncertainty at the end of the Cold War.

Today's Global War on Terror, North Korean nuclear tests, Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons, the war in Lebanon, and threats, however nascent, from our own hemisphere are merely the latest examples of this instability.

Today we are engaged in a Global War on Terror that we cannot afford to lose. We must work this balance between fighting today's Global War on Terror and transforming the force for an uncertain future—and we don't have much margin for error.

Joint Expeditionary Warfare will be playing a critical role in fighting today's war, and the innovative application of technology will continue to distinguish our forces from those who wish to challenge us. The development of our expeditionary warfare capabilities such as our Riverine Force and the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command is a top priority of this Department.

The many changes taking place in response to the change in the threats we face hold great promise, and I am excited about the possibilities these capabilities will add to our warfighting power.

America in this era of uncertainty needs you, and I appreciate the work of this conference, and the service each of you provides to our great Nation.

Thank you.