

**'Terrible decisions' ahead**

## **CONWAY: NEW WORLD NEEDS RETURN OF EXPEDITIONARY MARINE CORPS**

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**Date: May 19, 2008**

“Terrible decisions” are at hand in calling the Marine Corps out of land fighting and back to its expeditionary, maritime-based roots, but the move is vital to successfully fighting the war on terror in a world that will be drastically different in 20 years, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Conway said May 14.

“Our value is not in the fact that we provide a second land army to this great country,” Conway told the crowd of several hundred at the Marine Corps Association’s annual Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) awards dinner. “Our value is that we provide an expeditionary force second-to-none that can get out of town quickly, be light on its feet, be adaptable wherever we go, and very, very lethal.”

“We’ve got a ways to go, however, to get back there and there are some terrible decisions along the way, quite frankly,” he added.

Citing the work of the Marine Corps’ Strategic Vision Group, which is evaluating how to position the service into 2025 and beyond, Conway painted a future requiring a more agile and littoral-focused corps. For example, 75 percent of the world’s population will be living within 250 miles of a coastline by 2035, according to the group.

“So if you look at that arc of instability, it’s got a lot of blue on it,” Conway said. “If you accept that we’ll be fighting amongst the people, we’re going to be fighting in those littorals we think, a good bit, in this global war.”

The group, which released a preliminary information paper on strategic trends and implications in February, also postulates that water may become as valuable as oil, with 67 percent of the world’s population facing shortages by 2030 and conflicts between nations developing over competition for the resource. Furthermore, the group says, China and India are becoming bigger economic and political players, the legitimacy of sovereign nation-states is being increasingly challenged, and the definition of conflict is broadening to include terror by non-state actors.

“So it’s going to be a different world from what we know it, folks, and so we ask ourselves, how does our Marine Corps engage?” Conway said.

Strategic plans and recommendations from the group, which falls under the responsibility of Lt. Gen James Amos, commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, are expected in the coming months.

The Marine Corps has seen the question of how to engage in the new world already manifest itself with improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan, Conway said. Additional armor offers troops more protection from IED’s, but more armor also adds weight, which must be limited to get personnel aboard ships or aircraft.

“Where is that sweet spot, how do we do both, is a major question that [Amos] and his guys are wrestling with, but that we’re all really facing, I think, as a corps,” Conway said.

Conway said that while winning the fight in Iraq and Afghanistan is of the utmost priority, it should not take away from the service's need or desire to think beyond today's battlefields. Becoming a "two-fisted" force that can fight conventional warfare as well as it can fight counterinsurgencies will take reshaping of the force and a return to training that the service hasn't been doing, Conway said.

The Marines cannot be wedded to a "particular way or mode of war," according to the Strategic Vision Group's preliminary information paper.

"The future demands a military organization that is agile and adaptive in its approach to the unique conditions each conflict poses," the report states. "By virtue of its relatively small size and flexible structure, [and] maritime orientation, [the Marine Corps has] the opportunity to pioneer decentralized and agile responses to a wider set of contingencies across the full spectrum of conflict." -- *Rebekah Gordon*