

Persistent Conflict: The New Strategic Environment

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I'm in California to visit a laboratory we have here that is doing the integration for our future combat systems. It's a system that we hope is going to give us the edge that we need in the latter part of the 21st century and we've been working on it for some time. We had this novel idea that if we started at the beginning and integrated all of these different systems from the ground up rather than developing individual systems and trying to integrate them at the end that it would come out better. So far we're not disappointed.

What I would like to talk to you about is how I see the strategic environment, and then about the state of the army, and then end with the quality of this force. I testified before the House Arms Services Committee yesterday and it was kind of interesting. I was sitting there and Chairman Skelton who was delivering the opening comments said, "And General Casey asked for this hearing." Normally, it's not something that you do, and I smiled because my recollection was when I was having my initial call in May I said, "I'm going out to go around the army for about four months and try to get them a feel for what's going on" and he said, "Well, maybe you should come back and tell us about that when you get back." I said I'd be happy to, and he said, "We'll have a hearing." So that became the hearing that I asked for.

A few weeks ago our country has been at war for six years. It may not feel that way to you every day, but I will tell you that your army and your armed forces have been at war almost every day since then. We live in a world where the threats of global terrorism and extremist ideologies are a reality and we can't wish that away as a country. In my time in Iraq, I spent a lot of time reading about Al Qaeda's ideology and their direction and they are out to destroy our way of life and they will continue to work at that until we prevail or they succeed—and they won't succeed. But as I look to the future what I see is a future of what I call persistent conflict. I define that as a period of protracted confrontation among states, non-states and individual actors, who are increasingly willing to use violence to achieve their political and ideological ends. That's what I see coming for the next decade or so. And exacerbating that, if you look at trends that people generally agree with, people who think about the future generally agree, these trends are going to exacerbate that situation and make large elements of the world's population vulnerable to exploitation by these terrorists and ideological groups.

What am I talking about? First, globalization. There's no question that globalization will have positive impacts on prosperity around the world. Unfortunately, if you look at where that's happening a lot of it is north of the equator and not so much south of the equator. The flip side of globalization is that it runs the risk of creating have and have-not societies and the have-nots societies are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Demographics are working against us. The population is expected to double in size in some of these lesser developed countries in the next ten to 15 years—countries that are already having trouble governing and sustaining their populations. Projections are that 60 percent of the world's population will live in cities by 2030 and that's a much more difficult environment. You can imagine some of these sprawling cities like Karachi, Pakistan, and Cairo would be very, very difficult to sustain populations in less developed countries in these large urban areas. There's going to be continued competition for resources and projections are that by about 2030 demand for oil resources is going to exceed supply and as we look at what's in the pipeline in terms of development for additional exploration for alternative sources of oil it doesn't look like it's going to match up. This means the demand is being driven by these large middle class populations that are developing in India and China, for example. I read somewhere that the middle class in India is larger than the population of the United States, some 400 million people. That's a lot of demand on those resources. Climate changes and natural disasters will have a profound effect, particularly in less developed countries.

And then lastly, the two trends that worry me the most. The proliferation of weapons. There are over 1,100 identified terrorist organizations around the world, most of them are out seeking weapons of mass destruction—chemical, nuclear and biological—and there's no question in my mind that if they get them they'll try to use them against the developed countries.

And lastly, failed and failing states who are either unwilling or unable to govern and control their areas. These areas can become like Afghanistan was, a safe haven for terrorist organizations to plan, organize, train and export terror. So, you roll all those different things together with the fact that we're already at war and we have a bumpy future here. I think we all need to understand that and understand also that it just isn't going to go away if we turn our back on it.

The other thing I tell you after having said all that about the future, the one thing conclusively that we know about the future is that we usually get it wrong. From my perspective we have to develop an army that is versatile and agile enough to respond across this spectrum of conflict from peacetime engagement to a nation at war. Ike Skelton just a few weeks ago had Congressional Research Services do a study and he said, "Tell me how many times the United States of America has used force since I've been in Congress, 30 years." Any guesses? Twelve. In places like Iran, Desert One, Lebanon, Haiti, Kosovo, Bosnia, Panama, Grenada, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan. If you think back, those weren't household names when we did it and so you have this era of persistent conflict and you have the uncertainty of what can come out of this. So we just need to be ready.

As part of my transition, I had a group go out and I said, "Go look at the future. Talk to people who think about the future and tell us what it looks like." Well, what I just gave to you about persistent conflict is what came back. I had another group and I said, "Go back 13 years in the other direction and tell me what the country was doing in 1994." It came back. We were basking in the glow of our great success in Desert Storm, the Wall had come down, we succeeded in the Cold War, and we were scanning the horizon for a feared competitor and not finding one. By the way, we were decreasing the size of the army by about 300,000 and we were gutting the CIA and the Agency for International Development to the point where they're having difficulty doing things we need them to do in this type of environment. So, I ask you to think about that and remember that our nation has a bad history of turning away at the end of a war and neglecting its armed forces.

Now, what's the state of the army? There's lots of chatter out there. What I have repeatedly said recently is that we're out of balance. What do I mean by that? Our current demand is limiting our ability to restore our readiness and to be flexible as we need to be for other contingencies. It's also starting to impact on our ability to sustain our all-volunteer force. For the first time since the Revolutionary War we have had to sustain an all-volunteer force in a period of conflict. Now, out of balance is not broken. This army is a usually resilient committed and professional force and what the men and women of all our armed forces are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan is remarkable. But we need to do some things to right ourselves. Unfortunately, because of decisions that were made in the early, mid-90s, when we thought we were in for some decades of peace, we weren't as ready as we needed to be on September 11 for the kind of wars that are facing us. So, what we need to do, and this was my primary message to the House Armed Services Committee yesterday, was to put ourselves back in balance is going to take probably three to four years. We have to sustain the all-volunteer force, we have to continue to prepare our soldiers for success in the current conflict, we have to continue to reconstitute them when they come back from the war—their equipment and themselves, and then we have to transform for what is a very uncertain future.

Let me just say a couple of words on those. Sustain. Soldiers are the centerpiece of the army; they are our ultimate asymmetric advantage and we must continue to recruit and retain the best. As we look to that, it's clear to me that families are increasingly important in maintaining the readiness of that force, and families right now are the most brutal part of the organization. They tell me, "Look, General, the second deployment is harder than the first and the third is harder than the second." So, we recognize we have to do some things to ratchet up for what we're doing for our families. We also have to take care of our wounded soldiers. Over 2,400 soldiers have been killed and over 20,000 wounded. About seventy-five percent of those 20,000 got fixed up within 24 hours and went right back to work. That's a lot of folks and we will continue to work with them, particularly the severely wounded ones until they're reintegrated back into society or the military.

Prepare. We have to continue to give our soldiers the best equipment and the best training to give them an advantage over any enemy that they face and we've made great strides in giving them the best possible equipment. I was just in Iraq and Afghanistan and I grabbed every soldier I could put my hands on and said, "How's your equipment?" They all said, "Fine." Some of them wanted two guns instead of one, but they have to get pass that. We probably put 18,000 up-armored Humvees in the theatre now and that's from less than 1,000. That's a huge compliment to American industry who were able to turned it around. I went out to our training areas in the United States right after I got back to make sure that they were replicating the environments we're dealing with and much to my pleasant surprise they were. We can't back off in making sure that our soldiers who are going into combat have the best equipment in the world. Third, we send them out to come back. The old analogy about riding a horse hard and putting him up wet so he's not ready when you take him out the next time. Well, that applies to us. We're operating our systems now at five times the tempo that we thought we'd be operating under in harsh desert and mountainous conditions.

Resetting is really about resources. We estimate it takes about \$15 million a year to reset a 15 brigade force coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. That's a lot of money but if we don't do that we'll have a hollow army like we did back in the late '70s, early '80s.

And lastly, transform. We did not have the army that the nation needed on September 11. We were a Cold War army; we were optimized to fight on the plains of Europe. We've done a

remarkable job transitioning to fight the war that we're in right now, but we've also learned a lot about 21st century warfare. Transition for us is a holistic process. It's not just about new systems. It's about how we train, how we think, how we educate our soldiers and leaders, how we support our soldiers and families, and how we manage them. It's a generational process. I'd like to look at it in terms of Chiefs of Staff, who have four year tenures. Two chiefs ago, General Shinseki, really laid the intellectual foundations for our transformation and he fought a hard fight because a lot of folks in an operation the size of the army didn't want to change. We had a pretty good bureaucracy out there, believe me. And then my immediate predecessor, Pete Schoomaker, led the organizational change, converting ourselves into organizations that were much more versatile and deployable. I saw the power of these organizations on the ground in Iraq. We have to continue that, this transformation is a journey and not a destination, but we know where we need to go and I think we have great support in Congress to continue to help us transform so we can give the nation the army it needs in the latter part of the 21st century.

So, sustain, prepare, reset, and transform – that's what we need to do to put the army back in balance. We know where we need to go, it's just going to take a few years and resources to be able to do it.

Now, let me close by talking about quality, because I know there's a lot of chatter out there that the quality of the army has decreased. There's no question that when you look at the measures we measure ourselves by there's been a dip. Let me just tell you, we don't take anyone in the army who is not either a high school graduate or has a high school completion of some type—nobody. The men and women that we're getting in the armed forces right now are wonderful, magnificent. Let me tell you a story about one of them. I was just in Baghdad and I pinned a Silver Star on this young man. At the end of February, Sgt. Kenneth Thomas, from Utopia, Texas, was out on a river boat patrol with a group of Iraqi police and they were ambushed from the bank of the river by about 70 to 100 insurgents. The Iraqi policeman who was there abandoned the machine gun which was the major weapon the boat had and he jumped on the weapon and he starts returning fire as the rounds are bouncing off the steel plates that protect the machine gun. They tried to punch through—they can't get through. They divert to the other side of the river and they get everybody out of the boat into kind of a depression. The good news, they not taking fire. The bad news, they can't get out. So the squad leader looked at the Sergeant Thomas and said, "Get us out of here." So, he charged up the bank of the river under fire only to find that his way out was blocked by a fence. So he took out his wire cutters and started cutting the fence. The fence was electric, knocked him down. He got up and continued to cut the fence while his gloves were melting in his hand, got the fence cut enough to get the squad through, the last guy comes through and gets hung up on the fence. Sgt. Thomas goes back knowing he's going to get shocked again, grabs the fence, gets knocked down, pulls the guy out and then organizes the squad to secure a building so they can get evacuated. That's the type of men and women we have in the armed forces and don't let anybody tell you any differently. It's a magnificent force and you can all be very proud of it.

Thank you very much.

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