
DATE
Wednesday, September 1, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. EDT

FEATURING
General David H. Berger
USMC, Commandant, United States Marine Corps

Vice Admiral Peter H. Daly
USN (Ret.), CEO and Publisher, U.S. Naval Institute

CSIS EXPERTS
Seth G. Jones
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Good morning. I’m Pete Daly, CEO, and publisher of the U.S. Naval Institute. And on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Naval Institute, we’re proud to bring you this continuation of our maritime security dialogue. This series is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Huntington Ingalls Industries. Today’s topic is an update from the commandant of the Marine Corps. A graduate of Tulane University, General Dave Berger was commissioned in 1981. A career Marine infantry officer, he commanded at every level – Reconnaissance Company, 3rd Battalion 8th Marines in Haiti during Operation Secure Tomorrow; Regimental Combat Team 8 into Fallujah, Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom; as a general officer, he commanded the 1st Marine Division Forward in Afghanistan during OEF; the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force; the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific with Fleet Marine Forces Pacific; and Marine Corps Combat Development Command. General Berger’s staff and joint assignments include serving as an assistant division commander of 2nd Marine Division. He was a chief of staff in Kosovo, KFOR in Pristina, Kosovo. And he was director of Operations, Plans, and Policies at Headquarters Marine Corps. General Berger’s former education – formal education includes the U.S. Army Infantry Officer Advanced Course, the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and U.S. Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting. He holds multiple advanced degrees, a master’s in International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. And General Berger assumed duties as the commandant of the Marine Corps on 11 July 2019. Dr. Seth Jones will engage General Berger in a moderated discussion that will include some audience Q&A. Dr. Jones is a senior vice president, Harold Brown Chair, Director of International Security Program, and Director of Transnational Threats Project at CSIS. Before we go over to Seth and General Berger, I just want to say how proud we are of the Marines and what they did in Kabul. And we mourn the tragic loss of 13 service members last week, 11 of whom were Marines, and one was a Navy corpsman serving with the Fleet Marine Force. They are America at its best. Over to you, Seth and General Berger.

Thanks for that great introduction. And I want to echo Pete’s comments, General Berger, about how proud we are of your Marines and the other service members, and how much we mourn their losses, those that are wounded, and obviously the Afghans as well that were killed and wounded at the bomb site. So, thank you very much for the service of your Marines.

I appreciate that. I appreciate both of y’all mentioning it. And I know you have questions to begin, but listening to you, I would just have to tell you about a sergeant major and I went and visited the ones who are at Walter Reed who were medevacked back and the families at Dover. And the ones – the Marines and sailor who were at Walter Reed, just to pass on to you all, are exactly like I think they have been for a couple hundred years. All they
want to do is go back to their units – like, Commandant, how fast can you get me out of this hospital so I can go back to my unit? And the corpsman – magnificently – corpsman walking around in his gown. He’s wounded, walking around in his gown, dragging around his IV thing, to check on his Marines. Even though the nurses don’t want him – not supposed to be outside his bed, you’re not going to stop that corpsman. And he’s going up and down the ward to check on his Marines in his platoon. I just pass that on because some things don’t – they really don’t change.

Dr. Jones: No, and how proud we are of them for that. That’s exactly the kind of people that we want serving the country. So, thank you. Thanks for the values that you instill in them. I wanted to begin with force design. Well, let’s get to a number of other subjects. But one of the most important priorities that – when you became commandant was force design. So, for those who haven’t taken a look at it, worth looking through Force Design 2030. You indicated that a fundamental redesign of the service could address a concern that the Corps was not manned, trained, equipped, and postured to fight a peer competitor, with China, really as one of the key peer competitors – the peer – the main peer competitor. So, the question is, what have you learned from the past year regarding the force design? And how does that impact where you’re going to be focusing over the next year?

Gen. Berger: Perhaps a couple things. We started a couple years ago with some assumptions like you always do in planning. We began from my predecessor, who actually concluded that the Marine Corps wasn’t, as you put it, organized, trained, and equipped for the future. So General Neller before me said that a couple years earlier. “I agree with that assessment.” And then you – if that’s the case, then you have a couple choices. You can – you can make minor adjustments to the force that you have – try to move that along as fast as you can. Or I think like some other organizations outside the military, you step back and fundamentally look at where you need to be down the road, which is what we chose to do. So, what have we learned? One of the things we learned is we got a lot to learn. This is an environment where two forces are moving at the same time. It’s not one variable in motion and one static. So, part of it is we have an aim point a decade out. I have a pretty good idea of where the Marine Corps might need to be in 10 years, but equally convinced that that’s not going to be how it exactly plays out because we’re both trying to gain an advantage, the other side is countering that. So, this is a dynamic that’s going to go on as long as this competition goes on. So, if all that’s true, back to where I started from, this learning – we have to learn fast, we have to experiment pretty quickly, we have to be able to weave that back into the changes that are in the – in the force. And our cycle is not built – our mechanics, our bureaucracy isn’t built for that kind of speed, is not built for that kind of velocity. Though so far the premise of flat budgets, China is the pacing challenge, and Indo-Pacific is the primary theater but not the only one. All those still, to me, seem to be holding true.
Dr. Jones: Thanks. They do seem to be holding true. One of the issues – and I know you've discussed this as well – is you’ve stated in the past that the fiscal realities today and in the future dictate that we must first divest of some legacy programs in order to generate the resources needed to invest in future capabilities. And as you have recognized, this may create some near-term risk that has to be managed in order to obtain the force in 2030 that we require. So, can you talk a little bit about how you’re – what some of these risks are? How you’re managing them? And then, you know, how to ensure that the Marine Corps is prepared to contribute both to the joint force in crises in 10 years, but as well as deal with issues that are potentially more near-term?

Gen. Berger: Perhaps helpful to break it into two basic buckets, or two categories. One is capabilities and one is capacity. So, I think the challenge for service chiefs, me included, is managing, to your point, how much capacity, inventory, how much stuff, people do we – do we have today, do we need today, and the capabilities that are associated with that, to generate whatever the Secretary of Defense needs us to do. But also posture ourselves so that we’re not caught six, seven, eight years down the road with a force that’s not a match for the operating environment. We have divested. We have gotten rid of some things that we know; we love, they are proven in the past, but in our estimation are not the right fit for the future. Those are decisions that are hard to make because it would be great to hold onto everything and all of your structure and just keep it all and protect it all. But in my estimation, that force was not going to be a good match for what we need to do in the future. And I’ll just use end strength as an example. The size of the Marine Corps, there are some who – and this is a fault perhaps of mine in not communicating clearly enough – we’re 20,000 smaller than we were 15 years ago. We’re not shrinking, we’re not contracting the Marine Corps in order to save money. We’re contracting the Marine Corps to size it for what we need to do in the future. Sometimes, in other words, smaller but better is what you need. So, from the individual Marine and the training that we’re now shifting into giving them to the capabilities that they’ll have that they don’t have today, it’s not shrinking the size of the Marine Corps to save money and then pour that money into the new force. It’s sized the force for what you need, what you think you’ll be asked to do in the future.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. And one follow-up. So just out of curiosity, you mentioned some of the capabilities available today, not going to need 10 years from now. What are some examples of that that you might highlight?

Gen. Berger: Well, thus far, we've gotten rid of all heavy armor in the Marine Corps. We’ve divested of – we’ve gotten rid of some portion of our towed artillery.
Moving towards the direction of much more unmanned, both grounds – in other words, vehicles – plus aerial. Both. And I think surface as well because we’re going in the direction of a long-range unmanned surface vessel as well. And some – most of these will be platforms with unmanned platforms on them. In other words, unmanned autonomous vehicles that can launch unmanned UAVs or unmanned aerial vehicles. Same with the long-range surface vessel, can we get a vessel that can go out unmanned, and then launch aerial vehicles, and they need to recover them or they’re disposable. So, the systems that we’re moving to are not completely unmanned. It’s – I think the magic of it is marrying up platforms that are not manned, but there are people in the background with the manned part. The teaming part is where we’re going to generate actually the velocity, the speed, the momentum that we’re going to need in the future. So, I think the size of the Marine Corps, one thing. The armor, the artillery. Those are things that we’re shrinking down or completely getting rid of. Moving into unmanned, paired with artificial intelligence and autonomy, married up with human beings – with people who have the skillsets to really employ that capability. That’s where we’re headed.

Dr. Jones: So, just to pick up on this point, I know the department has spent a lot of time thinking through issues related to the future of warfare, including the Joint Warfighter Concept, the whole JADC2 construct. And we’ve talked to folks in the Navy in this program previously about JADC2 and how to link sensors and information. From your standpoint and from the Marine – from a Marine standpoint, how are you applying and thinking through these developments in machine learning and artificial intelligence, and advanced technology? You’ve talked about unmanned systems, aerial systems, sea systems. And then linking that together – how does that – how does that JADC2 concept and the technology fit into how you’re thinking through the next decade or so of warfare?

Gen. Berger: I think it’s essential. Where it takes us, joint all-domain command, and control, where it takes us, sort of like force design, I think we don’t know perfectly where it might end up, but we know we must go in that direction. And I think for our role as the stand-in force – which is where the Marine Corps’ sort of natural fit is forward, inside an adversary’s collection range, inside their weapons range – that in-tight force, which is where the sweet spot is for the Marine Corps, and I would argue Naval expeditionary forces, this is where we belong. So how does JADC2 – how does that fit into that? What we’re learning in experimentation and wargaming so far is one of the key roles of that stand-in force is the ability to collect, paint a picture of what’s in front of the joint force, and strip away their collection capability as well. Now, the reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance – I don’t know where his book is over here. Wayne Hughes would say – who would call it scouting and counter-scouting. And that’s where – originally where I got the idea from. I think this is a key role for us going forward. JADC2 enables us to tie
in the sensors, unmanned and manned, that we will use forward to try to collect against what’s in front of us, and also strip the threat’s ability to collect against our force. Without JADC2 there’s no way we’ll be able to pass that information. So JADC2, and I’m just going to oversimplify here, I think it’s an extrapolation of what Chris Brose was writing about in terms of kill chains. Now we’re into kill webs because I’m assuming they’re going to – you know, a good adversary is going to try to break down our command and control. So, we now need kill webs. They need to be resilient enough. And we need the – an architecture that stitches all that together so that whatever platform or human being is detecting something in front of them, it’s woven in through this web system, this architecture so that it’s shared from that forward and backward, and we can act on it inside an adversary’s – not OODA loop so much, but their kill chain. Yeah, because your kill chain, your cycle, has to be inside theirs. Or else it’s too much of a symmetrical fight. You want to – you want to be inside that.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. Yeah, you do. I wanted to just take this in a slightly different direction, just focusing on the Indo-Pacific theater. I think for any of us that have been in the military, particularly dealt with our NATO allies, NATO has got an architecture for sharing information. So, you know, there’s all of the sharing, when we talk about JADC2, just among even the U.S. side and the services. The Indo-Pacific doesn’t have that kind of architecture right now. So, I’m wondering what your thoughts are on how to – you know, what are the – whether they’re policy issues to think through, or an information sharing architecture between the U.S. that includes the Marine Corps and regional partners. We’ve got South Koreans, Japanese, Australians, Singapore, and others. And, you know, just even looking recently at information coming off, say, F-35s, we have challenges sharing information quickly with allies and partners, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, without any kind of architecture right now. So, I’m just wondering if you could sort of paint through some of the challenges as you see it and some possible solutions, particularly for the Indo-Pacific region.

Gen. Berger: More than half of my career’s been in the Indo-Pacific. I would agree with you, doctor, that it’s – when people compare and contrast NATO, Europe with Indo-Pacific, you know, I think in our brain we want that to look like that. It doesn’t and it won’t, and we shouldn’t – actually, we should accept that and embrace it. In the Indo-Pacific, to your point, there is no NATO equivalent. But what there is, because of the nature of the countries that are there, things are bilateral. They’re multilateral to a degree, but it’s one-by-one sort of arrangement. I think, as the U.S. we just want the one-size-fits-all. Can we not just create a NATO in the Pacific? What – if you’ve been operating there for 20-30 years, you realize that’s an impractical approach. Not going to work. So, I think the last – my experience, the last 10 years at least much effort done in bilateral – us and Japan, us and Singapore, us and the Philippines. Australia and Japan, Australia, and the U.S. And then gradually,
I've watched over the past 18-24 months – especially the past year – more of a move towards things like the Quad, that I think are – the nascent part of that is – provides perhaps part of the answer to that question or that dilemma of how do you move information, especially classified, between friends? So, I think watching the Quad sort of slowly, quietly get off the ground, a great thing. I would say, below the surface, there are already existing frameworks for how we share information with Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines. But they’re one-to-one arrangements. On the bright side, and I'll just turn it back over to you. On the bright side, I would – I would watch carefully things like the deployment of the Queen Elizabeth II right now. And next month – I think it’s next month, or November, I’m not sure – we’re going to do – we’re not going to go on deployment with, but we’re actually going to fly U.S. Marine Corps F-35s off of a Japanese ship. These are – these are the beginning steps of what you’re talking about. We’ve been on deployment now for five months with Marine F-35s and British F-35s on the same ship. And I’ve been on that ship multiple times to try to get to the answer you’re talking about, where there’s two skiffs across the passageway from each other. A U.K. and a U.S. skiff, I’m just – we are working our way through that in a very good way. I think in the coming years, pressed by, you know, what those countries in INDOPACOM see from China, they’re much more leaning into, OK, how do we – how do we plug into this network and share information, to your point? They bought the F-35s. Now, how do we make them communicate? How do we move that targetable information back and forth freely between them? So, I watch things like the Izumo-class, things that we’ll do this fall, the Queen Elizabeth II deployment all the way from the U.K. to the Pacific and back again. These are great steps in moving that ball forward, I think.

Dr. Jones:

Yeah. And I think the reason some of these issues come up is in any of the exercises or wargames in the Indo-Pacific area obviously there are a number of different allies and partners that come together. So, thinking through these issues obviously is important before ever getting to a conflict situation. I wanted to move just briefly. We started off just talking briefly about Afghanistan. I just wanted to come back to Afghanistan for a moment. And the first question – and it’s something you’ve written about recently, but I think it would be helpful for folks other than just Marines to hear this as well. And you posed a question in a letter you wrote recently on: Was it all worth it? You asked about the deployment in Afghanistan. And I think it is an inspiring letter that you and Sergeant Major Black wrote. But I think it’s important to ask you that question again: Was it all worth it? What are your thoughts here?

Gen. Berger:

A couple of us were talking this morning on that topic. It’s very timely. First of all – I would say, first of all, while it’s relatively fresh in our minds we need the honest, open critique or commission or whatever it is that cracks open, you know, what were the options that were available, who made what
decisions at what time, not so that we can penalize or hang somebody by a yardarm, but actually so that we can learn. So, on the Marine Corps side, yesterday and today we’re going back through the Holloway Commission, the Long Commission, there’s others as well, to try to figure out a framework where how can we study, to your point, what went right, what went wrong, what can we learn going forward? The events of the past 10 days have not all altered my view of was it worth it. Here’s how I know: To a person, if you were going to go to Walter Reed right now to visit a Marine or a sailor or a soldier who’s wounded and you ask them that question, they would – they would respond with: I know it is because I can tell you how many people, we processed through our evacuation control center and put on a plane. This is their yardstick, right? They’re not political. They don’t know about – they don’t really care about international relationships. What they do know is exactly to the person how many people they pulled over the wall, out of the canal, and put in a safe place, and then put on a plane. And to them, that’s worth it. There’s a baby who’s going to grow up here in the United States never probably going to meet that Marine or soldier who pulled them over the canal, but they’ll be – they’ll live a free life here. So, yes, is it worth it? Yes. Were there decisions that were made that we ought to go back and scrub? Absolutely yeah. Should we go back and look at the options themselves? Yeah, absolutely. How did this surprise us, that in the span of 11 days it so fundamentally changed, so those are things critically, as a government, as a military, we absolutely ought to unpack? It does not, for me, change anything in that letter. And my verification, my confirmation, is the service members who were there, who would do it again because they feel like they saved lives. And if they had not, that those people on the other side of the canal would have – who knows what would have happened, so to them it’s worth it.

Thanks. And that’s, again, an inspiring letter that you and the sergeant-major wrote on that. And definitely worth everyone taking a look at. I wanted to just keep with Afghanistan briefly but look forward. The U.S. intelligence assessments, not just in Afghanistan but also in a few other places, also highlight some concerns about terrorism remaining a persistent problem. In Afghanistan itself there are moves underway to put together a prime minister, minister of defense. One of the key individuals that’s being looked at for a senior Taliban position is the deputy right now, Siraj Haqqani, who I’ve spent considerable time tracking in my time in the government. He is – he is very closely, probably the most important conduit to al-Qaida. So, we have groups like that. We obviously still have – the Islamic State conducted an attack against Marines and others in Kabul itself. As the president recently noted in his talk even yesterday, there are concerns about West Africa, the Horn, other areas of the Middle East, he mentioned Syria and Iraq as well. So, the question for you is there clearly is a shift to the Indo-Pacific. As you noted earlier, it’s not the only region we’re looking at. But how do you balance some of these big peer competitor threats with what are clearly
some nonstate threats that are likely to continue? How do you – how are you prepared for all of the above?

I’ll try two or three, perhaps, approaches. First, I think our approach in the Marine Corps is we understand who the pacing threat is, pacing challenge is. That’s the PLAN. So, we must build a force that can match up to that force, because if we don’t then we won’t even be able to operate in the neighborhood. We won’t even – there’ll be so much overmatch at the tactical level you couldn’t operate in – you couldn’t do your job. OK, so that’s the pacing challenge. That’s the bar for their military capability that we must measure up against. And our premise is if you can design that force, then a Marine commander – well-trained with a well-led force – will use that force and adapt it for other missions anywhere on the globe. Because if it – like you all – I mean, doctor, you’ve heard this a hundred times, but I believe that it’s true. We have an absolutely perfect record of getting wrong where the next crisis will happen. So, we cannot – we’re not banking on a war in China at all. I think on the spectrum of likelihood way down near the bottom. There will be another crisis somewhere. But we need the capabilities that allow us to match up and deter the PLAN. Couple of other things in terms of balancing this. I think the global force posture helps answer that equation – or answer that question. In other words, if you have X amount of military force in the Department of Defense, where do you spend it, where do you put it? I think the pace at which you drive that force is also a factor. In the end, though, I think – here’s where I come down on the sort of approaches. We’ve talked for a long time – I don’t know how long; you probably know better than I do – about a whole-of-government approach. We talk about it in an academic kind of manner it’s brought to reality when you’re up against an adversary that is a whole-of-government approach. So now I don’t think we have an option. Now I don’t think it’s an academic discussion any longer. We either get there or we will certainly be overmatched. There is no military solution to deter China. There’s also no military solution to deter terrorism. I’m beyond that, is my point. In both cases, on the low end and on the high end, it’s going to require much more of a whole-of-government integrated approach than we have right now, or neither will work – not the terrorism part and not the deter China part. Neither one will work unless we get all parts stitched together in what Secretary Austin calls integrated deterrence.

Yeah, I hope we’ve learned that. I think that is clearly a lesson that stands out to me, anyway, the importance of other instruments of power applies. And then you can see it too with the way that China has attempted to project power in part through its Belt and Road Initiative, which was largely economic and technological, and using that for political and, in some cases, military intelligence leverage. So, our competitors are using other instruments of power to achieve their main objectives. I think, you know, you can say the Russians as well.
Gen. Berger: If I could just - not to - I don’t – I wouldn’t argue with anything you just said. It has to go beyond using the other instruments they actually have to be stitched together. This is what we’re not doing right now, in other words, as good as we’re going to need to do. It’s not good enough to do economic stuff and then some diplomacy and then some military – and we haven’t – we need a coherent, stitched-together effort. So, I think, yes, the elements of national power all have to be brought to bear. The more difficult part will be trying it, stitching it together in a coherent manner.

Dr. Jones: Yeah, that is the challenge. I think that is without a doubt the challenge. Otherwise, you’ve got – you’ve got potentially multiple instruments operating either not efficiently or in some cases, potentially, even against each other. I wanted to just turn briefly to a case which I think gets to an issue of readiness and sort of highlights the evolution of warfare. And it’s one that you have talked about, which is the Armenia and Azerbaijan case. It’s kind of an interesting one because during the recent conflict Armenian ground forces that some might have labeled ready to fight were targeted by Azerbaijani forces using precision strike, loitering munitions, lethal unmanned systems. And so, the question here is what do examples like this imply about readiness? And how does the Marine Corps, at least from your perspective, embrace this new readiness paradigm?

Gen. Berger: Boy, that’s a great topic to unpack., you brought up one example. I think Israel-Hamas, I think there’s a bunch of them that you could look at and go: Wow, they had forces, they weren’t short of that. But it didn’t work very well. I think there’s a couple lenses here perhaps to look at. One is the temporal lens. There was a writing maybe 15-20 years ago about ready for what, when? OK, so we have to think our way through that aspect of it. For example, you could spend all of your resources this afternoon thrown against problems around the world, expend all that energy and effort. But what you’re not thinking through is you actually spent what you’re going to need to deter three years from now. OK, that’s a problem. That’s a temporal sort of an issue, there’s a relative advantage, you can have another aspect, not kinetic. The Maritime Militia Coast Guard from China, their actions right now, an aircraft carrier, ready, capable, fifth-gen, doesn’t deter it. (Laughs.) So, we have to – we have to learn how to match up a capability that’s going to, especially I think below the threshold, sort of in that gray zone because we’re learning that the things that we built and bought for conventional deterrence don’t always deter other kinds of actions. They’re right below there. You can drive three aircraft carriers into the East China Sea. It’s not going to deter the Coast Guard of – or the Maritime Militia that’s scaring away a fishing fleet. So, we’re going to have to become much more nuanced and matched if we’re going to deter – match the capabilities so that it has a relative effect. And that’s learning we have to do; I think the example you brought up is another great one. Had armor, had tanks. Not so good against loitering munitions that have a top-down attack capability. You had what
you thought was a ready force and enough capacity, not a match – a complete mismatch for another type of lethal capability that they were just not ready for at all.

Dr. Jones:

Well, I think it’s worth highlighting, just to push this point a little further too, that when you look at Russian seizure of territory in Crimea it was done without firing a shot. Eastern Ukraine, where they were involved, was heavily involved in supporting partner forces, proxies, to do most of the fighting. In Syria, Russians did not put a lot of ground forces, they worked with Lebanese Hezbollah, among other forces. And I think, to your China point, China seized, built islands in the South China Sea with dredgers. They didn’t actually go in and seize territory the way one might do conventionally. They essentially did it overnight and built bases with dredgers. And so, I think – you know, I think that looks like it’s a challenge, is how do we – how do we operate or how do we think about not escalating? And how do we operate in that – in that gray zone? So, I don’t know if you have any other thoughts before we move on here.

Gen. Berger:

No, I think we have a lot of learning to do on deterrence, let’s just say. There was a – there was some real expertise, that deep bench, I think, in the ’50s, ’60s, ’70s in the United States thinking about deterrence. Now this is not the Cold War today, but it seems to me our bench of thought – intellectual thought in terms of deterrence 2020, 2030, 2040, we have – we have to focus there. It’s not the Cold War. It’s not the Soviet Union. And we’re going to need different forms of deterrence I think, to your point. The threat of punishment, conventional deterrence, sort of conventional theory, I don’t think that works. It hasn’t. Clearly the last 10 years, the last five years have shown that that will not work in all cases. So, we’re going to have to come up with some other measures, things that we’re thinking about. Is there such a thing – it doesn’t exist today – but is there such a thing, an idea, as deterrence by detection? In other words, if the adversary is doing all these nasty things below the radar, nobody’s really paying attention, you wake up: Holy cow, how did that island come from – whoa, where did that airfield come from? If they’re doing all that below the radar, how do we shine a big Maglite on top of that, turn up the volume, so that the rest of the world can see? How do we – how do we deter by presenting an adversary with the perception, convincing them that there’s nothing they can do that we’re not going to see, and we’re not going to shine a big light on and make a big deal out of? OK, so this is a nuanced form of – perhaps, of deterrence. But we don’t have it right now. We’re not using that sort of approach. But our conclusion is more of the same of what we’re doing right now, buying more of what they’re saying. So far, there’s no evidence that that’s actually deterring. So, we have to change. We’re going to have to change.

Dr. Jones:

On that point, it’s been interesting to watch the expansion of the Russians in places like Africa using some GRU and SVR, but mostly private military
companies to expand. That needs to be watched and monitored. Obviously, they have those in Syria and Ukraine and other countries. I wanted to just touch base on – you’ve mentioned the Navy a few times. Your force design that you’ve discussed at length enables the Marine Corps to provide, obviously, effects not just on land, but to project power seaward in support of Naval campaigns. And you’ve said this in other contexts. You see the Marine Corps contributing to anti-ship, anti-submarine warfare in the future, and have repeatedly argued – and we’ve heard this from the Navy side as well – about integration with the Navy as a strategic imperative. So, how do you assess interoperability with the Navy? And how are you looking at challenges and trying to address them, particularly Marine-Navy integration?

First of all, naval integration, from my perspective, is – begins actually up here. It’s not a staff thing it’s not a platform. It’s not a tactic. It’s intellectual. It’s conceptual. That’s where the root of naval integration is. I think force design, the best evidence of naval integration is the force design effort that we’re doing. We’re building a force that, married up with Navy capabilities, equals a Naval capability – a maritime capability that a joint force commander is going to need. So, I am all there, completely all there. But it begins with the conceptual, the intellectual Naval integration. I am extremely happy at the speed at which numbered fleets and MEF are moving to find ways from command and control to C5ISR, to power projection – ways that work in their neighborhood. And it’s going to – it won’t surprise you that what maybe works in 6th Fleet is going to be a little bit different than what 7th Fleet is going to do. And I should – me and CNO should be fine with that. It should not be the this is one-size-fits-all for Naval integration. You will all do this because the CNO and I have talked, and this is what you’ll – this is the template. No, absolutely no. We have three-star commanders at the numbered fleet and numbered MEF levels. They know their operating environment better than I do. Why would we not allow them to come up with Naval integration that works best in Japan, or works best in the Mediterranean? And me and the CNO should be moving our force to support that. And it may – what works good in one place may look different than the other place. But I’m very supportive of the speed at which they’re moving. We need to move faster at the headquarters to support what they’re doing because, frankly, they’re coming up with – OK, we’ve figured out how to fight. So far it looks like this. I need you to bend the Marine Corps there now. We should – we should work really hard to get there fast. It’s good. It’s good being pushed.

So, one example of this – and I’m curious what you learned from this – is the large-scale exercise 2021, which just wrapped up, in which the CNO, who we just mentioned, argues is the largest maritime exercise in a generation. So, it’d be helpful for you to just highlight what the Marine Corps – what role the Marine Corps played, and then what, even along these lines, did you take away from it?
Gen. Berger: We have three Marine expeditionary forces around the world. All three were involved. That’s never happened before. And not that size is everything. It’s not. Global isn’t everything. But I think it’s fair to assert that it’s very possible that in a future crisis if there is one with a great – with a peer competitor, it’s going to be more of a regional thing. So, we’re going to have to coordinate across boundaries in a way we haven’t been challenged to do in the past. So, it’s just goodness. I view exercises as a place to try things. It’s not, in other words, a rehearsal for an OPLAN. So, I like the way that this large-scale exercise was crafted in a way that allowed subordinate units to try things, try capabilities, try a command-and-control construct, try things. And if it didn’t work, OK, great. We’re learned that. We should use these exercises, as much as we can, to learn from. We should not drive a commander into: You have to use this exercise as a rehearsal for this OPLAN, that’s it. This large-scale exercise allowed a lot of flexibility for subordinate fleet and component commanders to try things, not all of which worked. But the ones that didn’t work, that’s probably at least as valuable as the things that did work. I think it was a very helpful, very good exercise. I also think it’s going to take a while to absorb what we learned at it, I think.

Dr. Jones: So, one broad question that comes from these kinds of exercises – and just looking at the laydown in – particularly in the Pacific, is that sustainment and logistics are challenging probably in ways that we haven’t seen, at least in the Middle East, when supporting expeditionary advanced base operation in a contested littoral environment. So, you know, we’ve been able to set the theater in the Middle East. We’ve had overmatch. And that’s not likely to be the case in some areas of the Indo-Pacific. A future adversary will almost certainly make it difficult for even the Marine Corps to be self-sustaining. So how do you see – and, you know, you can look at some of these issues in exercises and others. But what do you see the Marine Corps – or how do you see the Marine Corps addressing some of these sustainment and logistics challenges?

Gen. Berger: Well, those who postulate that our logistics will be contested, I am right there already. We have to train that way. We have to assume, actually, that our supply lines will be contested. We’ve never had – not never – we haven’t needed to do that in 70 years. OK. So, all that – we’re a little bit out of practice perhaps. But we’re going to have to actually protect our supply lines. That’s the long line, the operational to strategic, but mainly theater kind of level logistics. We’ve assumed its security. Can’t do that anymore. They’re going to challenge it. I think they’re going to challenge it all the way to – all the way to Bill’s Garage, whatever it is, in Idaho, that produces a freaking part of a pump that goes onto a jet or a ship. They’re going to try to go after that supply chain all the way back to his garage because they know that his garage is the only place that makes that bearing or that whatever it is. So, this is going to be an attack and a defense in depth like we have never
Dr. Jones: – we haven’t witnessed in your and my lifetime. OK, so back to the real pieces that we need to work on. And I’m talking about cyber. I’m not talking about bombs on Bill’s Garage. But I’m talking about shutting him down in other ways. That’s just going to choke us off. So, I would absolutely assume contested logistics. Now, so what does that mean for us? I’m also with you, there is no more set the theater. There’s no more this is how we’re going to flow the force over the first 90 days. I don’t think that’s going to work either, because they’re not going to allow us to follow our TIFIT. So those things are helpful for planning. They’re not going to be executed in a way that they’re laid out on paper. We’re going to need more agility than we have right now. I believe logistics, as a warfighting function, is the pacing function. Not one of, it’s actually THE. We can have the best force, postured perfectly, with this magnificent JADC2 on top of it. If they’re able to bring us – if they’re able to contest and really choke us off logistically, they’ll take us to our knees. We can’t let that happen. We need the organic mobility to move the force. We need distribution means that we don’t have right now to move supplies and sustainment laterally inside the West, inside the weapons engagement zone. Assume they’re going to contest it. We need to train our forces to forage because if you’re going in there, sir, with 100 Marines to someplace, I can’t afford to fly you in bottled water if we’re very much distributed. No. You got to find water, food, transportation. You got to find all that stuff on your own. And I’m going to give you a – here’s your checkbook, OK? You’re going to go in there and get all that stuff. And the only thing I’m going to fly you in? Ordnance. And maybe JP to refuel some aircraft. But it’s just fuel and bullets, that’s what I’m going to resupply. The rest you’re going to have to forage. So, we have to train in a way we did before, but now we’re going to go back to it.

Gen. Berger: So, one area to sort of think through some of these challenges – we’ve talked a little bit about exercises. The warfighting lab in Quantico broke ground a few months ago. And you’ve stated that wargaming has helped shape your thinking on force design, including how the Marine Corps can contribute to recon or counter-recon in the maritime domain. So, what do you – just out of curiosity – what do you hope to gain from the Warfighting Lab to inform the future of force design and to sort of think through some of these issues, including logistics, that we’ve just talked about?

The Wargaming Center is going to give us, all the way to the highest levels of classification, the ability to test-drive concepts, see how well they work. I think if we do it right, you can also bring in your headquarters’ staff and practice your war plan, your OPLAN too. The primary purpose, though, is a way to model, a way to run through concepts to see how at the very highest level of classification. So, it’s not the brick building, of course, as much as it is the software and the classification capabilities inside the brick and mortar. And, by the way, it has to be tied – it has to be able to tie into other wargaming centers so that we can actually model – we can actually war game joint capabilities in a larger framework. We don’t have such a facility
right now. And the fact that it’s right down the road at Quantico is going to enable I think not just the Marines but the joint force to have a place nearby, go test drive joint – this new joint concept we’re thinking about. Let’s go see if it actually works, comes back two weeks, makes some changes. Let’s go try it again. We don’t have that capability right now.

Dr. Jones:

Yeah, it’ll be a great development. I was just down there to take a look at it. We are almost done; you’ve been so unselfish with your time. Thank you very much. Just had one or two final questions. The first one’s a tough one too, which is really, how do you – how are you thinking about addressing some of the screening and evaluating recruits’ challenges? About 20 percent of Marines, I believe, don’t complete their first enlistment. So, what are your thoughts on whether it’s screening, evaluating recruits, et cetera? How do you start to decrease that number?

Gen. Berger:

When I came in, same as last year, we took the ASVAB and we took an inventory strength test. And that was all we knew about Berger, or anybody else really. We have got to know a lot more about a high-school graduate or college graduate than we know. And we can. For the last year and a half, two years, we’ve piloted programs to go way beyond the ASVAB and, in a cognitive sense, more things – not to the degree, but along the same path as if I were to apply for the special operations community, that sort of approach. I mean, the whole of me – cognitively, physically, resilience-wise – all of that. So, the screening and evaluation you’re talking about, about what we bring to the future, cannot be just the ASVAB and the strength test. That’s not going to cut it. That’s not going to get us the talent in the door that we need. We have to fundamentally change that.

Dr. Jones:

So, as part of the talent management, as you’re looking down the road, you know, you said that you’d like to move beyond this – what some might call an industrial-era model of manpower management to an information-age model that attracts flexible, critical thinkers, and also competes with the civilian market for this talent. So, how are you thinking about doing that? What initiatives are you considering to achieve that? I mean, I think this is just as relevant across other services as well.

Gen. Berger:

I’d begin by a premise that it – even if we were, we can’t design the exact perfect Marine Corps of the future. Even if we could design that, it will not work with the manpower and the training structures we have today. Won’t work. And I’m also convinced that the manpower framework that we have today, the construct we have today – we’ve made a lot of tweaks to it over the years. It’s beyond just a little more adjustment and it’ll catch up. Can’t do that. So, we have to make some fundamental changes there. If we’re going to retain the person you spoke about, they got in the front door, if we’re going to retain that we’re going to have to do some things very much different. The Air Force, the Army – Air Force especially – has used, like, a marketplace for
assignments. In other words, instead of it’s time for you to rotate, you call your assignment person. He goes: “Well, I got three jobs for you to pick from.” What if you could see all of the possibilities that are opening up next May? OK, that’s a whole nother world. We don’t do that in the Marine Corps right now, but that – if we’re going to actually retain the talent that we need – or, let’s say – let’s say me. I graduated from college. I went to work at Boeing. I went to work for wherever Amazon. Doesn’t matter. And I work there for six, seven years. And now I want to go into the military. I’m in pretty good shape. I’m 27 years old. I’d like to go into the military. You know how we’re going to do that in the military? We’re going to make you a private. (Laughs.) Because that’s our structure. Or a second lieutenant, because you got a college graduate – or, college degree so we’re going to make you a second lieutenant. Well, why can’t we figure out a way to bring that person in laterally? They have seven years of doing cyber stuff. Why are we starting them at the bottom as a second – OK, we have – so that’s not great. Or if I’m a Marine now, I’m Major Whatever now, and I want to go out to work in Amazon for a couple years, and then come back. OK, we don’t have any way to do that. It’s, like, a one-way door. So, we – our manpower systems – I think we have very hardworking manpower people. But they’re working in a structure that’s not going to suit us going forward.

Dr. Jones: Well, we wish you all of the luck and success, because I think that is an important aspect to think through. And I just want to thank you for the time you’ve spent with us, and with all of us collectively. A number of those questions I asked were from the audience. There was tremendous interest in hearing from you. I also want to thank USNI and HII in support of this. And I just wanted to conclude, General Berger, by thanking you and your Marines in Afghanistan, most recently those that put their lives on the line in service to the country. And thank them and their families for what they continue to provide to the United States and all of our allies and partners. So, thank you for what you’re doing, thank you to all of your Marines for doing it as well. They make us all proud.

Gen. Berger: Well, thanks for allowing me sometime today. I wrote down two and a half pages worth of questions. So, I’m going to – we have to go back now and learn more. And I think the people that are on the net are going to help the Marine Corps learn. We don’t have all the answers. Regarding the Marines, I think you’re spot on. They are – the people wearing the uniform today are the very best that America has. They are. They literally are the very best we have. They know that what they’re doing makes a difference. They’re very proud. We are proud of them too. We just got to keep America behind them, and we will be fine. But they just really – especially the last couple weeks – extraordinary. Just hard to describe in words. You just can’t.

Dr. Jones: Thank you very much, General Berger. We appreciate it.