

Marine Corps Underscores Nation's Need for Ships

Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus CO-Chairs Gene Taylor (D-MS) and Rob Wittman (R-VA) hosted a breakfast with speakers Major General Robert E. Schmidle, Jr., Assistant Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Programs and Resources and Lieutenant General George J. Flynn, Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration. The meeting was attended by Representatives Rodney Alexander (R-LA), Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD), Madeleine Bordallo (D-GU), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Randy Forbes (R-VA), Eric Massa (D-NY), Glenn Nye (D-VA) and Bobby Scott (D-VA).

Major General Schmidle discussed the Marine Corps' current and future operations across the globe and stressed how important a sufficient naval amphibious fleet is to fulfilling its missions. He noted: 75 percent of people live within 200 miles of a coast; 70 percent of the world is water; 95 percent of international voice and data communications travel via underwater cables; 23,000 ships are underway daily, carrying 90 percent of the world's international commerce; 49 percent of the world's oil travels through six major chokepoints, and 25 percent of the world's oil and gas is drilled at sea. Accordingly, the United States is a maritime nation and she "must have a very robust Navy."

Major General Schmidle expressed concern that the United States' major bases abroad do not always allow for military forces to easily arrive to the problem areas, which he noted makes a good case for seabasing. To that end, he explained that amphibious vessels bring a full range of assets for both conventional and irregular warfare.

Schmidle also underscored the need for the Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) Program, stating that it is a necessary capability "across the spectrum of operations." He said that at least one squadron of the future force was required, adding that it is extremely important to support upper echelon missions and requirements.

The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) for 2009, which will be commenced shortly, will be the first where the Navy and Marine Corps are actively working together on the needs of the sea services. Flynn stressed that the Navy/Marine Corps team is serious about using common hull forms to meet different mission requirements. An example given was that the LPD-17 hull could be used for the next generation LSD amphibious ship as well as for the amphibious command and control ship (LCC). He added that to take advantage of this common hull strategy, there has to be a steady state plan for ship procurement. Flynn concluded that successful mission accomplishment in the maritime domain in the future is tied to the Marine Corps' and Navy's ability to build ships.