

Remarks by General James Conway
the 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps

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General Conway: [laughs] Sit down. [laughs] Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for that very warm welcome. And welcome to you, many of you, to your nation's capital. Great to be here with you this afternoon.

I'm going to fall back on my military training and give you three points that I hope I can cover quickly and then get off the stage. The first of those is Ashraf 3. And I'm told that they're viewing live today, and I certainly hope so because I would like to send my greetings and my best wishes to those people in Ashraf 3. In a very real sort of way, they are my heroes. It probably started about six years ago, after the massacres at Ashraf and then Camp Liberty. Nations across the world expressed their outrage. Some sent letters. But one country did something about it and that was the great nation, the Republic of Albania. They extended a welcome, and they said to those people at Liberty, "Come here. Join us. Live in peace and freedom." And 2,500 of your fellow countrymen chose to do so.

We went there in 2019, an American entourage, if you will, of visitors. I didn't know what to expect. I think I anticipated that we would find 25 people who were fairly despondent, fairly depressed at that point, maybe even suffering from survivors' guilt, those types of things that would follow their most recent experiences. Folks, that is not what we found. When we got there, there were throngs of people lining the streets of their newly created village. They were waving little Iranian flags. They were smiling and cheering, and you could feel the warmth of their welcome. It was a complete surprise to me to see that. That night, I made it a point to sit down in conference with a number of them, actually a high percentage of them women, and they reflected back on the happy days at the original Camp Ashraf. I understood that because I had visited there actually in about 2008, when my Marines had security for the camp. And it was purely an oasis in the desert of culture in the humanities, and I understood the pride that they had in what happened there originally.

To be sure, when they spoke of their friends and family who had been killed or badly maimed in the attacks, they cried. But then I watched and there was a transformation in these people because they said, "We know who the Iranian agent thugs were and that the Iraqi security forces were doing these things to us. But the real culprits are in Tehran. That's where the orders came from." And they started to express a determination, a real sense of purpose in making sure that those people no longer rule the good people of Iran. You could see it in their faces. You could see it in their eyes. I read body language, and it was there.

Later that night before I hit the rack, I reflected on that, and it reminded me in many ways of a night I had had when I was a combat commander in the City of Ramadi in Iraq. We had a battalion there that was hotly engaged, and I went out to talk to them. I got to speak to one entire company of Marines. And these guys, I mean the look on their faces was really something to behold. They were stoic. They heard what I said. But their thoughts were elsewhere. And afterwards, a couple of the senior staff NCOs came up to me and said, "Sir, we lost a couple of good Marines today. We're going deep into bad guy tomorrow and somebody's going to pay."

And others said, "Sir, we're going to win this fight and we're going to keep winning until you pull us out of here."

And so I said then to the people at Ashraf 3 the next day, "What I saw last night reminds me of my Marines. And I am absolutely convinced that you have that same grit, that same level of determination and one day, you're going to win, too."

I will tell you folks, thank you, I will say to you that to me the people of Ashraf and, of course, Madame Rajavi, are the heart and the soul and the face of this great movement.

Point number two. Iran. I almost hate to say this because I know what it means to your countrymen that are still within the borders. But Iran is a threat to the United States, to Europe, to the Middle East and the freedom loving people everywhere. They are conducting proxy wars right now as we are here today in two nations, and they have armed militia interfering in the governance of three others, at least three others. Iran is one of four nations on the globe that has refused to acknowledge that terrorism is bad. They say, "We see it as an element of national power. If we have to exercise it, we will." Ninety-nine percent of the other nations on the globe do not see the world that way. And to my mind, Iran is hell bent, whatever else the world is trying to do, Iran is hell bent on bringing nuclear proliferation to the Middle East. I say proliferation because if Iran has a nuclear weapon, guess what? Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, they're not going to stand by and have that imbalance of power. So it creates a very dangerous situation.

My belief is that the nation of Iran is in near collapse. If you read the reviews, 15 to 20 percent unemployment with the good people of Iran, depending upon which age group you're looking at. A 40 percent inflation spike in 2019 that is carried on now to about 30 percent over the last couple of intervening years. A five percent reduction in the annual economy and oil exports that are now about 40 percent of what they were when our previous administration under President Trump reimposed the sanctions. Iran now has, I think, in everybody's estimation, a criminal for a president. The election was a sham. He was not elected; he was selected by the supreme leader. The election was in no way fair. Good people who wanted to run were denied the opportunity to do so in the early going. Only 40 percent, or 48 percent, I think, is the figure, of your fellow countrymen chose to vote and that's down from percentages of 60 and 70 percent in preceding elections. Of those roughly 30 million that voted, fully four million cast

invalid, I think purposely, invalid ballots or they had write-in candidates, such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, which I think gave some indication of what they thought about the whole of the election process.

Raisi has the blood of 30,000 of your countrymen on his hands. He was one of four members of that infamous death commission that oversaw 30,000 executions in 1988. As a result, he was condemned by Amnesty International, by the Human Rights Watch, by the governments of Italy and Canada. He is personally sanctioned, again by the last administration, by virtue of an executive order. And I'm convinced that Khomeini knew all of this, of course, when he selected him to be the leader. He is saying to the rest of the world, "Deal with it. Suck it up."

Well, do we have to do that? Must we? I can't believe that we do. If we and the European nations start to deal with this person, then all we will do is strengthen that regime. We will see a drop in sanctions, which are good for the people but just tends to extend the government. It will allow the Iranians to claim victory in the negotiations yet once again, and it will allow them to continue to cheat. Now I'm going to offer you a personal view and it's a little bit chilling. Let me say I haven't seen an intelligence report from the U.S. government in over 10 years of any level of classification. But I'll share a little history with you and express to you my concern. In 2007, the Israeli special forces and subsequently their air force struck a Syrian nuclear reactor under construction in the mountains of Syria. They dropped three tons of bombs on it, and it was completely destroyed. That night, in the process, they also killed somewhere between 10 and 15 North Korean scientists and engineers. My concern, my understanding of the real world is that it's a short bridge between North Koreans in Syria and Iranian scientists in North Korea. They need our capital, Iran seeks the nuclear technology, and my undying concern is that should the time come when Iran wants to roll out nuclear weapons, it won't be months or years before they can construct it. It may be weeks or even days before they can roll that kind of technology out of North Korea.

Point number three. Revolution. Now in the job that I held, you're always, I suppose, sort of an armchair kind of historian and I've studied revolutions to a greater or lesser degree. A cursory study will tell you that there's two types of revolutions. One is planned; one is unplanned or more spontaneous. We are dealing with that second kind because we don't have a military force or a guerilla force that's capable of taking on the military in Iran. When a revolution starts to take seed, there have to be factors that impact it, the social, the economic, the political. There has to be a level of unrest in all of those areas, exacerbated by internal or maybe external sources. Revolutions are most likely in nondemocratic regimes where the people feel like they have no say so in how they're governed. Where there is midlevel to low level economic ruin, where the man on the streets is barely being able to feed his family and sees no future for his children in that lifestyle, and yet he sees state ineffectiveness in dealing with all of that. My belief, folks, is that all those factors are present today in the state of Iran.

It's estimated that 95 percent of your countrymen now feel that the 79 revolution was a mistake, that Khomeini's personal fortune in money in foreign banks is equal to about \$95

billion. An historically proud nation, and rightly so, for all it has done throughout the centuries now, apparently, has no pride in the government that they have in place. Increasingly, lawyers for those who were at one point protesting in the street as well as the rest of the intelligentsia of your nation, are being arrested and thrown into jail themselves. The BBC reports that during the week of 11 through 18 October, another 16 people were put to death for “crimes against the state.” And perhaps most disconcerting is that the regime has just in recent weeks rejected 5.5 million doses of top-quality vaccine from the United States and from the U.K. simply because it comes from the great Satan. It’s criminal and thousands of your fellow countrymen will die, I believe, as a result of that very bad judgment. There’s another figure out there. When the nation is impacted by Covid, people will get the disease, okay? But only about two percent across the globe of populations who contract the disease will die in industrialized or nonindustrialized nations. In Iran that figure is 30 percent. Again, it’s inexcusable. The first role of a government is to protect its people, and yet here we have callous concern for your countrymen in the streets and in the towns and villages not being protected against this terrible disease. I read two editorials last week from pages from newspapers in the Middle East. They both said that this Covid could be the final straw, their term, final straw for this incredibly bad government in Iran, that the people may have had enough. And that means that their future may be limited to weeks and months, certainly not years and decades.

For all of that, I feel compelled to offer a however. In this review and study of revolutions, the experts will disagree on certain points but there’s one thing that they say is consistent and I beg you to take heed. They say, and I’m going to quote this, “Success in spontaneous revolutions seems to occur when the military is acquiescent and/or supportive of popular out-risings.” So folks, I know you have your groups, your people, your organizations inside the nation proper and I know they’re at great risk but they’re brave and courageous and they’re willing to stand up, but I beseech you, somehow, some way, find a method to bring the army to your side. The navy, the air force are too small. The revolutionary guard are hardcore fanatics. They don’t care about your country. They care about themselves, and they care about defending the regime. They won’t have to die or be charged. They don’t have to go away in some fashion.

But I contend that your army is made up of brothers and sisters, Iranian patriots who hopefully just want to do the right thing. And you may have more support from those people right now than you even know because they’re of the people. It may only take a few lieutenant colonels, maybe one or two generals to say this is ludicrous. This cannot continue. But it is my conviction that if you are to be successful, you will need them to either be with you or at least say we will do nothing and let the people decide.

Again, a little bit of a history lesson. I was a young captain and I got home one night in time to watch Walter Cronkite in 1979. And his lead report was on the uprising against the Shah. And he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to watch this footage.” And what it showed, taken from a second floor with the old movie camera, was Iraqi troops sweeping the streets of the demonstrators. And in this particular scene, there were three. There was one poor guy that got

sort of hemmed in by them and he's kneeling down in a door facing and one of those troops is giving him vertical butt strokes across his head and shoulders. The soldier in the middle looks around, turns and fires at point blank range, shoots him in the back and drops him like a sack of grain. Interestingly, the third soldier did nothing and the two of them simply continued to walk down the street. And Cronkite said, "Mark this day because if that is indicative of the army turning against the Shah, he will not last a fortnight." He was right. The Shah was gone within a week. The Shah was gone. And so I simply plead with you, consider...I know it's not easy. I know it's again a risk, but there's an old expression out there, if you go out to kill the king, you better kill the king. Okay, and I'm convinced that with at least the concurrence of the army on your side, we all will succeed.

God bless you all. Enjoy the rest of your conference.