

# Assistant Commandant: Marines Must Be Ready to Fight China, Other Adversaries Directly



Sgt. Maj. Troy E. Black speaks during a panel discussion at the Marine Corps Force Design session. *SOLARES PHOTOGRAPHY*  
NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The assistant commandant of the Marine Corps said the service must always be prepared for a direct war with China or any other adversaries during a panel discussion at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space symposium here on Tuesday.

In initial comments while moderating a panel including three other top service officials on the subject of Marine Corps force design, Gen. Eric Smith said it is not wise to assume the United States won’t go to war with China.

“The pacing threat is China,” Smith said. “People will say,

'Well, you're not going to fight China.' Hey, that's not for you to say. That's not for me to say. There's a plan required to fight the adversaries who may threaten this country – North Korea, China, Russia, violent extremists. We don't get to say, 'Hey, we didn't think that was going to happen, so we didn't build a plan.' You always pace off the fastest runner even if you don't think that's who you're going to beat in the final match. You pace off the faster runner and then you pivot to the runners who may not be that fast, and then you're good."

Smith said it is vital the Marines continue to be the nation's naval expeditionary force. "We are still America's crisis response force," he said. "We will seize or defend advance naval bases and conduct land campaigns in the furtherance of fleet operations."

A naval expeditionary force is vital to provide an alternative to deterrence besides nuclear weapons, Smith argued.

"Our part of the joint warfighting concept [is] we deter," he said. "When you're talking about a nuclear-armed peer adversary, you don't want nuclear deterrence to be your only deterrence. ... You want to deter forward [and] thwart every nefarious action that's happening. You want to thwart it from its infancy. You have to be forward deployed from a naval expeditionary force to do that."