

# From the Chairman

## *Sustaining Our Edge*

**T**he United States is the world's preeminent military power, and we have a responsibility to maintain this decisive advantage. It's good for us, and, frankly, I believe it's good for the world. But staying dominant doesn't just happen. What we do today—and how we do it—may not be as successful in the context of tomorrow. To keep our edge, we must place more emphasis on adapting the force, investing in innovation, and getting the people right.

### Adapting the Force

Adaptation is an institutional imperative for the joint force. Military power in the last century was defined largely by numbers—artillery pieces, tanks, carriers, and warheads. Materiel will remain important, but our ability to adapt smartly from the military we *have* to the military we *need* will determine our future success. That means focusing on agile organizational frameworks, people over platforms, and

acquisition paced to the challenge. It means that we have to out-learn and out-think our adversaries.

To explore this context, I like British author Lewis Carroll's 1871 classic *Through the Looking-Glass*. The Red Queen, a living chess piece, discusses with Alice what it takes to advance in the game. Alice runs alongside the Queen faster and faster until exhausted. Stopping to rest, Alice is startled to find that she is right where she started: "Why, I do believe we've been under this tree all the time! Everything's just as it was!"

"Of course it is," said the Queen, "What would you have it?"

The exchange between Alice and the Red Queen concludes: "Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same

place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

Theorists have used this story to illustrate that a species, evolving alongside its competitors, must continually adapt just to maintain its relative fitness.

Today, in an increasingly connected and competitive global security environment, a nation—and its military—must do the same.

That's not to say that our force hasn't been learning and adapting over the last decade—far from it. As members of the profession of arms, we're adaptable by nature. We always find ways to accomplish the mission. In a broader sense, our military has been quite introspective about its performance through 10 years of conflict and has continuously applied its hard-won lessons. However, the pace of change around the globe is accelerating. Technology and capability are cascading to a wider set of middleweight actors. The operational environment is increasingly complex, competitive, and often unpredictable.

In response, we have to be agile enough to see ourselves within this new context, and adapt on a tighter cycle than ever before, in order to, as the Red Queen would say, "get somewhere else."

This requires us to sharpen the discourse on our emerging concepts, doctrine, training, and leader development—underscoring adaptation as an imperative across the board.

### Investing in Innovation

"The real use of gunpowder," essayist Thomas Carlyle wrote, "is it makes all men tall." As far as innovations go, few in previous eras had as equalizing an effect. So I ask, what's the next gunpowder?

Wherever the next advances occur, we know the effects won't be clearly predictable. To account for this uncertainty, we need to expand our concept of what innovation means. Innovation is about new stuff *and* new



U.S. Airman speaks with Chairman at Naval Air Station Pensacola



Chairman receives brief on capabilities of Apache Block III aircraft during visit to Fort Riley, Kansas

ideas. We must prioritize innovation not only in our material solutions, but also in our war-fighting concepts, organizational constructs, and relationships.

Historically, advances in these areas during interwar and drawdown eras were possible because we were obligated to identify clear needs, prioritize resources, and leverage emergent technologies. A period of transition and tighter resources doesn't signal the end of innovation. Rather, it can and should promote creative and collaborative thinking.

America is built on innovation. We must reinforce a military culture that reflects and taps into this dynamic society—one that fosters and rewards innovation at all levels, and leverages private-sector networks in mutually reinforcing ways.

Along these lines, we must choose resource strategies that are not only innovative and collaborative but also affordable. In my view, strategy insensitive to resources is rhetoric. Global responsibilities, ongoing conflicts, and aging weapons systems—coupled with tighter budgets—only reinforce that reality.

This further underscores that we lean forward in how we invest in and cultivate relationships. The future of global security requires us to approach our challenges on

a wider plane—that we think beyond and through traditional dividing lines. This means deeper relationships and collaboration among the Services, academia, the interagency community, industry, and partner nations around the world.

### Getting the People Right

The Red Queen coached Alice by running alongside her and understood, instinctively perhaps, that people matter most. If there is a single dimension in which we must prevail to sustain our edge, it's getting the people right. People are the strength of our military and our nation's greatest strategic asset. Their leadership is what will enable us to adapt and innovate effectively.

We must continue to trust our men and women at the edge of our formations, to challenge them, and to leverage their talents and experiences. We must make sure they continue to be the best led, best trained, and best equipped in the world.

This means we need to make sure our leaders can effectively reconcile context, uncertainty, and surprise. It requires us to develop our Servicemembers with an unprecedented degree of versatility.

We need to promote and emphasize these characteristics in leader development

and training across the force. As a learning institution, we also need to push to do it better, smarter, and faster in relevant and realistic ways. It's particularly important that we get it right as our men and women spend longer times in the home station environment.

Getting the people right also means supporting those who support our force. Our military families and communities sustain the strength and readiness of the all-volunteer force. How we take care of them and how we honor our commitments say much about what we stand for as a profession and as a nation. We should remember that our future force is watching. They will have a big part to play in sustaining our edge, too.

Alice never finished her race. We have a responsibility to the American people, and to the world, to continue running ours—twice as fast. **JFQ**

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