



Chairman meets Marines stationed at U.S. Embassy, London

# From the Chairman

## *Why We Serve*

**T**here are as many reasons to serve the Nation as there are Servicemembers. Some join for honor, some for a challenge, and some for more concrete reasons. I once knew a Soldier who signed up on a dare.

Regardless of why we join, most Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coastguardsmen continue to serve because of the camaraderie we forge with our brothers and sisters in arms. These bonds of trust extend from those in uniform to the loved ones who support us, and they connect today's force with those who have already served and with those who will. This trust makes us who we are—it makes us a military family.

Like any family, we understand the importance of making tough decisions to balance competing challenges. General George Marshall famously stated, “Don’t fight the problem, decide it.” He knew that simply railing against our challenges was choosing not to choose.

Our family has some tough choices ahead as we deal with rising risks and declining dollars. I cannot predict all the choices or their consequences. But I can share with you how I will approach them. In every case, I will be guided by my commitment to ensure that we have the best trained and best equipped military on the planet *and* that we keep our nation immune from coercion. To

me, this means making choices that uphold the reasons why we serve.

### **An Uncommon Life**

Our choices must preserve the unique ethos of our profession of arms. Deployed in Afghanistan, Army Staff Sergeant Rachel Baranek put it this way: “I believe that being part of a bigger organization than myself and representing something bigger than myself is my way of earning my freedom and my way of life, and that of my family.”

Generations before Rachel have answered a similar call to live an uncommon life—a call embodied by the inscription at the base of “Old Simon” in Antietam National Cemetery: “Not for themselves, but for their country.” This spirit must continue to be our guide.

Our officers and enlisted personnel have to remain more than simply competent practitioners of the art of war. They must continue to be men and women of character, worthy of standing alongside past generations and leading this generation into the future.

## The Mission

Our choices must ensure we are always ready and always the best. Generations past and present have been driven by a desire to make a difference in the world. Navy Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Victor Vazquez enlisted at the age of 34 and celebrated his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday at boot camp. He remarked, “I wanted the opportunity to give back what I have learned as a civilian.” When asked why he serves, his answer was simple: “the mission.”

Petty Officer Vazquez’s story is unusual, but his motivations are familiar. People join the military because they want to defend our nation and its interests. At a more personal level, they want to do meaningful work that produces results and to be a part of the most potent military force the world has ever known.

We honor this drive by remaining committed to the effectiveness of our peerless Joint Force, both today and tomorrow. That starts with our people. We will ensure those in harm’s way have the training and resources required to achieve the mission in Afghanistan and around the world.

As they return home, we must give them the autonomy to excel and make sure that their work continues to have meaning. And we must work not only to keep them ready with reduced resources, but also to guarantee that we remain the best trained and equipped force in the world.

## Our Families

Our choices must contribute to the well-being of our families. Army Specialist Patrick Serna explained, “I knew that if I could join, I could pay bills, go to college, and I’ll be able to support [my son] in the long run.” Pay, benefits, retirement—these are powerful motivators for many who choose to serve. In the end, the well-being of our Servicemembers and their families is the foundation of strength for our whole military family.

To keep this foundation solid, we must preserve our ability to care for military families in the past, present, and future. Our compensation system strives to reflect the unique sacrifices our families make—the birthdays missed, friends left behind, and loved ones lost.

But just as Patrick worries about caring for his family in the long run, we have to

worry about providing for the military family in the decades to come. That means meeting our commitments, but resetting expectations developed over a dozen years of expanding budgets. It means working together to set up a system where pay remains competitive, health care becomes sustainable, and retirement stays solvent.

## Bonds of Trust

Our choices must safeguard the bonds of trust we have with one another and the Nation. As Army 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Ian O’Neill put it, “They do it for each other and I don’t think there’s any other organization where there’s that much selflessness and brotherhood.”

We cannot afford to mortgage this trust or our people for ever-expanding capabilities

or unsustainable compensation. We cannot compromise tomorrow for today. We have an obligation to the Nation to be ready for an uncertain and dangerous future. Along the way, our character and competence must remain unblemished.

In the end, we cannot fight the hard choices that will keep our force in balance. We must decide them. **JFQ**

MARTIN E. DEMPSEY  
General, U.S. Army  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



U.S. Army (Anna Rutherford)

Army 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Ian O’Neill, security force platoon leader for Provincial Reconstruction Team Paktika