

From the Chairman

Putting Our Nation First

One of the great joys of my office remains the privilege of presiding over the promotion ceremonies of those who serve the Nation. As family and friends proudly gather, surrounded by brothers and sisters in arms who bear witness, I cannot help but stand a little taller during this unique rite of passage.

But amid the proud traditions and tender moments that often accompany these ceremonies, the centerpiece remains the oath that each Servicemember takes as he or she moves onward and upward. As I administer that oath, I am always reminded that our military is different—different from any other in the world. We do not swear allegiance to a person or a party but to the Constitution and the living ideals inherent in it.

Our nation expects us to embody those highest ideals in every sense; it is one of the ways we preserve the trust that the American people place in all of us. As a profession, we must protect and guard that trust jealously, and never do anything to erode it.

That is why in my recently released *Strategic Direction to the Joint Force*, one of

my focus areas is renewing our commitment to the profession of arms. It calls for us to understand, adapt, and promote the knowledge, skills, and attributes that define us as a profession.

As the Nation prepares to choose its next President and other elected leaders this year, it is particularly important to remember that one of the core tenets of our profession is that we serve apolitically under civilian authority, regardless of which person or political party is in power. We do not pledge to protect blue states or red states, Republicans or Democrats, but one nation indivisible. We must also understand why our military as a profession embraces political neutrality as a core value.

The Framers of the Constitution went to great lengths to ensure the military's subordination to civilian authority, regardless of what person or which political party holds sway. Validated through centuries of willing yet neutral service to the state, we show fidelity to the Constitution every day by embracing this foundational principle. We are not elected to serve; rather, we elect to serve.

Just as profoundly, I believe that a professional armed force that maintains its separation from partisan politics—remaining apolitical at all times—is vital to the preservation of the union and to our way of life. Samuel P. Huntington, author of the seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, put it this way: “Politics is beyond the scope of military competence and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism.”

General George C. Marshall understood this inherently. An instrumental advisor to President Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, he made sure that he engendered an ironclad relationship of trust with the Commander in Chief by staying out of the business of partisan politics. General Marshall took to heart the advice given to him by a colleague to “understand the ways of politics without becoming involved in them.” His apolitical posture was a major contributor toward his effectiveness during one of the most trying times in our nation's history.

This does not imply that we forego the right to have a private opinion or a preference on the civic issues of the day. As citizens we should stay informed, and we are, of course, entitled to exercise our right to vote. But understanding the issues, even understanding the candidates, is different than advocating for them. When duty calls, neither friend nor foe cares about our personal political views; we are simply American Servicemembers—nothing more and nothing less. This is true even in the virtual world. Technology and social media make it seductively easy for us to broadcast our private opinions far beyond the confines of our homes. The lines between the professional, personal—and virtual—are blurring. Now more than ever, we have to be exceptionally thoughtful about what we say and how we say it.

We should always remember that serving in our profession is a privilege, a noble calling that requires us to subordinate our personal interests and desires to the greater principles of our profession. At our best, we

U.S. Navy (Tom Gagnier)



Marines drive armored tank during exercise Bold Alligator 2012



U.S. Air Force (Kenny Holston)

F-16 pilot talks with crew chief before launching from Shaw Air Force Base

represent service to the Nation, impartial to political partisanship. Our lifeblood is the will and support of the American people—we must never forget that. Nor can we act in a way that would undermine their confidence in us or fray our relationship of trust.

So let us renew our commitment to selfless—and apolitical—service not only this election year but also every day we serve. By doing so, we take a big step in ensuring that the American people never question what those who wear the uniform put first: our nation. [JFQ](#)

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



U.S. Navy (Brian Morales)

Sailor hugs family after returning home from deployment aboard USS Abraham Lincoln