For more than 238 years, the U.S. Army has displayed unparalleled strength and endurance, accomplishing a multitude of tasks and missions at home and abroad on behalf of the American people. The American soldier continues to be the source of that strength, and the volunteers who make up the Army are among the most dedicated citizens our nation has to offer. It is their commitment that has seen the Army through its most difficult challenges.

There are still more than 50,000 soldiers engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan in addition to another 160,000 soldiers forward based or deployed on other operations in 160 countries around the world, making the U.S. Army a truly global force. The United States and its NATO partners have begun the process of turning over security requirements
and responsibilities to Afghan military and police forces, but the job is far from done. U.S. soldiers will continue to deploy to Afghanistan at least through the end of 2014—and perhaps beyond—in order to ensure that Afghanistan has every opportunity to secure itself from becoming a haven for international terrorist organizations.

While the mission in Afghanistan continues, the Army is already undergoing significant changes in its size and shape. Earlier this year, the Army announced its largest reduction in combat forces in two decades. Twelve brigade combat teams from the active Army will be inactivated in the coming years. Accompanied by other structural changes, this represents the most fundamental alteration in the structure of the U.S. Army since World War II.

**Force Structure Changes, Regionally Aligned Forces**

The Army’s combat operations in Southwest Asia—the longest in its history—have resulted in a force that is more experienced, more capable and more relevant than ever before. The unprecedented integration of the active Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve is a strong foundation upon which the Army of 2020 is being built. Similarly, years of groundbreaking collaboration between the Army and U.S. special operations forces will continue to be a strength of the Army of 2020.

Land forces—Army, Marine Corps and special operations forces—are an essential component of a balanced joint force. Speaking earlier this year at the Atlantic Council, Army Chief of Staff GEN Raymond T. Odierno observed, “The thing I worry about is that in everybody’s declaration that there’s going to be no more ground wars, we need no more ground forces, that we’re going to make the Army too small. I see nothing on the horizon yet that tells me that we don’t need ground forces.”

One of the most important lessons for the land forces—especially the Army—from the past decade of continuous combat operations has been the value of engagement at the human level, on the ground, in areas of potential conflict. The Army’s plan to align forces with the regional combatant commands around the world will enable a network of human relationships that will prevent conflict in the future. If conflict should occur, however, having forces with the requisite cultural, regional, political and military awareness in a particular region will greatly assist combatant commanders in achieving their objectives.

**Reserve Components**

Similarly, during the last 20 years, we have seen the Army’s reserve components make the transition from their historical role as a strategic reserve force that trained one weekend a month and two weeks every summer to a force that has proportionately shared much of the load of two very long wars, one of which is ongoing.
We have come a long way toward appropriately integrating the active and reserve forces of the Army. That’s why, since 2003, AUSA’s annual legislative resolutions have fully integrated our reserve component resolutions into all other existing categories to emphasize the concept that there is only one Army. This year’s resolutions preamble states, “To sustain this force requires the institutionalization of reserve component practices and policies for its evolved role as an operational reserve. After a decade of war, it is a vital part of our operational Army. To maintain this integral component of the force requires assured access and end strength levels of 360,000 for the Army National Guard and 215,000 for the Army Reserve.”

Budget Uncertainty

In spite of all that the Army has accomplished, the greatest challenge (and danger) it faces is budget uncertainty. Shortfalls in the Army’s annual base budget and in overseas contingency operations supplemental funding, coupled with the known effects of sequestration—a total of nearly $20 billion per year—are extremely difficult to deal with. On the other hand, continuing resolutions, uneven support for critical Army modernization programs, reprogramming inflexibility and the lack of a key strategic vision for the armed forces make the task for Army leaders of forecasting, designing and implementing the force that will be needed in 2020 and beyond almost impossible. This has left the Army with few alternatives and options as we move forward.

Earlier this year, to remain effective while dealing with fiscal uncertainties, the Army cancelled combat training center rotations, delayed depot refurbishment work, cancelled maintenance for vehicles that are not bound immediately for the current fight, froze civilian hiring, furloughed thousands of existing civilian employees and laid off thousands more temporary workers. Training and readiness are suffering. The situation will only worsen and the effects multiply over time.

Compounding the problem is the lingering and alarming misperception that sequestration has not had the negative impact on our nation that was originally projected by the current administration. We must be clear: For the Army and the other military services, sequestration has had, and continues to have, a devastating impact on the readiness of the force. It is a mindless and irresponsible budget reduction technique.

In response to the strict budget-cutting measures and the sequestration process established by the Budget Control Act of 2011, there will be an active Army troop reduction of 80,000 to an end strength of 490,000 by 2017. Without swift congressional action to resolve sequestration, that number could dip dangerously lower, and without adequate funding for training, modernization and manning, there is great danger that our Army and the armed forces will return to the “hollow force” of the past. GEN Odierno has been clear on the effects of sequestration: “If I’m asked to deploy 20,000 soldiers somewhere, I’m not sure I can guarantee you that they’re trained to the level that I think they should be over the next two or three years because of the way sequestration is being enacted.”

Whatever the force of 2020 ultimately looks like, it must be kept trained and ready—that is non-negotiable. Budget predictability across several years is essential so that end strength, modernization and readiness can be carefully balanced.

All-Volunteer Force

Since the mid-1970s, our nation and its military have relied on an all-volunteer force of dedicated Americans—less than 1 percent of the population—to staff the armed forces. There is universal agreement that this military force is the best the nation has ever produced. Its sacrifices over the past 12 years of war have brought about its success. The quality of the young men and women who make up this magnificent force has been assured by a compensation program that attracts and keeps the best and brightest for a career of service to the nation.

As fiscal pressures build, however, there is a growing and disingenuous undercurrent in some circles that drastic cuts to pay, health care, education, retirement benefits, commissaries and family programs are the only way to retain force structure and maintain military readiness. Unfortunately, this narrative demonizes those who serve and have served as somehow unworthy of the benefits they
have rightfully earned. Some go as far as to say there is a sense of entitlement in the force. Let me be clear: Those who serve in the profession of arms are not just a workforce, and soldiers are not just civilian employees in uniform. The 1 percent of the U.S. population who serve and sacrifice are professionals, and they deserve to be compensated in a manner commensurate with the quality of their service.

Let’s remember that it wasn’t always this way. For example, a pay gap of 13 percent between soldiers and their civilian counterparts existed before 9/11. Thanks to the hard work of AUSA and others, that has improved. With soldiers still in the fight and their families still carrying a heavy load, now is not the time to ask those who have given so much to give more.

Earned deferred compensation—pay, retirement benefits and health care—are not entitlements. They are incentives to maintain this high-quality, career-oriented all-volunteer force we are all so proud of. If we are honest about keeping the soldier as the centerpiece of the Army, then we must not break faith with the current or future force.

AUSA—Needed Now More Than Ever

The 2013 AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition is the place for the Army to tell its story annually to our members and to national leaders. The keynote presentations by military and civilian leaders, the Institute of Land Warfare Contemporary Military Forums, Family Forums, the congressional breakfast, and Army/Industry exhibits are but a few of the many activities that allow AUSA to carry the Army message and allow the Army to showcase its role to a national and international audience.

In today’s challenging operational, fiscal and threat environment, AUSA is needed more than ever. Our Army and our nation face some of the most difficult challenges seen in many decades, yet the American soldier—the foundation of our national defense—never fails to step up, press on and do what he or she has been asked to do. Few organizations understand what that really means, and AUSA is at the forefront of that understanding. The nation can always count on America’s Army, and the Army can always count on its professional association, AUSA, to be there as the voice for the Army—support for the soldier.

CSM Daniel A. Dailey, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command’s senior enlisted advisor, addresses future soldiers following a June 14 oath of enlistment ceremony in Philadelphia, where he also participated in activities to celebrate Flag Day and the Army’s 238th birthday.

CW2 Bethany Bump conducts her pre-flight routine in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and checks with her crew chief before a mission on Jalalabad Airfield in Afghanistan’s Nangarhar Province.