Building on a Foundation of Strength: The Nation’s Force of Decisive Action

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The Strength of our Nation is our Army.
The Strength of our Army is our Soldiers.
The Strength of our Soldiers is our Families.
Army Strong!

With this year marking the 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks on our country, our nation has now been at war for more than a decade. Our Army (active, Guard, Reserve, Army civilians and our families) has responded to the demands of these past 10 years by proving itself to be the most capable, sustainable and decisive land force in the world—an experienced, innovative and professional force that stands on a proud tradition of victory for the nation. Our soldiers have displayed mental and physical toughness and courage under fire in combat situations that have...
been as tough and demanding as America’s Army has ever experienced in its 236-year history. Our leaders have transformed their organizations while fighting in two major theaters of war and meeting a host of other global security requirements, rising to new challenges and adapting to a broad range of emerging security demands. Our soldiers, leaders and organizations are as strong, agile and adaptable as they have ever been. I am proud to be part of this Army with the opportunity to serve with these great men and women. I am humbled and honored to be the 38th Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA).

As we look to the future, we are well aware that the nation will continue to require much of its Army. Like no other time in our history, today we face significant uncertainty and historic change: a multitude of security challenges such as the continued threat of international terrorism, concern over the proliferation of nuclear weapons, uncertainty over what the “Arab Spring” may bring, and both the risks and opportunities associated with the emergence of new regional and global powers. More important, we face the threat of enemies who continue to seek access to our country. We confront this broad range of security challenges at a time when the nation is dealing with a severely constrained fiscal environment. As our nation seeks to put public expenditures on more solid, long-term footing, it is clear that the Department of Defense will face its share of difficult resource decisions in the years ahead.

Amid all of this, we remain committed to an all-volunteer Army that is the most decisive land force in the world. We will provide depth and versatility to the Joint Force, be more effective in our employment and provide greater flexibility for national security decision makers in defense of the nation at home and abroad.

Strong and Getting Stronger

I have witnessed the character, strength, commitment and adaptability of soldiers firsthand. When the terrorist attacks of 2001 propelled our nation into conflicts around the globe, it was the Army that took the lead, delivering the sustained landpower that has proven essential to strategic success. In the period just after 9/11 and during the start of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army recognized that strategic success required more than decisive action in the high-intensity opening phases of these conflicts; it demanded a land force capable of being equally decisive in consolidating these successes. I am proud to say that our Army—active, National Guard, and Reserve—is meeting these challenges. This includes our magnificent Army special operations forces, peerless masters of their craft who have significantly enabled our nation’s triumphs across the globe. We have provided security and stability to peoples beleaguered by conflict, trained local security forces to provide that stability for themselves, supported the development of effective governance and viable economies, and facilitated transition to local civil authorities.

The Army has leveraged the skills, capabilities and capacity of the total force. Access to our reserve components has made the Army more united and more capable than it has ever been. Our National Guard and Army Reserve have been operational to provide the critical landpower depth that has proven essential to our efforts. Bound by
necessity and common cause, today and more than ever, America’s Army is “One Army.”

Time and again, our Army has demonstrated an adaptable character that is not often associated with the temperament of military formations but has become synonymous with the spirit of the American soldier. Our leaders today have grown up and thrived in an era of uncertainty. They have experienced the complex and interdependent challenges of multiple simultaneous operations. At every level, soldiers have displayed unparalleled ingenuity, flexibility and commitment. This is the foundation of strength that we seek to deepen and build on moving forward.

Hybrid Threats and Security Challenges
In an Era of Declining Defense Budgets

As our ability to predict the future has repeatedly proven far less than perfect, if not wholly unreliable, uncertainty has become the watchword of the contemporary strategic environment. The future is not imponderable, however. The perils and challenges of the years ahead are well appreciated even if they are not fully known. The enemies we face now and into the future are adaptive. We must be prepared to anticipate and defeat myriad hybrid threats that incorporate regular warfare, irregular warfare, terrorism and criminality. We can be certain—although we do not know to what degree—that our adversaries will pursue a multidimensional approach to exploit perceived vulnerabilities and deny our strategic interests.

Against the backdrop of hybrid threats, we remain mindful of the range of other security challenges that lie ahead. Most important, the Army remains committed to ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the successful conclusions of which will prove essential to stability in these vital regions. We know too that we confront changed and changing threats from international terrorist organizations, many of whom continue to seek to attack our country. We will likely face continued challenges stemming from the proliferation and potential trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, and we anticipate the continued threats associated with persistent regional conflicts, civil wars and failed states. Along with these familiar challenges, we also face cyber threats to an increasingly critical and vulnerable information technology infrastructure, the destabilizing impact of global economic downturns, poverty and humanitarian crises.

In confronting this diverse range of security challenges, however, we are not without recourse. We look forward to opportunities for strengthening partnerships with traditional allies, while building new and greater stability with partners around the world. We will continue to develop global and regional engagement strategies that forge the necessary trust and build the required capabilities and capacity for greater unity of effort in meeting our shared challenges.

We are also aware that we confront this future security environment in an era of declining defense budgets. As the nation is engaged in the urgent task of balancing its future public budgets, the Army will be expected to share in this burden. Our great productive capacity and economic health being an essential feature of American national power, we appreciate the importance of this task. We know that the Army tomorrow will be smaller than it is today, but we must be careful to avoid the historical pattern of drawing down too fast and getting too small, especially since our record of predicting the future has been so poor. As we determine those essential characteristics and capabilities that are required in our Joint Force to meet future security challenges, we will carefully examine all alternatives to ensure that we mitigate associated risks and provide greater flexibility to our national decision makers.

We find ourselves at a strategic crossroads but not without direction. The Army has been in similar situations before. We look to both the successes and missteps of earlier strategic inflection points to inform our course.

Continuity—Our Enduring Priorities

When I entered the Army, we were just completing the transition to an all-volunteer force. I saw an Army that, in a matter of a few years, transformed its leader development systems; instituted revolutionary unit and individual training regimens; and charted a vision for integrated, joint and combined operations that became the benchmark for effective military operations. A lot has changed since I began my journey in our Army, but there is much that endures. Foremost, we will continue to provide the nation the trained and ready land forces it needs to prevail in current wars, even as we continue to prepare for the future. To do this, my focus as CSA will be on preserving the all-volunteer Army and strengthening our profession of arms based on implicit and universal trust; building on our leaders’ current experience and improving leader development systems; cultivating a versatile mix of capabilities, formations and equipment; continuing our efforts to enhance the capabilities of our soldiers; and maintaining the focus on Army families.

SGT Larry J. Isbel, representing the National Guard, watches his firing lane for targets during the M4 qualification event of the Best Warrior Competition held at Fort Lee, Va., last October.
Our enduring priority must be to preserve the all-volunteer force and the professional character of our men and women that has proven so essential to our success. The Army has gained the trust of the American people more than at any other time in recent history while developing a force that is very different today from what it was a few short years ago. There is more combat experience in the all-volunteer Army than we have ever had. We must be conscious of this experience and leverage it as we reinvigorate our understanding of the profession of arms and ensure that our Army continues to exist as the model of a professional military force.

Similarly, the basic building block for the Army of the future is with us today in our junior leaders. Current conflicts have provided us some key insights into the attributes we will need. First, the foundation of leadership remains physical and mental toughness, discipline, and technical competence, but today we require much more. We expect all leaders to be lifelong learners—no matter the rank—who are committed to understanding themselves and their environment. We need selfless leaders who are flexible, innovative and inclusive. These attributes enable our leaders to forge trust and create unity of effort among diverse stakeholders inside and outside the military chain of command. We need leaders who are not averse to risk and can make sound, timely decisions under stress, while remaining morally and ethically strong. Within our Army, we must create an environment that encourages individual and collective development, contributes to organizational flexibility and adaptability, and allows our leaders to grow and flourish.

We must build this into our officer, warrant officer and noncommissioned officer leader development programs, cultivating and reinforcing these attributes throughout their careers from the time they enter the Army to when they become senior leaders. We will need to explore new ways to provide broadening opportunities to our leaders, so that they are better prepared for the myriad challenges they will encounter throughout their careers. By providing them with the professional challenges they have come to expect, we must retain our emerging leaders and nurture their adaptive spirit, make it institutional and then build on it as we move forward.

As we look to the future, we must also develop a versatile mix of capabilities, formations and equipment that will complement the flexibility of our leaders across a range of operations. First, we must always remember that our Army is soldiers. After 10 years of combat, we understand the tremendous sacrifice and commitment of the men and women who are our Army. The Army will continue to pursue programs and policies focused on the development of the individual soldier with the intent of making our formations more flexible, adaptable and lethal.

This entails a continued focus on providing our soldiers at the squad, platoon and company level the capabilities they need to overmatch any potential adversary. The focus on individual and small-unit capability recognizes the tremendous advantages previous transformation efforts have bestowed on our larger formations. To provide this same overmatch ability to small units, they must be mobile, networked, protected and sufficiently sustained. We know the incredible responsibility our small-unit leadership has borne these last 10 years, and we anticipate that this will only increase in the complex and decentralized operational environments of the future.

We will ensure flexibility, versatility and depth with the right mix of light, medium and heavy formations across the active and reserve force. The lessons of the last decade of conflict have taught us the criticality of integrating combat, combat support and combat service support capabilities to achieve synergy across our warfighting functions.

Equally critical to the way ahead is a modernization plan that allows us to develop, field and sustain equipment in a more responsive and affordable manner. We will make fiscally informed investments—thoroughly reviewing costs, benefits, risks and potential areas for trade-offs. We will fully align our requirements, acquisition, resourcing and sustainment processes, ensuring that all are focused on a common goal.

For our families, the focus is simple. We remain dedicated to providing quality, relevant and sustainable programs that meet their needs. That means identifying and reinforcing programs that provide the best care and eliminating those that are ineffective or redundant. We have to make access easier and simpler.

Sustaining Success and Building Toward the Future

Our accomplishments over the past 10 years have given us great momentum and put us in a position of strength.
The joint force has relied on the Army for decisive action and will continue to do so. Decisive action includes a variety of missions: providing humanitarian assistance at home and abroad; engaging with our allies while building partner capacity; supporting civil authorities; and conducting regular and irregular warfare against hybrid threats. Decisive and sustainable Army landpower enables the Joint Force and provides combatant commanders the ability to bring operations to a definitive conclusion. Critical in this regard is the ever-present and unrivaled edge Army special operations forces provide combatant commanders across the range of military operations. As our former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike G. Mullen, so aptly stated, “Our Army is the center of gravity for the U.S. military.”

With these requirements in mind, my intent is for an all-volunteer Army to remain the most decisive land force in the world, provide depth and versatility to the Joint Force, be more effective in its employment and provide greater flexibility for national security decision makers in defense of the nation at home and abroad.

Achieving depth will require an operational and strategic bench of land forces capable of conducting sustained operations across the full range of conflict and engagement missions anywhere in the world. Our ability to maintain access to select operational capabilities within the reserve component is an essential feature of the depth this force will require. Also critical to this goal is the need to see the Army in terms of its contribution to the Joint Force. In this past decade, we have become extraordinarily proficient at tactical joint integration. We must maintain this proficiency and extend that same level of integration to the strategic level. This includes identifying and maintaining those capabilities that are unique to the Army and those areas where service redundancy is necessary. It also includes a careful consideration of those capabilities in which redundancy may not be necessary or desirable. Recognizing the importance of unique service capabilities and cultures, we should never stop asking ourselves: Are we joint enough?

Fully aware of the uncertainty of the future, we are committed to versatility and flexibility. We seek versatility in our force mix to build adaptable formations capable of meeting any threat and accomplishing any mission. We expect to extend and improve upon the flexibility our Army has gained over this past decade by making institutional our proven ability to adapt quickly to changing environments, missions, priorities and national security needs. This will be made operational through trained, equipped and ready units led by educated, trained and professionally developed leaders.

Finally, with effective employment, we seek the right capabilities to meet combatant commanders’ requirements. We realize that, in an era of fiscal uncertainty, Army power will come through prudent investment, deployment and employment of our nation’s precious resources.

**Remaining Resolved**

As GEN Gordon R. Sullivan warned in his final AUSA speech while serving as the 32nd Chief of Staff, “We must not become so introspective about the future and those challenges that we lose our resolve.”

As America’s decisive force, the Army is a globally recognized symbol of our national resolve and commitment. To serve the nation, we must be organized, trained and equipped to provide our leadership a range of options to defend our interests at home and abroad. We must remain prepared to accomplish any mission we are called upon to perform. America’s Army will continue to fill this role for our nation because of the resolve of the American soldier—our greatest resource.

At this strategic crossroads, I could not be more proud to be a soldier, serving alongside the great men and women of America’s Army. America’s Force of Decisive Action—Army Strong!

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**Implicit and Universal Trust**

**Trust between Soldiers**

**Trust between Soldiers and Leaders**

**Trust between Soldiers/Families and the Army**

**Trust between the Army and the American People**

*The Bedrock of the Profession of Arms*