

Lessons of the Past Must Guide the Army's Future

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Not long ago, I received a note from a civilian aide, one of a small number of local leaders who serve without compensation to better connect the Army with states and communities across the country. She wrote to me about a recent conversation with a "lieutenant colonel in the Guard currently in Afghanistan who worries if he will have a job when he gets home." She also told me about a gathering attended by a small group of people from a local university. Those present debated whether there will be opportunities in the Army for those "who are now of high school age," if you men and women will "seek the Army not only to serve but to improve their character and hone leadership skills," and if there will be a "place for the best and the brightest." They wondered, too, over lunch, why "the defense of our nation was included in sequestration.

None of the questions were new, but what most struck me about her note was that it indicated that many of the same conversations we've been having at the Pentagon this past year are resonating at lunch counters and dinner tables across America. It's fair to say that it will be a major part of what we talk about at this year's Association of the U.S. Army Annual Meeting and Exposition.

While the shrinking federal budget—and its impact on end strength, modernization and readiness—may have provided fodder for academic debate, it has, importantly, dominated the defense agenda. Indeed, while last year I wrote in part about building the Army of 2020, this year I'm equally concerned about what the Army will look like in October or the months that follow.

For years now, we've been preparing for a shrinking budget and fewer resources. With the completion of our mission in Iraq and the scheduled drawdown in Afghanistan, we were advised to begin planning and were promised the time to get it right. Then sequestration took effect, something then-Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta said was designed to be so bad that "no one in their right mind would let it happen."

The across-the-board budget cuts mandated by sequestration have had an impact on virtually every aspect of the U.S. Army, from equipment to quality of life. We have had to cancel combat training rotations and flight hours for helicopter pilots. Hundreds of thousands of civilian workers across the Army and DoD were subjected to mandatory furloughs and lost 20 percent of their pay for six weeks. We cut tuition assistance for soldiers and deferred reset programs. Little was left untouched, and we see little hope

for relief as these deep, indiscriminate and mandatory budget cuts remain the law of the land.

As Army Chief of Staff GEN Raymond T. Odierno and I recently informed Army commanders, “The money is gone; our mission now is to determine how best to allocate these cuts while maintaining readiness.” Even if sequestration is reversed, we have to take this opportunity to reshape the Army or we will be doomed to repeat mistakes of the past.

When GEN George C. Marshall was MAJ George C. Marshall, serving as aide-de-camp to GEN John J. Pershing after World War I, he addressed a group of school headmasters gathered in Boston. He spoke of a dangerous cycle in war planning and the repeated failure to learn from past mistakes.

“Immediately following the termination of war,” Marshall said in 1923, “comes a new thought dominating all minds: the war debt, high taxes and their reduction. Economy is demanded by public opinion ... and a reduction of the military establishment is the easiest” solution. Marshall warned of the impact of such thinking on what we today call readiness. He pointed to breakdowns in organization and preparedness caused by a lack of planning and funding that occurred throughout American history. He pointed to GEN George Washington’s Continental Army, the young nation’s land forces during the War of 1812 and the early Union Army of the Civil War.

“History is filled [with]—in fact, it almost consists of—remarkable repetitions,” he said. When he delivered his speech, our nation was still grieving its losses from World War I. The military faced massive cuts in funding and manpower, leading Marshall to observe, “The cycle is complete and we are moving today into the same predicament in which war has always found us.”

Nine months after Marshall’s speech, Adolf Hitler would be arrested in Munich following a failed attempt—the Beer Hall Putsch—to overthrow the German government; and not long after victory in Europe and the Pacific, the cycle was to begin anew. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

After ending operations in Iraq and a scheduled drawdown in Afghanistan, the end of America’s longest war is in sight. Consequently, we are, like Marshall, living through “a new thought dominating all minds.” Unlike Marshall, we have the lessons of the past, repeated warnings to manage a smaller budget and the opportunity to fundamentally reshape the Army. It’s an opportunity we need to seize, the chance to show leadership and imagination that gives our Commander in Chief the options he needs, the power projection that deters our enemies, and a lethal combination of organization and agility

that will allow our Army to go anywhere, anytime, to defeat any foe.

Regardless of the size of our budget or our force, we can achieve this with an adequate, appropriate mix of manpower, training and equipment. A smaller, well-equipped and highly trained force is better able to meet contingencies than a large force without training, or modern equipment with no skills or people to use it. Such is the nature of balance and our imperative to avoid creating a hollow Army.

Our first and most important responsibility, however, as we prepare for the end of more than a decade of conflict, is to continue providing our soldiers everything they need to successfully execute the fight they are in. We remain a nation at war, and regardless of the planning we must pursue, we can never lose sight of our fundamental duty to the here and now. In the near term, we also need to meet our responsibility to our soldiers as they transition from the battlefield to home stationing, and we need to do this in very important ways.

First, we must provide adequate care and support for our wounded warriors, whether it's tending to the visible scars of battle or treating the invisible wounds such as post-traumatic stress disorder. As President Barack Obama remarked, "For our wounded warriors, coming home doesn't mean the fight is over. In some ways, it's just beginning."

Second, we must ensure that the officers and NCOs on whom we've relied for judgment and leadership remain active and engaged. We've given these young men and women remarkable responsibilities over the last dozen years, and they have performed brilliantly. Nevertheless, when I read leadership surveys that find nearly half of all soldiers and 58 percent of junior NCOs believe "the Army no longer demonstrates that it is committed to me as much as it expects me to be committed," I am deeply concerned that they simply don't recognize how much we value them and need them to be successful for the future.

That extends to our civilian workforce as well, which works side by side with its uniformed counterparts to ensure our soldiers get what they need when they need it. Army civilians have demonstrated time and again their commitment to our soldiers and their mission, and I worry that furloughs, lack of pay increases, hiring freezes and other workforce issues are taking a very high toll.

Finally, as large numbers of our forces return from Afghanistan, we need to re-instill across the Army a fundamental return to our core values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. I sometimes remind people that with an Army of 1.1 million soldiers—active duty, National Guard and Army Reserve—and another 330,000 civilians, we have a population larger than 11 states. If the Army were a

city, it would be the nation's sixth largest. Like those cities and states, we struggle with problems inherent to a large population, such as alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide. The root causes of these problems are often the same as those found in homes and cities across America. A recent example is a study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* that found the underlying reasons for an increase in military suicide were the same as those in the civilian population: mental illness, substance abuse, and financial and personal relationship problems.

What could make similar comparisons about another scourge on our force—sexual assault and abuse— of which we have had proportionally fewer such crimes and more success in prosecution than similarly sized populations. Not being as bad as some isn't good enough, however, not by a long shot. In an Army that lives and swears by a set of values, we expect—we demand—character within our ranks. As an Army, we do not follow; we lead, and we lead by our example. If we are true to our convictions, we must be honest about our performance, and we have failed in combating sexual assault within our ranks.

How can we protect a nation from its enemies if we cannot protect a soldier from the enemy within? Every commander, every leader, every soldier has a responsibility to help change the culture and create an environment of trust and respect, ensuring the safety of all soldiers—men and women—wherever their duty may call them. It's not only something we expect; it's something we demand.

This year, we marked the 60th anniversary of the end of America's Forgotten War—its Forgotten Victory—the Korean War. As we celebrated the gallant veterans who fought and served, the President noted that Korea holds important lessons for all of us today.

“Korea taught us the perils when we fail to prepare,” he said, echoing Marshall's lament. “After the Second World War, a rapid drawdown left our troops underequipped, so that in the early days of Korea, their rockets literally bounced off enemy tanks. Today, as we end a decade of war and reorient our forces for the future, as we make hard choices at home, our allies and adversaries must know the United States of America will maintain the strongest military the world has ever known, bar none, always.”

Through creative and determined leadership, keeping leaders who were forged in combat active and engaged, supporting soldiers and their families, and caring for those coming home, we can do more than learn from history. We can create a better Army and a more secure future.

The men and women of the U.S. Army have proven time and again that they are

the greatest force for good the world has ever known. Every decision we make must help ensure that they have what is needed for continued success—whether they are fighting on distant battlefields, responding to crisis on the homeland or living their lives in garrison. With history as our guide, that is our mission and that is our challenge.