

## **NCOs Must Lead In This Period of Uncertainty**

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Our Army is at a crossroads. We are less than 15 months from our departure from Afghanistan. Even as we transition in these many ways, we must remain ready to confront any number of threats. As the Chief of Staff of the Army has stated, it is imperative that the Army perform three vital roles for the nation: prevent war, shape the international environment and, if called upon, win decisively and dominantly.

Our nation is facing significant budgetary challenges that could affect our readiness, modernization and benefits for several years. We are reducing the size of our Army at the same time we are expanding the reach of our NCOs. In short, we are in transition. Enlisted soldiers are at the vortex of this change. Even as we transition in these many ways, we must remain ready to confront any number of threats. As the Chief of Staff of the Army has stated, it is imperative that the Army perform three vital roles for the nation: prevent war, shape the international environment and, if called upon, win decisively and dominantly.

Right now, we have more than 150,000 soldiers deployed and forward stationed in nearly 150 countries around the world. As proven time and time again over the past 12 years, our soldiers—and especially our NCOs—continue to do all we ask of them and more, whether they are on a combat outpost in Afghanistan, a humanitarian relief mission in Haiti, a forward presence in South Korea or a civil-military operation in the United States. During my visits to posts, camps and stations around the nation and locations overseas, I have heard stories from our soldiers, their families and our Department of the Army civilians. The past 12 years have been difficult, but collectively we have demonstrated our commitment, professionalism and resilience. Each of us has played a part in successfully completing every mission we have been given, in turn securing the trust of the American people and the elected officials who govern our nation.

These achievements have been made possible because of the increased operational readiness and deployability of our soldiers. Soldiers from our Army National Guard and Army Reserve have seamlessly worked side by side with the active component. This will continue to pay dividends for our Army and the nation if we continue to communicate across the force and create opportunities to maximize and synchronize our unique capabilities.

Since September 11, 2001, we have been focused on counterinsurgency operations. As we transition out of Afghanistan, however, our focus will shift to decisive action operations -- wide-area security, combined arms maneuver, civil support and other missions.

The intent of the Chief of Staff as we move forward is to sustain a highly trained, professional, all-volunteer Army that remains the most decisive land force in the world. It will be globally responsive, regionally engaged, and uniquely organized and equipped to provide expeditionary landpower to the joint force. Our soldiers will be ready and capable of performing military operations and contingencies in support of combatant commanders to defend the nation at home and abroad both today and against emerging threats.

One of our main focuses in sustaining the Army of 2020 is the development of regionally aligned forces to meet combatant commander requirements through an adapted Army force generation model. This will allow us to learn and be more culturally attuned to what is going on in the operational environment. We will ensure that we allocate forces for planning in order to have better synchronization of how we have used the joint force—maritime, air and ground forces—and we will learn to tailor those in order to support the combatant commanders. An increasingly diverse Army will support this effort.

By looking at studies and surveys from academics and think tanks, Army leaders know that higher levels of expertise, varied experiences and a broader knowledge base are all essential to having agile and adaptable NCOs. Therefore, as the Army moves toward 2020, we will invest more effort in making NCOs capable of doing more than we have ever asked of them.

Over the past few years, we have implemented significant initiatives related to the way we develop our NCOs. These include the connection between structured self development and an NCO's ability to attend the next level of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) and the development of revamped NCO evaluation reports expected next year. These changes will be important tools to give commanders the ability to focus NCO talents and education on tactical, organizational and strategic-level priorities.

At the most senior levels of the NCO Corps in the active Army, we have also been managing our sergeant major population. We ensure that the best qualified sergeants major are chosen to advance and that they have both command sergeant major and staff sergeant major experience as they move from battalion to brigade level and beyond. Part of this oversight includes a focus on "broadening assignments" into positions that make NCOs well-rounded and increase their knowledge of strategic-level concerns.

Over the past two years, we have incorporated training at the current level of soldiers and also at the next higher level within the NCOES. For example, the Warrior Leader Course was designed for the team leader at the sergeant level. We have expanded that to incorporate training not only for the team leader but also for the squad leader. This was done to take into account what the Chief of Staff says we need for our Army in 2020 and the NCO's role as part of that. As we move forward, we are also looking at incorporating the Army learning model and leader development strategy into NCOES courses even more than they are now.

This will likely mean that not every NCO who attends a course will pass. When we have soldiers who do not meet standards, they will be disenrolled because of various issues such as physical fitness, weight control or academics. Our profession demands that we “self-police.” Those who cannot meet the standards are not certified to go to the next level, but they will be given an opportunity to retrain, since everyone should have another chance. If that does not work out, then they will not graduate and that will affect their career potential.

Each of us must be ready to test our mettle, challenge our minds and live up to these standards. We must be the flexible, agile, adaptive, critically thinking NCOs needed to fight and win our nation’s wars as well as every other mission sent our way. The key to this success is our professionalism.

As we move forward and our force goes through changes in size, focus and capabilities, we must ensure we provide needed leadership to those in our charge. This applies to all NCOs, from corporal to Sergeant Major of the Army. We must instill in those we lead the importance of our Army profession, how we demonstrate that and why it must be part of every action we take and decision we make.

From the time we raise our hands and swear to defend the Constitution to our promotions to NCO, we have made solemn promises to live up to certain responsibilities. They are embodied in the three Cs of our professionalism: character, commitment and competence. We are reminded of these by:

- Our warrior ethos: “I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade.”
- Our NCO creed: “No one is more professional than I.”
- Our Army values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

These form the framework of our profession and are nonnegotiable. Our Army needs every NCO to be an uncompromising standard bearer now and into the future. The soldiers they lead deserve nothing less. The American public is rightfully proud of each NCO for choosing to serve the nation, but Army service cannot be just words. Our Army is an organization of action, and our leadership and commitment to the Army and our fellow soldiers must also be demonstrated by our actions.

To support our efforts in doing this, the Army created Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, “The Army Profession,” which was published this year on the Army’s birthday, June 14. This manual has been approved for distribution and use in professional development programs throughout the Army. It is the first publication in the Army’s long history that is solely dedicated to establishing a common understanding of the Army profession.

NCOs must not only be well acquainted with the web- site and resources of the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic; they must also ensure that soldiers understand the role they play in the success of their unit, the Army and our nation.

Over the past year, I have witnessed the presentation of two Medals of Honor to two NCOs, SSG Ty M. Carter and former SSG Clinton L. Romesha. Both earned our highest military honor through their valor at Combat Outpost Keating in Afghanistan on October 8, 2009. They, along with the other 52 soldiers assigned to 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, demonstrated their military expertise, honorable service, esprit de corps and trust in each other— hallmarks of our Army profession. Even in the face of overwhelming adversity, they relied on their abilities, their positive outlook and their commitment to the soldiers on their left and right. SSG Carter said the battle that day was “one team/one fight” and everyone did what he could to keep each other alive. The families of those who lost their lives that day can be comforted in some way by that commitment and the actions taken to defend and care for brothers in arms.

We should be proud of our achievements, but our Army faces some formidable challenges as we move ahead. We will overcome them because of the resilience and capabilities each of us has earned over the past 12 years of living up to our warrior ethos. While our senior leaders and elected officials address these challenges, Army leaders— both NCOs and officers—must preserve the readiness and esprit de corps of their Army team: soldiers, their families and Department of the Army (DA) civilians. No matter what the situation or circumstance, we leaders must provide a measure of predictability to our team. We do this by sharing as much information as soon as possible so soldiers can understand what is going on, how it affects them and their families, and how we can support the things they want to accomplish in life.

Though we may have a smaller budget than those we have been given over the past 12 years, the Chief of Staff said we are going to train to the highest proficiency level given the resources we have. Some units, depending on where they are in the Army force generation cycle, may have sufficient money to go through a combat training center rotation. Others who are further back in the Army force generation cycle might receive enough money to do only squad- or platoon-level training, but they must still get their team to higher levels of proficiency. We must understand which tasks are going to give us the highest payoff and make sure we have conducted rehearsals so that when we do the training event, we get the most out of it. We must also continue to look for creative solutions.

While drawdown and budget concerns might be out of our control, our Army has other challenges that can and must be addressed. These challenges are largely focused on indiscipline within our ranks and leaders who are not actively engaged with their soldiers. Two of the top challenges we face from within our Army are suicide and sexual assault and harassment.

In almost every incident of suicide in the Army, there seems to have been someone who knew something was wrong. As engaged leaders, we must know those we

lead—and that means more than a boot size and a PT score. Take the time to learn what motivates soldiers and what demotivates them. It does not matter if you are a command sergeant major talking to a soldier from your formation or a battle buddy checking in on a friend; you need to listen and take action if needed. Our NCO creed directs us to ensure the welfare of our soldiers.

The incidents of sexual assault and harassment in our ranks are also troubling. These are crimes committed by soldiers against soldiers. We are held to a very high standard by the American people, and that is one reason they hold us in such high esteem and trust us. Just as importantly, we must have trust between soldiers.

Our Army's first priority must be to encourage soldiers to come forward—and when they do, to believe them. We must not be skeptical. There is an answer for someone who comes forward and makes a false statement, and we will handle that, but in 99 percent of cases, something happened, and we must do our part as NCO leaders.

The challenges we face now—both those that we can and cannot influence—should not be seen as obstacles to leadership. They should be seen as the building blocks of leadership development and the foundation of trust for those who will look to us to provide our commitment and professionalism.

My wife, Jeanne, and I have been privileged to visit our soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and families at many posts, camps and stations over the past year. We are proud of them and impressed by their commitment, professionalism and ability to remain resilient.

It takes a very special person to serve the nation and agree to do so in harm's way, but our soldiers and DA civilians continue to do this. The support that our professionals receive from resilient families is equally special. I encourage all to be proud of what they do to make our Army and our nation strong. Collectively, we have succeeded in every mission we have been given over the past 12 years. No matter what challenges lie ahead, I am sure we will continue to succeed. The strength of our nation is our Army. The strength of our Army is our soldiers. The strength of our soldiers is our families. These strengths make us Army Strong.