

From the Chairman

Military Must Stay Apolitical

During just about every trip I make to the field and to the fleet, I get asked about the challenges I will face leading the military through this upcoming Presidential transition:

“Aren’t you worried about having to work for a new President?”

“What if a Democrat wins? What will that do to the mission in Iraq?”

“Do you think it’s better for one party or another to have the White House?”

And this one, asked of me by a young Marine at Camp Lejeune a few weeks ago:

“Are you endorsing any of the candidates? And if so, which one and why?”

My answer is simple and always the same: the U.S. military must remain apolitical at all times and in all ways. It is and must always be a neutral instrument of the state, no matter which party holds sway.

A professional armed force that stays out of the politics that drive the policies it is sworn to enforce is vital to the preservation of the union and to our way of life.

I am not suggesting that military professionals abandon all personal opinions about modern social or political issues. Nor would I deny them the opportunity to vote or discuss . . . or even to debate those issues among themselves. We are first and

foremost citizens of this great country, and as such have a right to participate in the democratic process. As George Washington himself made clear, we did not stop being citizens when we started being Soldiers.

What I am suggesting—indeed, what the Nation expects—is that military personnel will, in the execution of the mission assigned to them, put aside their partisan leanings. Political opinions have no place in cockpit or camp or conference room. We do not wear our politics on our sleeves. Part of the deal we made when we joined up was to willingly subordinate our individual interests to the greater good of protecting vital national interests.

We defend all Americans, everywhere, regardless of their age, race, gender, creed,



ADM Mullen (left), Secretary Gates (2^d from left), Service chiefs, and combatant commanders meet with President Bush and Cabinet in the White House

DOD (Chad McNealey)

and, yes, political affiliation. We may be citizens first, but we are also Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguardsmen by oath—a promise we made to defend the Constitution of the United States “against all enemies foreign and domestic.”

We do this by obeying the orders of the Commander in Chief. Obedience to that authority is a military virtue underpinning the very credibility with which we exercise our own command and control.

Now, I know all too well the famous dictum that war is but an extension of politics, and that at the highest levels it is vital for military leaders to understand the political context of national security decisionmaking. But understanding is not advocating. It is not deciding.

“Political factors may exercise a determining influence on military operations,” noted General George Marshall, “therefore they must be given careful consideration. Yet soldiers must not assume to lead or to dictate in such matters.”

As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I am responsible for providing the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council with my best and most independent military advice. I have an input to policy, as do the other chiefs and the combatant commanders. We get a chance to affect the decisions of our civilian leaders, but we do not make those decisions. And we do not involve ourselves in political debates.

As the Nation prepares to elect a new President, we would all do well to remember the promises we made: to obey civilian authority, to support and defend the Constitution, and to do our duty at all times.

Keeping our politics private is a good first step.

The only things we should be wearing on our sleeves are our military insignia.

MICHAEL G. MULLEN
Admiral, U.S. Navy
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



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The National Defense University (NDU) Foundation was pleased to support three writing competitions conducted in 2008 by NDU Press. The Foundation congratulates the contestants and winners of the following:



The Secretary of Defense Transformation Essay Competition

The Secretary of Defense initiated this competition in 2007 to inspire critical and innovative thinking on how to adapt national security institutions to meet current and future challenges.



The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategic Essay Competition

In the 27th annual competition, the Chairman challenged students in the Nation's joint professional military education institutions to think and write creatively about national security strategy.

The Joint Force Quarterly Kiley Awards

In honor of the former Director of NDU Press, Dr. Fred Kiley, the most influential essays from 2007 were selected for recognition. Articles were evaluated for their contributions toward the *JFQ* mission of continuing joint professional military education and security studies.

The final round of the competitions was held May 20–21, 2008, at Fort Lesley J. McNair, with 24 professors from the joint professional military education colleges serving as judges. The winners have been posted on the NDU Press Web site at:

www.ndu.edu/inss/press/winners

The next issue of JFQ (Issue 51, October 2008) will include the winning entries from the essay competitions as a Special Feature.

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