

Dempsey: It's The Mission, Not The Money, That Counts

Joint Chiefs chairman calls for a smarter, more innovative soldier

By Kate Wiltrout, The Virginian-Pilot

Despite shrinking Pentagon budgets and political wrangling over defense-spending priorities, the nation's top military officer didn't mention money in a speech Wednesday in Virginia Beach.

Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it's more important to discuss missions and capabilities than to bicker over how big the military should be.

—We're not ordering coffee at Starbucks. This isn't a matter of getting a tall, grande or venti. It's what will be different that will most matter,|| Dempsey told an audience of about 550 military officers, civilians and defense contractors at a joint war-fighting conference.

During his hour on the stage at the Virginia Beach Convention Center, Dempsey made references to topics as varied as the Civil War battle for Vicksburg; Facebook and Twitter (he uses both); and the war between Athens and Sparta in the 5th century B.C.

He spoke of the importance of cyberwarfare and a robust effort to deter potential enemies from crippling communications networks. But he also said today's military must train to operate in degraded environments where networked technology isn't accessible.

—GPS is terrific when it's working, but if it gets jammed, we have to be ready to continue the mission,|| Dempsey said, adding that —it could be that the worst-case scenario is actually the most likely scenario.||

Dempsey's address marked his first return to Hampton Roads since March 2011, when he left Fort Monroe, where he headed the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, to become chief of staff of the Army. He had been in that role for just a few months when President Barack Obama tapped him to replace Adm. Mike Mullen as his top military adviser.

Dempsey didn't mention the \$33 billion in proposed defense cuts in next year's budget or the \$487 billion the administration has pledged to slice from Pentagon programs over the next decade. Instead, he urged conferencegoers to challenge their own assumptions and beliefs and to think critically about military vulnerabilities.

As an example, he cited a young Marine captain, Wayne Sinclair. In 1996, Sinclair wrote an article about new trends in explosives that made previously impenetrable military vehicles vulnerable to attacks and pointed out innovations South Africa had used in response.

The military didn't grasp the full import of Sinclair's work until 10 years later in Iraq, Dempsey said, when —simple homemade bombs nearly brought the world's most technically advanced fighting force to a halt.|| In response, the U.S. military developed mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles, or MRAPs, based on technology from South Africa, as Sinclair had suggested.

—There is no substitute for taking a clear-eyed look at the threats we face and asking how our force must change to meet them. So when you finish this conference, go find the Wayne Sinclairs of the world and get comfortable with the arguments that make you the most uncomfortable,|| Dempsey said.

—That’s the kind of intuition that will help us build the best possible joint force.||