
America's Place in the New World Order

A CONVERSATION WITH JOSEPH DUNFORD

FLETCHER FORUM: *In 2018, you criticized Google for its inexplicable choice to avoid working with the DoD while simultaneously pursuing deeper business ties with China. As the United States operates in an era of Great Power competition with China, how can and should it confront this trend in the private sector?*

GENERAL JOSEPH DUNFORD: First of all, I'd like to provide a little bit of context about this issue. I speak a lot about competitive advantage. I was also looking at the issue through a U.S. military lens at that particular time. When I look at the elements that have given us a competitive military advantage, really, since World War II, the relationship the Department of Defense had with the private sector has always come to the forefront. Our ability to tap into the American people's intellectual capital, to tap into the production capability of U.S. industry, has given us the edge necessary to move men, materiel, and equipment around the world. And so, from my perspective, what I was first pointing out about Google was that they had qualified what they will and what they won't do with the United States government—with the Department of Defense, specifically. I also think the prevailing notion was that those bright lines didn't help China, but if you read about Xi Jinping and his concept of civil-military fusion,

General Joseph Dunford (ret.) *served as the 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's highest-ranking military officer. In this role, he was the principal military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Council from 2015 to 2019. He is a Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, and currently serves as Chairman of the Board for the Semper Fi Fund & America's Fund, which supports wounded, ill, and injured active duty personnel and veterans from all services. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, General Dunford graduated from Saint Michael's College. He also earned master's degrees in Government from Georgetown University and in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.*

and you take a look at how China deals with the intellectual property of any country or company that is of interest in China, it's unreasonable to expect that related work is not contributing to the development of military capabilities of the [Chinese] People's Liberation Army. I mean, it's just not possible. So from my perspective, this was not a "go to war with Google" issue. The expression I used was, "we're the good guys. We're not the perfect guys. And we make mistakes from time to time, but who would you like to have leading the world order? Who would you like to be underwriting the rules in a world order?" Given what China has done both domestically as well as in terms of economic coercion, political influence, and feeding corruption globally, my argument to Google and other companies is that it's in their long-term interests to cooperate with the U.S. government.

FORUM: *Public-private partnerships are also a powerful tool for bolstering American competitiveness. How can the government court the private sector, or more specifically, its talent, while pursuing this tougher line?*

DUNFORD: Per my previous answer, this relationship has shifted. Traditionally, a lot of U.S. R&D—or a majority of R&D—was done by the Department of Defense. So the U.S. government funded a lot of research and development, and frankly, funded a lot of technological development in the private sector. Today, most technological development takes place in the private sector. So that requires you to kind of redefine your relationship with the private sector and develop partnerships. An example of the Department of Defense's approach to that is what was DIUx, and now, DIU, which is the Defense Innovation Unit. And what that was designed to do is identify what emerging technologies are out there, available, and of utility today, even as we invest in the long-term potential of their horizons. I think that strong communication with industry is important. We can't be looking at industry as the enemy, either. Cost overruns, schedule challenges—those things notwithstanding. And there are many factors behind that just besides industry malfeasance, which is not the root cause of many of those things. We have to view U.S. industry as a full partner in developing the capabilities of the U.S. military, and frankly, across the U.S. government.

FORUM: *The civil-military divide has come to the forefront of national debate in recent years to include your tenure as Chairman. What advice would you give to young servicemembers who face difficult choices when their political beliefs run the risk of threatening mission focus?*

DUNFORD: This is a pretty easy one for me to answer. If you take a look at recent Gallup polls, the military runs somewhere between 70 percent to 80 percent favorability amongst the American people. One of the fundamental reasons for that is that we're not looked at as a Democrat organization or a Republican organization. We're looked at as men and women who swear to defend and uphold the Constitution of the United States, the very idea and foundation of our country. Participation in partisan politics erodes the trust that the American people have in us as a non-partisan organization. So what I have said many times to people is, "look, when it comes to policy that is being developed and executed by people who have the statutory authority and responsibility to execute policy—whether you like it or not, you execute it."

Many times, people ask questions like, "under what circumstances would you resign?" When it comes to these questions, my advice to young people is, "that's not an option you have in uniform. In particular, that's not an option you have as a senior leader."

Resigning over an issue of policy if that policy is again developed and executed by someone that has that statutory authority and statutory responsibility—a lance corporal, a specialist, a sailor, or an airman can't quit because they don't like the orders they are given. A senior leader is in no greater a position

A senior leader is in no greater a position of moral responsibility to quit because they don't like the policy that's being implemented.

of moral responsibility to quit because they don't like the policy that's being implemented. You obviously always have an opportunity quietly to retire or to resign and you can do that, but I think it would be a mistake and a violation of our ethos to make a public demonstration of your dissatisfaction with policy. I feel the same way whether an individual is in uniform or, in a case like mine, out of uniform. I don't think it is appropriate for me to publicly criticize an elected official or a policy. I feel pretty strongly about that. Someone who is just joining the U.S. military needs to think about that as one of the things that would be expected of them throughout a career.

You concede some rights by choosing to serve. There's not a law and there's not a directive—it's an ethic. You choose to be part of the profession and therefore you follow the ethos of the institution.

FORUM: *Your successor General Mark Milley is facing an array of threats to the United States. What's the greatest challenge he is facing as he begins his tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?*

DUNFORD: I think General Milley is confronted with the same ones that I was confronted with in 2015, as are most leaders in the Department of Defense, and that is the challenge of balancing the management of today's crises and contingencies with making sure you develop the capabilities the Department of Defense is going to need for tomorrow. Getting that balance right has proven difficult. For well over a decade, we didn't. As a result, our competitive advantage eroded over time and the margin of our competitive advantage is much smaller than it was in 2000-2001. We're in the most complex, volatile security environment since World War II. Kissinger said that five years ago and I think it's truer today than it was then. General Milley is dealing with that, but at the same time still has to focus the organization on the path of capability development and force design for the future. Getting that balance right really is his biggest challenge.

If you want to talk about our greatest nation-state challenges, I probably would have characterized them differently six months ago. The relationship that is most tense right now is with Iran, particularly in light of recent developments for uranium enrichment and stockpiling over the last couple of weeks. Iran is either on a path towards a nuclear weapon or they are trying to use that as leverage as they use violence to bring people back to the table for the Joint Cooperative Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Iranian situation is the top of the list. General Milley's still dealing with violent extremism. Kim Jong Un, despite the diplomatic outreach over the last two years, did some testing two weeks ago [early spring 2020] and materially he is in a much different place than he was in 2016 when many of us thought he would announce in 2017 that they were a nuclear power. Ultimately, General Milley, along with the Secretary of Defense and leadership in Washington, are dealing with our competition with China and Russia. Therein lies the tension I described to you between today and tomorrow.

FORUM: *You've talked briefly about the Defense Innovation Unit. You've also talked about the way in which the U.S. private sector treats intellectual property as opposed to foreign governments. What are the major themes of capability development, acknowledging the possibility that if the United States doesn't get it right, they won't get it at all?*

DUNFORD: Artificial intelligence is much talked about, but I assess that it will have a profound impact on military capabilities, so it as a capability is near the top of the list. Additionally, the need for resilience in space and for space capabilities is why we stood up the Space Command and Space Force. We made some assumptions in the 1990s that space would largely

remain a benign environment. That assumption unfortunately failed to hold, so now space capabilities are also near the top of the list. Quantum computing combined with artificial intelligence is clearly going to have a profound impact. And then, technological developments that are already here create great challenges in the form anti-ship cruise missiles and anti-ship ballistic missiles. If you just look at Iran on a day-to-day basis, the ratio of Iranian missiles to our ability to defend those missiles is significantly greater. If you look at China, it's even greater still. There is a lot of technology out there, but I would highlight those as near the top of the list.

FORUM: *Last year you remarked that U.S. competition with other world powers in space has reached a Sputnik moment. What is your advice for the head of the Space Force right now?*

DUNFORD: I don't have to give the head of the Space Force much advice. We selected carefully. We selected General [John] Raymond who has had a deep background in space as the first commander of the United States Space Command. Our Vice Chairman of the Joint Staff today, General (John) Hyten, grew up in space issues and then went to Strategic Command. We actually have some very mature, seasoned leadership in the Department that understand space very well. I think the only advice that I do have is when you start a new initiative like this, you only have a slight window of opportunity to really mature that organization, articulate the requirement for resources, and lay out a vision that those resources will fulfill. You can't underestimate the need to communicate in Washington, D.C. to the American people in the form of their elected representatives about the importance of space and getting after some of the vulnerabilities we identified. One of the reasons I supported moving out with the Space Force and Space Command was the recognition that our dependence on space, day-to-day as well as in a conflict, makes us vulnerable enough to require serious changes on how we think about this newest warfighting domain.

FORUM: *Throughout your career, you've emphasized the importance of military modernization and readiness. In your mind, what's the next great modernization challenge the military will face in this new era?*

DUNFORD: It gets back to power projection. When I was a student here [at The Fletcher School], it was 1991. We had just completed [Operation] Desert Storm and an unprecedented ability to project power when it was necessary to advance our interests. For the next 10 years plus, we had an unchallenged ability to project power. When I look at the United States

Military from a perspective that asks, “what is our source of strength?” I think we have two sources of strength. At the strategic level, it’s our network of allies and partners that we have built up since World War II. At the operational level, it’s our ability to project power when and where

I think we have two sources of strength. At the strategic level, it’s our network of allies and partners that we have built up since World War II. At the operational level, it’s our ability to project power when and where necessary to advance our interests.

necessary to advance our interests. What power projection capability thus means is that if you are able to establish superiority in any domain, sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace, at the time and place of your choosing, you will be able to successfully advance your campaign. We are challenged now in our ability to project power and we are challenged in each of those domains by the development of new technologies that are fielded by China, Russia, Iran, and even North Korea. New benchmarks have been set for how we must

deal with all of them.

FORUM: *Speaking of your time here as a student, you came into your most recent role after studying at both Georgetown and Fletcher. While we know which school is really better, what advice might you give to young foreign policy and national security professionals looking to stay ahead of the curve in this new era of Great Power competition?*

DUNFORD: This is probably overstated and you all may have heard what I’m about to say so many times that you’ll roll your eyes when you hear it. One of the strengths of a place like Fletcher is the relationships that you build. You have to look outward. You can’t just be consumed by what you are doing on a day-to-day basis and I think one of the best ways to stay connected, to stay out in front, is to take that network that you’ve developed here as students at Fletcher and maintain it going forward. You are going to be engaged with people that will be headed off in a variety of different disciplines and I think that staying connected to those individuals, or staying connected to the trends in their disciplines, is going to mitigate the risk of being surprised. It won’t necessarily keep you from being surprised, but an ounce of mitigation is worth a pound of catastrophe. *f*