

New Army Chief of Staff says networks determine future war successes

By Rob McIlvaine

In meeting the demands of conflict, GEN Martin E. Dempsey, Army chief of staff, knows the American Soldiers' ability to adapt and learn will overcome the enemy.

GEN Dempsey became the 37th Army chief of staff April 11, 2011. Although he is nearly 60, he says he understands the new generation of Soldier.

"I read recently that a young man or woman is likely to have had four jobs between the time they graduate high school or college until they turn 34. I think this generation thinks differently about what longevity is and what continuity is. I think they embrace adaptation far more easily than my generation does."

"America's enemies are commanding and controlling their forces using smartphones, we can't let them become more adaptable than we are."



Photo by Rob McIlvaine

GEN Martin E. Dempsey, chief of staff of the Army, speaks at his swearing-in ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., 11 April 2011.

GEN Dempsey knows, based on his own children's lives, that the new generation wants to sit in the middle of an open field with a smart phone, be by themselves, but be connected to the world.

"I'm an advocate of social media," Dempsey said, who just opened his own Chief of Staff Facebook page.

Referring to LTG Mark Hertling, the former commanding general of initial military training at U. S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, GEN Dempsey applauded his efforts to connect Soldiers to digital applications so they can pull information off the net and begin learning on their own.

"It's having remarkable

results. But there are two issues I have to figure out. One is the security protocols. This is more difficult than the bandwidth issue, though the bandwidth issue for the deployed force is a bigger issue. But we have to be secured, because the information makes us vulnerable," GEN Dempsey said.

"America's enemies are commanding and controlling their forces using smartphones, GEN Dempsey said, adding "we can't let them become more adaptable than we are."

Adaptability is not just about technology, though. The new chief of staff believes it's also about organizational design.

"I think the Army should think of itself as an organization that will adapt about every five to seven years and organizational design ought to be part of that," GEN Dempsey said. "It's not just about equipment.

"Let's say that in 2020 our assessment is that we might need fewer heavy brigades and more engineering brigades or more infantry brigades. But our projection for some future chief of

staff in 2025 or 2030, we might need to recapture the design of a heavier force and we ought to be adaptable enough to do that and I think we can be," GEN Dempsey said.

Over the past 10 years, he said, the Army has learned that the force is distributed on the battlefield in a way that junior leaders have quite a bit of responsibility. He said a sense of confidence and trust needs to be developed at the junior leader level all the way up to the top.

"It's not about pushing things down now, it's actually about pulling things up. You give a Soldier a mission, you give a leader a mission and they've got to have tools, and they've got to have your trust and confidence to execute and they've got to provide you the context for you to understand what's going on -- a completely different paradigm than when I was growing up. That's why we need the network," he said.

To accomplish this task, he said, the Army has to figure out how the smartphone and similar items can come into play. This will empower a junior leader to let commanders know what's happening on the ground.

"When I was a captain, I completely relied on the colonels to provide me what I needed in terms of information intelligence. I mean, I knew I had an obligation to develop the situation myself, but my expectation was that all the really good intel was going to come from the top down. Not now. Now the really good intel comes from the bottom up and we have got to build the network to deliver," GEN Dempsey said.

With talk of the budget being slashed,

"You give a Soldier a mission, you give a leader a mission and they've got to have tools, and they've got to have your trust and confidence to execute and they've got to provide you the context for you to understand what's going on -- a completely different paradigm than when I was growing up. That's why we need the network."

though, can the network become part of the new Army?

"I think the answer is yes," GEN Dempsey said. "But it's about less long-term exquisite and expensive programs and more about commercial and government off-the-shelf, because here's the other reality of networks."

"By 2017, as an example, your contact lens could be your iPad. So we have to learn faster and understand better than our enemies, and we have to leverage the technologies that exist, instead of trying to find that exquisite answer," he said.

The biggest challenge, he said, is reconciling the very different pressures that exist between meeting the current demand, winning the current fight and building the future force. To this end, GEN Dempsey said he is committed to building an Army that is well organized, well trained and well equipped.

"The armed forces of the United States, and that's not just the Army, have to provide the capability that the nation requests, requires and demands," GEN Dempsey said.

Rob McIlvaine is a writer-editor for Defense Media Activities. He previously served as senior information specialist, Public Affairs at U.S. Army Family Morale Welfare and Recreation Command, a writer/editor at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services and executive producer of video at the National Museum of the American Indian. DMA is the Department of Defense's direct line of communication for news and information to U.S. forces worldwide. The agency presents news, information and entertainment on a variety of media platforms, including radio, television, internet, print media and emerging media technologies.

