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Barack Obama

*Department of Defense Personnel Announcement*



Delivered 30 May 2011, Rose Garden, White House

**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio**

All right. Good morning. In a few moments, I'll be joining members of our armed forces, their families, and veterans for the Memorial Day observance at Arlington. There, and across our nation, we'll pause to honor all those who've given their last full measure of devotion in defense of our country. Theirs was the ultimate sacrifice, but it is one that every man and woman who wears America's uniform is prepared to make -- so that we can live free.

The men and women of our armed forces are the best our nation has to offer, and they deserve nothing but the absolute best in return. And that includes leaders who will guide them, and support their families, with wisdom and strength and compassion. And that's what I expect as Commander-in-Chief as we work to keep our nation secure and our military the finest in the world.

I found those qualities in Leon Panetta, who I announced last month as my choice to succeed our outstanding Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, who I thank for joining us today. And I found these qualities in the leaders who will complete our team at the Pentagon and whom I'm proud to announce today -- General Martin Dempsey as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral James Winnefeld as the Vice Chairman, and to succeed General Dempsey as Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ray Odierno.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military advisor to me and my national security team, including the Secretary of Defense. Since taking office, I've been very grateful for the leadership of the current Chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen, and the Vice Chairman, General Jim "Hoss" Cartwright.



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These two men have served our nation with distinction for decades, and I look forward to paying tribute to their lives of service in the months ahead.

Today, I'll simply say that, like President Bush before me, I've deeply valued Mike's professional steadiness and his personal integrity. On his watch, our military forces have excelled across the whole spectrum of missions, from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan to relief efforts after the Haiti earthquake. He's helped revitalize NATO, reset our relations with Russia, and steer our relationship with Pakistan and China. And I believe that history will also record Mike Mullen as the Chairman who said what he believed was right and declared that no one in uniform should ever have to sacrifice their integrity to serve their country.

I've also benefited enormously from the advice and counsel of Hoss Cartwright. Hoss is that rare combination of technical expert -- from cyber to missile defense -- and strategic thinker, whether it was updating our nuclear posture or preparing our military for 21st-century missions. I'll always be personally grateful to Hoss for his friendship and partnership. And as he concludes four decades of service in the Marine Corps that he loves, he can do so knowing that our nation is more secure, and our military is stronger, because of his remarkable career.

And I know that Michelle joins me in saluting Deborah Mullen and Sandee Cartwright for their decades of extraordinary service, especially as champions of our inspiring military families.

With the advice and consent of the Senate, it is our hope and expectation that Leon Panetta will soon take the reins as Secretary of Defense. General Cartwright's term ends this summer; Admiral Mullen's term ends this fall. I'm announcing my choice for their successors today because it's essential that this transition be seamless and that we stay focused on the urgent national security challenges before us. And I want to thank Deputy Secretary of Defense Bill Lynn for the continuity that he'll provide during this transition.

With nearly 40 years in uniform, Martin Dempsey is one of our nation's most respected -- and combat-tested -- generals. In Iraq, he led our soldiers against a brutal insurgency. Having trained Iraqi forces, he knows that nations must ultimately take responsibility for their own security. Having served as acting commander of Central Command, he understands that in Iraq and Afghanistan security gains and political progress must go hand in hand. And just as he challenged the Army to embrace new doctrine and tactics, I expect him to push all our forces to continue adapting and innovating to be ready for the missions of today and tomorrow.

I was proud to nominate Marty as Army Chief of Staff, and I realized he only assumed that position last month. Marty, your tenure as Chief may go down as one of the shortest in Army history. But it's your lifetime of accomplishment that brings us here today. And I thank you for your willingness to take on this new assignment, along with your wife Deanie and your three children, all of whom have served in the Army.



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Today, I want every one of our men and women in uniform to hear the words that you spoke to your soldiers on your first day as Chief, because it's our shared message to all who serve, especially our troops in harm's way: "We will provide whatever it takes to achieve our objectives in the current fight."

As Vice Chairman, Admiral Sandy Winnefeld will draw on more than 30 years of distinguished service. Under his command, fighters from the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise pounded Taliban positions in the weeks after 9/11 and his carrier strike group played a critical role in air operations over Iraq. Having served as a NATO commander, Sandy is well known to our allies. Having served on the Joint Staff, he is known and trusted here at the White House.

Most recently, as head of Northern Command, Sandy's been responsible for the defense of our homeland and support to states and communities in times of crisis, such as the recent tornadoes and the floods along the Mississippi. He's supported our Mexican partners in their fight against the cartels and our Japanese allies in the response to their nuclear emergency. So Sandy knows that we have to be prepared for the full range of challenges. Sandy, I thank you and your wife Mary and your two sons for your continued service.

I've selected General Dempsey and Admiral Winnefeld because of their record -- and potential -- as individuals. But I've also selected them because they will make an extraordinary team -- despite their competing loyalties to Army and Navy. Between them, they bring deep experience in virtually every domain -- land, air, space, sea, cyber. Both of them have the respect and the trust of our troops on the frontlines, our friends in Congress, and allies and partners abroad. And both of them have my full confidence.

They both have something else. For the first time, the Chairman and Vice Chairman will have the experience of leading combat operations in the years since 9/11. Two moments in particular speak to this leadership. On the morning of September 11, 2001, the Enterprise was returning home from the Persian Gulf when word came of the attacks. Rather than wait for orders, Sandy took the initiative, reversed course, and put his ship and aircraft within range of Afghanistan by the next morning, setting the stage for the strikes that followed. A few years later, as Marty's 1st Armored Division was rotating out of Iraq, he suddenly got new orders. He turned his division around, shifted to new parts of Iraq, and defeated an insurgent uprising -- a remarkable maneuver that has entered the annals of Army history.

And while I know that folks across the Army are proud to see one of their own selected as Chairman, I also know this means losing their new Chief in a time of war. And that's why, for the next Army Chief of Staff, I'm nominating one of the Army's most accomplished soldiers -- and one of the tallest -- General Ray Odierno. In three pivotal deployments to Iraq, he commanded the troops that captured Saddam Hussein, partnered with General Petraeus to help bring down the violence, and then transferred responsibility to Iraqi forces, allowing us to remove some 100,000 American troops and end our combat mission.



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After years on the frontlines, Ray understands what the Army must do -- to prevail in today's wars, to prepare for the future, and to preserve the readiness of the soldiers and families who are the strength of America's families. And we're fortunate that Ray's dedication to our soldiers is shared by his wife Linda and their family, including their son Tony, a combat veteran and advocate for his fellow wounded warriors.

I urge our friends in the Senate to confirm these outstanding individuals as swiftly as possible. They're innovative, flexible, focused on the future, and deeply devoted to our troops and their families. General Dempsey, Admiral Winnefeld, we have much to do -- from bringing our troops home from Iraq to beginning to reduce our forces in Afghanistan this summer and transitioning to Afghan lead; from defeating al Qaeda to protecting the Libyan people. All this, even as we make difficult budget decisions while keeping our military the finest fighting force in the world.

Above all, as Commander-in-Chief, I'll be looking to you, and the rest of the Joint Chiefs, for what I value most in my advisors -- your honest, unvarnished advice, and the full range of options, especially when it comes to our most solemn obligation: protecting the lives of our brave men and women in uniform. We have no greater responsibility, as we are reminded today when we honor all those who sacrificed so that we can enjoy the blessings of freedom.

So, again, to Marty, Sandy, and Ray, as well as your families, thank you for your patriotic service and your readiness to lead once more.

Thank you very much, everybody.