

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019*

**Remarks at an Armed Forces Welcome Ceremony Honoring the 20th Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff Mark A. Milley in Arlington, Virginia**

*September 30, 2019*

*The President.* Thank you very much, Mike. And I have to start off by saying that all of my life I've heard that if it rains on a big occasion, it brings luck. So, Mark, I think you're going to be the luckiest general in history. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank everybody for being here—Vice President Pence. And thank you all for the incredible servicemembers. We have the finest military anywhere in the world. The American military is the greatest fighting force, without question, in the history of the world. And today, it's stronger than it's ever been, by a large factor. No enemy on Earth can match the awesome might of the American Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and the United States Marines.

We're gathered today for a truly historic occasion. We're here to welcome our outstanding new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: General Mark Milley. Mark, I want to congratulate you. You're my friend. You're my adviser. And you deserve this position. I never had a doubt. Congratulations. [*Applause*] Congratulations.

I also want to express our profound gratitude to Mark's wife Hollyanne and his children Mary and Peter, for their selfless devotion to our country. The strength of our military is truly found in the love and support of our military families. So important. Those families are so important.

We're especially honored to be joined by some of America's Gold Star Families. Your treasured loved ones made the supreme sacrifice for our Nation. They're looking down on you right now. You look up in the sky, and they're looking down on you. Our debt to you is infinite and eternal. America will hold you in its heart forever. And we will never forget.

We're also grateful to the many veterans here today. To our heroic wounded warriors in attendance: Our nation will always remember what you did for the cause of freedom.

Joining us as well are: Secretary Mark Esper. Thank you, Mark. Great job you're doing. Secretary Mike Pompeo. Mike, thank you very much. EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. Thank you, Andrew. Many of our great Secretaries and my Cabinet and service chiefs.

I know we have a couple of wonderful Representatives; I think you have many, so I'll get myself in trouble, but I see John Carter and I see Brad Wenstrup. Thank you very much for being here, fellas. Thank you very much. And I see a senator that's so supportive of our military and this administration, Senator Dan Sullivan—thank you, Dan—of Alaska. Done a great job.

As we prepare to welcome a new Chairman, we must first pay tribute to one of America's most admired and beloved military leaders: outgoing Chairman, Joseph Dunford, here today with his wonderful wife Ellyn. Joe hails from just outside Boston. His father was a marine—and a tough one—who landed on Inchon, in Korea, and fought at the Chosin Reservoir. So Joe knew which branch he was destined to join. He didn't have too much of a decision to make, I think. What do you think about that? [*Laughter*] Huh? Not a big decision? No.

In 1977, he was commissioned into the U.S. Marine Corps. In 2003, Joe commanded some of the first American troops in Operation Iraqi Freedom and very, very successfully commanded them. For his exceptional bravery, he received the Legion of Merit with Combat Valor.

As a general, Joe was promoted so quickly that he was nominated for his third star before he had formally received his second. How do you do that? *[Laughter]* How do you do that, Joe?

In 2013, he was named International Security Assistance Force Commander in Afghanistan. And he was instrumental in strengthening Afghan security forces to share more of the burden. And today, they are indeed sharing much more of the burden.

In 2014, Joe became Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the next year he was named Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And in that role, Joe published the first Joint Military Net Assessment in 20 years. We have a lot of the ideas that we've brought forward. And you know, we've spent \$2.5 trillion since I'm President—\$2.5 trillion—far more than this country has ever even thought about spending. But we had to have a modern, great military with the most magnificent and the finest machinery, planes, boats, ships, weapons of all kinds. We've never had anything like you have today. When I took over, we were a very depleted military, and today, we're at a level that we have never even come close to.

Joe solidified America's competitive advantage through global integration of the Joint Force. He also provided critical leadership during the complete rebuilding of our military.

And he helped me in another way—something that probably only Joe and Ellyn really know—because in, I would say, 2015, I sat with Joe at a dinner. And believe it or not, I was getting a big award from the Marines. And Joe was presenting the awards, and I had no even thought of running for President. And I said to my wife and family: "Look at that guy. He's a great looking guy, isn't he? He's like central casting. He's like right out of Hollywood." But he made the great presentation that night.

And I got to talk to him because I sat with him and Ellyn and his son Patrick. And I was asking Joe lots of questions about the military. He said, "You really enjoy this, don't you?" I said: "Well, I just love our country. It's very important to me. I love our country." And I said: "I don't know. What do you think? Should I give it a shot?" This was before it was public. He was one of the first people I asked. I said: "What do you think? You think I'd have a shot? If I get it, we're going to rebuild that military. It's going to be stronger than ever before."

And he helped me form an opinion. He gave me a lot of information. And he has ever since. So, for that, I want to thank you and Ellyn, and I want to thank Patrick. I hope I got his name right. It was a long time ago, but I think his name was Patrick, right? Huh? Did I do good? *[Laughter]*

But General Dunford also provided vital strategic direction to the campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. With his help and the great courage of our warfighters, I am proud to say that the ISIS territorial caliphate has been 100-percent completely obliterated. When we came to office, it was a mess; it was all over. Now we have thousands of captured ISIS fighters, and we have 100 percent of the caliphate.

As Chairman, Joe has also been a strong supporter and crucial advocate for creating the sixth branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, something that I'm really proud about and something that, when I make these big speeches in these massive arenas loaded up with people, thousands and thousands, it just about gets the number-one line of applause, because I say, "We're creating the Space Force." And the place goes crazy. Great popularity, because that's where it's going to be at, more and more.

General, your life exemplifies those words that beat in the heart of every Marine: Semper Fi. America salutes your incredible legacy of noble service. You've been exceptional. Thank you. Thank you very much, Joe. I think they like you, Joe. *[Laughter]*

As one exceptional Chairman departs, our Nation gains another. Today Mark Milley takes General Dunford's place as the highest ranking member of the most skilled, determined, and powerful military ever assembled in human history.

Mark has been preparing for his duty his entire life. Like Joe, he grew up in a family of patriots just outside of Boston. His dad was a Navy corpsman and tough as can be, they say. Was he that tough?

*Chairman Milley.* He was that tough.

*The President.* Huh? No games? He didn't play games?

*Chairman Milley.* No. No.

*The President.* [Laughter] He says, "No games."

But his dad was a strong Navy corpsman, serving with the 4th Marine Division in World War Two, a veteran of the assault landings in the Marshall Islands campaign, the Mariana campaign, and in two Iwo Jima hits. During the war, Mark's mother also served at a Navy hospital in Seattle, treating wounded men from the Pacific.

Inspired by their example, Mark chose the path of duty and the life of service. He could have done whatever he wanted. He was exceptional in every way.

In 1980, he was commissioned into the Army and quickly joined the ranks of its finest soldiers. He graduated from the Army Ranger School and became a master parachutist and a Green Beret. In a long Army career, Mark deployed to Panama, Colombia, Korea, Somalia, Egypt, Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, often seeing very, very close up the combat.

He has not just served, but shown immense valor, on nearly every continent. He is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, four Bronze Stars, and the Legion of Merit, along with two awards of the Combat Infantry Badge.

With degrees from Princeton, Columbia—wow, I didn't know you were such a great academic. [Laughter] Wow, let me give you a little more. [Laughter] I'm impressed with that. That's very good. And the Naval War College—but I liked you anyway—Mark is living proof that the American warfighter is the toughest, smartest and bravest, best and brightest, by far, anywhere in the world.

Following four deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, he became the 39th Chief of Staff of the Army in 2015. Over the last several years, he has worked tirelessly to rebuild a depleted force into a fully manned, fully trained, and fully equipped Army prepared to achieve complete victory in the conflicts of tomorrow.

And when we were determining where we were going to spend all of these billions of dollars, like you've never seen—we haven't seen it in decades—I went with Mark, I sat with Mark, and I hope we spent it wisely, and I know we spent it wisely. Two and a half trillion dollars.

He built the Army Futures Command, and he created Security Force Assistance Brigades to reduce the need for large deployments. When Mark took over, only two Brigade Combat Teams were at the highest levels of readiness. Today, that number stands at 28, an extraordinary turnaround and achievement. And I congratulate everybody here today.

America's Armed Forces are more powerful than ever and growing even stronger. We have the newest equipment, and we also have equipment that we keep under wraps that nobody has ever even heard of. We have weapons that we pray to God we never have to use. Our nuclear has

been totally rebuilt, some brandnew and some refurbished. But we hope to God we never have to use any of our weapons—any of our weapons.

In his new role as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley will serve as my top military adviser. I have absolute confidence that he will fulfill his duty with the same brilliance and fortitude he has shown throughout his long and very distinguished career.

From the great General Omar Bradley to the famed Joe Dunford, our Nation has been blessed by the advice, counsel, and wisdom of 19 Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Today, we pass the baton to the 20th. Together, we vow to continue the righteous mission that has united every Chairman and every patriot ever to wear the uniform and to defend our great American flag. We will keep America safe, we will keep America strong, and we will keep America proud so that our children and their children will forever and always be free.

Thank you again, General Dunford, for the incredible job you've done. And to General Mark Milley: Good luck, Godspeed, God bless you, God bless our military, and God bless America. Thank you all for being here. Thank you very much. It's a great honor. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Michael R. Pence, who introduced the President. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark A. Milley, Armed Forces welcome ceremony in Arlington, VA.

*Locations:* Arlington, VA.

*Names:* Carter, John R.; Dunford, Ellyn; Dunford, Joseph F., Jr.; Dunford, Patrick; Esper, Mark T.; Milley, Hollyanne; Milley, Mark A.; Milley, Mary; Milley, Peter; Pence, Michael R.; Pompeo, Michael R.; Sullivan, Daniel S.; Wenstrup, Brad R.; Wheeler, Andrew R.

*Subjects:* Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: U.S. nuclear arsenal modernization; Defense and national security : Defense readiness, improvement efforts; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Environmental Protection Agency; State, Department of : Secretary; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Veterans : Service and dedication; Virginia : President's visits; White House Office : Vice President.

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