

# Dempsey: Jacks-of-all-trades aren't leaders

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Gen. Martin Dempsey, President Obama's pick for the next U.S. Army chief of staff, wants the service to focus on mastering a few skills in the coming postwar era.

"What do you do with this magnificent Army of ours when Iraq and Afghanistan are in the rear view?" Dempsey asked Feb. 10, the final day of a weeklong war game.

The Army needs to decide which five things — not 55 things — its soldiers are going to master, the four-star told the audience at Unified Quest, an annual Army exercise held at a Booz Allen facility in McLean, Va.

Dempsey, who commands Army Training and Doctrine Command, spoke two days after Defense Secretary Robert Gates formally announced his nomination for Army chief of staff. The Feb. 8 nomination next goes to the Senate for confirmation.

The Army will also have a new top enlisted leader soon. Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Chandler will become the new sergeant major of the Army in a ceremony March 1, when the current top enlisted soldier, Kenneth O. Preston, retires. Chandler will be Dempsey's enlisted adviser.

Dempsey offered glimpses of his leadership style and his priorities for the Army during the exercise in early February. He littered his talk with literary references, yet also drew hearty laughter by making fun of himself and the Army's foibles.

He indicated that if he is confirmed as chief, he will try to focus the Army's skills and, in doing so, hopes to prepare the service for whatever mission it is given. The Army does not want soldiers who are jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none, he said.

“If we make leaders skilled in a few areas, they’ll have the confidence to adapt when we inevitably get the future wrong,” Dempsey said. “But if you’re not a master of anything, you have no confidence in anything. I’m a passionate believer in that.”

Throughout the weeklong war game, participants tested two emerging doctrinal ideas: combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security. The Army placed the ideas at the center of its mission in its new Operating Concept, published last summer. Now the service is working to translate the concepts into official doctrine.

The words will first appear in a new revision of Field Manual 3-0, which was to be released this month at the annual winter conference of the Association of the United States Army in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

At Dempsey’s direction, the Army plans to continue revising that document and will publish a second round of changes in October. Revisiting and updating the Army’s field manuals will help the service keep up with the rapid pace of change in the world, Dempsey has said in the past.

## Getting the words right

He said he sees these new changes to the Army’s core doctrine as central to shaping the service’s role in the near future. For that reason, he is serious about getting the definitions right. Words matter.

The working definition of combined-arms maneuver is “the application of the elements of combat power in unified action to defeat enemy ground forces, seize, occupy, and defend land areas, to achieve physical, temporal, and psychological advantages over the enemy, and to preserve freedom of action.”

One TRADOC official said they had debated the word “temporal” for over an hour.

While some at the event questioned the usefulness of haggling over words, Dempsey explained why doctrinal language matters.

“I love that,” Dempsey said, citing a Mark Twain quote, “The difference between the almost-right word and the right word is really a large matter — it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

## The full spectrum

Over the past nine years in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army has been mostly focused on one end of the spectrum: lower-intensity, counterinsurgency-type operations. Now with more time at home between deployments, the service wants to improve its other skills.

The Army is beginning to conduct “full-spectrum” training exercises that encompass everything from humanitarian assistance to major combat operations. What’s happened, though, is some people have begun to equate this return to full-spectrum operations as a return to preparing for major combat, rather than re-integrating major combat into the Army’s set of skills.

It’s clear this frustrates Dempsey.

He said doctrine in this area will inform leader development, but it will also shape the kinds of technology and the equipment the Army decides to buy.

Soon, it appears, the Army’s supply of forces will exceed the demand, Dempsey said.

One Army official noted that the first thing they’ll ask inside the Pentagon is: Why do you need all of that force structure?

Dempsey’s response: It’s about sincerely building the force the nation needs.