

## **GENERAL ANTHONY C. ZINNI, USMC, (RETIRED)**

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General Zinni joined the Marine Corps in 1961 and was commissioned an infantry second lieutenant in 1965 after graduating from Villanova University. He has held numerous command and staff assignments, including platoon, company, battalion, regimental, Marine expeditionary unit, and Marine expeditionary force command. His staff assignments included service in operations, training, special operations, counter-terrorism, and manpower billets. He has also been a tactics and operations instructor at several Marine Corps schools and was selected as a fellow on the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group. General Zinni's joint assignments include command of a joint task force and a unified command. He has also had several joint and combined staff billets at task force and unified command levels.

He has made deployments to the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Western Pacific, Northern Europe, and Korea. He has also served tours in Okinawa and Germany. His operational experiences include two tours in Vietnam; emergency relief and security operations in the Philippines; Operation Provide Comfort in Turkey and northern Iraq; Operation Provide Hope in the former Soviet Union; Operations Restore Hope, Continue Hope, and United Shield in Somalia; Operations Resolute Response and Noble Response in Kenya; Operations Desert Thunder, Desert Fox, Desert Viper, Desert Spring, Southern Watch, and the Maritime Intercept Operations in the Persian Gulf; and Operation Infinite Reach against terrorist targets in the Central Region. He was involved in the planning and execution of Operation Proven Force and Operation Patriot Defender in support of the Gulf War and noncombatant evacuation operations in Liberia, Zaire, Sierra Leone, and Eritrea. He has also participated in presidential diplomatic missions to Somalia, Pakistan, and Ethiopia-Eritrea, as well as State Department missions involving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and conflicts in Indonesia.

He has attended numerous military schools and courses, including the National War College. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics, a master's in international relations, and a master's in management and supervision.

General Zinni's awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal with oak leaf cluster; the Distinguished Service Medal; the Defense Superior Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters; the Bronze Star with Combat "V" and gold star; the Purple Heart; the Meritorious Service Medal with gold star; the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V" and gold star; the Navy Achievement Medal with gold star; the Combat Action Ribbon; and personal decorations from South Vietnam, France, Italy, Egypt, Kuwait, Yemen, and Bahrain. He also holds 36 unit, service, and campaign awards. His civilian awards include the Papal Gold Cross of Honor, the Union League's Abraham Lincoln Award, the Italic Studies Institute's Global Peace Award, the Distinguished Sea Service Award from the Naval Order of the United States, the Eisenhower Distinguished Service Award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Chapman Award from the Marine Corps University Foundation, the Penn Club Award, and the St. Thomas of Villanova Alumni Medal.

He currently holds positions on several boards of directors of major U.S. companies. In addition, he has held academic positions that include the Stanley Chair in Ethics at the Virginia Military Institute, the Nimitz Chair at the University of California-Berkeley, the Hofheimer Chair at the Joint Forces Staff College, and the Harriman Professor of Government appointment and membership on the board of the Reves Center for International Studies at the College of William and Mary. He has worked with the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation and the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva. He is also a Distinguished Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

# THE OBLIGATION TO SPEAK THE TRUTH

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Welcome from Dr. Albert C. Pierce, Director, Center for the  
Study of Professional Military Ethics



Introduction by VADM Richard J. Naughton, USN,  
Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy



Lecture by General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC (Ret.)

*This is an edited, abridged version of the original lecture transcript.  
Publication of this lecture is made possible through the generosity  
of Northrop Grumman Corporation.*

# WELCOME

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## ***Dr. Pierce***

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the spring 2003 ethics lecture, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics. It promises to be a stimulating and rewarding evening. We at the Ethics Center like to think of these lectures as part of our ongoing efforts to contribute to enriching the life of the Naval Academy in the field of ethics, and while they're open to the entire Naval Academy community, we are especially pleased that these lectures add some value to the core ethics course NE203, and I know particularly we have the NE203 midshipmen with us this evening.

The inaugural lecture in this series was in April of 1999, almost four years ago, and we've grown from one lecture per academic year to one per semester. The first couple of lectures had moral courage as the theme, and then the next several focused on ethics and the use of military force. This evening represents a new focus, inviting retired senior officers and government officials to reflect on the ethical challenges in their own careers and more broadly in military and public service. We simply could not have a better speaker to sound this theme than our honored guest this evening. To introduce him, I will ask Vice Admiral Naughton, the 57th Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, to come to the podium.

# INTRODUCTION

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## ***Admiral Naughton***

Let me say it is a great pleasure to be here and introduce Tony Zinni to the brigade of midshipmen. Tony Zinni is simultaneously a warrior, a peacekeeper, a strategist, and a statesman. Combat-hardened in Vietnam and Somalia, he ended his career essentially as my boss at Central Command. When I was over in JTF Swallow as a deputy commander, he gave us great latitude and great support, and we hope that the infrastructure that we ruined during Desert Fox and in the spring of 2000 has made it easier for our combat troops today. But he's truly a hero, and he knows a lot about strategic thinking.

He brought to the table a wide-angle view of what's going on. He won acclaim for his ability to recognize the underlying political, social, cultural, historical, economic, and religious dimensions of what was happening in his theater. He is truly a respected troubleshooter for America and a respected troubleshooter for what's going on in Southwest Asia today.

His operational career embodies the history of the 20th century. The names, the places he has served in geo-strategic and political assignments over the last several decades are where our country has been and where our country will be. Vietnam, Okinawa, Germany, Turkey, Iraq, Somalia, the former Soviet Union, Kenya, Liberia, Zaire, Sierra Leone, and Eritrea, and that's not everywhere he's been. He's done everything.

We're honored to have Tony Zinni come here and speak to us tonight about some of the ethical challenges that we will all face in the years ahead. He could not come to speak about a more relevant topic: the obligation to speak the truth. It is my great honor and pleasure to introduce General Tony Zinni.

## LECTURE

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### **General Zinni**

Thank you. It's a little bit strange to be in front of this group in uniform and not be in uniform. It's not that long since I've retired, and retirement is a shock. For those of you that will face this someday, you'll realize that taking that uniform off is a traumatic experience, especially after 39 years. The system doesn't allow you to think about it much. You end up one day suddenly realizing your driver is not there. The aide is gone, and your airplane has got somebody else's name painted on it.

(Laughter.)

### **General Zinni**

You go cold turkey. As a four-star, I had to pull out in my car at MacDill Air Force Base after turning over command to General Tommy Franks of Central Command. For the first time in 10 years, I was leaving a base where I didn't have to be in secure communications with the Secretary of Defense anymore, and as we were driving up 95 from Florida to our retirement home, I kept trying to reach for my cell phone. My wife kept grabbing my hand and saying, "What are you doing?" I said, "I have to call the command center and tell them where I am," and she said, "They don't give a damn anymore."

(Laughter.)

### **General Zinni**

That's why I think we're issued spouses. They keep you straight and make sure you understand what's happened.

I wanted to speak to you this evening about your obligation as future officers to speak the truth as you know it. This is a difficult decision.

Right now, as you watch the war unfold, there are a number of retired officers who are working for the different networks, providing color commentary. Old generals never die; they just sign a contract with CNN, I guess. They have chosen to do that,

and I respect them greatly. They made a decision, in some cases where they see flaws or faults, to criticize the war plan. There has been a lot of debate about the appropriateness of this, whether the timing is right once the troops are committed, whether someone that is retired should do this.

There is a lot more debate about, when you wear the uniform, what is your obligation to speak? When is it appropriate, and when isn't it appropriate? And I will be the first to tell you that the ground rules are fuzzy. Some of the rules are pretty clear. Some more have to do with your judgment, and some have to do with the judgment of your peers and the people that you may speak to.

I want to talk a little bit about a personal experience specifically and then a little bit about my generation and how we feel about the need to speak the truth to our civilian masters about things military. Not too long ago, about 1997, I was in Washington—as the Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command—and I was asked to attend a press breakfast. The Pentagon's public affairs officer said, "This is something we normally do when CINCs [Commanders in Chief, or Combatant Commanders] or others are in town. We have a breakfast with the media, and they'll shoot questions out." Jamie McIntyre from CNN dropped a bomb on me at this breakfast. He said, "What's your view of the Iraqi Liberation Act?" Iraq was, of course, one of the countries in our area of responsibility, and I said, "I don't know what the Iraqi Liberation Act is." He said, "Well, it's an act that has just been passed by Congress that authorizes \$97 million for the Iraqi opposition groups."

Now, based on our intelligence people and our knowledge of the Iraqi opposition groups, especially those outside of Iraq, we didn't have very much confidence in their abilities. They had been pushing to be armed and to be supported in some sort of rebellion inside Iraq, and it was the judgment of my intelligence officers, CIA and others, that they weren't a very viable organization and that anything like this could be a problem. I mentioned to him, "I don't understand fully what the Iraqi Liberation Act is and what the \$97 million is for, but if it's for promoting them as a political opposition to Saddam, where they

can voice the need for multi-representational government, disavow the use of weapons of mass destruction, designs on their neighbors, and that sort of thing, then I'm all for it. If the money is there to support some of the wild schemes I hear about putting them in and supporting them in some way militarily as they become the front for countering Saddam, I'm opposed to it, because there are all sorts of problems with that."

Well, as things would have it, Jamie McIntyre and the *Washington Post* and CNN made sure that was made public, and it didn't please the legislators who passed the ILA, obviously. Unfortunately, I was also in town to go before the Senate Armed Services Committee to testify the day after that. And the day after that, needless to say, 13 senators were loaded for bear when I walked in, particularly Senator McCain. Senator McCain started really grilling me, because this was something that he supported.

I said, "Senator, my concerns about this are the fact that, number one, I'm the Commander in Chief of this region. If there is a military option and the use of military forces in this region, I think someone should have asked for my view or opinion in this." In fact, what had happened is two Senate staffers and a retired general put together an actual plan for this, committing CENTCOM [Central Command] forces to support this, and I said, "So my first problem is that the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Central Command, the appointed military leader for this region, who reports to the Secretary of Defense and the President, has not been involved in this. My second problem is, what the hell Senate staffers are doing making war plans, a little strange to begin with, and my third point is why retired generals don't stay home where they belong?"

(Laughter.)

### **General Zinni**

I also said that I worry about this, because this isn't a plan that we control. In other words, we are supporting a group when we don't understand what they might do. They could drag us into situations where we aren't the lead. We aren't making the decisions. We're trying to bail them out. I really don't think

there will be a viable force on the ground. What the Iraqi Liberation Movement had proposed to the senators, and they accepted, is arming a few thousand of them, and they would go into Iraq and defeat the Iraqi military and turn them. In light of what's happened in the last couple of days, maybe not the most brilliant plan we've ever heard of, and the other problem I had is, then we become responsible for them and what they might do.

Senator McCain was very upset with me, and he said to me, "What gives you the right to question this?" Later on, I got the same question from the National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger: "What gives you the right to question this?" My response was the First Amendment. You know, they didn't appreciate that answer, but that's what gave me the right.

(Laughter.)

### **General Zinni**

And I mentioned to the Senate Armed Services Committee that, unless I forgot something, when I first came before you to be confirmed as the Commander in Chief of U.S. Central Command, Senator Strom Thurmond required of me to raise my hand and swear that I would come before this committee in the Senate and give my honest opinion and my honest views, even if they were in opposition to Administration policy or any other policies that may have been implemented by our government. I swore to do that, and yet those who were not hearing what they wanted to hear objected to it. It was very painful.

I managed to get called over to see my boss, the Secretary of Defense, along with the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, and got an appropriate portion of my anatomy chewed on. I had to respond to questions like: "Why did you do this? Why did you say this to the Senate?" And I said, "Because they needed to hear the answer. They needed to understand my view, that I have an obligation if asked a question to provide that." I asked the Secretary of Defense, "Do you think I'm wrong? Do you agree with them and disagree with me, because if that's the case, then you know, you obviously need to get another Commander in Chief." He said, "No, I agree with you, but I disagree with the way you said it." I said, "Well, I don't understand. I spoke in

declarative sentences. I know that's unusual for Washington, but you know, it's the way I was brought up."

(Laughter.)

### ***General Zinni***

The Undersecretary for Policy said, "No, you don't understand the problem. You weren't nuanced enough," and I said, "You know, if you want nuance, don't send a Marine. We don't do nuance very well."

(Laughter.)

### ***General Zinni***

Needless to say, this brewed on and on and has haunted me for a long time after that.

Not long after that, David Hackworth, one of my favorite guys, because he is irreverent and p---s everybody off, wrote an article in 1999 about Marine generals, and he said, in effect, "What is it with most of these Marine generals? They get inoculated with double shots of truth serum in boot camp? Why is it that Jack Sheehan, Chuck Krulak, Charlie Wilhelm, and Tony Zinni speak their minds? Why doesn't anybody else speak their minds?" I liked it. Most of my bosses didn't.

But why is it that we spoke our minds? And, this is what I would try to explain as to why you may see General McCaffrey, General Short, and others speaking their minds. Maybe not choosing the best time to do it, but the reason my generation does it goes back to our first war. I spent two tours of duty in Vietnam, as many of them have. We saw what happens when our country goes to war and goes to war in a way and on a basis that isn't clear, that isn't understood and may not even be correct, or in a way that empowers our military that may have the same problems.

In 1997, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton, sent each of us commanders in chief and service chiefs a book written by a young Army major named H.R. McMaster called *Dereliction of Duty*. Chairman Shelton required us each to read that book, and at the next conference of the CINCs and

service chiefs in Washington, D.C., he had Major McMaster, who had done research in writing this book about the performance of the military leaders during Vietnam, or the lack of performance in giving their views. General Shelton wanted to instill in us the importance and the need not to ever forget what happened in Vietnam and the need to speak out, now that we were in these positions of authority as the senior four-star admirals and generals of our respective services and the unified commands.

I want to read the closing paragraph from McMaster's book to you, because this is what Vietnam meant to us. He said:

The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of the *New York Times* or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C. even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting in 1965 and before they realized the country was at war; indeed, even before the first American units were deployed. The disaster in Vietnam was not the result of impersonal forces but a uniquely human failure, the responsibility for which was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisers. The failings were many and reinforcing: arrogance, weakness, lying in the pursuit of self-interest, and above all, the abdication of responsibility to the American people.

This wasn't some columnist. This wasn't some left-wing, liberal journalist that wrote this book. This was a highly touted, very successful, now command colonel in the United States Army who discovered this and said this, and charged all of us, then very senior to him, to not ever let that happen again.

Shortly after that, Secretary of Defense McNamara wrote his book that was called *In Retrospect*, about the Vietnam War, a book that angered me greatly, and I want to read just two short quotes from that. He said:

I want to put Vietnam in context.

We of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who participated in the decisions on Vietnam acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of this

nation. We made our decisions in light of those values.

Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why.

I truly believe that we made an error, not of values and intentions, but of judgment and capabilities.

He went on to say that, “One reason the Kennedy and Johnson administrations failed to take an orderly, rational approach to the basic questions underlying Vietnam was the staggering variety and complexity of other issues we faced. Simply put, we faced a blizzard of problems, there were only 24 hours in a day, and we often did not have enough time to think straight.”

Well, I felt terribly sorry for him, because I can tell you where my Marines were putting 24 hours a day at the time, and so this becomes very emotional for us, who lived through this. We feel a strong sense not to let this ever happen again to our nation.

There is an obligation when you are in uniform to follow orders. There may become a point in time in your career when you have to make a decision. Your choices are only two: to follow those orders or to step aside. You have no other choice when you swear that oath to the Constitution of the United States except to follow the orders of our Commander in Chief, but you have, up until that point when you have to make that decision, a sincere obligation to give your honest view and opinion on what’s going to happen and what in your view is right or wrong about the decision that’s being made.

There is a lot of debate now about what’s going on in the Pentagon. There is a lot of debate about decisions on war plans that are made by those wearing civilian suits that may have been removed from the purview and the prerogative of those wearing uniforms where it should be, and you’re hearing a lot of the rumblings of that. I personally don’t believe this is the time to air that out. There is no rule about that, but when our men and women are in combat, we don’t want to do anything to make them believe that there is some flaw or some mistake in what’s bringing them to the battlefield. But I do believe at some point—it should have been well before and it wasn’t—our political system didn’t create the debate we needed in this case.

What certainly needs to come is an examination of what we have done on the battlefield, what strategic and policy decisions we made, and even what operational and tactical decisions were made. We are obliged to do that. We are obliged to look back and be as critical as we possibly can of ourselves. There is a time to do that and a time not to do that, but it is an obligation.

The trouble with what we are obliged to do as we become more senior is that we have to answer to many masters. If you're a service chief, you have an obligation to answer to your service Secretary and through that service Secretary to the Secretary of Defense and the President. At the same time, you swear that obligation to the Senate and to the Congress, and you answer to the American people through their elected officials. At the same time, as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you answer through your chairman directly to the Secretary of Defense and to the President. Those can be three competing obligations. There are times when you may have to say things to the elected representatives of America and to the people that are not in agreement with the policies that are being passed down through your normal chain of command, what used to be known as the National Command Authority before transformation changed the lexicon.

By the way, I think that's the only thing I've seen in transformation now is the words we can't use. I'm waiting for the real transformation to occur. We've gotten rid of one artillery program, and we changed three words in the military dictionary. I'm hoping there is more to come to transformation than that, but it remains to be seen.

The same thing happens to our CINCs. We are obliged to stand before the Congress that confirms us and answer to them and in effect to the American people about what we feel and what we think and what our opinions are, and at the same time, to our Commander in Chief.

Now recently, Elliot Cohen has written a book that talks about the need for our political leaders to not listen to our generals. He said in effect in his book that the generals are risk averse, and the generals tend to be conservative, and I quote my friend Colin

Powell, who said, “Guilty as charged.” We are risk averse in many cases, because we measure risks in casualties and in failure of the mission, and oftentimes generals tend to try to mitigate risk. The Powell doctrine of overwhelming force did not say that you don’t gamble or you take risks or that you are bold or audacious. It says that you mitigate that risk by putting on the battlefield overwhelming force to protect yourself at that same time.

If you speak out, you’re going to find that there are things that work against you speaking out. One of them is the question of loyalty. You’re required obviously to be loyal to your bosses and loyal to the system. It’s very difficult to sit before a congressional committee and give testimony when you know that what you might be saying might not be in agreement with the policy of the chain of command, the Secretary of Defense, or the President of the United States.

You have to remember that when we have troops in battle, it becomes difficult to speak out as it is now, because they need our support. They want our confidence. They want to believe what they’re doing is correct, so timing becomes a problem. There is also the uncertainty about the rightness of what you’re saying. I don’t think anyone can be 100 percent certain that what they say is correct, that what they say is the absolute truth in the long run, especially if you’re trying to be predictive about events. You also have to understand that it is at great personal risk that you speak out, and a lot of times, you are putting at risk a career that you’ve worked hard to develop, but you owe this obligation to those that work for you.

The generals and the admirals that I grew up with and I knew that went through the Vietnam era swore to themselves that we wouldn’t let it happen again, that we would question, that we would comment, that we would take these positions over and above our own benefit and our own careers, and I want to just tell you when this hit home to me. When I was a young captain in Vietnam, newly wounded on the battlefield, I was evacuated to an Army evacuation hospital in Danang, the 85th evacuation hospital. At the same time as I was evacuated, so were some of my troops, who had been killed and wounded in the same fight.

I had been rushed into the operating room as they took the rounds out and debrided the wound, and as I came to about 24 hours later, I was in a really weakened state and could barely move. The first thing I wanted to know was what happened to my men, and I asked the corpsman, or the medic rather—it was an Army hospital—to please take me to the ward where I could maybe find my troops. I went all around the hospital and had a difficult time finding any of the troops. I didn't know what happened to them or where they were evacuated. I knew some had come with me.

I found my Kit Carson scout there, and we went into one ward, and I recognized one of my Marines, a lance corporal named Maui—big, Hawaiian kid, tough athlete—a strapping guy who had been shot up in his legs and had lost the use of one leg. Maui was fairly heavily sedated, and I went up to him and grabbed his hand, and Lance Corporal Maui looked up at me, and he said, “Sir, why are we here, and what are we doing? Does what we're doing and what we did count for anything?” And I tried to answer Maui, but I didn't give him a good answer. I gave him kind of the pat answer, the company response, and I was really disappointed in myself.

I walked out of that ward, and I said, “Never again in my career will I ever, ever not be able to explain to one of my soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, why they're here doing what they're doing.” I made a promise to myself, to Lance Corporal Maui, that never in my career, in my life, would I find myself in a position where [I am silent or less than truthful] when there is something I felt I had to say about the policy, about how we were using our forces, about the operations, the tactics, or whatever it is that affected the lives of the men and women I was responsible for, and I think you see reflected in my peers this same sense or this same feeling.

In your career, you are going to find yourself at moments when this issue is going to hit you. It doesn't just happen when you're wearing four stars. It can happen at any time in your career. It can happen in the smallest unit. It can happen in the smallest command. There can be an issue that you feel you need to deal with, you need to speak out on. It's a personal decision. It's a

difficult one to make. What you have to say may not be well received. What you have to say may come back in some way to harm you career-wise or other ways. You have to pick that time and that cause and that reason fairly carefully, but you have to remember one thing. You have to look yourself in the mirror the next day, but more importantly, you have to look at the men and women that you're responsible for. They need to know that you stand up for them and that you're willing to speak what is right and truthful.

It's not easy, and you will be criticized for it, and it's very painful to accept that criticism, especially if you feel in your heart of hearts you're right. Sometimes you find yourself in a position where you know you're right; you say what you have to; and the decision is made opposite of how you feel. Then the very difficult position you are faced with is praying that you are wrong, praying that in the end that whatever happens out there will happen in a way that benefits our mission, that benefits our troops, even though you may be then criticized for having made the statement. It puts you in a difficult position to pray to be wrong and to pray afterwards to have to suffer the consequences of having taken a stand that doesn't pan out.

But I think each of us who are going to put something on that acknowledges our authority, whether it's those first gold bars or it's those four stars eventually, [we] have to remember that we have in our hands the true treasure of the United States of America, the enlisted men and women we are given responsibility for. There is no greater treasure that this country has, and along with that comes the responsibility to accomplish the mission which we hope is noble and right.

In my war, back when I was your age, we went into a conflict, as you heard Secretary of Defense McNamara say, with the right intentions, but we did it the wrong way and found the wrong cause. We created an incident, the Tonkin Gulf incident. We had the United States of America and its citizens believe in the President of the United States, who created a falsehood for going into war. We fought, based on a strategy that I believe the decision-makers felt was right, the domino theory. If you don't stop communism in Vietnam, all of Southeast Asia will begin to

fall, and it will affect us adversely around the world. It was a flawed strategy. It was based on a lie, and we fought it terribly. We didn't mobilize this nation for that war. We went to individual replacements instead of unit replacements and made a whole series of mistakes and bad decisions at the lowest tactical levels all the way up to the highest strategic policy decisions. We can't let that happen, when you get yourself in that strange situation where you need to trust and believe in your leadership and that point where you as someone who has sworn an oath to the Constitution must obey the order or step aside, but have those doubts and those gnawing concerns that tug at your heart.

No one can give you the right answer. It's pretty clear what your obligations are in terms of whom you answer to and what kinds of answers you're supposed to provide, but in most cases, the timing, the decision to speak out, ends up having to be a personal one. There is no universal rule about all this, and it's very difficult for anyone senior to you to give you the advice on how to do it. Those judgments have to be made from within.

The only advice I could give you is to be as proficient as you can and as knowledgeable as you possibly can, so when you face those decisions and those points in your career, they're coming from the greatest base of understanding, the greatest base of knowledge, the greatest base of experience that you can gain or you can provide for yourself, and then you won't have those agonizing doubts as to whether you may be right, or you may be wrong, and should I speak out, or shouldn't I speak out.

We do not swear an oath to the President of the United States. We do not swear an oath to the king or the queen. Each one of us swears an oath to the Constitution of the United States. It is unique. Even our closest allies, the Brits who are on the battlefield with us, swear an oath to an individual, to the Queen. We don't. You swear an oath to a concept, to an ideal, to a law, and with that comes the obligation to protect the men and women that you're responsible for, to protect the concept, the values, the ideals of what our country stands for, and it supersedes any obligation or duty to any one individual. What goes with that is the understanding that when the order is issued, you have

to follow it or step aside, but up to that point, there is this obligation to speak out and to speak the truth.

You will face this, as I said, somewhere along the line in your career. As you get more senior, the issues get, I think, more critical, but you will face this even at the lowest level, as I said before.

You don't want to develop the reputation of being a complainer or being someone that is always an obstructionist, so you have to choose the point in time pretty wisely, and you have to make sure that you're not jousting every windmill, but I think you will gain the respect of those who work for you if they understand that you're willing to sacrifice perhaps your own career and future to do what is right.

And I would just close with something that I learned at my last command. My sergeant major and I conducted what we called the command climate survey in the Central Command Headquarters. It was a combination of a written survey and a number of us going around and talking to a number of the enlisted men and women from all the services.

Normally things came out that were very good. We were very pleased with the results and how the command was viewed by our enlisted force. One year, the sergeant major came in to me and said we have an unusual comment on the command climate survey that reflects a trend, because I see it on several different surveys, and I've heard several people say it when I talk to them, and it is a concern about careerism amongst officers, that the enlisted force has a sense or feeling that their officers are careerists. This really shocked me. I mean, I really felt in the command we had some very strong officers, from the most junior to the most senior, and if the enlisted force was thinking that these were careerists, that had to be really damaging to their trust and their confidence in what we could do.

So I decided to get the sergeant major and several of our enlisted troops together to talk about this issue. The sergeant major picked some of our best and brightest and those who would speak out, who weren't intimidated by being with the sergeant major

and the CINC. We gathered them around a table in my office, and I told them that I was shocked to see this, and I really felt this might, you know, reflect a lack of trust in our officer corps, and they quickly corrected me. They said, “You don’t understand. We’re not talking about the officers as individuals. We do respect them, and we do trust them.” They were talking about the system that has forced officers to pay more attention to their careers than to their job and their leadership position, the system that these young men and women in our enlisted ranks saw were driving our officers to make careerist kinds of decisions.

Everything was a cut or a selection, whether it was school or command or joint staff duty, or the right duty assignment. What they saw reflected was a very small professional military with a high selection rate. What they saw were systems in our services that were zero defects in the way we judge people, and what they saw in their officers, who they felt sorry for, was that they were trapped in these decisions and having to make these sort of career decisions that consumed them and their time, making these wickets and cuts all along. They didn’t see their officers as able to lead and to concentrate on leadership, or as able to make mistakes and not suffer from making those honest mistakes that weren’t necessarily killers, and they were concerned about what they were seeing in that leadership.

It worried me greatly, to the point where I talked to our service chiefs about that perception, because I was getting it from all four services. It worried me that sometimes the system could put us in a position where we don’t create and develop officers who are willing to speak the truth and feel the sense of obligation to do it, regardless of the cost, or who won’t be respected or admired or rewarded for doing that. I would hope that we would never find ourselves in a position where we would create an atmosphere where our subordinate leaders didn’t feel free to speak. So the other part of the obligation, besides speaking the truth, is to encourage an environment or an atmosphere where that’s invited and welcomed by your subordinate leaders too.

This is going to be a critical issue, I think, over the coming months. We are involved in a very controversial endeavor here with a very controversial strategy and a very controversial method

of applying that strategy. In the weeks and days ahead, I really believe we are going to face much of this criticism, and you're going to find many of the uniformed people having to make a difficult decision on what to say about how things evolved and how things are going. I would hope again that they choose their time and their words carefully while we have troops on the battlefield, but at some point, I think these issues have to be dealt with. If not, we're doomed to repeat them again.