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*Remarks by Henry A. Kissinger  
Honoring General James N. Mattis  
at the 2021 Henry A. Kissinger Prize*

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It is my great honor to be present at the awarding of the Kissinger Prize to my admired friend, General Jim Mattis.

Jim Mattis is a distinguished soldier and a purposeful thinker about the future of America, of free peoples, and of the global order.

I met Jim when he was Commander of the Central Military Command of the United States, in charge of military operations in the Middle East, during the Obama Administration. One day, I received a call from General Mattis, whom I had never met, telling me that he was engaged in military operations all over a historic area, comprised of many different people and cultures. He did not think that his military preparations were adequate to encompass the range of issues that he was indirectly affecting.

So he came about once a month for quite a while, to discuss with me the geopolitics of the region, my perception of its history, and to exchange views about its evolution in a way that could contribute to world peace.

It turned out that he had sold himself short in introducing himself, because I found that he was carrying books on ancient history with him wherever he went. When he came to see me the first time, he had a volume of *The Reflections of Marcus Aurelius*, the Roman emperor. In the months ahead, I developed enormous admiration for this soldier, who was, in his essence, attempting to improve the world order.

He eventually was obliged to give up that position, because at a meeting in Washington, when asked how he related to military to political guidance, he answered that he would do that when he received appropriate political guidance.

Jim returned to government when President Trump appointed him secretary of defense, a position he filled with the same sense of responsibility and dignity that had the previous one. Jim was dedicated to the purposes of America. But he also deeply believed that America could not protect itself unless it protected others as well, and unless these other people could find themselves ready to share American purposes.

It was always an inspiration to meet with Jim Mattis during a very divisive period in our national history—to see his steadiness of purpose and his commitment to the principles that he had believed in.

Finally, a point was reached where, in the opinion of Jim Mattis, a decision was taken that imperiled people who, in reliance on America's word, had risked their life and the future of their society by following American advice.



When he accepted the order, he drafted a letter to the President, and delivered it personally, which said that it would be better for the President to have at his side somebody, as secretary of defense, more in accordance with his views. He forwent the temptation of outlining the specific nature of his disagreements, nor has he, at any other time, participated in strictly political controversy.

In a speech explaining why he accepted his position as secretary of defense to a group of Marine soldiers, he said that he had flunked retirement and therefore had to go back into service. Now he is in retirement again, but he has not flunked his role a second time, either. He has written books focused on the lessons he learned from his soldiers, which consisted of service, duty, and self-sacrifice.

At a complex period in American history, where national divisions sometimes seem to override great national purposes, Jim Mattis, by his demeanor, his erudition, and by his personal conduct, remains a symbol of the role that America plays in the community of people who defend democracy and freedom.

For that reason, Jim Mattis has been deeply devoted to the Atlantic Alliance. He has recognized that alliances are not simply a legal document, but an expression of a common purpose and a common capability. And he knows also that with the passage of time, conditions change, purposes have to be redefined, new capabilities have to be developed. This is a particular issue at a moment when technology is transforming our societies, our capabilities, and our perception of reality.

Jim Mattis does not present himself as a carrier of philosophical messages, but his life has been an expression of the importance of national purpose and allied cooperation.

On the day of his resignation, he came to my office and personally hand-delivered a letter thanking me for our previous discussions, which he said enabled a simple infantryman to step forward and do his duty.

Jim was never a simply infantryman. And Marines are never completely simple, because they go through an arduous process of training and of experiences of national service. He has honored America by his conduct, and he has put forward a commitment to allies and world peace. In his role as secretary of defense, he was not only concerned with alliances, but with relationships with our presumed adversaries in China, and he devoted many thoughtful hours of study to that problem.

So, it is my great personal honor and a great privilege for the American Academy to honor Jim Mattis for his services, for his view, and for his inspiration.

Thank you.