

## “I Never Saw Him Unprepared”

**Participant:** Joseph Dunford

**Interviewer:** Russell L. Riley

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**Project:** Barack Obama Oral History Project

In May 2015, President Barack Obama nominated Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Dunford remarks that President Obama’s lack of military experience did not affect his careful and thorough approach to foreign policy.

**Interviewer:** General, he [Barack Obama] never served in the military. How did you find his professional sensibilities about the issues you were bringing to him?

**Joseph Dunford:** I’ll just say this: I’m not sure if any of you are constitutional lawyers, or you’ve been around one, but President Obama read everything we gave him. He asked many, many questions before he ever came into the Situation Room. I never saw him unprepared, and I never saw him attend a meeting where he didn’t have a pretty clear understanding of what the outcome of that particular meeting was going to be. I’m sure you have heard this from many other people. [laughter]

I don’t recall thinking about his lack of military experience once during my tenure. I don’t recall one time saying, “Ah, you just don’t understand.” Keep in mind, now, I became the Chairman in almost year seven of his Presidency, so he was a very experienced President at that point. He had dealt with the issues of Iraq and Afghanistan ad nauseam by then, so his grasp of the issues, his understanding of the nuance of the issues, allowed for what I would describe as a very mature dialogue. I never found him wanting for understanding on these issues.

*End of excerpt.*

Interview 1 with Joseph Dunford, October 4, 2022, Barack Obama Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.  
URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/joseph-dunford-oral-history-interview-1>