



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

MAR - 2 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PERSONNEL

SUBJECT: Message to the Force

Since day one as Secretary of Defense, I have been guided by three priorities: defending the Nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through teamwork. Over the past two years, we've made tremendous progress in all three areas, and I'd like to thank each one of you for your commitment and hard work.

As we look to the year ahead, these same three priorities continue to guide all that we do. The 2022 National Defense Strategy articulates how we will achieve our goals through integrated deterrence, campaigning, and building enduring advantages. Implementing our strategy means tackling the pacing challenge from the People's Republic of China (PRC) while also confronting the acute threat of Russian aggression and managing the risk of escalation as Putin's cruel war against Ukraine enters a second year. We must also defend against and deter threats from Iran, North Korea, and global terrorist organizations, even while we grapple with 21st-century, transnational challenges such as climate change. Finally, we'll continue to modernize the Joint Force and out-innovate our competitors.

We face historic challenges — but we will meet them. We have the best fighting force in history, and our military families, civilian and contractor workforce, and domestic and international allies and partners are without equal. We will continue to recruit and sustain a uniformed and civilian workforce that embodies the diversity and dynamism of our great democracy — because our people are the bedrock of a strong national defense.

DEFEND THE NATION

Prioritize China as the “Pacing Challenge.” An increasingly aggressive China is trying to shape the international rules-based system to suit its authoritarian preferences. This is a generational challenge, and the Department will rise to meet it. To do so, we must embrace integrated deterrence, which charges us to coordinate our efforts across all war-fighting domains, theaters, and the spectrum of conflict to create new and more complex dilemmas for our adversaries. We must continue to break down stovepipes across the Department; improve our cooperation with the interagency and Congress; and work with our allies and partners to improve operational planning, increase joint and allied interoperability, and better align our operations, activities, and investments.

We are strengthening our deterrence posture in the Indo-Pacific by developing new concepts and capabilities, deepening our alliances and partnerships, and expanding our activities and operations. As the threat from the PRC evolves, we will provide Taiwan self-defense capabilities consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act. Our team is making major investments in the nuclear triad, space, cyberspace, long-range fires, and next-generation capabilities in fighter aircraft and undersea warfare, while also accelerating Joint All Domain Command and Control.



OSD001846-23/CMD002351-23

Tackle the Acute Russian Threat. Russia's illegal and unjust invasion of Ukraine is also an attack on the rules-based international order built at such high cost since 1945. The United States has rallied the world to support the brave defenders of Ukraine, and the unprecedented speed and scale of contributions from nations of goodwill has been inspiring. We are determined to support Ukraine's fight for freedom over the long haul. We will not be drawn into Putin's war of choice, but we remain resolved to defend every inch of NATO territory. Working closely with our allies, we have already strengthened NATO's Eastern Flank, and we will continue to strengthen our collective defense and deterrence.

Address Advanced and Persistent Threats. The Department will also remain vigilant against dangers including North Korea, Iran, and global terrorist organizations. We will continue to respond to North Korean provocations, coordinating closely with the Republic of Korea, Japan, and other allies and partners. We will counter unmanned aerial systems that threaten our homeland or our forces around the world. We will continue to sharpen our over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities and defend against terrorist threats against the United States. In recent months, we have removed top leaders of ISIS and al-Qaeda from the battlefield, upgraded our presence in Somalia, and taken historic steps to limit civilian harm.

Innovate and Modernize. America's dynamism has always been at the heart of our strategic advantage. To tackle emerging challenges, we are modernizing every aspect of the Joint Force, from hypersonic weapons to our Joint Warfighting Concept, from data analysis to artificial intelligence. We are also accelerating the development of advanced technologies to deliver new capabilities to the Force. Finally, to strengthen America's competitive edge further, we are making historic investments in defense research and engineering, a once-in-a-generation investment in our shipyards and our munitions industrial base, and much more.

Meet the Climate Crisis. Our strategy and planning addresses the security implications of our changing climate. We are developing new platforms that mitigate logistical risks in contested environments. We are also investing to improve mission resilience and cut the risks from extreme weather.

TAKING CARE OF OUR PEOPLE

Grow Our Talent. To remain the strongest fighting force in the world, we must recruit and retain the best of America. That means building pathways of opportunity for all qualified American patriots who choose to serve their country. We will deepen the Department's partnerships with America's best universities. We will continue to make investments in training and education and create scholarships for science, technology, engineering, and math. We will provide exceptional opportunities for service and professional development for our total force.

Build Resilience and Readiness. Last year, through my "Taking Care of People" initiative, we made significant investments to improve the quality of life for our Service members and their families, including making moves easier, strengthening childcare support, and expanding spousal employment opportunities. But we still have much more to do. We will strengthen our mental health care and suicide prevention efforts, maximize the effectiveness of the Military Health System, and improve military housing.

Ensure Accountable Leadership. This Department will not tolerate any behavior that detracts from the health, safety, or well-being of a Service member. On my first day in office, I created a 90-day independent review commission on sexual assault in the military, and the Department and all Military Services are now implementing the commission's excellent recommendations as approved. The Department worked with the President and Congress to enact historic legislation improving the response to sexual assault and related crimes under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and we have begun standing up new Offices of Special Trial Counsel to prosecute these crimes. And we will continue to work relentlessly to prevent sexual assault and related crimes.

SUCCEED THROUGH TEAMWORK

Join Forces with Our Allies and Partners. America's unparalleled network of allies and partners is unmatched — and one of our greatest strategic assets. We will continue to work closely with our friends around the world. Our support to Ukraine has demonstrated what nations of goodwill can achieve when they work together to defend freedom and sovereignty. We will continue to strengthen NATO, and our commitment to Article V remains ironclad. We will strengthen our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific by improving interoperability, deepening information-sharing and joint planning, and conducting more complex joint and combined exercises. We will also implement the historic Australia-United Kingdom-United States initiative.

Strengthen Partnerships Across America. Our partners at the state, local, and tribal levels play important roles in our national security, including supporting Service members and their families at military installations around the country. Service members will also continue to support our fellow Americans in times of crisis, such as pandemics and natural disasters. In addition, Congress remains an important partner in providing the resources and the oversight that we need to protect our republic, and our partners in industry are the engine of innovation that ensure our warfighters remain ready and lethal.

Build Unity Within the Department. We will make timely decisions based on rigorous cooperation among civilian and military teams across the Department. We will demonstrate that spirit of partnership at the highest levels, and we will expect it from every person in the Department.

Thank you all for what you do every day. I'm honored to call each of you my colleagues. Together, we will continue to tackle the challenges of this decisive decade to meet our sacred obligation to defend the American people.

