

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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Secretary of Defense

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Introduction

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of President Trump's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget for the Department of Defense.

I am honored to testify alongside General Dan Caine, the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He embodies the warrior ethos that President Trump wants to reinvigorate in our joint warfighting force. General Caine exemplifies courage, honor, and selfless service.

I'm impressed by his focus on increasing readiness, capability, and fighting spirit across the force. Our shared values and commitment to defending our nation have fostered a strong and collaborative working relationship. General Caine's unique background, including his previous role as Associate Director for Military Affairs at the CIA, makes him an invaluable advisor to me and the President. I look forward to our continued partnership, which will leverage his expertise to inform our decision-making and ensure the strength and effectiveness of our military.

I am also honored to testify alongside Bryn MacDonnell, who is performing the duties of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer. Ms. MacDonnell's experience supporting the work of the Chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and serving as a Special Assistant at the White House Office of Management and Budget make her uniquely qualified to testify about the budgetary needs of the Department.

Under the leadership of our Commander in Chief, Donald J. Trump, this budget puts America First and enables the Department of Defense to achieve its clear mission of achieving Peace through Strength. To carry out this mission, I have set three priorities for the Department: restore the warrior ethos, rebuild our military, and re-establish deterrence.

The \$961.6 billion budget put forward by the President reverses four years of mismanagement and underinvestment. It realigns the military to the historic strength that began in President Trump's first term and makes generational investments in the President's priorities including developing the Golden Dome, sealing the Southwest Border, investing in the F-47, revitalizing our shipbuilding industry, and shaping end strength to match to the threats we face.

These investments are amplified by the savings and efficiencies that the Department has found in collaboration with the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). To date, we have found \$6 billion in savings through this collaboration. Additionally, we have pulled \$30 billion away

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from the last administration's nonlethal priorities to reinvest into the President's priorities. We will ensure every single dollar of taxpayer money funds lethal Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Guardians. Every cent will provide capabilities to deter our adversaries, and if necessary, prevail on the battlefield.

These savings and efficiencies are considerable, but are just the beginning of our focused effort to rein in waste, fraud, and abuse. The Department of Defense must pass a financial audit by 2028. We will ensure full accountability to Congress and the American taxpayer. We will improve our processes and controls to make better financial decisions. And we will understand where every taxpayer dollar goes and why. This is what it will take to rebuild our military and exactly what we will do. We will pass an audit by 2028.

Workforce Acceleration and Recapitalization

The Department is optimizing our civilian workforce. This ensures that we have the right employees in the right roles at the right times to support our warfighters. We're doing this by voluntary means, to the greatest extent possible, through incentives like voluntary early retirement and separation initiatives. The Department approved approximately 22,000 employees to participate in Round One of OPM's Deferred Resignation Program (DRP). The DoD also offered its own second round of the Deferred Resignation Program from April 7 through April 14, 2025.

With thanks for Deputy Secretary Feinberg's leadership, we are undertaking a workforce acceleration and recapitalization initiative. This means we are re-evaluating every position to make sure that each focuses on our core mission of supporting our warfighters. Reorganization plans will strip away bureaucracy, accelerate decision-making, and deliver maximum value to the warfighters. We will eliminate non-essential and redundant roles, consolidate functions, flatten hierarchies, and eliminate unnecessary vestiges of the past. This realignment will ensure our ability to respond to any threat with speed, precision, and overwhelming force.

The technologies used by our adversaries — and the threats they pose — are evolving at breakneck speed. We cannot deter — or if need be, defeat — opponents like Communist China if we're moving at yesterday's pace. We need to be lean and nimble. We need to be fast. And that is exactly what we are doing.

We have ended the culture of full-time, low-productivity telework. We expect employees, at all levels, to deliver results and respond to leadership needs. Incentives and performance plans will

reflect that. These changes will allow us to properly allocate the workforce, boost readiness, and increase efficiency across our team.

Threat Environment

For a generation, the United States ignored China's threat to U.S. interests. We became distracted by open-ended wars, regime change, and nation building. In the process, past leaders sent our service members on mission after mission with no exit strategy, no end in sight, and with little articulation for the American people or for the war fighters about how these conflicts would benefit Americans and our core national interests.

These costly diversions lacked clearly defined goals and were not tied to vital and core American interests. President Trump is changing that.

We are done with that approach. Under this Administration, we are focused on delivering for the American people, on safeguarding their security, on protecting their economic interests, and on using common sense to preserve peace in the Indo-Pacific

The Department of Defense has already made great strides to reverse the trend of deterioration and decay.

First, border security is national security. To secure our own border first, we deployed troops and declared two new National Defense Areas in Texas and New Mexico to allow our military to effectively assist the Department of Homeland Security. We will achieve 100% operational control of the border.

We will also defend our nation's interests throughout the Western Hemisphere. In Panama, as the President promised, we are taking back the Panama Canal from Chinese influence. We have also secured "First and Free" canal passage for our military and auxiliary vessels.

The President has also been clear – we will not tolerate attacks on American vessels. To that end, we have completed a highly successful and focused campaign against the Houthis. Our message — and our goal — was clear: Stop shooting at our ships and we will stop shooting at you. I am pleased to report that the attacks on American ships have now ended.

Despite this significant progress, real threats remain. Our pacing threat is Communist China. Beijing is preparing for war in the Indo-Pacific as part of its broader strategy to dominate that

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region and then the world. Were it to succeed, it would be able to attempt to derail American reindustrialization and then strangle the U.S. economy. This cannot happen and my Department will not let it happen.

As I said at the Shangri-La Dialogue recently, the United States seeks a durable peace in the Indo-Pacific. Our goals are limited, and peaceful. To ensure this peace, the Department is laser-focused on strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific to ensure that core U.S. interests are protected.

That means restoring and modernizing America's forces with a strong focus on the capabilities required to maintain peace through strength in the Western Pacific. It also means strengthening our forward posture in the region and working closely with our allies to enhance their own defense capabilities. In fact, we have already expanded the scope and scale of our cooperation with Australia, Japan and the Philippines to deter China, including with new understandings for enhanced posture in the future.

But Asia isn't the only place where we're strengthening our nation's alliances. In Europe, President Trump and his administration have told our NATO allies that they must step up and take primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense – and we are already seeing progress. We are seeing recognition across NATO on the need for European nations to spend 5% of GDP on defense spending.

This is a break from the last Administration's policies, which failed to encourage NATO allies to invest in their own defenses and distracted them from their core mission in the Euro-Atlantic region by encouraging them to do more in the Indo-Pacific.

Our strategy is one of common sense: our NATO allies have the economic strength to deter Russia, and our own resources are increasingly strained. As we shift our focus to the Pacific, we are counting on our NATO allies to devote more resources to defense to forge a strong shield of deterrence in Europe. Our NATO allies taking primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense is vital and as it is overdue. Not just as a matter of fairness to American taxpayers who are tired of freeriding, but to ensure that NATO remains a strong and sustainable alliance, even as U.S. forces prioritize defending our nation's homeland and deterring China. This is how we can restore and sustain peace through strength in Europe for the coming generations.

Continuing Resolutions

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As the members of this committee know, despite supporting a flexible full-year Continuing Resolution (CR) in FY25 in order to keep the Department funded, the routine use of CRs degrades our ability to deter our adversaries, and reduces our readiness to fight if necessary. This state of affairs is insufficient to meet the moment, and I urge members of this committee and Congress to:

- Fully fund this budget request which makes generational investments to rebuild our military and restore deterrence;
- Support the savings and efficiencies that the Department has found in coordination with DOGE

Restoring the Warrior Ethos

My first priority is to restore the warrior ethos and restore trust in our military, both of which were casualties of the last four years, as demonstrated by historically low recruitment numbers across the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. President Trump charged me to bring the warrior culture back to the Department of Defense. He, like me, demands a Pentagon laser-focused on warfighting, lethality, meritocracy, standards, and readiness.

Balanced Accountability

I have directed each of the military departments to conduct a review of their Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity programs and processes. Our personnel deserve fair treatment and a positive work environment that is free from unlawful discrimination and harassment. They also deserve qualified leaders who are empowered to make tough decisions, enforce standards, and restore good order and discipline through balanced accountability.

We are going to streamline investigation processes, address problematic behaviors, and mitigate undue mission impacts. Complaints that are unsubstantiated by actionable, credible evidence will be dismissed in a timely manner. Flimsy allegations will not be used adversely against the accused. Personnel who knowingly submit false complaints will be disciplined.

This is critical to advancing meritocracy and balancing accountability. It is also the right thing to do for the DoD and our workforce. We will continue to hold leaders at all levels accountable for their actions, but the Department will no longer foster a culture of “walking on eggshells.”

Focus on Warfighting, Lethality, and Readiness

At the Department of Defense, we are sweeping away distractions to focus on our core mission of warfighting. One of our Department's early actions was commissioning a rapid, force-wide review of military standards. This review included fitness standards, training standards, physical standards, grooming standards, and gender-neutral standards for combat roles. To be the world's most lethal and effective fighting force, we must set and maintain high, equal, and unwavering standards for our men and women in uniform, particularly our leaders. We are assessing how the department has maintained standards in the past, particularly the last four years, and whether those standards have dropped, formally or informally.

The Department of Defense has an obligation to the American public to ensure their sons and daughters serve under the best leadership we can provide them. Doing so is a national security imperative. A foundational tenet of the Department must always be that the most qualified individuals are placed in positions of responsibility in accordance with policies that are merit-based and color-blind.

That is why President Trump established the "Restoring America's Fighting Force" Task Force. I have tasked it to abolish the DEI bureaucracy across all of our services. That begins with ending any DEI offices and all of their vestiges, including sub-offices and initiatives established to promote a race-based preferences system. These programs devastated morale under the last administration, subverted meritocracy, perpetuated unconstitutional discrimination, and promoted divisive concepts and radical gender ideology.

We will not consider sex, race, or ethnicity in promotions. We will eliminate racial and gender quotas. We will not teach CRT, DEI, or gender ideology in any contexts. Our contractors, boards, councils, and working groups will cease any operations relating to these divisive ideologies. We are removing any content from the DoD that does not support our core mission of warfighting.

We are undertaking an exhaustive internal review to discover all programs that fall under the remit of President Trump's order. We are ensuring that our military is protecting the Constitution and our nation's history, not subverting them. At the DoD, unity is our strength. Providing Service members an equal opportunity to excel will help us remain the world's strongest and most lethal fighting force.

General and Flag Officer Reductions

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In addition to these reorganization efforts, I have directed a reduction in the number of general and flag officer positions. To accomplish our mission of lethality, deter threats, and achieve decisive victory, we must cultivate exceptional senior leaders who drive innovation and operational excellence. They must be unencumbered by unnecessary bureaucratic layers that hinder their growth and effectiveness.

Therefore, we will reduce 4-star positions across the Active Component by a minimum of 20%, general officers in the national guard by a minimum of 20%, and general and flag officers by a minimum of 10% with the realignment of the Unified Command Plan.

COVID Reinstatements

We are also welcoming back former service members who were wrongly forced to leave the military. More than 8,700 service members were involuntarily separated for not taking an experimental COVID-19 vaccine. Others were more informally pushed out or decided to get out. We are actively welcoming back those warriors of conscience.

We have begun identifying those individuals and sending them letters to apologize for the wrong that was done to them and invite them to return back to the military, with back pay. In April, I directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to provide additional guidance to remove adverse actions based solely on refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine or a request for accommodation, provide discharge upgrades for those individuals, and facilitate additional remedies for Service members who suffered other career setbacks resulting from their principled stand. Through these efforts we will continue to restore confidence in our military and retain a Force that meets the highest standards.

Recruitment

The Trump administration recognizes that our most valuable resources is the young people who are brave enough to put on the uniform and risk your life for this country. One of our clearest metrics of success to date is coming from outside the military. Young Americans are responding positively to our articulation of our mission. Year-to-date, the Army has seen its best recruiting numbers since 2010. Earlier this month, the Army hit its annual recruitment goal four months early, bringing in over 61,000. And under Secretary Driscoll, they are still going strong. The Navy has seen its best recruiting numbers since 2010. Every service branch is on track to meet or exceed their targets for FY2025.

This recruiting renaissance is welcome news, but unsurprising. When our standards are high, when the mission is clear, when we prioritize warfighting over wokeness, that energizes the young men and women of our country, the very patriots our American experiment has always needed. President Trump’s clear vision for a Golden Age of national defense has been a catalyst for this upward trend in recruiting.

Rebuilding our Military

After the Cold War, a new consensus emerged: we had no peer or even near-peer competitor. The Soviet Union had dissolved, China’s GDP was less than one-tenth of ours, Iran was on its heels after a grueling eight-year war with Iraq, and North Korea was far from achieving nuclear technology. Scholars proclaimed “the end of history” was at hand. America enjoyed a mostly unchallenged command of the commons, airspace, sea, space and cyberspace. Consequently, the United States, along with allies, scaled down our military and defense spending. We cancelled strategic-defense initiatives, halved the size of our naval fleet, closed shipyards, and cut spending on troops and technology. We believed that we could reap a peace dividend in perpetuity, and that American leadership would remain unchallenged.

But that was always wishful thinking. The era of uncontested U.S. dominance, is over. President Trump’s 2018 National Defense Strategy made clear that great power competition was back – and that is exactly what we are seeing now. This Administration inherited a world with Europe and the Middle East at war. Meanwhile, China is undertaking a historic military buildup and actively rehearsing for an invasion of Taiwan.

As President Trump has stated, our policy is Peace Through Strength. That will require rescuing our stagnant defense industrial base. Only by having the most powerful and lethal military in the world — and focusing it where it is needed most to protect and advance America’s interests — can we deter our nation’s adversaries and, if necessary, prevail any potential conflict.

Reviving the Defense Industrial Base

Reviving the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) is a key component of rebuilding the military. We must be prepared to match capabilities to threats, and to ensure we are prepared to deliver the warfighter what is needed to win. While the DIB remains technologically advanced and essential to our warfighting capabilities, decades of under-investment have left it strained, overly consolidated, and at risk of not keeping pace with modern and near-peer threats, especially in a protracted conflict. As foreign competition has hollowed out American manufacturing, we have

lost capacity and resilience in our defense supply chain as well. Meanwhile, Communist China has enjoyed explosive growth in manufacturing capacity.

While much more is needed, we have already undertaken some actions to address this crisis through our Office of Industrial Base Policy. Congress should also reauthorize the Defense Production Act to continue providing President Trump the broad authority he needs to respond swiftly and agilely to national security needs.

Consistent demand signals to industry are key, and I look forward to working with Congress on this matter. Our industry partners need consistency to plan out additional capacity — on-time budgets help provide those demand signals. I am encouraged by Congress's emphasis on multi-year procurements, especially for key munitions. Multi-year procurements provide an additional measure of stable and sustained demand signals to promote DIB investment. New entrants encounter numerous barriers to entry, including heavy regulations and scrutiny — I look forward to working with Congress to roll back unnecessary red tape to reinvigorate our DIB.

Modernizing the Nuclear Triad

Defending the homeland, is the top mission for DoD and our nation — and few things if any are more important for that mission than maintaining a strong and reliable nuclear deterrent. This is vital not just to deter enemies from using nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction against our nation's homeland. It also empowers the United States to help deter aggression against allies in forward theaters, while providing U.S. forces — and the President himself — with maximum flexibility and options for restoring deterrence and managing escalation in the event of a crisis or conflict anywhere.

Yet the nuclear deterrence mission is growing more difficult — not just because America's nuclear forces are getting older, but because America's adversaries are increasingly expanding, modernizing, and diversifying their own capabilities. This not only complicates escalation dynamics with individual adversaries — it also poses new difficulties as we work to deter multiple adversaries simultaneously.

To address these challenges and maintain a strong deterrent, we must continue to not only sustain our legacy triad systems — which remain a crucial component of our military — but also to complete the decades-long modernization of our nuclear forces. Therefore, in FY26, the Department is requesting more than \$62 billion in support of the nuclear enterprise, including \$50 billion to modernize and sustain our nuclear forces and over \$12 billion for nuclear

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command, control, and communications. A modernized nuclear triad supports President Trump's goal of Peace Through Strength and enables our ability to reestablish deterrence and rebuild our military.

Each leg of our triad offers complementary attributes that support deterrence. Our modernization efforts include transitioning the land leg — our most responsive capability — from the Minuteman III to the Sentinel; the sea leg — our survivable and assured second strike capability — from the OHIO-Class SSBN equipped with the Trident II (D5) Life Extension to the COLUMBIA-Class SSBN equipped with the Life Extension II and a new sea-launched cruise missile; and, finally, the air leg — our most visible and flexible capability — from the B-2 Spirit to the B-21 Raider equipped with the Long-Range Standoff Cruise Missile. The future of these programs will depend on sustained, consistent, and sufficient funding, as requested in the FY 2026 Budget.

Additionally, the Department continues to support modernizing our nuclear command, control, and communications; nuclear stockpile; and production and supporting infrastructure and the defense industrial base. We recognize this large-scale modernization effort was conceived in a more benign security environment. It may not be sufficient to address current and future challenges. The Department's current nuclear employment posture and planning guidance begins to address the risk presented by multiple nuclear challengers, and, if necessary, we will adjust U.S. nuclear forces to ensure they are responsive to the current and evolving security environment.

Shipbuilding

Improvements in ship construction are needed, and more efficient processes are required to ensure ships are built on time and on budget. Currently, we are losing the shipbuilding race with China, both in terms of capacity and available ships. China has over 230 times the shipbuilding capacity of the U.S. 70 percent of Chinese warships were launched after 2010, while only 23 percent of U.S. warships were. Our maritime advantage is shrinking rapidly due to decades of deindustrialization, consolidation, and reduction in U.S. ship construction and repair capacity, affecting both public and commercial sectors. Given this formidable challenge, we are revitalizing our shipbuilding industry with \$5.9 billion in funding in FY26.

The Navy's current goal is to achieve a fleet of 381 vessels. We have stagnated below 300. In peacetime, our force struggles to replace vessels as they are decommissioned. This bodes poorly for our force in wartime.

Shipbuilding is the top priority for the Navy and for both President Trump and myself. Alongside Secretary Phelan, we are aggressively improving ship construction processes and methods, prioritizing modernization, and expanding the capacity of our commercial maritime industrial base. We can no longer spend billions of taxpayer dollars to receive years-long delays and capacity shortfalls.

President Trump signed his executive order, “Restoring America’s Maritime Dominance,” demonstrating his commitment to not only revive the Navy, but our nation’s defense industrial base and commercial maritime industrial base, for decades to come. Alongside President Trump, we will Make Shipbuilding Great Again.

Generational Investments in F-47 and Golden Dome

We have awarded the contract for the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) fighter jet – the F-47. This will be the world’s first 6th generation fighter jet, ensuring our nation’s continued air superiority in the face of growing global threats. The F-47 will be the most advanced, lethal, and adaptable fighter ever developed, with state-of-the-art stealth technologies to stay one step ahead of America’s adversaries. The F-47 is built to dominate the most capable adversaries and operate in the most perilous threat environments imaginable. The F-47 will have significantly longer range, more advanced stealth, be more sustainable, supportable, and have higher availability than our fifth-generation fighters. . The platform will also take significantly less manpower and infrastructure to deploy.

In FY26, the Department is allocating \$3.5 billion for this generational program. The F-47 will significantly strengthen America’s air power and improves our global position. It will keep our skies secure – even as it ensures we are able to reach out adversaries wherever they may hide. The decision to proceed with the F-47 is the first of several decisions required to maintain air dominance into the future, and I look forward to working with Secretary Meink to make those decisions.

Golden Dome

One of President Trump’s key campaign promises was a Golden Dome for America (GDA). Inspired by Israel’s Iron Dome, the GDA will be a next-generation missile defense system to protect Americans from the threat of nuclear, hypersonic, and conventional weapons in our homeland. The GDA architecture will employ a combination of sensors and effectors working across multiple layers: a space layer with space-based sensors, and interceptors; an upper layer

with Ground-based Midcourse Defense next-generation interceptors; an under layer with upgraded expeditionary effectors and other supporting terrestrial sensors; and a lower-tier layer for cruise and terminal missile defense and other advanced aerial threats.

The Department is investing \$25 billion in FY26 to accomplish that goal. DoD Acquisition and Sustainment is working with the Missile Defense Agency and the military services to address supply chain challenges and begin the work necessary to construct the Golden Dome. This project will include developing cutting-edge domain awareness systems, kinetic and non-kinetic missile defeat capabilities, and advanced command, control, and battle management systems to integrate and augment existing U.S. missile defense capabilities.

Drone Technology Investment

The rapidly transforming arena of small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) and counter-sUAS (C-sUAS) presents enormous challenges and opportunities that require us to bring the very best American innovation to bear. Massed, affordable, and attritable platforms with short lifespans are changing the character of war and transforming the way our forces must fight. Incidents in the homeland and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine remind us of how this technology has changed modern warfare. The supply chain is a significant challenge. For every commercial drone made in the United States, China makes more than a hundred.

The current global UAS capability threat is broadly characterized by a wide variety of kinetic and non-kinetic uncrewed systems capabilities. Kinetic capabilities include short-range, remote-piloted, kamikaze drones commonly known as First Person View (FPV), reusable bomber drones, one-way attack (OWA), and long-range one-way attack (LROWA) platforms. Non-kinetic platform capabilities include, but are not limited to, short-range intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), long-range ISR, electronic warfare, signals intelligence, communications relay, and drones with other critical warfighting missions.

On offense, we must take advantage of the pace of commercial technology progress to enable our forces — on the ground, in the air, and at sea — to defeat our adversaries and to overcome our adversaries' rapidly evolving C-UAS capabilities as we do so. DoD's Replicator-1 initiative — with sustained senior leadership focus, cross-Departmental collaboration, the help of the Defense Innovation Unit, and support from Congress — has made enormous strides towards delivering and fielding multiple thousands of unmanned systems across multiple domains, with thousands more planned under this budget to further strengthen our deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. On defense, we must meet the exponentially growing challenge from ever more-capable

drone weaponization. We must also end the unsustainable pattern of shooting down increasingly sophisticated, lethal drones — that in many cases cost just a few hundred dollars and are therefore accessible to a much broader range of bad actors — with exquisite multi-million-dollar weapons that are difficult to produce and to replace once used.

This is why the DoD, with support from Congress, must reinforce the progress made over the last few years to quickly improve its UAS and C-UAS capabilities and integrate them into how we fight.

Cybersecurity

A robust cybersecurity posture is critical to safeguarding sensitive data, increasing operational lethality, and ensuring the resilience of critical infrastructure. Without a proactive and comprehensive approach to cybersecurity, we leave ourselves vulnerable to attack.

The current cybersecurity landscape is characterized by escalating sophistication and frequency of threats. Nation-state actors, criminal organizations, and individual hackers are constantly developing new and innovative methods to exploit vulnerabilities. We are seeing an increase in attacks targeting critical infrastructure, sophisticated phishing campaigns, and supply chain compromises.

The DoD recognizes the urgency and severity of this threat environment.

We are therefore strengthening our defensive capabilities through enhanced threat detection, incident response, and vulnerability management. Investing in advanced technologies like AI-powered security tools and zero-trust is crucial.

We also aim to deter malicious actors by imposing costs and consequences for cyberattacks. This includes working with international partners to uphold norms of responsible behavior in cyberspace and holding attackers accountable.

Finally, we are investing in developing a highly skilled cybersecurity workforce through education, training, and recruitment initiatives. We must foster a culture of cybersecurity awareness across the DoD and encourage collaboration between government, industry, and academia.

By prioritizing these objectives, the DoD is committed to maintaining a strong and resilient cybersecurity posture that protects our nation's interests against evolving threats.

Reestablishing Deterrence

Everything I describe above is designed to deter our adversaries from aggression toward the United States and protect our interests at home or abroad. Under the leadership of President Trump, the message to our adversaries has been undeniably clear. We will relentlessly pursue American interests, prioritize the Indo-Pacific region, and work with our allies and partners to establish deterrence worldwide.

Southwest Border

Defending our homeland is our first objective. We must secure our own border before we can help secure other nations' borders. From day one, we have surged forces to the Southwest border to achieve 100% operational control there.

Some of the greatest threats to the American people came over our border. Under the previous administration, cartels — now designated as foreign terrorist organizations — enjoyed easy access across the border. Encounters with foreign terrorists between ports of entry rose 3000% under President Biden. Under President Trump, the open-borders era is over and the Golden Age of border security is here.

On Day One of his administration, President Trump issued executive orders declaring a national emergency at the southern border, and clarifying the military's role in protecting the territorial integrity of the United States. These swift and decisive actions directed the military to seal the border and defend our sovereignty.

This has included deploying personnel and resources, constructing additional physical barriers, countering unmanned aerial systems, and more. Joint Task Force Southern Border is now conducting enhanced detection and monitoring, including vehicle and foot patrols, rotary wing and fixed surveillance site operations. We have sent a Stryker brigade combat team and a general support aviation battalion. And we have created the New Mexico and Texas National Defense Areas, allowing Service members to detain illegal aliens until Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) or other agencies can assume custody, further securing our border.

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Approximately 11,900 troops are currently deployed protecting the southwest border. Working with our partners at DHS and CBP, these interagency efforts have achieved at least a 99.99% reduction in migrant crossings. There are now fewer illegal crossings than at any point in the 21st century.

Panama

At the same time, President Trump has made clear that we are pursuing not just an America First foreign policy, but an Americas First foreign policy. Prioritizing American interests begins with our neighbors. To that end, the administration is working with Panama to regain control of the Panama Canal from the malign influence of the Communist Chinese. We have achieved a framework for “First and Free” passage for U.S. warships and auxiliary ships, as well as increasing the presence of U.S. troops on both sides of the canal.

People’s Republic of China (PRC)

China is the Department’s pacing threat. Beijing has made clear its desire to achieve hegemony in the Indo-Pacific and then the world, and in the process could strangle America’s economy and even project military power into the Western Hemisphere on a larger and more sustained basis. That is evident not just in China’s belligerent activities throughout the region but also – and most glaringly – in its massive, historic military buildup, including expanding numbers of advanced submarines, ships, aircraft, and satellites, as well as increasingly dangerous missile threats and cyber capabilities. That is not to mention China’s ongoing efforts to rapidly expand its nuclear forces.

President Trump is committed to Peace Through Strength – and that is precisely what the Department will deliver in the face of China’s military buildup. To that end, in addition to homeland defense, DoD is prioritizing deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, including by focusing U.S. military modernization on the capabilities required to deny Chinese aggression in the First Island Chain, strengthening our forward posture in the Western Pacific, and working closely with our allies and partners to bolster our collective ability to deter or respond effectively to aggression.

In Australia we have increased rotations of air assets, expeditionary submarine visits, Army watercraft, and more. Through our U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, we have targeted enhanced operational coordination, greater information sharing, expanded regional and global cooperation, and closer industrial cooperation. In Japan, we have started Phase One of

upgrading U.S. Forces Japan to a Joint Force Headquarters and deployed B-1 bombers at Misawa Air Base, the first ever bomber task force to operate from Japan. In the Philippines, we maintain a robust rotational force presence and we have extended the timelines of exercises with the Philippines. With these partners we are also investing in multilateral maritime cooperative activities in the South China Sea. These investments will prioritize combat-credible military forces to and re-establish deterrence.

Finally, even as we strengthen our relationships with each of these allies and partners, we are also urging them to increase investments in their own defenses. This is vitally important if they are to field the range of military capabilities and supporting infrastructure required to deter China in the coming years, and for decades to come.

Israel and the Middle East

In the Middle East, President Trump has made it clear that America is fully committed to the security of Israel, our close ally. Just days after his inauguration, the Administration released the shipment of 2,000-lb MK-48 bombs to Israel — critical munitions that the Biden administration had blocked. The Defense Department has also delivered three new F-35s to Israel with another three aircraft on the way.

Defending Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea

At President Trump's direction, the Joint Force took decisive action to defend freedom of navigation in the Red Sea – and the results speak for themselves. After several weeks of U.S. strikes killing key members of the Houthi organization and degrading their capabilities, the Houthis agreed to stop striking American shipping. Not only is this a victory for Americans – it sends a clear signal to all others in the region, and the world. President Trump is a man of a peace – but he can and will take decisive action to defend our nation's interests where they are threatened.

Conclusion

We have the opportunity to create a new Golden Age of National Defense. The threats we face are significant, and rising. Communist China is on the rise and is preparing for conflict. But conflict is not inevitable, and let me stress once again that our goal is to prevent war through increasing U.S. strength. We long for peace, but we must prepare for war. By restoring the

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warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence we can deter and deny our adversaries' objectives and ensure peace for our homeland and the world.

For decades, our military has been stagnant. Our leaders have spent more time focusing on diversity goals than in rebuilding our Navy. We have lost the moral confidence that animated prior generations. We have lost the focus and sense of responsibility that our positions demand.

We are reversing those trends. With a trillion-dollar national security budget, surging interest in military service, and an industrial base reinvigorated by President Trump's America-First industrial policy, we have the chance to overcome decades of decline and strengthen our position as the world's most lethal and focused fighting force. Our allies and partners increasingly stepped up to share the burden as we prioritize and confront the most pressing conflicts of the day, and our adversaries will take note of our revitalized military.

Of course, we cannot do this without the critical leadership and oversight of Congress. This committee is our critical partner in everything we do. I look forward to working with you to reinvigorate our national defense.