



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

MAR - 4 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EMPLOYEES

SUBJECT: Message to the Force

As the Secretary of Defense, I am committed to ensuring that the Department develops the right people, priorities, and purpose of mission to continue to defend our Nation from enemies foreign and domestic. This will require aligning our priorities and capabilities to a changing and dynamic threat landscape. We will do so in a way that is based on a sober assessment of our strategic needs and recognize the importance of building and sustaining a strong workforce and unity within our Department, across the Nation and with our allies and partners around the world.

Three priorities – defending the Nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through teamwork – will guide our efforts.

DEFEND THE NATION

Defeat COVID-19. The greatest proximate challenge to our Nation's security is the threat of COVID-19. The Department will continue to act boldly and quickly to support Federal Government efforts to defeat the disease, defend the force against it, and work with our domestic and international partners to protect our Nation from potential novel and deadly viruses of the future. We will continue to provide direct support to the Federal Government's vaccination efforts and encourage vaccination participation by military personnel to remain ready and able to continue to protect our Nation at home and abroad. Both of these challenges demand of us an aggressive effort to inform and educate people about the safety and efficacy of available vaccines and protective measures.

Prioritize China as the Pacing Challenge. The Department will prioritize China as our number one pacing challenge and develop the right operational concepts, capabilities, and plans to bolster deterrence and maintain our competitive advantage. We will ensure that our approach toward China is coordinated and synchronized across the enterprise to advance our priorities, integrated into domestic and foreign policy in a whole-of-government strategy, strengthened by our alliances and partnerships, and supported on a bipartisan basis in Congress.

Address Advanced and Persistent Threats. Even as we address accelerating competition by China, we will ensure that we remain fully ready to respond to and effectively deter nation-state threats emanating from Russia, Iran, and North Korea, and disrupt transnational and non-state actor threats from violent extremist organizations, such as those operating in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central Asia. We will seek to impose cost where necessary, while using all of our tools to lower the risk of escalation with our adversaries and respond to challenges below the level of armed conflict. We will continue to maintain credible deterrence against advanced threats, and we will right-size our missions around the world in a transparent and principled manner.



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Innovate and Modernize the DoD. The Department will innovate at a speed and scale that matches a dynamic threat landscape. This will require advances in our joint warfighting concepts and a commitment to rapid experimentation and fielding of capabilities. Where necessary, we will divest of legacy systems and programs that no longer meet our security needs, while investing smartly for the future. In turn, we will improve the efficiency of the force and guarantee freedom of action in contested, complex operating environments.

Tackle the Climate Crisis. We face a growing climate crisis that is impacting our missions, plans, and capabilities and must be met by ambitious, immediate action. In line with the President's direction, we will elevate climate as a national security priority, integrating climate considerations into the Department's policies, strategies, and partner engagements. We will incorporate climate risk assessments into our war-gaming, modeling, and simulation, and we will bolster mission resilience and deploy solutions that optimize capability and reduce our own carbon footprint. Where possible, we will seek to lead the way for alternative climate-considered approaches for the country.

TAKE CARE OF OUR PEOPLE

Grow our Talent. Our most critical asset as a Department is our people. We remain the preeminent fighting force in the world because of our personnel in and out of uniform, and I have never had more confidence in our ability to meet the security challenges of today and tomorrow. To maintain that advantage, we will build opportunities for growth and development in the Department, invest in training and education, and create new opportunities for advancement that drive promotion and retention for our total workforce – civilian and military. We will focus our efforts on building out a range of skills and capabilities among the workforce and removing barriers that limit our people from realizing their full potential as partners in the work of the DoD.

Build Resilience and Readiness. We maintain and enhance force readiness and develop the capabilities we need to protect America when we fully embrace a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and thought. The Department will lead with our values, building diversity, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our work and in everything we do. Inclusivity will drive innovative solutions across the enterprise and create a constructive environment in which every person has the space to contribute fully. We will never spare support for our people, and we will protect the safety, health, and welfare of service members and their families, as well as our civilian employees. In addition, we will work closely with the President, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the interagency to ensure that we properly support our Veterans and their families long after they have served their duty.

Ensure Accountable Leadership. Some behaviors are antithetical to our values, undermine our readiness, and put our effectiveness at risk but are alive within our workforce. DoD leaders at every level will be responsible for building a safe environment for our people and guaranteeing that we show swift and clear accountability to anyone who does not act within the highest standards of the Department. In particular, we will not tolerate sexual assault and sexual harassment. Similarly, extremism presents a complex and unique challenge to DoD. We must meet this head-on, working to stamp out extremism among the ranks, permanently. These

efforts, among others, will ensure that we provide every member of the Department a safe and supportive place to serve their country – one free from discrimination, hate, harassment, and fear.

SUCCEED THROUGH TEAMWORK

Join Forces with our Allies and Partners. Our allies and partners are a force multiplier and one of the greatest strategic assets we have in protecting our Nation. As we face complex challenges that span across borders, our success will depend on how closely we work with our friends around the world to secure our common interests and promote our shared values. We cannot meet our responsibilities alone, nor should we try. Rather, we will consult with our allies and partners and, when appropriate, we will act together. Where one country may lack the unique capabilities of others will fill that void, making us stronger as a team than the sum of our individual parts.

Work in Partnership with Our Nation. Protecting the United States of America requires teamwork at every level: state, local, tribal, and Federal. It requires cooperation with all who have a stake in our national security: our interagency, Congress, private industry, and the American people. Moreover, it requires leading with diplomacy, our primary means of engaging the world and our first national security tool of choice. We will redouble our commitment to a cooperative, whole-of-nation approach to national security that builds consensus, drives creative solutions to crises, and guarantees that we lead from a position of strength – fielding a credible force, ready to back up the hard work of our diplomats around the world and our national partners here at home.

Build Unity Within the DoD. To guarantee that the Department remains the greatest joint fighting force in the world, we will continue to build unity of effort and mission across components, commands, services, and theaters. We will ensure meaningful civil-military cooperation, safeguarding the proper balance of civilian and military inputs to our policies and missions. We will demonstrate teamwork at the highest levels of the Department and expect it across every level, knowing that working collaboratively together will ensure the greatest success in protecting and defending our Nation.

As I said in my confirmation hearing, we need resources matched to strategy, strategy matched to policy, and policy matched to the will of the American people. I believe that focusing our efforts on the priorities I have articulated here will help us develop that policy, fashion that strategy, and acquire those resources. I hope you will consider how you can assist in that effort. Thank you for your service to our country and for your commitment to our national security. I look forward to working with each one of you as we build a Department ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow, together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. F. O'Connell", with a stylized flourish at the end.