

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III
PREPARED REMARKS BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
JUNE 23, 2021

Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the President's budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022.

On behalf of myself, Deputy Secretary Hicks, the leadership of the Department of Defense, and the men and women of our Department and their families, let me also thank you for your continued support and partnership as we work to address the threats facing the United States of America today, and build the force that can address the challenges of tomorrow. I also want to thank the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, who is testifying alongside me and is a critical partner in realizing the Department's priorities. I am also pleased to be joined by our Comptroller and Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Mike McCord.

The President's \$715 billion defense budget request for FY 2022 provides us with the capabilities we need most and drives investment in efforts that will help us advance our three key priorities: defending the nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through teamwork.

Today, the Department of Defense stands ready to deter conflict in any domain and, if necessary, to fight and win against any challenger. Since becoming Secretary of Defense, I have met with many of our service members and commanders in the field and have seen first-hand the dedication of the men and women of our Department. I can assure you that we continue to have the best joint fighting force on Earth and a civilian workforce fully dedicated to the many critical missions we face.

We must maintain and improve this advantage on land, at sea, in the air, and in emerging domains, including space and cyberspace. I am confident that the President's budget request helps us do that. The request is driven by our recognition that our competitors—especially China—continue to advance their capabilities. We must outpace those advances to remain a credible deterrent to conflict around the world.

The President's budget request represents my commitment to matching resources to strategy, strategy to policies, and policies to the will of the American people. This budget also reflects difficult funding decisions necessary to ensure that we have the right mix of capabilities that we need most. We have proposed cuts to systems and capabilities that no longer meet the challenges and requirements of the Department, making room for more advanced programs that do. In making these decisions, we were guided by the President's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance and informed by a set of program reviews conducted by the Department early in this Administration.

We are also undertaking a series of strategic reviews in the Department to ensure that our global force posture, and our nuclear and missile defense capabilities, are matched with the challenges that we face and aligned with the priorities of the President. The Global Posture Review will help inform my advice to the Commander-in-Chief about how best to allocate our forces around the world to advance our

national interests, and our nuclear and missile defense reviews will consider how we maintain our deterrent and defensive capabilities, within and across domains.

I take very seriously the importance of being good stewards of taxpayer dollars and ensuring that we are transparent and honest with the American people about how their money is spent. This year, the President's budget consolidates the Overseas Contingency Operations funding and the base budget, raising transparency of direct war costs to a level not seen in several years.

We are also working to address our audit responsibilities as quickly and effectively as possible and move forward on reform to our business operations. This is not just about finding and reapplying savings to higher priorities, it is about improving organizational performance and efficiency. The best advocates for reform are those closest to the issues, so we will hold leaders appropriately accountable for a management improvement agenda within their respective components. Reform also requires a holistic approach—including concepts of operation, organizations, personnel, training, and modern systems—and must have a seat at the table in our deliberations over Department programs and priorities.

The FY 2022 budget also reflects the President's decision to retrograde in Afghanistan, following 20 years of war in that theater. We are profoundly grateful to our uniformed service members and their families, and to our civilian workforce, who have served and sacrificed so much through combat deployments in the defense of our nation since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. We are now engaged in a deliberate, safe, and orderly withdrawal from Afghanistan following the President's decision.

Moving forward, we must continue to engage in a concerted effort to recruit, retain, and develop the finest talent available for the uniformed and civilian workforce, providing quality opportunities for personal and professional growth, advancement, and leadership to those in our charge.

We owe it to them to build an environment that is safe, welcoming, and free of fear, harassment, or violence. That is why I have focused some of my earliest efforts on addressing sexual assault and harassment in the Department, identifying and addressing extremist behavior in the ranks, and ensuring that everyone is given a fair and equitable opportunity to serve this country.

But we cannot do this work alone. Whether it is defending the nation, building a force of the future, growing our talent, or building an environment welcoming to all, we rely on teamwork that starts at the senior-most levels of the Department, filters down into our workforce, and extends across departments to our relationships with interagency colleagues, Congress, and our allies and partners.

When called upon to protect and defend our nation, the Department of Defense will always answer, but diplomacy must be our first national security tool of choice. That is why the President's FY 2022 budget helps fund a Department of Defense able to credibly back up the hard work of our diplomats through our deterrent capabilities and our force posture.

As we look outward to our global security interests, we are focused on strengthening our relationships with our allies and partners. The investments in this budget demonstrate that the United States will continue to be a key guarantor of the peace, security, and the rules-based world order that we have helped foster for the past seven decades.

The FY 2022 budget request ensures that we will remain the best-trained and best-equipped military in the world and will have the resources to defend the nation, with the confidence to advance our priorities and build and sustain the force we need now and in the years ahead.

Defending the Nation

As the President has noted, the country finds itself at an inflection point. The rapid pace of development of capabilities by our competitors, and the changing character of conflict that comes with it, mean that we can no longer do things the way we always have and sustain our military edge.

China has invested heavily in new technologies, with a stated intent to complete the modernization of its forces by 2035 and to field a “world-class military” by 2049. Russia has shown that it is not afraid to target the United States in contested domains like cyberspace and still shows a continued interest in regional hegemony. Iran continues to advance its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and to support destabilizing proxy groups in the Middle East in an effort to threaten its regional neighbors. We also face challenges from North Korea, a country with the ambition to be capable of striking the U.S. homeland.

We will continue to address violent extremist and transnational criminal organizations active in several theaters and to face unexpected but challenging tests of our resolve like the deadly spread of COVID-19. Climate change is a growing challenge, the effects of which are driving regional conflicts and instability, even as extreme weather caused by a changing planet threatens installations and readiness.

As the character of conflict and competition changes and accelerates, our strategic competitors have watched our efforts in warzones over the last two decades, seeking to understand not only our capabilities but also our will to defend our interests abroad. They are watching us and learning from us.

I have asked the Department to think through our capabilities and operational concepts and how we use cyber, space, and nuclear capabilities to create a more credible and resilient deterrent against our competitors, including China. What I have in mind are ways we can better use the capabilities we already have, including by integrating across domains, and determining the capabilities we need to address potential future conflict.

This means investing in cutting edge technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing. It also means ensuring that if an adversary attacks one system or domain—in cyberspace or Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites, for example—we are able and ready to respond through appropriate and separate means in other domains, as necessary.

This is going to take a culture shift in the Department because it requires working across Military Services, domains, and regions in a way that we have not done before. It also requires deeper integration with our allies and partners, ensuring that their capabilities add value in deterrence and in conflict.

The FY 2022 budget request will help us achieve this new vision of 21st-century deterrence, and we look forward to your support and partnership to help get it right.

Regional Challenges

In the Indo-Pacific region, we are facing an increasingly assertive People's Republic of China (PRC). Beijing's regional ambitions have grown, as has its footprint around the world, drawing on significant economic influence to encourage and, in some cases, coerce countries into a deepening relationship with the PRC.

But China's ambitions are not only economic. It seeks to use its influence to shift rules and norms in the region, erode democratic values and human rights, and challenge a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The President's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance identifies China as the only global competitor capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to the international order.

As the Department of Defense, our responsibility is to protect and defend our interests in the Indo-Pacific region and to assure our allies and partners of our commitment to our shared goals. That requires keeping pace with the rapid military modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and remaining sighted on the PLA's advancements in the South and East China Seas, the Second Island Chain, and beyond.

That is why I established the China Task Force early in my tenure. The Task Force's mandate was to conduct a baseline assessment of Department policies, programs, and processes on China-related matters so that we might better meet the challenge posed by the PRC. The Task Force has now completed its work. Based on its recommendations, yesterday I issued internal guidance initiating major Department-wide efforts to address China as the United States' number one pacing challenge.

Even as we address China's growing military capability, we will remain focused on North Korea. Pyongyang continues to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, posing an increasing threat to regional allies and partners and with ambitions to be able to strike the U.S. homeland. Leading with diplomacy, the United States will continue to work to mitigate North Korea's destabilizing and provocative behavior and maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

In Europe, I am focused on strengthening our relationships with our allies and partners, bilaterally and in NATO. The Department will ensure that we are postured to deter aggression from Russia or any other power that seeks to challenge us in the region. Our alliance with NATO remains ironclad, and our allies remain a force multiplier for U.S. security around the world. We are encouraged that NATO defense spending has increased for the seventh straight year, demonstrating their commitment to the strength of the alliance. The FY 2022 budget supports efforts to grow the capability and capacity of our allies.

Over the past 20 years, much of our effort as a Department has been focused on the threat posed by violent extremist organizations operating out of parts of the Middle East and South Asia. We remain committed to ensuring that no one launches an attack on the U.S. homeland, and we will maintain the capability to protect the United States and our interests in the region. That includes countering the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, al-Qa'ida, and associated terrorist networks that pose ongoing threats to the United States.

Meanwhile, Iran remains a destabilizing force as it seeks to advance its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, threaten freedom of navigation, and support proxy terrorist and militia groups. We will continue to maintain the capability to deter Iran in the Middle East. We will also continue to support our partners in the region, including by helping to ensure that Israel has the capability to defend itself effectively and maintain its qualitative military edge.

In Afghanistan, the Department is working to conduct a deliberate, orderly, and safe withdrawal, as directed by the President. This is an important step in responsibly ending this two-decade-long conflict, and it offers us an opportunity to redirect our resources toward strategic competition.

In Africa, the Department is focused on sustaining and improving the capabilities of our partners, particularly as we deter and disrupt terrorist attacks by al-Shabaab. The group remains an active threat to Somalis, their neighbors, our interests in Africa, and those of our allies and partners. Our partner-centric strategy has always been at the core of our counterterrorism mission, and we will continue to help regional partners strengthen their capabilities to counter shared threats. This is critical to stability and the opportunity for political and economic development in East Africa.

To the north, the Department remains committed to preserving a free and open Arctic region, which is why we undertake annual Arctic exercises and operations, including with allies and partners, such as ARCTIC EDGE, ICEX, and NORTHERN EDGE. These exercises provide valuable experience and offer important lessons learned for conducting multi-domain operations in the High North.

In the western hemisphere, our competitors seek to gain a foothold through economic and security investment and cooperation. We remain focused on building partner capacity and capability to ensure that the United States remains the partner of choice and to address transnational criminal and terrorist networks active in the region.

Additionally, the Department supports interagency efforts to address the migration crisis. Although other departments and agencies appropriately lead efforts to respond to this challenge, DoD supports partner nations in addressing the security-related aspects of the root causes of migration. This includes providing limited humanitarian and medical assistance and participating in engagements to strengthen the professionalism of Central American militaries and defense institutions.

Here in the United States, our men and women in uniform have supported our critical domestic missions. National Guard personnel provide support to our fellow Americans, including at Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) mass vaccination sites. National Guard personnel have also helped secure our national Capitol at various times over the past year, and thousands more have helped secure State capitals across the United States at the direction of State officials. We also continue to support law enforcement operations on our southern border by providing limited enabling capabilities. At the request of the Department of Health and Human Services, we are supporting its mission to shelter unaccompanied migrant children arriving at the border.

COVID-19

Tackling COVID-19 has been one of my highest and most urgent priorities. Since I became Secretary of Defense, the Department has received almost 500 FEMA mission assignments and 67 requests for

assistance from other Federal departments and agencies. As of June 21, more than 4,700 active-duty service members have deployed to 40 community vaccination centers in 29 States and territories. Additionally, more than 32,000 National Guard personnel have deployed, carrying out FEMA mission assignments issued to DoD to assist their local communities.

In total, the Department has administered over 17 million vaccine doses to the American people, with over 4.9 million delivered by active-duty personnel and 12.2 million supported by the National Guard. Within the Department, we have executed one of the most complex vaccination programs in the world, vaccinating millions of service members, beneficiaries, and Department personnel in 42 countries, including multiple combat zones. Internally, the Department has protected its force and families by administering over 3.6 million vaccinations.

We are also making investments in the Defense Health Agency to ensure that we have the resources needed for public-health surveillance and force protection. We continue to review and update our force health protection policies, and even as vaccinations increase, we remain committed to testing, which will expand our genomic sequencing efforts so that we can track variants and declining immunity.

I am tremendously proud of our men and women in uniform who stepped up to join our whole-of-nation response. But this will not be the last time our nation and our world will face such a challenge. That is why our budget request also funds programs that support biological threat reduction, in cooperation with our global partners, emerging infectious-disease surveillance, biosafety and biosecurity, and medical countermeasure research and development.

Climate Change

We face a grave and growing climate crisis that is threatening our missions, plans, and capabilities. From increasing competition in the Arctic to mass migration in Africa and Central America, climate change is contributing to instability and driving us to new missions.

At the same time, increasingly frequent extreme weather events degrade force readiness and drain resources. Recent DoD budgets have been forced to absorb recovery costs at battered bases such as Naval Air Station Pensacola, among others. Our military installations, and the mission-critical capabilities they support, must be made resilient to climate-induced extreme weather.

Our mission objectives are aligned with our climate goals. The Department is investing in projects and capabilities that mitigate the impacts of climate change while improving the resilience of our facilities and operations to a range of threats. Our budget request also invests in initiatives to reduce operational energy demand to enhance capability, improve freedom of action in contested logistical environments, and reduce costs. Those investments are good for the climate, and they are critical for the mission.

Additionally, this budget invests in power and energy research and development to improve installation and platform energy performance and optimize military capability. The Department can help lead by leveraging its buying power to deploy technologies such as energy storage and microgrids that support the mission while protecting the climate.

The Climate Working Group is coordinating the Department's work implementing the President's Executive Order on this crisis and building up climate expertise within DoD. It will also track the implementation of climate- and energy-related actions and progress toward future goals.

Modernization and Innovation

One of our chief priorities is to drive innovation across the Department and modernize our culture, people, systems, and processes to meet our future needs. It is critical to nearly everything we do. Even as we develop new capabilities, we will always adhere to our international humanitarian law obligations in the use of new weapons of war, as well as ensure the protection of civilians in all missions.

This budget supports our efforts to:

- Modernize the nuclear Triad to maintain a strong and effective strategic deterrent;
- Make critical investments in advanced technologies such as microelectronics, fifth-generation network (5G), and artificial intelligence (AI);
- Ensure access to precursors and key inputs by shoring up our critical supply chains;
- Accelerate investments in cutting-edge capabilities that will define the future fight, such as hypersonics and long-range fires; and
- Advance our joint warfighting concepts and commit to rapid experimentation and the fielding of emergent capabilities across warfighting domains.

The nuclear Triad remains the bedrock of our national defense and strategic deterrence, ensuring that no adversary believes it can employ nuclear weapons against the United States or our allies without risking devastating consequences.

But we must modernize our aging capabilities to ensure a credible deterrent for the future. As we do, we will review ongoing programs to assess their performance, schedule, risks, and projected costs. The FY 2022 budget invests in nuclear modernization efforts, and the Department will always seek to balance the best capability with the most cost-effective solution. We are also launching a nuclear posture review to ensure that we have the right capabilities matched with the national nuclear strategy.

Microelectronics enable many of today's capabilities, such as GPS, radar, command and control, and communications. Advanced microelectronics are key to nearly all of the Department's modernization efforts, from AI and hypersonic weapons systems to 5G wireless networks. The Department will continue to invest in programs to secure U.S. microelectronics interests; reverse the erosion of domestic innovation and supply; and establish a strong foundation for the next generation of microelectronics technology for DoD applications, while also sustaining current systems.

The U.S. military must also utilize the connectivity provided by 5G to operate with the speed, precision, and efficiency required in the future. Countries that master advanced communications technologies and connectivity will have long-term military advantages; for example, tomorrow's warfighters will be able to use local and expeditionary 5G networks to move considerable amounts of data to connect distant sensors and weapons into a dense, resilient battlefield network.

Similarly, the power of AI will help us modernize not only our warfighting decisions but also our business processes. We must be able to ingest, make sense of, and act on the vast amounts of information available to our warfighters on the battlefield and our decision-makers leading our Department. As I have said, we must understand faster, decide faster, and act faster. And we must do it all responsibly and at scale.

To support many of these efforts, we recently launched the Innovation Steering Group. This entity, chaired by the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, will advise me on science, technology, and technological transition. It will also empower efforts to make the changes to incentives, processes, and structures needed to truly innovate.

However, our efforts are not just focused on buying the capabilities of the future. We must fundamentally shift the way we think and the way we do business. We have not yet made full use of our most agile acquisition authorities, and we remain too risk-averse as a Department to move decisively beyond the capabilities of today and prepare for the future.

We also remain too reliant on critical minerals produced in or by China. To shore up our critical supply chains, we must focus on building our domestic production capabilities and growing our defense industrial base. That is why I am establishing the Supply Chain Risk Management Group, which will complement the work of the Industrial Base Council, both of which are chaired by the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment.

Tomorrow's conflicts will be contests of speed within and across domains of conflict. The President's budget request invests in the development and testing of hypersonic strike capabilities, while enhancing existing long-range strike weapons to bolster deterrence and improve survivability and response timelines. Long-range fires provide key offensive capabilities that are cost-effective and improve deterrence. By enabling power projection from standoff ranges, the risk to critical U.S. assets decreases while the defensive burden imposed on the enemy increases.

The Department is also focused on developing enhanced joint warfighting concepts; expanding experimentation and fielding; shifting our budget and investment priorities to incentivize innovation; and improving acquisition systems while making use of more flexible ones to identify and deliver new capabilities at scale. These efforts will help build a force that is more resilient and integrated and that ensures decision advantage across all domains.

Domain Challenges

On land, the Army continues to invest in its six modernization priorities: long-range precision fires, future vertical lift, next-generation combat vehicle, air and missile defense, the network, and soldier lethality. To sustain the required funding levels for the development and procurement of next-generation capabilities, the Army reduced resources for several platforms as well as missiles, munitions, and conventional ammunition.

At sea, delivering all-domain naval power that can defend the homeland, deter adversaries, control the seas, and project power ashore in a conflict requires the Navy to balance current operational demands with the need for modernization. Maintaining naval power is critical to reassuring allies and signaling

U.S. resolve to potential adversaries. The budget request proposes responsible investments in the Navy fleet. It also continues the recapitalization of our strategic ballistic-missile submarine fleet and invests in remotely-operated and autonomous systems and the next-generation attack submarine program.

We also seek to divest of some platforms that do not contribute effectively to power-projection needs. The FY 2022 request reflects a strong commitment to continued U.S. naval dominance, including a properly sized and well-positioned defense industrial base. The health of the defense industrial base continues to be fundamental to achieving and sustaining our future fleet. Our shipbuilding and supporting vendor base constitute a national security imperative that must be steadily supported and grown to maintain a skilled workforce.

In the air domain, the Air Force will shift away from certain platforms in favor of key weapons systems such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the F-15EX Eagle II, and the Next Generation Air Dominance aircraft to bolster the Air Force's ability to provide air superiority. Meanwhile, we will drive down sustainment costs, the fleet's average age, and inherent risk. At all times, we will work to ensure rigorous oversight of maintenance costs of the F-35.

Additionally, Air Force investments in hypersonics, the Long-Range Standoff Weapon, the B-21 Raider, and the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent will allow the Department to conduct global strike operations with precise conventional and unconventional capabilities, delivered from both standoff capabilities and penetrating platforms. Meanwhile, the Navy is developing the "Air Wing of the Future" to deliver game-changing lethality and survivability. These efforts include transforming Carrier Air Wings with the addition of the F-35C, E-2D, and CMV-22B aircraft and rapidly developing the MQ-25 Stingray.

Unfettered access to space and the freedom to maneuver there enhances every aspect of American power and underwrites the design of the joint force. Competitors including China and Russia are seeking to challenge the United States' advantage in space by developing weapons to deny or destroy U.S. space capabilities in conflict. The FY 2022 budget request strengthens our ability to deliver flexible capabilities and strategic options swiftly to outpace emerging threats in space.

Priority areas in this budget include investment in a resilient architecture of capabilities for missile warning and missile tracking; modernization of all segments of GPS to ensure precision and availability; development of cyber-resilient space command-and-control capabilities that can integrate with Joint All-Domain Command and Control; and investment in a broader base of domestic launch providers to further ensure our access to space.

In cyberspace, the United States is facing increasingly aggressive activity, including strategic campaigns by competitors, other nation-states, and proxies seeking to undermine our national security and democracy. The FY 2022 budget invests in cybersecurity and cyberspace activities that build on the goals in DoD's Cyber Strategy. The Cyber Operations portion of the budget supports U.S. Cyber Command's operational element, the Cyber Mission Force, which performs cyberspace operations to defend the nation, support the joint force, and secure DoD infrastructure and networks.

The budget also enhances our cybersecurity by mitigating key cyber deficiencies and strengthening our defensive capabilities to counter malicious attempts to exploit U.S. technology. Ultimately, we seek to improve joint force offensive capabilities to stay ahead of foreign threats.

Taking Care of Our People

The dedicated men and women who make up the Department of Defense are the greatest strength and asset we have. That is why I have prioritized growing our talent, building resilience and readiness in the force, and ensuring appropriately accountable leadership as we address tough workforce issues.

The FY 2022 budget request prioritizes improvements to recruiting, retention, training, and education, and support for military spouses, caregivers, survivors, and dependents. We are also intensely focused on ending sexual assault and harassment and identifying and addressing extremist behavior in the Department, two of my top priorities.

We have established the Deputy's Workforce Council, a senior-level governance forum co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is dedicated to addressing the most pressing people management, personnel policy, and total force requirements. This includes issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion; military healthcare and childcare; sexual assault prevention and response; and more. This forum will ensure that workforce issues remain a critical priority for Department leadership, including the Secretaries of the Military Departments and our commanders, and will help bring the same vision and disciplined execution to workforce issues that the Department devotes to weapons systems and budgeting.

Growing Our Talent

We accomplish our mission far better when we look to the full range of talent that the United States has to offer. That means drawing on a diversity of experiences and backgrounds, which will help drive creative thinking and adaptation, innovation, and cultural understanding. These will be vital to meet the complex challenges of today and the future.

Longstanding, systemic barriers for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities persist today. We must do all we can to ensure that we recruit and retain talent from the broadest pool of qualified, eligible candidates.

This spring, we updated the Department's policy on the open service of transgender people in the military. We welcome the recruitment, retention, and care of all qualified transgender individuals, and we look forward to their continued service with honor and dignity. The new policy reinforces that principle and also allows for a short implementation period for the Military Departments and Services to update their policies.

We also must continually grow and develop our workforce and create new avenues for advancement to drive the promotion and retention of our outstanding next-generation leaders. That requires thinking about our critical skill sets with an eye to the future, in particular by recruiting and training individuals in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, and advanced technologies.

Building Resilience and Readiness

In building a resilient and ready force, we must recognize the key role that our military families play in supporting our personnel. The health and well-being of our service members and their families are inextricably linked to the readiness of our force, and we must do all we can to take care of them.

The effects of COVID-19 have been especially tough for our military families, putting a particular strain on those who have lost childcare or civilian employment. The FY 2022 budget expands our efforts to provide high-quality childcare to our military families, and we continue to provide virtual career support through Military OneSource.

The budget also addresses efforts related to our military electronic health records, through which the Department is working to implement needed modernization most effectively. We must get military healthcare right for our service members and their families.

We will also remain focused on addressing suicide and mental health issues in our joint force by enhancing services and support while seeking to reduce the stigma around seeking help.

Ensuring Appropriately Accountable Leadership

We must provide our workforce with a safe, secure, and welcoming environment that empowers them to do their best work and grow personally and professionally. At the most basic level, that means creating a workplace free of discrimination, hate, and harassment. It also means guaranteeing swift and clear accountability to anyone who does not live up to the highest standards of the Department.

Sexual assault and harassment have no place in our country and no place in the Department of Defense. For too long, the Department's leadership has tried to get a handle on this challenge, but we have not made significant progress. One case of sexual assault or harassment is too many, and we are losing the confidence of our junior enlisted personnel and officers because we have yet to make significant progress against this challenge.

That is why, at the direction of the President, I established a 90-day Independent Review Commission (IRC) on sexual assault in the military. The IRC is responsible for reviewing DoD policies and processes related to sexual assault and harassment to determine where we can improve as a Department.

The IRC will soon complete its work on all four lines of effort—accountability, prevention, climate and culture, and victim care and support. I recently received an initial set of recommendations from the IRC Chair and provided the Department the opportunity to review those recommendations. It is critically important that we get this right, and I am grateful for congressional partnership as we seek to do that.

The vast majority of those who serve in uniform and their civilian colleagues do so with great honor and integrity. But extremism in our ranks can have an outsized impact on the Department, which will not be tolerated. The Department is focused on rooting out extremist behavior, and this fight is about our values, the Constitution, and the obligations in the Oath of Office we swear to uphold.

Behavior that defies or degrades our core values erodes unit cohesion as well as good order and discipline. It can also damage the health, morale, and readiness of the workforce.

I have moved immediately to meet this problem head-on. On February 5, I directed that within 60 days, commanding officers and supervisors at all levels conduct a one-day extremism stand-down to emphasize the importance of the Oath of Office we take, and to give military members and civilian employees the opportunity to participate in and continue to have this important conversation.

On April 9, I further directed several immediate actions to combat extremism, including reviews of what constitutes extremist activity, training for transitioning service members who may be targeted by extremist groups, and establishing the Countering Extremism Working Group to develop long-term recommendations to ensure all those who serve do so with honor and fealty to our values and our democracy. This must be a sustained effort, embraced by Department leadership.

Succeeding Through Teamwork

To accomplish anything we set out to do, the Department must operate as a unified team. That requires that we build unity among our leadership and ensure the right balance of civilian and military inputs to our decision-making and Department processes. In the last four months, we have made significant progress in rebuilding normal order in the Department to safeguard civilian oversight of the military.

In particular, we have established several bodies aimed at supporting the efforts of our Deputy's Management Action Group, the Department's principal governance body for management actions, including resource management and planning, programming, budgeting, and execution.

We have also established the Deputy's Workforce Council to address the Department's people management, personnel policy, and total force requirements, and task forces and working groups on COVID-19, China, climate change, and extremism.

Protecting the United States requires teamwork at every level: state, local, tribal, territorial, and federal. It requires cooperation with all who have a stake in our national security, including Congress, private industry, civil society, and the American people.

Our work to combat COVID-19 is a prime example of our commitment to working with our fellow Americans. Across the Executive Branch, DoD has worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security, including FEMA, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the State Department in efforts to end the pandemic. We are also investing in the defense industrial base to produce more personal protective equipment and test kits. And across the nation, we continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and State, local, tribal and territorial authorities to bring life-saving vaccines to the American people. At all times, our support to the nation is reliant on our partnership with Congress, which plays an integral role in providing the authorities, appropriations, and leadership necessary to have the most effective Department of Defense.

As part of our efforts to build teamwork into all we do, and in line with the President's intent, we are also leading with diplomacy, our first national security tool of choice. I am committed to ensuring that the Department of Defense continues to field a credible force able to back up the hard work of our diplomats around the world. We are working in lock-step with the State Department and other departments and agencies, and I took my first trip as Secretary of Defense with Secretary Blinken to reassure our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region that this Administration is committed to our relationships there. Secretary Blinken and I also traveled to Europe to assure our allies and partners of our commitment to the region.

When I traveled to NATO Headquarters earlier this spring, I shared a key message: we must consult together, decide together, and act together. Global crises, such as the pandemic, climate change, and

economic downturns, present significant dangers that span our borders. In many countries, internal strife, brought on by corruption, inequality and polarization, and transnational threats, such as violent extremism and criminal organizations, threaten stability around the alliance's rim. In Afghanistan, we went in together and we will leave together, after a substantial consultative effort. Meanwhile, aggressive and coercive behaviors from emboldened strategic competitors such as China and Russia reinforce the importance of collective security.

Conclusion

The challenges we face are many, but the Department stands ready to defend the United States against any enemy, foreign or domestic, just as we always have. We remain resolute in our commitment to protect the nation and will not shy away from any challenge.

The FY 2022 budget will help us fulfill that responsibility, and we are grateful for your support in working with us as we build the Department of the future. We need your help.

We also remain grateful for the tremendous trust that the United States places in our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, guardians, and DoD civilian employees, all of whom will continue to defend our democracy, our people, and our way of life. Thanks to them, we will always operate from a position of strength. Thank you.