



U.S. Department of Defense

DOD COMMUNICATION PLAYBOOK

March

2025

Secretary Hegseth's Priorities

When Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth arrived at the Pentagon in January 2025, he stated that improving lethality, warfighting, and readiness are the main lines of effort he will pursue while in office. He stressed that the President gave us a clear mission: achieve Peace through Strength. The Secretary outlined in his message to the force that DoD will do this in three ways: restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence.

Restoring the Warrior Ethos

- We will revive the warrior ethos and restore trust in our military.
- We are American warriors. We will defend our country.
- Our standards will be high, uncompromising, and clear.
- The strength of our military is our unity and our shared purpose.

Rebuilding our Military

- We will rebuild our military by matching threats to capabilities.
- We will remain the strongest and most lethal force in the world.

Reestablishing Deterrence

- We will reestablish deterrence by defending our homeland — on the ground, in the water, sky, and space.
- We will work with allies and partners to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific by Communist China, as well as supporting the President's priority to end wars responsibly and reorient to key threats.
- We will stand by our allies — and our enemies are on notice.

SECRETARY HEGSETH'S JAN. 25, 2025, MESSAGE TO THE FORCE CAN BE FOUND HERE:

[Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force > U.S. Department of Defense > Release](#)

ATSD(PA) Priorities

To support [President Trump's Executive Orders](#) and [Secretary Hegseth's priorities](#), Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA)) Sean Parnell has established the following priorities which must guide all DoD public affairs channels and be integrated into public communications to amplify that we are the world's strongest and most lethal fighting force and will achieve peace through strength: lethality, warfighting, and Homeland Defense and Border Security.

Lethality

- The strength of DOD is our unity and shared purpose.
- We will emphasize the best of our Armed Forces visually and by communicating that our Service members are ready, modern, and prepared to defeat and destroy those who threaten our homeland, our partners and allies, and our American way of life.
- We will promote the warrior ethos in all we do.

Warfighting

- The Golden Age of America begins now. DOD will always put America first.
- To remain at the tip of the spear, DOD will execute these core functions: rebuild our military and match threats to capabilities, revive the Defense Industrial Base, reform the acquisition process, pass a financial audit, and field emerging technologies.
- We will communicate DOD "wins" front and center on these core functions that enable warfighting and the warfighter:

Homeland Defense and Border Security

- DoD's founding mission is homeland defense.
- We must communicate our commitment to fulfilling DOD's role in protecting the territorial integrity of the United States.

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RESTORING THE WARRIOR ETHOS

- ▶ Restoring America's Fighting Force
- ▶ Reinstating Servicemembers Discharged Under COVID-19 Vaccination Mandates

FOR MORE INFO ON THE TOPICS IN THE RESTORING THE WARRIOR ETHOS SECTION GO TO:

- [EXECUTIVE ORDERS: GUIDANCE FOR FEDERAL PERSONNEL & READINESS POLICIES](#)
- [DEFENSE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ADVISORY SERVICE](#)
- [AND CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE FOR THE LATEST GUIDANCE](#)

RESTORING AMERICA'S FIGHTING FORCE

DoD's mission is to win the Nation's wars. To do this, we must have a lethal fighting force that rewards individual initiative, excellence, and hard work based on merit.

"Providing Service members an equal opportunity to excel will help us remain the strongest and most lethal fighting force the world has ever known."

***– Secretary Pete Hegseth
January 29, 2025***

Cultural Awareness Events

- Military departments and DoD components may not use official resources, to include man-hours, to participate in events related to cultural awareness months.
- Installations, units, and offices are encouraged to celebrate the valor and success of heroes of all races, sex, and backgrounds.
- Service members and civilians may participate in cultural awareness events in an unofficial capacity outside of duty hours and out of uniform.
- Services may participate in outreach events focused on a minority group where that participation directly supports DoD's mission (e.g., recruiting or public affairs objectives).

REINSTATING SERVICEMEMBERS DISCHARGED UNDER COVID-19 VACCINATION MANDATES

DoD is making things right for the thousands of Service members who were discharged, regardless of their years of service to our Nation.

DEI

- On January 27, 2025, the President issued an [Executive Order](#) (EO) which states that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies as defined in the EO are incompatible with DoD's values.
- On January 29, 2025, Secretary Hegseth signed a [memorandum](#) directing the establishment of a multi-functional "Restoring America's Fighting Force" task force charged with overseeing DoD's efforts to abolish DEI offices and any vestiges of such offices that subvert meritocracy, perpetuate unconstitutional discrimination, and promote radical ideologies related to systemic racism and gender fluidity.
- The task force will provide an initial report to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness of actions taken by DoD to terminate DEI initiatives by March 1, 2025, and a final report no later than June 1, 2025.

Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness

- Joining the military services is open to all persons who can meet the high standards for military service and readiness without special accommodation.
- On January 27, 2025, the President issued an [Executive Order](#) (EO) which states that expressing a false gender identify divergent from an individual's sex cannot satisfy the rigorous standards necessary for military service.
- On February 7, 2025, Secretary Hegseth signed a [memorandum](#) that paused all new accessions and medical procedures for individuals with a current diagnosis or history of gender dysphoria and directed the (Performing the Duties of) Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to provide additional policy guidance to the military departments on implementation.
- That [guidance](#) was signed on February 26, 2025. The guidance establishes a reporting mechanism to ensure DoD compliance. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs will be responsible for all data collection and reporting. The first report is due March 26, 2025. All DoD and Military Service policy rescissions and updates must be completed no later than June 25, 2025.

- On January 27, 2025, President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#) (EO) to reinstate Service members who were dismissed for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine.
- The EO directs the Secretary of Defense to reinstate all members of the military (active and Reserve) who were discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine and who request to be reinstated.
- Secretary Hegseth on February 6, 2025, signed a [memorandum](#) calling the vaccination requirement unfair, overbroad, and unnecessary. He directed DoD to execute the president's order.

RESTORING THE WARRIOR ETHOS

- ▶ Non-Covered Assisted Reproductive Technology Travel
- ▶ Return to In Person Work
- ▶ Deferred Resignation Program
- ▶ Hiring Freeze, Probationary Hires

NON-COVERED ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY TRAVEL

Service members and authorized dependents are eligible for travel and transportation allowance to receive non-covered Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART).

- On February 4, 2025, DoD issued a [memorandum](#) reestablishing travel for non-covered ART.
 - Service members and authorized dependents are eligible for travel and transportation allowances to receive non-covered ART when timely access to non-covered ART is not available within the local area of the members Permanent Duty Station, Temporary Duty location, or the last location the dependent was transported on Government orders when authorized by the appropriate authority.

RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORK

On his first day in office, President Trump issued a [memorandum](#) to improve the efficiency and accountability of the federal workforce, terminating remote work arrangements and requiring civilian employees to return to in-person work.

- On January 31, 2025, Secretary Hegseth issued initial implementation guidance returning to in-person work, stressing that in-person collaboration is key to building camaraderie and mission execution.
- Employees with alternative worksites more than 50 miles from their agency worksite will report full time in person to their agency worksite as soon as possible, but not later than the first week in June, including some exemptions.
- One of the [exemptions](#) is for employees approved for remote work so they may accompany their Service member spouse to assignments not in the vicinity of their agency worksite. The stability of our military families depends on spouses having access to quality employment.

DEFERRED RESIGNATION PROGRAM

The voluntary Deferred Resignation Program allows federal employees, if approved, to retain all pay and benefits regardless of their daily workload and to be exempted from in-person work requirements until September 30, 2025, or earlier if they choose to accelerate their date.

- On January 28, 2025, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sent all federal employees the first of several emails with the subject, "[Fork in the Road](#)," outlining the voluntary Deferred Resignation Program.
- The voluntary Deferred Resignation Program closed February 12, 2025.
- To ensure DoD can maintain its mission, the Department will carefully consider civilian functions essential to operations, and consequently some employees' applications may not be approved.

HIRING FREEZE, PROBATIONARY HIRES

The Administration is focused on efficient use of personnel and funds to improve public services and the delivery of these services.

FOR MORE INFO AS FURTHER DETAILS EMERGE, REFER TO THE RESOURCES LISTED ON PAGE 4.

ALSO REFER TO: [DOD PROBATIONARY WORKFORCE STATEMENT](#)

- On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued a [memorandum](#) ordering a freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees. That order does not apply to military personnel or positions related to national security.
 - The memo states that in carrying out the order, heads of executive departments and agencies shall seek efficient use of existing personnel and funds. Accordingly, the order does not prohibit making reallocations to meet the highest priority needs such as protecting national security.
 - Secretary Hegseth said on February 20, 2025, in an on-camera [address](#) that DoD will implement a hiring freeze to take time to identify better hiring practices relating to our core warfighting mission.
- On January 20, 2025, OPM issued [guidance](#) regarding potential personnel actions that includes employees on probationary periods.
 - Secretary Hegseth [said](#) on February 20, 2025, that DoD is proceeding carefully, and future manning decisions will be based, in part, on quality of performance.
 - DoD is committed to ensuring the best and brightest are promoted based on merit.

REBUILDING OUR MILITARY

► DoD Budget

DOD BUDGET

The Department is strengthening the military by cutting excess and refocusing the DoD budget to put us on a ready footing to deter our enemies and fight for peace.

FOR MORE INFO:

[SECRETARY HEGSETH VIDEO ON DOD BUDGET](#)

[FY 2025 DEFENSE BUDGET SPOTLIGHT](#)

Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 Budgets

- President Trump's charge to DoD is clear: to achieve peace through strength. We will do this by putting forward budgets that revive the warrior ethos, rebuild our military, and reestablish deterrence.
- To achieve our mandate from President Trump, we are guided by his priorities including securing our borders, building the Golden Dome for America, and ending Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs and preferencing.
- Through our budgets, the Department will resource warfighting and cease unnecessary spending. We must act swiftly to deter current and impending threats and make the best use of taxpayers' dollars in doing so.

Budget Offsets

- Secretary Hegseth has directed a review to identify offsets from the Biden Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget that could be realigned from low-impact and low-priority Biden-legacy programs to align with President Trump's America First priorities for our national defense.
- DoD will develop a list of potential offsets that could be used to fund these priorities, as well as to refocus the Department on its core mission of deterring and winning wars. The offsets are targeted at 8 percent of the Biden Administration's FY26 budget, totaling around \$50 billion, which will then be spent on programs aligned with President Trump's priorities.
- The Department is conducting this review to ensure we are making the best use of the taxpayers' dollars in a way that delivers on the President Trump's defense priorities efficiently and effectively.

Continuing Resolution

- Although the passage of another Continuing Resolution (CR) on December 21, 2024, averted another government shutdown, this is a temporary funding measure.
- We urge Congress to reach a bipartisan agreement on FY 2025 appropriations.
- The current CR is scheduled to expire on March 14, 2025.

REBUILDING OUR MILITARY

- ▶ AUKUS
- ▶ Nuclear Deterrence

AUKUS

AUKUS, the Australia, U.K., and U.S. trilateral security agreement, has been in place for just over three years.

“The president ... recognizes the importance of the defense industrial base. ... It has to [include] robust allies and partners. Technology sharing and subs are a huge part of it.”
– Secretary Pete Hegseth February 7, 2025

- On February 4, 2025, the Government of Australia deposited \$500 million into the U.S. Department of Treasury as part of its commitment to provide a \$3 billion uplift to the U.S. Submarine Industrial Base (SIB).
- Australia made the contribution under Pillar I of the AUKUS security partnership, which aims to provide Australia with its own conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability.
- Australia’s investment in America’s SIB reflects our shared understanding that an interoperable and ready submarine force is essential to securing a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
 - The investment demonstrates that Australia wants and is willing to pay for an increase in its defense.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Strategic deterrence remains a top priority mission for DoD and our Nation. U.S. nuclear weapons deter aggression, assure allies and partners, and allow us to achieve Presidential objectives if deterrence fails.

Nuclear Deterrence Policy

- The United States faces an unprecedented security environment with multiple nuclear challengers who have not followed our lead as responsible nuclear powers.
- The possibility of coordinated or opportunistic aggression by a combination of adversaries in a crisis or conflict requires U.S. strategists to consider complex escalation dynamics to deter multiple adversaries simultaneously.

Nuclear Weapons Modernization

- Nuclear weapons provide unique deterrence effects that no other element of U.S. military power can replace. Our Nation must continue to field a flexible and modern nuclear deterrent.
 - We will maintain, and if necessary, adjust U.S. nuclear forces to ensure they are responsive to the current and evolving security environment.
 - The United States is committed to the modernization of its nuclear forces; nuclear command, control, and communications system; production and support infrastructure; and sustaining fielded systems through the transition to modern systems.
 - The United States is committed to arms control efforts that advance U.S., allied, and partner security and that are verifiable and enforceable.

Extended Deterrence

- The United States does not face the challenging international environment alone. Our network of allies and partners in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific is an asymmetric advantage that our adversaries can never hope to match.
 - Our tailored dialogues with allies in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific have become deeper and broader — including work on conventional-nuclear integration, crisis consultation, and efforts to strengthen allied understanding of U.S. nuclear deterrence posture and capabilities.

RE-ESTABLISHING DETERRENCE

▶ Border Security

BORDER SECURITY

Defense of our homeland is an absolute priority for DoD.



***FOR MORE UP-TO-DATE
INFO, CHECK [DOD SUPPORT
TO THE SOUTHERN
BORDER](#), AND CONTACT
YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC
AFFAIRS OFFICE FOR THE
LATEST GUIDANCE***

Operation Southern Border

- Securing the U.S. southern border is a top priority of the Department.
- Approximately 9,300 U.S. Service members are supporting the mission at the southern border. Of these, approximately 4,200 are serving on active-duty under Joint Task Force (JTF) North. The remaining approximately 5,000 are serving on state active duty under Texas National Guard mission Operation Lone Star.
- U.S. Transportation Command has supported the mission to return illegal aliens to their home countries or other appropriate destinations with 26 flights since January 20, 2025.
- We are committed to working with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), to achieve and maintain full operational control of the border.
- The president directed the Secretary of Defense to take appropriate action to support the activities of the Secretary of Homeland Security in obtaining full operational control of the U.S. southern border.
- U.S. Northern Command is the operational lead for the mission at the southern border, supported by U.S. Transportation Command, the National Guard Bureau, and the military services.
- As directed by the president, the Department will develop and execute additional missions, as requested and appropriate, in cooperation with DHS and consistent with law.

Operation Southern Guardian (Illegal Alien Holding Operations at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay)

- DoD is supporting DHS and ICE illegal alien removal operations by providing temporary holding facilities at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB).
- As of February 21, 2025, the current capacity at NSGB is approximately 50 illegal aliens in the Migrant Operations Center and approximately 139 high-threat illegal aliens in JTF-Guantanamo (GITMO) facilities. Efforts to expand capacity for non-high-threat illegal aliens at the naval station are ongoing.
- U.S. Service members are responsible for security at NSGB, including at the facility where high-priority illegal aliens are held. ICE officers are present at NSGB and responsible for custody and oversight of all illegal aliens from arrival until departure.
- DoD is working with DHS to evaluate additional support requirements as the mission continues.

RE-ESTABLISHING DETERRENCE

► China

CHINA

DoD will act urgently to sustain and strengthen deterrence, with China as our most consequential opponent in strategic competition.



FOR MORE UP-TO-DATE INFO, CHECK [FOCUS ON THE INDO-PACIFIC SPOTLIGHT NEWS](#) AND CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE FOR THE LATEST GUIDANCE.

China Military Power Report

On December 18, 2024, DoD publicly released its annual report, "[Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China](#)," also known as the China Military Power Report. This congressionally mandated report charts the current course of China's national, economic, and military strategy, and offers insights into the PLA's strategy, current capabilities, and activities, as well as its future modernization goals.

[Key takeaways](#) include how China is: expanding national power to confront a strategic environment Beijing views as increasingly turbulent; increasing military coercion; advancing defense industry developments; intensifying pressure against Taiwan; deepening ties with Russia; and resisting military-to-military communications with the United States.

- We are doing more than ever to strengthen peace, stability, and deterrence across the Indo-Pacific region, because we are clear-eyed about the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) efforts to reshape the rules in the region.
- We are making historic investments in our own capabilities and working with our allies and partners to maintain a secure and prosperous free and open Indo-Pacific.
- DoD maintains the capability to deter, defend, and, if necessary, defeat aggression from the CCP against the United States, our allies, our partners, and our interests.
- We are focused on ensuring that the U.S. military remains the world's most combat-credible fighting force capable of maintaining peace through strength.
- DoD is developing innovative operational concepts and deploying cutting-edge capabilities right now and investing in capabilities to maintain deterrence now and in the future.
- We are delivering historic achievements to make U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific more mobile, distributed, resilient, and lethal.
- The United States will protect our interests by securing critical supply chains, infrastructure, and technologies. Likewise, we are committed to accelerating our operational cooperation and defense industrial and technology collaboration with key allies and partners.
- We are committed to safe, responsible, and lawful operations: the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate — safely and responsibly — wherever international law allows.
- Open lines of military-to-military communication with China are important because they help us reduce risk and manage crisis.

RE-ESTABLISHING DETERRENCE

- ▶ Russia
- ▶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization

RUSSIA

DoD's role is to support Ukraine's ability to defend itself and deter further Russian aggression.



FOR MORE UP-TO-DATE INFO, CHECK [SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE SPOTLIGHT](#), AND CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE FOR THE LATEST GUIDANCE

- On February 12, 2025, Secretary Hegseth participated in the 26th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) at Ramstein AB, Germany. The UDCG is a vital coalition of 50 nations committed to Ukraine's defense.
- As the war in Ukraine approaches its third anniversary, our message is clear: the bloodshed must stop, and this war must end.
- The U.S. will continue supporting Ukraine, but we expect Europe to lead on long-term assistance.
 - Every dollar and weapon sent must serve a clear strategic purpose.
- The U.S. will deter Russia and counter China simultaneously, but European allies must carry more of the Ukraine burden.
- The Administration looks forward to working together with our allies to achieve peace through strength.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a transatlantic alliance of 32 North American and European countries securing peace since 1949. The Alliance promotes democratic values and diplomacy and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues, build trust, and, in the long run, prevent conflict.



FOR MORE INFO: [NATO SPOTLIGHT](#)

- It is time for our European allies to step up and meet their defense spending commitments.
- The Administration expects NATO allies to contribute 5 percent of their Gross Domestic Product to defense spending.
- The United States expects allies to invest in their own defense capabilities to maintain a robust and fair NATO partnership.
- We strengthen deterrence where it matters — NATO's eastern flank will be secure and ready.

“The United States remains committed to the NATO alliance and to the defense partnership with Europe. ... Safeguarding European security must be an imperative for European members of NATO. As part of this Europe must provide the overwhelming share of future lethal and nonlethal aid to Ukraine.”

**– Secretary Pete Hegseth
February 12, 2025**

RE-ESTABLISHING DETERRENCE

► Middle East

MIDDLE EAST

An integrated, whole-of-government approach with Allies and partners across the Middle East is key to enabling peace and stability in the region. The United States is committed to advancing the security of our Gulf partners against external threats.



FOR MORE UP-TO-DATE INFO, CHECK [THREATS IN THE MIDDLE EAST SPOTLIGHT](#), AND CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE FOR THE LATEST GUIDANCE.

GAZA

- We fully recognize the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the concern for a lasting peace in the region.
- While we understand the need to help displaced Palestinians, we are not at the point where U.S. troops are necessary on the ground in Gaza.
- The United States maintains its strong military commitment to Israel, and we will continue to work with our allies and partners in the region to ensure peace and stability.

IRAN

- Iran should be denied a nuclear weapon and intercontinental ballistic missiles.
- Iran's terrorist network should be neutralized.
- Iran's aggressive development of missiles, as well as other asymmetric and conventional weapons capabilities, should be countered.

SYRIA

- The United States remains fully committed to the enduring defeat of the terror group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is critical to our national security.
- The United States always stands ready to find and eliminate terrorists who threaten our Nation and our allies.

YEMEN/HOUTHİ ACTIONS

- The United States will not hesitate to take action to defend American lives and assets, to deter attacks against civilians and our regional partners, and to protect freedom of navigation and increase the safety and security in these waterways.
- We will continue to make clear to the Houthis that there will be consequences for their illegal and reckless attacks.



U.S. Department of Defense

MEDAL OF HONOR DAY

Congress designated March 25 as National Medal of Honor Day, when we honor the heroism of those who have received the highest U.S. military award for valor. The first Medal of Honor was awarded on March 25, 1863. Since then, 3,530 medals have been issued.



VIETNAM WAR VETERANS DAY

Over nine million Americans served in the Vietnam War. The last U.S. combat troops left on March 29, 1973. The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act in 2017 named March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

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