

STATEMENT OF
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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUDGET HEARING
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OVERVIEW

I am honored and filled with gratitude to represent our incredible Joint Force, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, and their families, who serve and sacrifice for our national security every day. I am also honored to testify alongside the 29th Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, and I thank him and the President for the trust they placed in me to serve as the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I would like to thank Congress for your continued support to our United States Military and for your continued collaboration as we work to achieve peace through strength.

The President's \$961.6 billion Department of Defense budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 invests in and enables the Joint Force to act urgently to strengthen U.S. homeland defenses and to match our end strength to the threats we face. It includes funding to defend the Homeland by sealing our borders, and repelling illegal immigration and narcotics trafficking. It advances U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere, and defends the American people through the Golden Dome for America. Further, it invests in our ability to deter China in the Indo-Pacific by prioritizing properly postured, combat credible military forces.

The Joint Force is fully engaged in supporting the Secretary of Defense's three pillars of restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence. We are prioritizing warfighting and are laser focused on lethality and readiness. We support the Secretary's charge to ensure that only those who meet the highest standards and merit are made leaders in our ranks. Our Joint Force's strength stems from our unity.

We are also working to rebuild the military. This budget invests in reenergizing our national and defense industrial base and modernizing the Nuclear Triad, enhances shipbuilding efforts, funds the Golden Dome and the newest F-47 fighter jet, and makes

crucial investments in drone technology and cyber security. We are also working toward cutting wasteful spending to re-invest in filling critical mission needs.

We will ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and with purpose. We strive to provide accountability to Congress and the American people while achieving our end goal of providing every service member with the right capability, equipment, and training to deter our adversaries, and if necessary, crush our enemies on the battlefield with overwhelming technological superiority.

We are gaining 100% operational control of our Southern Border and working with our partners in Panama toward enabling a mechanism to ensure U.S. warships and auxiliary vessels transit the Canal on a cost-neutral basis. We are also working to deter China in the Indo-Pacific by increasing regional force posture, investing in our military to maintain our competitive edge, and working with our network of allies and partners. Finally, we are postured to maintain stability and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

This budget invests in our ability to keep pace with both the rapidly evolving strategic environment and developing technology. We owe the Nation's 2.8 million service members, our Department of Defense civilians, and their families the very best. We must be a force that is properly armed, globally integrated, and ready. We must deter our Nation's adversaries and, if necessary, fight and win now and in the future. I have full trust in our Joint Force to make hard decisions, persevere in adversity, and to do the right thing. This budget helps support the essential work of our Joint Force.

The President's FY 2026 budget also makes critical investments in our most important asset – our people. It has been an honor to serve alongside some of the most extraordinary warriors, civilian teammates, and families that our Nation has ever known. I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue serving with them. I remain mindful of all those currently deployed, at home and around the world, standing watch in defense of

our Nation and its ideals. And I hold in special remembrance our fallen and their families, whose sacrifice, courage, and unwavering commitment embody the highest ideals of service.

THE THREAT

The world remains a dynamic and turbulent place. The return of great power competition requires us to make large scale changes and take an entrepreneurial mindset to adapt. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) actions throughout the world, and conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia make it clear: our adversaries are advancing. Nuclear threats are on the rise and maintaining deterrence is more critical than at any point in our history. The United States homeland is being threatened by hostile gray zone activities, including cyber attacks, economic coercion, and increasingly aggressive behavior in space and cyber space.

Additionally, China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are pursuing unprecedented levels of cooperation, driven by a desire to challenge U.S. interests and stability around the world. Their collaboration extends across military, cyber, economic, and informational domains. These developments come alongside growing threats to the U.S. homeland, including cyber intrusions, transnational crime, and coercive influence operations. While the CCP has not openly taken a leading role in directing these efforts, China continues to support and enable this growing network of collaboration. This convergence marks a strategic shift – one that reinforces the need for sustained American resolve and unity in the face of more aligned challengers.

U.S. Homeland: Illegal migration, illicit narcotics trafficking, foreign terrorists, and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) continue to pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. TCOs, violent gangs, and violent extremist organizations leverage revenue from drug trafficking and human smuggling to degrade regional democratic institutions. Criminal violence drives drugs and illegal migration to the U.S. southern border,

threatening the safety, security, stability, and sovereignty of the nations in our hemisphere.

The CCP's influence and economic coercion in the Western Hemisphere is growing. Using its Belt and Road Initiative, China has become South America's largest trading partner, with the aim to monopolize access to the region's abundant natural resources and use them for political control.

China: The CCP is advancing an unprecedented military modernization effort alongside increasingly aggressive actions that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland, as well as to our allies and partners. The CCP is employing a multifaceted strategy that blends military pressure, cognitive and cyber operations, and economic coercion. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to display expanding capabilities through sustained pressure activities across multiple domains, activities that are growing in scope, scale, complexity, and frequency against Taiwan. These aggressive maneuvers are not routine exercises, they are rehearsals for a forced unification.

The PLA is developing and integrating cutting edge technologies at an alarming pace. They are adopting artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonic and advanced missiles, and space-based capability. They have greatly advanced their development of space and counter space capabilities, including direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons, co-orbital threats, and advanced jamming systems. The PLA Defense Industrial Base is manufacturing thousands of weapons and hundreds of fighters every year. Finally, the CCP deploys extensive resources toward its cyber operations and has an enormous workforce dedicated to launching cyber-attacks.

Russia: The war in Ukraine continues, and Russia continues its attempt to accomplish its geopolitical objectives using military force. These objectives include expanding its territorial control, broadening its influence regionally and globally, and weakening U.S.

leadership and influence. Russia has strengthened its relationships with the CCP, North Korea, and Iran. Russia has used the war as an opportunity to refashion its military and build a military that is now larger than its pre-war forces. Russia has modernized its Pacific fleet, particularly submarines, becoming an increasing threat to U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific.

North Korea: North Korea's advancing and unlawful nuclear program threatens U.S. interests and regional stability. Its ongoing and increasingly aggressive ballistic missile research and testing represent a threat to our homeland and to our Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, North Korea's direct involvement in the Ukraine conflict has allowed North Korean soldiers to gain combat experience, and enhanced their proficiency with advanced weapons systems, including drones, further sharpening North Korea's military's preparation for future conflict. A significant portion of Russia's supplies, including ballistic missiles and artillery shells, come from North Korea. In exchange, Russia has provided North Korea with advanced military technology.

North Korea has accelerated its navy's nuclear armament and the development of a nuclear-powered submarine, signaling a significant modernization of its naval forces. These developments underscore North Korea's growing capacity to project power beyond its borders, posing an escalating threat to U.S. interests and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Iran: Iran continues to pose a multifaceted threat to U.S. interests through its regional proxy networks, missile development programs, and support for Russia's military operations in Ukraine. Since the October 2023 Hamas attacks, Iran-backed militias have intensified assaults on U.S. forces in Syria, Iraq, and the Red Sea region. In the Red Sea, Iran's support has enabled the Houthis to conduct hundreds of attacks on commercial shipping, significantly disrupting global trade routes and prompting international military responses.

Iran's nuclear ambitions have also escalated, and they have undertaken key activities that better position it to produce a testable nuclear device. Additionally, Iran has threatened to target U.S. bases, indicating advancements in its missile range capabilities.

Furthermore, Iran's deepening military cooperation with Russia, including the provision of drones and other military support, underscores its role in sustaining Russia's war efforts in Ukraine. Collectively, these actions reflect Iran's strategic intent to challenge U.S. influence and destabilize regional security architectures.

JOINT FORCE FUNDAMENTALS

Today's threats demand an entrepreneurial mindset that drives us to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, fight through adversity, and foster innovation across the Joint Force. Meeting these challenges requires a force that is properly armed, globally integrated, and ready.

Properly Armed: The United States military is the most professional, capable, and lethal force on the planet. Make no mistake – we are the world's best. But our competitive edge is not a preordained right. If we want to stay ahead of our adversaries, we must continually reinvest and renew our ability to produce capability. We owe America's force of 2.8 million the right tools, weapons, and capabilities to enter any battle with overwhelming strength. They must be armed so that they never have to enter a fair fight.

We must reinvigorate our Defense Industrial Base – now. Today's threats require an industrial base that can accelerate the right capability to match the threat to the warfighter at capacity. We need to be able to harness America's innovation and

entrepreneurial spirit to increase the speed of developing technology and get it into the hands of our warfighters at the tactical edge. The Department must be better buyers.

During World War II and the early Cold War, industry was able to produce game-changing systems quickly. Technology like the B-29 Superfortress and the nuclear submarine went from concept to combat in under 5 years. Today, it takes 16 years to develop a basic ground vehicle and more than 20 years for a fighter jet.

Meanwhile, technology keeps accelerating. Simply put, we are not moving fast enough. We must make the reforms necessary to restore trust in the Department of Defense as a partner of choice for private industry. We must optimize alignment and agility between requirements, acquisition, and budgeting, helping smaller firms and new entrants work with DoD and allowing DoD to leverage innovation within the private sector. The Department will benefit from increased competition among defense contractors, which drives down prices and grants more opportunities for innovative solutions.

Additionally, we need to send consistent demand signals to industry, which allows industry partners to plan out additional capacity. This budget makes crucial investments in boosting munitions production and we are investing in expanding domestic production of critical minerals.

Defending the homeland through strategic deterrence remains the DoD's top priority. U.S. nuclear forces deter adversaries, reassure allies, and provide unmatched capabilities that are essential if deterrence fails. Today's security environment features multiple nuclear-armed challengers, some actively engaged in conflict, requiring the U.S. to deter more than one nuclear challenger at a time.

To meet this challenge, the U.S. is both sustaining legacy triad systems and modernizing all three legs of the nuclear triad, including transitioning from Minuteman III to Sentinel ICBMs, moving from OHIO-Class SSBNs to COLUMBIA-Class with updated

Trident II missiles, and replacing the B-2 with the B-21 Raider and introducing the Long-Range Standoff Cruise Missile.

Modernization also includes command and control, the stockpile, supporting infrastructure, and the defense industrial base. While this modernization effort began under less urgent conditions, it now underpins deterrence in a more dangerous and complex world.

We must also keep pace with China's shipbuilding capacity, who now vastly outpaces the United States. Decades of deindustrialization and underinvestment have eroded U.S. maritime strength. The Navy's current goal is to build a 381-ship fleet, but it remains stuck below 300.

Replacing decommissioned vessels is already a challenge in peacetime, raising serious concerns for wartime readiness. The President's budget makes significant investments to advance shipbuilding, to include commercial shipbuilding, a necessary aspect of industrial capacity to aggressively improve military ship construction, modernization of the fleet, and expanding the capacity of the maritime industrial base.

The President's FY 2026 budget also makes generational investments in our homeland defense, including for a next-generation missile defense system, or Golden Dome, and for fielding the F-47.

The F-47 is the world's first sixth-generation fighter, offering superior stealth, range, and adaptability compared to fifth-generation platforms. It is designed for peer conflict, cost-effective sustainment, and higher availability, all while requiring fewer support resources. This aircraft will ensure continued U.S. air dominance for decades.

The Golden Dome for America is a layered, next-generation missile defense system to protect against nuclear, hypersonic, and conventional threats. It includes space-based sensors and interceptors, next-generation ground-based systems, and lower-tier defenses. Work is underway to integrate these systems into a seamless homeland defense architecture.

The President's budget also makes crucial investments in rapidly advancing drone technology, including improving our acquisition and production of drone systems at scale. This is an area where we must take advantage of fast-moving private sector innovation to field low cost, attritable, kinetic and non-kinetic, small, unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) and counter sUAS systems to keep pace with our adversaries.

The budget makes additional investments in F-35 development.

Globally Integrated: In addition to being armed, we must also be globally integrated. Threats today are borderless and fast-moving. Today's battlefields cross domains and regions. Wars take place on land, at sea, in the air, and in space and cyber space, often all at once. They cross geographic boundaries and regional lines. The Joint Force needs to fight as one, aligning Joint and Service concepts.

We must field interoperable capability and rehearse at every echelon, across our Services. We must test our readiness concepts in dynamic, contested environments. We must never miss an opportunity to create consistent and trusting joint relationships at all levels.

Additionally, we need to integrate the Department of Defense, Department of State, Intelligence Community, and the rest of our government across aligned legal authorities

and operating frameworks. And we must work more closely with the private sector, leveraging advancing technology and the American entrepreneurial spirit.

Finally, in today's capability and capacity constrained world, we must be integrated with our allies and partners. We need a common, all-domain operating framework. That is why this budget makes vital investments in Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control; space-based Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Targeting equipment; Precision, Navigation, and Timing capability; and air and refueling capability and capacity like the KC-46.

Ready: Lastly, we must be a Joint Force that is ready. Having the right tools is just part of the equation. We need our military to be organized, trained, and mentally prepared to fight at a moment's notice. Our Nation's adversaries can never doubt the readiness, capability, and lethality of the Joint Force. Our leaders at every level must be trained, educated, and prepared to fight a large scale war.

We need to get families ready too. We ask much of our service members, and by extension, their families. Readiness at home is readiness in the field. Our Nation's warriors have spouses, children, and parents. If we want them fully focused on the mission, they need to know their loved ones are taken care of. Lifting that weight from their shoulders increases combat readiness.

In addition, we must think in terms of national readiness. While our military stands at the forefront, history shows that major conflicts must be met by the full strength and resilience of a nation. In the event of a large-scale crisis, we will need all parts of American society to respond with urgency, especially within our industrial and commercial sectors. Meeting the moment will require shared effort, shared responsibility, and a united sense of purpose.

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287 **Take Care of our People:** Wrapped around all of this, is our most critical asset – our
288 people. Humans are always more valuable than hardware. The most important thing is
289 to take care of our people and make sure they are ready to go. No amount of advanced
290 hardware or cutting-edge technology can replace the value of human commitment,
291 judgment, and resilience. There are 2.8 million service members and civilians who make
292 up our Armed Services. They have volunteered, along with their families, to serve our
293 great Nation. We must acknowledge the sacrifices military families make and take
294 seriously our responsibility to care for them, including making sure they are armed,
295 trained, equipped, and supported. We are committed to having leaders that are
296 empowered to make tough decisions, enforce standards, and uphold accountability.

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298 This budget makes necessary investments in quality of service and quality of life for our
299 service members and their families, including for enlisted housing. In addition, we are
300 committed to improving the lives of our service members by ensuring healthcare for
301 service members and their families, the timely moving of their household goods,
302 improved housing conditions, childcare access, and career support for military spouses.
303 We must ensure families have the resources, support, and stability they need to sustain
304 our all-volunteer force.

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306 **CONCLUSION**

307 I have the utmost trust and faith in the men and women of our Joint Force. The threats
308 we face are advancing and they are multi-faceted. Emerging technology and the
309 American entrepreneurial spirit to innovate and overcome provide us ample opportunity
310 to meet the challenges before us. We have fought and won as a Nation before, and we
311 can and will do it again, if necessary. We, as a Joint Force, Congress, and society, must
312 move faster. We need to take unconventional approaches, think outside the box, be
313 disruptive, and create a sense of urgency within our Joint Force.

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315 I ask Congress to fully fund the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget and to pass it on
316 time. While the flexibility granted to the Department in the FY25 Continuing Resolution
317 was greatly appreciated, routinely operating under Continuing Resolutions limits audit
318 efforts, lowers real buying power, results in less deployable capital, and makes it harder
319 for industry to make long term investments.

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321 I am honored to have served alongside some of most incredible warriors and civilian
322 teammates our Nation has ever seen, and their families. I am thankful to continue
323 serving with them. I am mindful of all service members who are currently deployed at
324 home and abroad, defending this Nation and its values. I always specially remember
325 our fallen and their families, who demonstrate true sacrifice, courage, and commitment
326 to our Nation.

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328 Once again, I thank Congress for their support to our Joint Force. The President's Fiscal
329 Year 2026 budget is designed to ensure that the Joint Force can effectively address our
330 national security priorities. Together, we will achieve peace through strength.