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DEPARTMENT *of* WAR



2026 NDS

NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY



RESTORING PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH
FOR A NEW GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICA

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

JAN 23 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOW FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: 2026 National Defense Strategy

For too long, the U.S. Government neglected—even rejected—putting Americans and their concrete interests first. Previous administrations squandered our military advantages and the lives, goodwill, and resources of our people in grandiose nation-building projects and self-congratulatory pledges to uphold cloud-castle abstractions like the rules-based international order. These past leaders neglected and often actively undermined our warfighters' warrior ethos and our military's core, irreplaceable role—fighting, winning, and thereby deterring the wars that really matter to our people. Consequently, President Trump entered office with the nation on the precipice of disastrous wars for which we were unprepared.

President Trump has decisively changed that, courageously putting Americans first to truly make America great once again. Under his leadership, the United States has the world's strongest, most lethal, and most capable military—indeed, the most powerful military that this world has ever seen. No longer will the Department be distracted by interventionism, endless wars, regime change, and nation building. Instead, we will put our people's practical, concrete interests first. We will support a policy of actual peace through strength. We will be the sword and shield to deter war, with the goal of peace—but ready to fight and win the nation's necessary wars if called upon.

This does not mean isolationism. To the contrary, it means a focused and genuinely strategic approach to the threats our nation faces and how to best manage them. This approach is based on a flexible, practical realism that looks at the world in a clear-eyed way, which is essential for serving Americans' interests. As the National Security Strategy articulates, this is the commonsense approach President Trump has advanced.

America First. Peace Through Strength. Common Sense.

Essential to this approach is being realistic about the scale of the threats we face and the resources available to meet those threats. We recognize that it is neither America's duty nor in

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our nation's interest to act everywhere on our own, nor will we make up for allied security shortfalls from their leaders' own irresponsible choices. Instead, the Department will prioritize the most important, consequential, and dangerous threats to Americans' interests. We will restore the warrior ethos and rebuild the Joint Force so that America's enemies never doubt our resolve or ability to respond decisively to those threats. We will insist that allies and partners do their part and lend them a helping hand when they do step up. We will be responsible stewards of Americans' lives, money, and support.

We will defend the Homeland and ensure that our interests in the Western Hemisphere are protected. We will deter China in the Indo-Pacific through strength, not confrontation. We will increase burden-sharing with allies and partners around the world. And we will rebuild the U.S. defense industrial base as part of the President's once-in-a-century revival of American industry.

In the process, we will restore peace through strength—not just for the duration of President Trump's administration but for decades to come, as the American people deserve. The 2026 National Defense Strategy shows how.

This Strategy reflects President Trump's historic approach to our nation's defense. It must be carried out thoroughly, rapidly, and comprehensively. All Department of War components will adhere to the guidance and direction enclosed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P.B. Johnson", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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