



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

1/2/20

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DOD PERSONNEL

SUBJECT: Message to the Force - Reform through Focused Prioritization

As the National Defense Strategy (NDS) reminds us, “We have a responsibility to gain full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense, thereby earning the trust of Congress and the American people.” In this spirit, the Department of Defense is pursuing aggressive reforms to ensure that our resources are being put towards the highest priority activities. In doing so, we must be willing to make tough choices as we engage in great power competition and execute the NDS. This means divesting legacy systems, low priority tasks, and activities that deliver little value.

The President and Congress have placed an emphasis on funding the military. Our budgets over the past three years have allowed us to reverse the decline in readiness, while beginning to modernize our air, land, sea, space, and cyber capabilities. However, there is no guarantee that this level of funding will continue into the future. To meet the objectives outlined in the NDS, we must continue to make the most of every resource. I expect leaders at all levels to ruthlessly prioritize to ensure your time, money, and manpower are put into the right efforts and activities.

Time: There is not enough time in the day to accomplish every task. The Joint Force remains very busy, and our daily requirements rarely leave room for “white space” on our training schedules. When determining which tasks to conduct, use this as your guiding principle – *prioritize those activities that contribute most to the readiness and lethality of the force*. Whether that’s weapons gunnery, maintenance, or resilience training, all leaders should assess the needs of their organization and plan their time accordingly. Conversely, make time by doing away with low-priority, low-value activities.

Money: Preparing for high-intensity conflict against a near-peer competitor requires a Joint Force that is highly trained and properly equipped. This is expensive. Given our limited resources, we must find the right balance between spending on the needs of today and investing for tomorrow. The trade-off between current readiness and future modernization is one of our most difficult decisions. Getting this right requires a deliberate budgeting process and continual assessment. Every leader should review their spending in detail and not hesitate to reallocate resources. Fund your highest priorities first, so that when fiscal conditions change, you will still be able to accomplish your mission.

Manpower: In wartime, every soldier, sailor, airman, marine, and DoD civilian matters. Across the Department, we have done great work in reducing our non-deployable rates so that we can train and fight with more of our uniformed personnel. The challenge now is where and how to employ these warriors – here again, the NDS is our guide. When we put boots on the ground, ships on the sea, or planes in the sky, we must ensure our units are performing the most high-payoff activities in line with our strategic priorities.



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I am thankful for everything that our Service members and DoD civilians do on a daily basis to make our military great. No profession in America is held in higher regard than our own. Together, we have earned the trust and confidence of the American people and the U.S. Congress. We must now demonstrate our continued commitment to the Nation by prioritizing the use of every hour, dollar, and person to help ensure we remain the greatest military in history.

*Mark T. Esper*