

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III
PREPARED REMARKS BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
APRIL 5, 2022

Overview

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the President's Department of Defense budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

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 the support that Congress continues to provide. Thank you also to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General 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, Under Secretary Mike McCord.

The President's \$773 billion defense budget request would provide the Department of Defense with the resourcing we need to address the threats that America faces and to advance the Department's four key strategic priorities: to defend the homeland, deter strategic attacks, deter aggression while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary, and build a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystem. As always, the Department is determined to match resources to strategy, strategy to policies, and policies to the will of the American people.

For more than seven decades, American vision and leadership have been pillars of international peace and prosperity. A strong, principled, and adaptive U.S. military remains central for U.S. leadership in the 21st century as we face dramatic geopolitical, technological, economic, and environmental changes. The Department stands ready to meet these challenges and seize opportunities with the confidence, creativity, and commitment that have long characterized our military and the democracy that it serves.

We face rapidly evolving military capabilities on the part of our competitors, accelerated by emerging technologies and intensified by the potential for new threats to strategic stability and the U.S. homeland. We also face an escalation of our competitors' coercive and malign activities in the "gray zone," as well as transboundary challenges that impose new demands on the Joint Force and the Defense enterprise. Our competitors seek to exploit our perceived vulnerabilities, including by developing conventional and nuclear capabilities that pose all-domain threats to the United States and could jeopardize the U.S. military's ability to project power and counter aggression.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is the Department's pacing challenge due to its coercive and increasingly aggressive efforts to refashion the Indo-Pacific region and the international system to suit its interests and preferences. The PRC has expanded and modernized nearly every aspect of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including its conventional forces and nuclear capabilities, with a focus on offsetting U.S. military advantages. The PRC seeks to fragment U.S. alliances and security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, and the PRC's leaders hope to leverage their economic influence and the PLA's growing military strength to coerce China's neighbors and threaten their vital national interests.

The PLA is also rapidly advancing and integrating its space, counter-space, cyber, electronic, and information-warfare capabilities to support its holistic approach to joint warfare.

As we have seen in recent weeks, Russia also remains an acute threat, requiring close and sustained coordination across the NATO alliance to prevent further aggression in Europe. Russia's flagrant attack on its peaceful, sovereign, and democratic neighbor, Ukraine, poses a huge challenge to transatlantic security. Russia's nuclear capabilities also pose significant challenges now and in the future.

While the PRC and then Russia pose the greatest challenges to U.S. security, we must also remain vigilant against other dangers. We face persistent threats from North Korea, with its nuclear arsenal and developing missile capability, and Iran, with its nuclear ambitions and support for proxy groups that threaten the security of our forces and our allies, partners, and interests in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, other threats persist. We have degraded the capabilities of global terrorist groups – including al-Qa'ida and ISIS – but some may be able to reconstitute in short order. The whole world has learned how deadly and destabilizing a pandemic can be, and we must also be ready for other transborder challenges, such as cyber attacks and the existential threat of climate change.

To address these challenges, we have developed a budget that we believe offers the right mix of capabilities across all domains, while retiring certain platforms that no longer meet the needs of the Joint Force. We are grateful for our partnership with Congress as we seek to ensure that the Department can successfully address present and future threats.

As we work to defend the nation, the Department will continue to invest heavily in our people, who are the most important element of our national defense. Our All-Volunteer Force, with the support of their families, and our civilian and contractor defense enterprise, work tirelessly every day to defend the United States.

After decades of leadership and investment, the United States enjoys an unparalleled network of allies and partners, who together provide an enormous strategic advantage that our competitors cannot match. This advantage has been on full display in Europe, where a galvanized NATO has risen to the moment and shown extraordinary unity in the face of unprovoked Russian aggression against a democratic neighbor, Ukraine.

Countries around the world share a vital interest in a free and open international system. Close cooperation with allies and partners is foundational to protecting U.S. national security interests and to our collective ability to address the risk of aggression from the PRC and Russia, while responsibly managing the full array of other threats we face. In all cases, we strive to be the partner of choice for our friends. We will continue to work with our allies and partners to advance our shared interests and maintain the rules-based international order that relies on U.S. global leadership.

The President's FY23 defense budget request seeks to address these national security imperatives in three major ways: integrated deterrence, campaigning, and building enduring advantage.

Integrated deterrence entails working seamlessly across military domains and the spectrum of conflict, using all instruments of U.S. national power and our extraordinary network of alliances and partnerships. It applies a coordinated, multifaceted approach to reducing competitors' perceptions of the

net benefits of aggression relative to restraint, tailored to specific circumstances. Integrated deterrence is enabled by combat-credible U.S., allied, and partner forces, and it is backstopped by a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent.

Campaigning is the way that we tie together the global, day-to-day actions of the Joint Force to achieve deterrence. From joint exercises to military diplomacy, from advanced weapons tests to short-notice operations with close allies and partners, we campaign to make our competitors question the efficacy of coercion and aggression. Simply put, we aim to convince them that today is not the day to challenge the United States or our friends around the world.

To shore up the foundations for integrated deterrence and campaigning, we are moving urgently to build enduring advantages across the defense ecosystem – the Department of Defense, the defense industrial base, and the array of private-sector and academic enterprises that spur innovation and support the systems on which our military depends. We will continue to swiftly modernize the Joint Force, with a focus on innovation and rapid adjustments to new strategic demands. We will make our supporting systems more resilient and agile in the face of any and all threats. And we will cultivate the talents of our exceptional team, recruiting and training a workforce with the skills, character, and diversity that our nation needs to creatively tackle today’s national security challenges.

Ultimately, this year’s budget request seeks the resources for a Joint Force that can deter competitors and campaign across the spectrum of competition and conflict each and every day. But most critically, it also seeks the resources that the U.S. military needs to fight and win decisively should deterrence fail.

Integrated Deterrence

Integrated deterrence aims to bring to bear the right mix of capabilities to demonstrate beyond doubt that the United States can respond across domains and the spectrum of conflict, working closely across the U.S. Government and with our global allies and partners – all in the manner, time, and place of our choosing.

This requires that the Joint Force maintain our superiority in the air, on land, at sea, undersea, in space, throughout cyberspace, and anywhere in the gray zone where our competitors may seek to challenge us. Integrated deterrence also requires a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent, which remains the ultimate backstop of our national security posture. And we will keep our capabilities networked and ensure that our warfighting concepts are integrated and optimized for a potential future fight.

To maintain superiority in the air, the Department is focused on modernizing our global strike capabilities and continuing to provide rapid global mobility to the Joint Force, so that we can respond to any conflict or crisis effectively and swiftly. The President’s FY23 defense budget request invests in our air command-and-control framework; in our surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities; in our Next Generation Air Dominance system of systems; in resilient basing, sustainment, and communications in contested environments; and in long-range strike and fires capabilities, including the B-21 family of systems and investments in long-range standoff weapons and hypersonics. We have also made significant investments in 4th, 5th, and 6th generation fighters, logistics, and uncrewed aircraft systems.

On land, the FY23 budget continues to build a combat-credible, ready, and lethal force that can tackle challenges around the world. Our budget request seeks to invest in additional Security Force Assistance Brigade rotations in the Indo-Pacific region and Europe, and it works to build capacity and improved capabilities in the Arctic. We are also focused on developing our long-range hypersonic weapons and mid-range capability prototypes on land, and we are increasing the command and control and domain awareness capability in our forces focused on defending the homeland. This will require unified network investments to facilitate the Joint All Domain Command and Control efforts across the Joint Force.

At sea and undersea, we are investing in mobility, self-reliance, and survivability, and our budget request seeks to produce a balanced fleet that remains capable of a high level of readiness for power projection, sea control, maritime security, and sealift. Investments in this year's budget focus on force design to deliver a ready force now and in the future, including through investments in ship and aviation maintenance, training, and facilities. We have also invested in long-range precision fires and platforms that ensure our future combat capability, including guided missile destroyers, attack submarines, and globally responsive, combat-ready naval expeditionary forces in the maritime littorals. The construction of our new battle force fleet ships and the incremental construction of Ford-class nuclear-powered aircraft carriers will ensure we maintain our dominance at sea.

In space and cyberspace, we must continue to build and maintain our advantages over our competitors. The PRC has made significant investments in space-based and cyber capabilities. To protect our space architecture, the President's FY23 defense budget proposes significant investments in space resilience and a more distributed space architecture. This includes investments in missile warning and tracking architecture, launch enterprise investments, protected satellite communications, and the Global Positioning System (GPS) enterprise.

In cyberspace, our budget will help defend national security systems, including the Department of Defense Information Network; enhance the Department's own cybersecurity by implementing Zero Trust; build more redundancy and resilience into our cyber infrastructure; organize, train, and equip cyber mission forces; advance our cyber partnerships with like-minded countries; and reinforce international norms in cyberspace promoted by the United States.

To defend the homeland, the FY23 budget invests in the development of the Next-Generation Interceptor for Ground-Based Midcourse Defense, and it extends the service life of the current Ground-Based Interceptor. The budget also includes significant investment in the defense of Guam. We also improve our ability to see over the horizon, with investment in new homeland defense radars. Just as important is our investment in multi-Service, multi-domain, long-range fires, including hypersonic capabilities on land, at sea, and in the air. The budget request would also procure more than 3,500 highly survivable subsonic weapons for new and existing launch platforms.

We must be able to track, understand, and respond to malign activities in the gray zone, including the information space, and maintain a strategic hedge against unexpected, rapidly emerging threats, including from violent extremist organizations or an adversary's use of weapons of mass destruction. We also need to sustain a robust crisis-response capability. This budget invests in theater integration, including irregular warfare capabilities, internet-based military information support operations (MISO), armed overwatch, and efforts to counter unmanned aerial systems (UAS) before they launch.

Our nuclear triad remains the ultimate backstop of our national defense. Maintaining global strategic stability – particularly in light of Russia’s significant nuclear capability and China’s expanding nuclear arsenal – requires the United States to maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear capability. The President’s FY23 defense budget provides for that investment through the modernization of our nuclear command, control, and communications system. It also fully funds the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine; ramps up production funding for the B-21 bomber; fully funds both the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent and the Long-Range Standoff weapon; and funds the revitalization of science and technology (S&T) research and development to keep pace with the evolving nuclear threat. The Department’s nuclear modernization investments will ensure our extended deterrence commitments for years to come.

Campaigning

Day after day, the Department will strengthen U.S. deterrence and increase our advantage against our competitors’ coercive measures through campaigning: the conduct and sequencing of coordinated military initiatives aimed at advancing well-defined, strategic priorities over time. The United States will operate forces, synchronize broader Departmental efforts, and align our activities with other instruments of national power to counter our competitors’ coercion, complicate their military preparations, and develop our own warfighting capabilities, along with those of our allies and partners.

In the Indo-Pacific region, campaigning requires thinking, acting, and operating differently every day, including by re-aligning our posture toward a more distributed footprint and building and exercising the preparatory elements needed in crisis and conflict, including infrastructure, logistics, dispersal and relocation. To that end, the President’s FY23 defense budget request makes clear that China is the Department’s pacing challenge, and it makes investments that robustly support the requirements of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, as well as the development of capabilities and operational concepts aligned to those requirements. This includes leveraging existing and emergent capabilities, posture, and exercises to influence China’s perception of asymmetric, temporal, and geographic advantages.

Specifically, the budget invests in site surveys and the planning and design for potential future military construction projects, in achieving initial operating capacity for new missile warning and tracking architecture, in defense of Guam efforts, in a framework for multinational information sharing and multi-domain training and experimentation, and in other security cooperation efforts to improve allied and partner capability and capacity in the region. The FY23 budget request includes significant investments in the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, and we remain grateful for congressional partnership in our efforts to address challenges posed by the PRC.

Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine poses a historic challenge to transatlantic security. We need to continue robust investments in all domains relevant to European security. The FY23 budget makes significant investments to support Ukraine’s self-defense efforts through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and includes funding to support security cooperation programs throughout Europe, strengthening the capability and capacity of our allies and partners in the region.

The Department was able to swiftly deploy additional forces to the European theater through our enhanced presence efforts, increasing readiness, operational flexibility, and interoperability with our

allies. All of this was made possible by sustained investments in the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). EDI has been vital to efforts to improve indications and warning, command and control, and mission command in Europe. Investments in EDI helped prepare U.S. and allied forces for the current situation in Europe, for credibly deterring an attack on alliance territory, and for ensuring we are ready to fight and win should deterrence fail. The Department is grateful to Congress for your leadership in the provision of EDI authorities and resources.

Meanwhile, Iran challenges Middle East stability and poses threats to U.S. forces, our partners, and the free flow of energy. At the same time, ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and other violent extremist organizations remain a proximate threat to the security of the United States, our citizens, and our interests in the Middle East and South Asia. In response, our forces increasingly need to operate forward with a sustainable military posture and an operationally ready force capable of deterring security threats.

Our FY23 investments in support of campaigning activities across the Middle East and South Asia are focused on technological advancement, partner engagement and coordination, and focused military operations. We also continue to bolster integrated air and missile defense and counter-UAS systems. We are proud to cooperate with our partners through regional multilateral exercises, MISO, foreign military sales, and efforts to secure access, basing, and overflight. And throughout the region, we remain committed to countering Iran's malign influence and to counterterrorism operations that degrade groups that have the will and capability to harm the United States.

In Africa, we face a series of intersecting challenges – from malign PRC activity, the evolution of violent extremist groups, and destabilizing transboundary dynamics across the continent. China and Russia have invested heavily in Africa to challenge U.S. influence and undermine our partners. In response, our forces in Africa are focused on day-to-day campaigning to counter violent extremist organization activity, strengthen the capability of our partners in the region, and observe, assess, and frustrate Chinese and Russian coercive behavior.

Our military personnel are engaged in campaigning activity throughout the Western Hemisphere to combat cross-cutting threats. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance solutions offer low-cost capabilities to compete in the gray zone. Through increased security cooperation and the sharing of information, our strong, willing partners in the region have become force multipliers.

In the homeland and the High North, our forces are working to sustain and strengthen U.S. deterrence to defend the United States and our allies and partners. The scale and scope of homeland vulnerabilities have fundamentally changed, and the United States faces multiple, simultaneous challenges from highly capable and advanced competitors, including nuclear and conventional missiles. Meanwhile, strategic competitors, rogue states, and non-state actors seek to strike institutions and critical infrastructure in the United States through cyber means to exploit our vulnerabilities, offset our military advantages, and disrupt our power-projection capabilities. At the same time, climate change is creating opportunities and vulnerabilities in the Arctic, requiring that we develop resilient infrastructure to support Arctic operations and train and equip our Joint Force to compete in this important region.

A globally integrated, layered defense remains critical to deterring and thwarting potential attacks against the U.S. homeland. Our campaigning efforts in the U.S. homeland support homeland defense by helping our forces gain and maintain domain awareness, information dominance, and decision

superiority. Annual exercises in the Arctic, including ARCTIC EDGE, ICEX, NORTHERN EDGE, and COLD RESPONSE, provide valuable experience and lessons-learned for conducting multi-domain operations while simultaneously demonstrating the U.S. commitment to a free, peaceful, stable, and open Arctic region.

Building Enduring Advantage

Finally, the Department must maintain our enduring advantage to continue to field the best joint fighting force in the world. That means changing and adapting the ways we operate across domains and within our Joint Force and the Department to ensure that the Joint Force will deter conflict across all theaters and domains now and in the future.

To construct a durable foundation for our future military advantage, the Department – working in concert with other U.S. departments and agencies, Congress, the private sector, and our valued allies and partners – will move swiftly in five key ways.

Transform the Foundation of the Future Force. Building the Joint Force requires modernization of the Department’s force development, design, and business management practices over time. That starts with establishing a framework for strategic readiness. This framework will keep the Department’s eyes on the horizon, ensuring that the urgent and competing demands of the present are balanced with preparations for the future.

This effort requires investments in training, exercises, sustainment, and mission capability in all Military Services, the special operations community, and across the Joint Force. The Department is also updating and advancing its centerpiece joint training program to support integrated deterrence and campaigning by demonstrating and exercising our capabilities alongside our allies and partners.

The FY23 budget supports the exercise and engagement requirements of the 11 combatant commands, increases joint integration in Military Service exercises, and trains individuals and staffs in key joint skills. Our Department training efforts will better integrate major force elements across multiple levels of command and control in the conduct of Joint All Domain Operations against a strategic competitor, with live forces, virtual forces, allies, and partners.

Make the Right Technology Investments. The United States’ technological edge has long been key to our military advantage. To keep that edge razor-sharp, the Department will support the innovation ecosystem, both at home and in expanded partnerships with our allies and partners. That is why the FY23 budget request includes the largest research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E) budget in the Department’s history – more than a nine percent increase over last year’s already historic RDT&E request.

Our investments to build enduring advantages include resources for science and technology research, the National Defense Education Program, and the Department’s educational and STEM programs, ranging from K-12 to the postgraduate level and continuing through employment.

The Department will also invest further in the Rapid Development and Experimentation Reserve (RDER), which brings together the Military Services and combatant commands to experiment with advanced and emerging technologies. RDER’s continuous, coordinated iteration across global and

virtual exercises moves advanced capabilities into the hands of warfighters earlier, while developing new operational concepts and demonstrating our capacity for innovation to our competitors.

In addition, the Department is committed to making the United States a world leader in 5G by working with the commercial sector and fielding 5G to the warfighter. We are enhancing the cybersecurity of the defense industrial base by sharing information and providing tools and expertise. By fielding resilient GPS and alternative Position, Navigation, and Timing capabilities to our most critical systems, we are enabling continuous operations in degraded environments. We are also prioritizing the Artificial Intelligence and Data Accelerator initiative to support combatant commands with urgently needed data, analytics, and AI-enabled capabilities.

Adapt and Fortify Our Defense Ecosystem. The Department will prioritize joint efforts with the full range of domestic and international partners in the defense ecosystem. This will help us fortify the defense industrial base, our logistical systems, and relevant global supply chains against subversion, compromise, and theft.

The FY23 budget request includes significant investment in microelectronics, casting and forging, batteries and energy storage, strategic and critical minerals, and kinetic capabilities. The Department will also adapt and fortify the defense ecosystem by fostering supply chain resilience, including by making use of the Defense Production Act Title III and the Industrial Base Analysis Sustainment Programs and maximizing Made in America manufacturing and procurement where appropriate.

The Department's ability to strengthen the defense ecosystem and project military force is inextricably linked to industry. Our industrial partners provide critical transportation capacity and the global networks to meet our day-to-day and wartime requirements. Our forces in U.S. Transportation Command spend approximately \$7 billion with industry each year in transportation services to execute defense requirements. Our proactive approach and vibrant relationships with our commercial partners ensure that we have sufficient military capacity to satisfy wartime demands at acceptable levels of risk, making use of our industry emergency preparedness programs, such as the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement, and a newly implemented Voluntary Tanker Agreement. We also maintain a strong relationship with the National Defense Transportation Association.

Strengthen Resilience and Adaptability. The Department must maintain our ability to respond quickly and effectively to emerging and transboundary threats such as climate change and pandemics. To that end, the budget invests in installation resilience and adaptation, operational energy and buying power, science and technology, and contingency preparedness. We will also invest in the Energy Resilience and the Conservation Investment Program, which allows us to carry out military construction projects that make our installations more energy resilient.

To further fight the damage wrought by climate change, the Department will strengthen resilience on several fronts. Climate change is a fact of life for Department of Defense installations around the country and the world that are facing rising sea levels and increasingly severe storms and droughts. The resilience of our installations is a critical component of our military readiness. Further, investing in more fuel-efficient platforms eases the logistics burden on the Joint Force and can extend the reach of our weapons systems. Finally, we must move with the commercial market toward electrification where it

makes sense if we are to avoid being left behind, stuck with old technologies that are expensive and difficult to sustain.

We must also learn from the current global pandemic and be more prepared for future outbreaks. Fighting COVID-19 will continue to be a priority for the Department, and our activities will be informed by the best science, the most rigorous evidence, and the need to maintain readiness.

The Department has worked hard to tackle the COVID-19 challenge, providing urgently needed support across the United States. That has included vaccinating our force, their families, and Americans around the country, sending vaccines around the world, and supporting stressed healthcare systems. Our determined COVID-19 response has also included procuring personal protective equipment, therapeutics, and tests on behalf of the Federal government. Safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 help ensure that we remain the best and most ready fighting force in the world.

Additionally, the FY23 budget request supports the Biological Threat Reduction Program (part of the DoD Cooperative Threat Reduction Program), which will help strengthen the Department's capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to global outbreaks of disease. The program also strengthens partner countries' capacities to mitigate biological threats – whether deliberate, natural, or accidental.

Cultivate the Workforce We Need. Strategies mean little without the right people to execute them. To recruit and retain the most talented workforce, we must advance our institutional culture and reform the way we do business. The Department must attract, train, and promote a workforce with the skills and abilities to tackle national security challenges creatively and capably in a complex global environment. Investments included in the FY23 budget request aim to diversify and dynamically shape the mix of skills and expertise among our workforce to meet the needs of our missions, now and in the future.

The Department must improve its capacity to find, support, and nurture an innovation-minded workforce to support our warfighters and encourage innovative best practices throughout the armed forces. The across-the-board pay raise of 4.6 percent is critical to compete for, hire, develop, and retain our force. Authorities for incentives, special pay rates, and workforce-development programs will be vital to growing our team.

Enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is fundamental to our strategy. Building a talented workforce that reflects our nation improves our ability to compete, deter, and win in today's increasingly complex global security environment – and doing so is a national security imperative.

Taking care of our workforce is also a national security imperative. Every day, Americans who answer the call to serve need the Department's support to do their best work to defend our country. Across the Department, we have implemented initiatives to make sure that Service members and their families, and our civilian and contractor employees, can stay safe, be healthy, and thrive.

That includes numerous efforts to combat sexual assault in the military. Sexual assault is an affront to our values and a threat to our readiness. Implementing the approved recommendations from the Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military requires a long-term culture change. We will not compromise on the safety of our teammates, and we will get this right.

In furtherance of these efforts, the FY23 budget request provides significant resources to reform military justice by putting prosecution decisions for sexual assault and other named offenses in the hands of trained, experienced attorneys; fielding a specialized prevention workforce in every Military Service to reduce sexual assault, suicide, and domestic violence; and providing sexual-assault response coordinators and victim advocates with independence and increased expertise needed to foster recovery and to ensure that victims have the resources they require.

The Department is deeply committed to the health and well-being of Service members and their families – in body and mind. That is why we have been clear: mental health is health. We are steadfastly committed to preventing, identifying, and treating mental health conditions across the force.

One suicide in the U.S. military is too many. Suicide stems from a complex interaction of factors, and there is no single fix. We are addressing the problem of suicide in the military comprehensively to increase access to mental health care, to reduce barriers to getting support, to combat old stigmas on getting help, and to reach out to populations at highest risk. Our FY23 budget request expands telehealth, implements programs to end stigma, optimizes use of mental health providers, embeds mental health providers in units, and conducts comprehensive mental health screening throughout one's service.

Serve Military Families. Child care support is essential to many in our Joint Force, and it is critical to the readiness, efficiency, and retention of our people. The Department provides high-quality, affordable child care for children from birth to age 12, through installation-based Child Development Programs and community-based fee assistance. To help meet the child care needs of our Service members and civilian workforce, the Department will invest in the construction of additional on-base child development centers, expand fee assistance programs, extend eligibility for fee assistance programs to lower income Department civilian employees, and support public-private partnerships to increase child care capacity in high-demand, low-capacity areas. The FY23 budget request also continues a promising pilot program that provides financial assistance to Service members to offset the cost of in-home child care.

The economic security of our Service members and military families is also critical. Military compensation must remain competitive with private sector pay, and we must address the high stress and demands on the force, today's tight labor market, and the effects of inflation on our Service members.

We will work across the Department to enhance support to military families, increase access to healthy food, improve financial resources, and increase awareness of available resources. The Department is focused on the food security of our military families, and we continue to gather data to better understand the problem of food insecurity. But we will not wait to take action. This is a multifaceted problem, without a single solution, and we will pursue several angles to get at this challenge.

The Department will also continue to improve the environment in and around our installations. This includes transitioning from the use of potentially harmful chemicals and cleaning up the soil and groundwater on and around our bases, to ensure that our military families and the surrounding communities have access to safe, clean drinking water. The budget invests in programs and initiatives to ensure that we are meeting these obligations.

Closing

Providing the resources for our strategy requires hard choices, which are reflected in the President's FY23 defense budget request. We have made some tough but necessary decisions already, such as shifting our posture, ending the U.S. war in Afghanistan, transitioning our combat forces in Iraq, and prioritizing modernization to meet future challenges. The Department undertook a rigorous analytical process to retire vulnerable systems and programs that no longer meet mission needs. That included the decommissioning of certain ships, including some Littoral Combat Ships, and divestment of some A-10s, E-3s, and KC-135s. Taken together, these savings will enable the Department to improve the Joint Force's efficiency and to redirect resources to higher national defense priorities.

We are focused on the most important security challenges facing the United States, while ensuring that we maintain the capabilities required to protect our global interests and respond to emerging crises around the world. We must maintain that discipline to move the Department forward – and we look forward to Congress's support and partnership as we build the force of the future.

The United States has advantages that no other country can match. We have the right strategy, resources, people, and partners around the globe to do precisely what the Department has always been called upon to do: defend the nation, protect our national interests, take care of our outstanding people, and work as a team with those who share our values. We will continue to help lead the free and open international system through this tumultuous period to a place of greater peace, prosperity, and stability.

Ultimately, America's strength stems not just from our military might but from our democratic values, our Constitution, our open society, our diversity, our creativity, our hard-fought operational experience, our unmatched network of allies and partners, our valued colleagues across the U.S. Government, our civilian and contractor workforce, and above all, the extraordinary patriots of our All-Volunteer Force and their stalwart families. We will meet the nation's security challenges with the vigor to prevail in the near term and the strategy, resilience, and wisdom to remain strong in the long term.