

TRANSCRIPT

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Secretary of War Pete Hegseth Addresses General and Flag Officers at Quantico, Virginia, Sept. 30, 2025

SECRETARY OF WAR PETE HEGSETH: Mr. Chairman, the joint chiefs, generals, admirals, commanders, officers, senior enlisted, NCOs, enlisted and every member of our American military, good morning.

UNKNOWN: Morning.

SECRETARY OF WAR PETE HEGSETH: Good morning and welcome to the War Department because the era of the Department of Defense is over.

You see, the motto of my first platoon was those *who long for peace must prepare for war.* This is, of course, not a new idea. This crowd knows that.

The origin dates to fourth century Rome and has been repeated ever since, including by our first commander in chief, George Washington, the first leader of the War Department. It captures a simple yet profound truth. *To ensure peace, we must prepare for war.*

From this moment forward, the only mission of the newly restored Department of War is this:

- warfighting,
- preparing for war and
- preparing to win,
- unrelenting and
- uncompromising

in that pursuit not because we want war, no one here wants war, but it's because we love peace. We love peace for our fellow citizens. They deserve peace, and they rightfully expect us to deliver.

Our number one job, of course, is to be strong so that we can prevent war in the first place. The president talks about it all the time. It's called **peace through strength**. And as history teaches us, the only people who actually deserve peace are those who are willing to wage war to defend it.

That's why pacifism is so naive and dangerous.

- It ignores human nature and
- it ignores human history.

Either you protect your people and your sovereignty or you will be subservient to something or someone. It's a **truth** as old as time.

And since waging war is so costly in blood and treasure, we owe our republic a military that will win any war we choose or any war that is thrust upon us.

Should our enemies choose foolishly to challenge us, they will be crushed by the

- violence,
- precision and
- ferocity of the War Department.

In other words, to our enemies: FAFO! [Fuck Around, Find Out!]

UNKNOWN: Fantastic.

SECRETARY OF WAR PETE HEGSETH: If necessary, our troops can translate that for you.

Another way to put it is peace through strength brought to you by the warrior ethos, and we are restoring both.

As President Trump has said, and he's right, we have the strongest,

- most powerful,
- most lethal and
- most prepared military on the planet.

That is true, full stop.

Nobody can touch us.

It's not even close.

This is true largely because of the historic investments that he made in his first term, and we will continue in this term. But it's also true because of the leaders

in this room and the incredible troops that you all lead. But the world, and as the chairman mentioned, our enemies get a vote.

You feel it.

I feel it.

This is a **moment** of urgency, mounting urgency.

Enemies gather.

Threats grow.

There is no time for games. We must be prepared. If we're going to prevent and avoid war, we must prepare **now**. We are the strength part of **peace through strength**, and either we're ready to win or we are not. You see,

this **urgent moment** of course **requires**

- more troops,
- more munitions,
- more drones,
- more Patriots,
- more submarines,
- more B-21 bombers. It requires
- more innovation,
- more AI in everything and ahead of the curve,
- more cyber effects,
- more counter UAS,
- more space,
- more speed.

America is the strongest, but we need to get stronger and quickly. The time is **now** and the cause is **urgent**.

The **moment** **requires**

- restoring and
- refocusing

- our defense industrial base,
- our shipbuilding industry and

- onshoring all critical components.

It **requires**, as President Trump has done, getting our allies and partners to step up and share the burden.

America cannot do everything. The free world **requires** allies with

- real hard power,
- real military leadership and
- real military capabilities.

The **War Department** is tackling and prioritizing all of these things, and I'll be giving a speech next month that'll showcase

- the speed,
- innovation and
- generational acquisition reforms we are undertaking **urgently**.

Likewise, the nature of the threats we face in our hemisphere and in deterring China is another speech for another day coming soon.

This speech today -- as I drink my coffee, this speech today is about people and it's about culture.

The topic today is about the nature of ourselves, because

- no plan,
- no program,
- no reform,
- no formation

will ultimately succeed unless we have

- the right people and
- the right culture at the War Department.

If I've learned one core lesson in my eight months in this job, it's that

- personnel is policy.
- Personnel is policy.

The best way to take care of troops is to give them good leaders committed to the warfighting culture of the department, not perfect leaders,

- good leaders,
- competent,
- qualified,

- professional,
- agile,
- aggressive,
- innovative,
- risk-taking,
- apolitical,
- faithful to their oath and to the Constitution.

Eugene Sledge in his World War II memoir wrote,

"War is brutish, inglorious, and a terrible waste. Combat leaves an indelible mark on those who are forced to endure it. The only redeeming factors are my comrades' incredible bravery and their devotion to each other."

In combat, there are thousands of variables, as I learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, and as so many of you did in so many more places.

Leaders can only control about three of them. You control

- how well you're trained, mostly
- how well you're equipped, and the last variable is
- how well you lead.

After that, you're on your own.

Our warfighters are entitled to be led by the best and most capable leaders. That is who we need you all to be. Even then, in combat, even if you do everything right, you may still lose people because the enemy always gets a vote.

We have a sacred duty to ensure that our warriors are led by the most capable and qualified combat leaders. This is one thing you and I can control, and we owe it to the force to deliver.

For too long, we have simply not done that. The military has been forced by foolish and reckless politicians to focus on the wrong things. In many ways, this speech is about fixing decades of decay, some of it obvious, some of it hidden, or as the chairman has put it, we are

- clearing out the debris,
- removing the distractions,
- clearing the way for leaders to be leaders.

You might say we're ending the war on warriors. I heard someone wrote a book about that. For too long, we've promoted too many uniformed leaders for the wrong reasons,

- based on their race,
- based on gender quotas,
- based on historic so-called firsts.

We've pretended that combat arms and non-combat arms are the same thing. We've weeded out so-called **toxic leaders** under the guise of double blind psychology assessments, promoting risk averse go along to get along conformists instead. You name it, the department did it.

Foolish and reckless political leaders set the wrong compass heading and we lost our way. We became the woke department.

But not anymore. Right now, I'm looking out at a sea of Americans who **made a choice** when they were young men and young women to do something most Americans will not, to serve something greater than yourself, to fight

- for God and country,
- for freedom and the Constitution.

You **made a choice** to serve when others did not, and I commend you.

You are truly the best of America.

But this does not mean, and this goes for all of us, that our path to this auditorium on this day was a straight line, or that the conditions of the formations we lead are where we want them to be.

- You love your country and
- we love this uniform,

which is why we must do better.

We just have to be honest. We have to say with our mouths what we see with our eyes, to just tell it like it is in plain English, to point out the obvious things right in front of us.

That's what leaders must do.

We cannot go another day

- without directly addressing the plank in our own eye,
- without addressing the problems in our own commands and in our own formations.

This administration has done a great deal from day one to remove the social justice, politically correct, and toxic ideological garbage that had infected our department, to rip out the politics.

- No more identity months, DEI offices, dudes in dresses.
- No more climate change worship.
- No more division, distraction or gender delusions.
- No more debris.

As I've said before and will say again, we are done with that shit. I've made it my mission to uproot the obvious distractions that made us less capable and less lethal. That said, the **War Department requires** the next step.

Underneath the woke garbage is a deeper problem and a more important problem that we are fixing and fixing fast. Common sense is back at the White House, so making the necessary changes is actually pretty straightforward. President Trump expects it.

And the litmus test for these changes is pretty simple.

Would I want my eldest son, who is 15 years old, eventually joining the types of formations that we are currently wielding?

If in any way the answer to that is no, or even yes but, then we're doing something wrong, because my son is no more important than any other American citizen who dons the cloth of our nation. He is no more important than your son, all precious souls made in the image and likeness of God.

Every parent deserves to know that their son or their daughter that joins our ranks is entering exactly the kind of unit that the secretary of war would want his son to join.

Think of it as the **Golden Rule** test. Jesus said *"do unto others that which you would have done unto yourself."* It's the ultimate simplifying test of **truth**.

The new **War Department golden rule** is this: do unto your unit as you would you want him serving with

- fat or
- unfit or
- under trained troops or
- alongside people who can't meet basic standards, or
- in a unit where standards were lowered so certain types of troops could make it in,
- in a unit where leaders were promoted for reasons other than merit, performance and warfighting?

The answer is not just no, it's hell no.

This means at the **War Department** first and foremost we must restore

- a ruthless,
- dispassionate and
- common sense

application of standards.

I don't want my son serving

- alongside troops who are out of shape or
- in combat unit with females who can't meet the same combat arms physical standards as men, or
- troops who are not fully proficient on their assigned weapons platform or task or
- under a leader who was the first but not the best.

Standards must be

- uniform,
- gender neutral and
- high.

If not,

- they're not standards.
- They're just suggestions,
- suggestions that get our sons and daughters killed.

When it comes to combat arms units, and there are many different stripes across our joint force, the era of

- politically correct,
- overly sensitive,
- don't hurt anyone's feelings leadership ends **right now**.

At every level,

- either you can meet the standard,
- either you can do the job,
- either you are disciplined, fit and trained,
- or you are out.

And that's why **today at my direction** -- and this is the first of ten Department of War directives that are arriving at your commands as we speak and in your inbox.

Today, at my direction, each service will ensure that every requirement for every combat MOS, for every designated combat arms position returns to the highest male standard only.

Because this job is **life or death**. Standards must be met. And not just met. At every level, we should seek

- to exceed the standard,
- to push the envelope,
- to compete.

It's common sense and core to who we are and what we do. It should be in our DNA.

Today, at my direction, we are also adding a combat field test for combat arms units that must be executable in any environment at any time and with combat equipment. These tests, they'll look familiar. They'll resemble the Army Expert Physical Fitness Assessment or the Marine Corps Combat Fitness Test. I'm also directing that warfighters in combat jobs execute their service fitness test at a gender-neutral age normed male standard scored above 70 percent.

It all starts with physical fitness and appearance.

If the secretary of war can do regular hard PT, so can every member of our joint force.

Frankly, it's tiring to look out at combat formations, or really any formation, and see fat troops. Likewise, it's completely unacceptable to see fat generals and admirals in the halls of the Pentagon and leading commands around the country and the world.

- It's a bad look.
- It is bad, and
- it's not who we are.

So, whether you're

- an airborne Ranger or
- a chairborne Ranger,
- a brand new private or

- a four star general,

you need to meet the height and weight standards and pass your PT test.

And as the chairman said, yes, there is no PT test. But **today, at my direction**, every member of the joint force at every rank is required to take a PT test twice a year, as well as meet height and weight requirements twice a year every year of service.

Also **today, at my direction**, every warrior across our joint force is required to do PT every duty day.

It should be common sense, and most units do that already, but we're codifying it. And we're not talking, like, hot yoga and stretching, real hard PT and as -- either as a unit or as an individual.

At every level, from the Joint Chiefs to everyone in this room to the youngest private, leaders set the standard. And so many of you do this already, active, guard and reserve.

This also means grooming standards.

- No more beards,
- long hair,
- superficial individual expression.

We're going to

- cut our hair,
- shave our beards, and
- adhere to standards.

Because it's like the broken windows theory in policing. It's like you let the small stuff go, the big stuff eventually goes, so you have to address the small stuff.

This is

- on duty,
- in the field and
- in the rear.

If you want a beard, you can join Special Forces. If not, then shave.

We don't have a military full of Nordic pagans. But unfortunately, we have had leaders who either refuse to call BS and enforce standards, or leaders who felt like they were not allowed to enforce standards.

Both are unacceptable. And that's why **today, at my direction**, the era of unprofessional appearance is over. No more beardos. The era of rampant and ridiculous shaving profiles is done. Simply put, if

- you do not meet the male level physical standards for combat positions,
- cannot pass a PT test or
- don't want to shave and look professional,

it's time for a new position or a new profession.

I sincerely appreciate the proactive efforts the secretaries have already taken in some of those areas -- service secretaries. And these directives are intended to simply accelerate those efforts.

On the topic of standards, allow me a few words to talk about **toxic** leaders.

Upholding and demanding high standards

- is **not toxic**.

Enforcing high standards,

- **not toxic** leadership.

Leading warfighters toward the goals of

- high,
- gender-neutral and
- uncompromising

standards in order to forge a

- cohesive,
- formidable and
- lethal

Department of War

- is **not toxic**.

It is our duty consistent with our constitutional oath.

- Real **toxic** leadership is endangering subordinates with low standards.
- Real **toxic** leadership is promoting people based on immutable characteristics or quotas instead of based on merit.
- Real **toxic** leadership is promoting destructive ideologies that are an anathema to the Constitution and the laws of nature and nature's God, as Thomas Jefferson wrote in the *Declaration of Independence*.

The definition of **toxic** has been turned upside down, and we're correcting that.

That's why **today, at my direction** we're undertaking a full review of the department's definitions of so-called **toxic** leadership, bullying and hazing, to empower leaders to enforce standards without fear of retribution or second guessing.

Of course, you can't do, like, nasty bullying and hazing. We're talking about words like bullying and hazing and **toxic**. They've been weaponized and bastardized inside our formations, undercutting commanders and NCOs. No more.

- Setting,
- achieving and
- maintaining

high standards is what you all do.

And if that makes me **toxic**, then so be it.

Second, today, at our direction, we're ensuring that

- every service,
- every unit,
- every schoolhouse and
- every form of professional military education

conduct an immediate review of their standards. Now, we've done this in many places already, but today it goes across the entire Department of War.

Any place where tried and true physical standards were altered, especially since 2015 when combat arms standards were changed to ensure females could qualify, must be returned to their original standard.

Other standards have been manipulated to hit racial quotas as well, which is just as unacceptable. This too must end; merit only.

The President talks about it all the time, merit-based.

Here are two basic frameworks I urge you to pursue in this process, standards I call -- my staff's heard all about them, the 1990 test and the E-6 test.

The 1990 test is simple. What were the military standards in 1990? And if they have changed, tell me why. Was it a necessary change based on the evolving landscape of combat, or was the change due to a

- softening,
- weakening or
- gender-based

pursuit of other priorities? 1990 seems to be as good a place to start as any.

And the E-6 test. Ask yourself does what you're doing make the leadership, accountability and lethality efforts of an E-6 or, frankly, an O-3, does it make it easier or more complicated?

Does the change empower staff sergeants, petty officers and tech sergeants to get back to basics?

The answer should be a resounding yes. The E-6 test or O-3 test clarifies a lot, and it clarifies quickly.

Because

- war does not care if you're a man or a woman.
- Neither does the enemy,
- nor does the weight of your rucksack,
- the size of an artillery round or
- the body weight of a casualty on the battlefield who must be carried.

This -- and I want to be very clear about this. This is not about preventing women from serving. We very much value the impact of female troops. Our female officers and NCOs are the absolute best in the world.

But when it comes to any job that requires physical power to perform in combat, those physical standards must be high and gender-neutral.

If women can make it, excellent. If not, it is what it is. If that means no women qualify for some combat jobs, so be it.

That is not the intent, but it could be the result. So be it.

It will also mean that weak men won't qualify because we're not playing games.

- This is combat.
- This is **life or death**. As we all know,
- this is you versus an enemy hell bent on killing you.

To be an effective lethal fighting force, you must trust that the warrior alongside you in battle is capable, truly physically capable of doing what is necessary under fire.

You know this is the only standard you would want for your kids and for your grandkids.

Apply

- the **War Department Golden Rule**,
- the 1990 test and
- the E-6 test,

and it's really hard to go wrong.

Third, we are attacking and ending the walking on **eggshells** and zero defect command culture.

- A risk averse culture means officers execute not to lose instead of to win.
- A risk averse culture means NCOs are not empowered to enforce standards.
- Commanders and NCOs don't take necessary risks or make tough adjustments for fear of rocking the boat or making mistakes.

A blemish free record is what peacetime leaders covet the most, which is the worst of all incentives. You, we as senior leaders, need to end the poisonous culture of risk aversion and empower our NCOs at all levels to enforce standards.

Truth be told, for the most part we don't need new standards. We just need to reestablish a culture where enforcing standards is possible.

And that's why **today, at my direction**, I'm issuing new policies that will overhaul the IG, EO and MEO processes. I call it the no more walking on **eggshells** policy.

- We are liberating commanders and NCOs.
- We are liberating you.
- We are overhauling an inspector general process, the IG, that has been weaponized, putting complainers, ideologues and poor performers in the driver's seat.

We're doing the same with the equal opportunity and military equal opportunity policies, the EO and MEO, at our department.

- No more frivolous complaints.
- No more anonymous complaints.
- No more repeat complainants.
- No more smearing reputations.

- No more endless waiting.
- No more legal limbo.
- No more sidetracking careers.
- No more walking on eggshells.

Of course, being a racist has been illegal in our formation since 1948. The same goes for sexual harassment. Both are wrong and illegal. Those kinds of infractions will be ruthlessly enforced.

But telling someone

- to shave or
- get a haircut or
- to get in shape or
- to fix their uniform or
- to show up on time,
- to work hard,

that's exactly the kind of discrimination we want.

We are not civilians. You are not civilians. You are set apart for a distinct purpose.

So, we as a department need to stop acting and thinking like civilians and get back to basics and put the power back in the hands of

- commanders and NCOs,
- commanders and NCOs who make life and death decisions,
- commanders and NCOs who enforce standards and ensure readiness,

- commanders and NCOs who in this War Department have to look in the mirror and have to pass the Golden Rule test,
- my kids,
- your kids,
- America's sons and daughters.

So, I urge you all here **today** and those watching, take this guidance and run with it. The core of this speech is the **ten directives** we're announcing **today**. They were written

- for you,
- for Army leadership,
- for Navy leadership, f
- or Marine Corps leadership,
- for Air Force leadership,
- Space Force leadership.

These directives are designed to take the monkey off your back and put you, the leadership, back in the driver's seat.

Move out with urgency because

- we have your back.
- I have your back, and
- the commander in chief has your back.

And when we give you this guidance, we know mistakes will be made.

It's the nature of leadership. But you should not pay for earnest mistakes for your entire career.

And that's why **today, at my direction**, we're making changes to the retention of adverse information on personnel records that will allow leaders with forgivable earnest or minor infractions to not be encumbered by those infractions in perpetuity.

People make honest mistakes, and our mistakes should not define an entire career. Otherwise, we only try not to make mistakes, and that's not the business we're in.

We need

- risk takers and
- aggressive leaders and
- a culture that supports you.

Fourth, at the **War Department**, promotions across the joint force will be based on one thing: merit; colorblind, gender-neutral, **merit** based.

The entire promotion process, including evaluations of warfighting capabilities, is being thoroughly reexamined. We've already done a lot in this area, but more changes are coming soon.

We'll promote top performing officers and NCOs faster and get rid of poor performers more quickly.

- Evaluations,
- education and
- field exercises

will become real evaluations, not box checks, for every one of us at every level.

These same reforms happened before World War II as well. General George Marshall and Secretary of War Henry Stimson did the same thing, and we won a world war because of it.

As it happens, when he started the job, Chairman Caine gave me a frame and a photo to hang in my office. A matching frame and photo hangs in his. It's a photo of Marshall and Stimson preparing for World War II. Those two leaders famously kept the door open between their offices for the entirety of the war.

They worked together, civilian and uniform, every single day. Chairman Caine and I do the same. There is no daylight between us. Our doors are always open. Our job together is to ensure our military is led by the very best ready to answer the nation's call.

Fifth, as you have seen and the media has obsessed over, I have fired a number of senior officers since taking over, the previous chairman, other members of the Joint Chiefs, combatant commanders and other commanders.

The rationale, for me, has been straightforward. It's nearly impossible to change a culture with the same people who helped create or even benefited from that culture, even if that culture was created by a previous president and previous secretary.

My approach has been simple. When in doubt,

- assess the situation,
- follow your gut and, if it's the best for the military,
- make a change.

We all serve at the pleasure of the President every single day. But in many ways, it's not their fault. It's not your fault. As foolish and reckless as the woke department was, those officers were following elected political leadership.

An entire generation of generals and admirals were told that they must parrot the insane fallacy that "*our diversity is our strength*."

Of course, we know our unity is our strength.

- They had to put out dizzying DEI and LGBTQI+ statements.
- They were told females and males are the same thing, or that males who think they're females is totally normal.
- They were told that we need a green fleet and electric tanks.
- They were told to kick out Americans who refused an emergency vaccine.
- They followed civilian policies set by foolish and reckless political leaders.

Our job, my job, has been to determine which leaders simply did what they must to answer the prerogatives of civilian leadership and which leaders are truly invested in the woke department and therefore incapable of embracing the **War Department** and executing new lawful orders.

That's it. It's that simple. So, for the past eight months, we've gotten a good look under the hood of our officer corps. We've done our best to thoroughly

assess the human terrain. We've had to make trade-offs and some difficult decisions. It's more of an art than science. We have been and will continue to be judicious but also expeditious.

The new compass heading is clear. Out with the Chiarellis, the McKenzies and the Milleys, and in with the Stockdales, the Schwarzkopfs and the Pattons.

More leadership changes will be made, of that I'm certain, not because we want to but because we must. Once again, this is **life and death**. The sooner we have the right people, the sooner we can advance the right policies. **Personnel is policy.**

But I look out at this group and I see great Americans, leaders who have given decades to our great republic at great sacrifice to yourselves and to your families.

But if the **words** I'm speaking today are **making your heart sink**, then you should do the honorable thing and resign. We would thank you for your service.

But I suspect, I know, the overwhelming majority of you feel the opposite. These **words make your hearts full**. You love the **War Department** because you love what you do, the profession of arms.

You are hereby liberated to be

- an apolitical,
- hard charging,
- no nonsense

constitutional leader that you joined the military to be.

We need you locked in on the M, not the D, the E or the I, not the DEI or the DIE of DIME. By that I mean the M, military, of the instruments of national power.

We have entire departments across the government dedicated to diplomatic, informational and economic lines of effort. We do the M. Nobody else does. And our GOFOs need to master it in every domain, in every scenario,

- no more distractions,
- no more political ideologies,
- no more debris.

Now, of course, we're going to disagree at times. We would not be Americans if we didn't.

Being a leader in a large organization like ours means having frank conversations and differences of opinion.

You will win some arguments and you will lose some arguments.

But when civilian leaders issue lawful orders, we execute.

We are professionals in the profession of arms.

Our entire constitutional system is predicated upon this understanding.

Now, it seems like a small thing, but it's not.

This includes as well the behavior of our troops online. To that end, I want to thank and recognize the services for their new proactive social media policies. Use them.

Anonymous online or keyboard complaining is not worthy of a warrior. It's cowardice masquerading as conscience.

Anonymous unit level social media pages that

- trash commanders,
- demoralize troops and
- undermine unit cohesion

must not be tolerated. Again, O-3s, E-6s.

Sixth, we must train and we must maintain.

Any moment that we are not training on our mission or maintaining our equipment is a moment we are less prepared for preventing or winning the next war.

That is why **today, at my direction**, we are drastically reducing the ridiculous amount of mandatory training that individuals and units must execute.

We've already ended the most egregious. Now we're giving you back real time;

- less PowerPoint briefings and
- fewer online courses,
- more time in the motor pool and
- more time on the range.

Our job is to make sure you have the money, equipment, weapons and parts to train and maintain, and then you take it from there.

You all know this because it's common sense. The tougher and the higher the standards in our units, the higher the retention rates in those units.

- Warriors want to be challenged.
- Troops want to be tested.

When

- you don't train and
- you don't maintain,
- you demoralize.

And that's when our best people decide to take their talents to the civilian world.

The leaders who created the woke department have already driven out too many hard chargers. We reverse that trend right now.

There is no world in which high intensity war exists

- without pain,
 - agony and
 - human tragedy.
-
- We are in a dangerous line of work.
 - You are in a dangerous line of work.

We may lose good people, but let no warrior cry out from the grave *"if only I had been properly trained."*

We will not lose warfighters because we failed to train or equip them or resource them. Shame on us if we do.

Train like your warriors lives depend on it, because they do. To that point, basic training is being restored to what it should be,

- scary,
- tough and
- disciplined.

We're empowering drill sergeants to instill healthy fear in new recruits, ensuring that future warfighters are forged.

Yes,

- they can shark attack,
- they can toss bunks,

- they can swear, and yes,
- they can put their hands on recruits.

This does not mean they can be reckless or violate the law, but they can use tried and true methods to motivate new recruits, to make them the warriors they need to be. Back to basics at basic as well.

Of course, and you know this, basic training is not where mission readiness should end. The nature of the evolving threat environment demands that everyone in every job must be ready to join the fight if needed. A core credo of the Marine Corps is every Marine a rifleman.

It means that everyone, regardless of MOS, is proficient enough to engage an enemy threat at sea, in the air or in a so-called rear area. We need to ensure that every member of our uniformed military maintains baseline proficiency in basic combat skills, especially because the next war, like the last, will likely not have a rear area.

Finally, as President Trump rightly pointed out when he changed the department name, the United States has not won a major theater war since the name was changed to the Department of Defense in 1947.

One conflict stands out in stark contrast, the Gulf War.

Why?

Well, there's a number of reasons, but it was a limited mission with overwhelming force and a clear end state.

But why did we execute and win the Gulf War the way we did in 1991?

There's two overwhelming reasons.

- One was President Ronald Reagan's military buildup gave an overwhelming advantage, and
- two, military and Pentagon leadership had previous formative battlefield experiences.

The men who led this department during the Gulf War were mostly combat veterans of the Vietnam War. They said never again to mission creep or nebulous end states.

The same holds true today. Our civilian and military leadership is chock full of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who say never again to nation building and nebulous end states.

This clear eyed view all the way to the White House, combined with President Trump's military buildup, postures us for future victories if, and we will, and when we embrace the **War Department**.

And we must.

- We are preparing every day.
- We have to be prepared for war, not for defense.
- We're training warriors, not defenders.
- We fight wars to win, not to defend.

Defense is something you do all the time. It's inherently reactionary and can lead to

- overuse,
- overreach and
- mission creep.

War is something you do sparingly on our own terms and with clear aims. We fight to win. We unleash overwhelming and punishing violence on the enemy.

We also don't fight with stupid rules of engagement. We untie the hands of our warfighters to

- intimidate,
- demoralize,
- hunt and
- kill

the enemies of our country. No more politically correct and overbearing rules of engagement, just

- common sense,
- maximum lethality and
- authority for warfighters.

That's all I ever wanted as a platoon leader. And it's all my E-6 squad leaders ever wanted, back to that E-6 rule. We let our leaders fight their formations and then we have their back. It's very simple yet incredibly powerful.

A few months ago, I was at the White House when President Trump announced his **liberation day** for America's trade policy. It was a landmark day.

Well, today is another **liberation day**, the liberation of America's warriors,

- in name,
- in deed and
- in authorities.

- You kill people and break things for a living.
- You are not politically correct and don't necessarily belong always in polite society.

- We are not an army of one.
- We are a joint force of millions of selfless Americans.
- We are warriors.
- We are purpose built not for fair weather, blue skies or calm seas.
- We were built to load up in the back of helicopters, five tons, or Zodiacs in the dead of night, in fair weather or foul to go to dangerous places to find those who would do our nation harm and deliver justice on behalf of the American people in close and brutal combat if necessary.

You are different.

- *We fight not because we hate what's in front of us.*
- *We fight because we love what's behind us.*

You see, the Ivy League faculty lounges will never understand us. And that's okay, because they could never do what you do.

The media will mischaracterize us. And that's okay, because deep down they know the reason they can do what they do is you.

In this profession, you feel comfortable inside the violence so that our citizens can live peacefully.

- Lethality is our calling card and
- victory our only acceptable end state.

In closing, a few weeks ago at our monthly Pentagon Christian prayer service I recited a commander's prayer. It's a simple yet meaningful prayer for wisdom for commanders and leaders.

I encourage you to look it up if you've never seen it. But the prayer, it ends like this.

And most of all, Lord, please keep my soldiers safe,

- *lead them,*
- *guide them,*
- *protect them,*
- *watch over them.*
- *And as you gave all of yourself for me,*
- *help me give all of myself for them.*

And Amen.

I've prayed this prayer many times since I've had the privilege of being your Secretary, and I will continue to pray this prayer for each of you as you command and lead our nation's finest.

Go forth and do good things, hard things.

President Trump has your back and so do I, and you'll hear from him shortly. Move out and draw fire, because we are the **War Department**. Godspeed.

Transcript nach rhetorischem Gesichtspunkt graphisch bearbeitet als Beitrag zum Artikel in der Kolumne der Redemanufaktur ***Change, Challenge, Chance.*** ***Hegseths Rede an die Generäle.*** Géza Ákos Molnár – 21.10.2025

Rede u.a. hier zu sehen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOXbRu43ok8>

