



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

NOV 13 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EMPLOYEES

SUBJECT: Initial Message to the Department

Apart from leading fighting men and women in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq earlier in my career, serving as your Acting Secretary of Defense is the greatest privilege of my professional life.

Our mission at the Department of Defense has been – and remains – serving the people of the United States with honor and integrity so that they may continue to enjoy the blessings of freedom and liberty. To do this, we must take care of each other, focus on outcomes, and remain the most dynamic and innovative organization and fighting force in the world.

With a foundation built upon respect, professionalism, competence, and honesty, we will continue to transform our Department to compete in a new strategic environment. This requires changes in organizations, skills, and decision-making processes. But we know how to do this. We have done it before – and no one on earth does it better. We will continue to aggressively challenge established paradigms, maintain and modify those that have value, and courageously discard those that have run their course.

Today, with enormous gratitude to those who came before us, we face the future with confidence and humility. We are the inheritors of the genius of our founders and generations of successors who created an organization ruthlessly committed to excellence, non-partisanship, and servant leadership. This motivates me enormously and allows me to face the daily challenges of our chosen calling.

The opportunity to again work with all of you and serve as your leader is something that could only happen in America. After all, I still see myself as a kid from Iowa who enlisted to serve his Nation, be challenged, and do something that matters – which is what each of you do *every day*. I am a better person thanks to the opportunities that the Army and the Department of Defense provided me, and my story, while not distinctive, is emblematic of the boundless opportunities that are available in this ongoing experiment of democracy. To each of you, I offer my utmost gratitude and respect for your willingness to sacrifice so much to our vital mission.

My thoughts, hopes, dreams, and prayers are with all of you and your loved ones as we resolutely lean into the future and update our processes and structures to guarantee that our Armed Forces remain preminent and the beacon of justice and goodness in the world.

As we prepare for the future, we remain committed to finishing the war that Al Qaida brought to our shores in 2001. This war isn't over. We are on the verge of defeating Al Qaida and its associates, but we must avoid our past strategic error of failing to see the fight through to the finish. Indeed, this fight has been long, our sacrifices have been enormous, and many are



weary of war – I’m one of them – but this is the critical phase in which we transition our efforts from a leadership to supporting role. We are not a people of perpetual war – it is the antithesis of everything for which we stand and for which our ancestors fought. All wars must end.

Ending wars requires compromise and partnership. We met the challenge; we gave it our all. Now, it’s time to come home. As I consider the scarring but ennobling experience many of us have undergone during this war, the words of Abraham Lincoln during his second Inaugural Address bring me strength, perspective, and confidence:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

To all of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Space Professionals, and civilians: Continue to be bold. Continue to be courageous. Continue to set the example of selfless service that is the envy of the world and an example for our citizens. Our tasks are not easy. The burden is great. But *together* we will take our Nation to new heights.

What a magnificent time to be a part of the Department of Defense and the United States Armed Forces. Our Nation needs you, and I’m enormously proud of you. I am humbled and honored to be on your team.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher C. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher C. Miller  
Acting