



THE HONORABLE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III

Secretary of Defense

SASC Opening Testimony – 10 June 2021

(1422 words / 10 min)

(As Prepared)

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee -- thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the President's budget request for fiscal year 2022.

I'm pleased to appear before you alongside General Milley, whose advice and counsel has been crucial to us as we developed our budget and as we continue to defend this nation, which is our chief responsibility and my top priority.

I'm also glad to be joined by our Comptroller and CFO, Mr. Mike McCord.

Let me say at the outset that I believe our budget request will help us match resources to strategy, strategy to policy, and policy to the will of the American people.

Informed by the President's Interim National Security guidance and my own Message to the Force, it funds the right mix of capabilities that we need *most* to defend this nation... now and in the future.

It invests in hypersonic weapons, artificial intelligence, micro-electronics, 5G technology, space-based systems, shipbuilding, and nuclear modernization... to name a few.

In fact, this budget asks you to approve nearly 28 billion dollars to modernize our nuclear triad and 112 billion dollars for research, development, test and evaluation -- the largest R&D request ever put forth by this Department.

Our request also gives us the flexibility to divest ourselves of systems and platforms that no longer adequately meet our needs... including older ships, aircraft, and I-S-R platforms that demand more maintenance, upkeep, and risk than we can afford.

As you know, we have commissioned a Global Posture Review and a new National Defense Strategy, which will further inform and guide our resource decisions.

The Department must be ready to meet and keep pace with our competitors... and, if necessary, to fight and win the next war... not the last one.

That's why this budget stays true to our focus on matching the pacing challenge that we clearly see from the People's Republic of China, to include more than five billion dollars for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

And I would just add that our China Task Force has also completed its work.

Yesterday I issued an internal directive kicking off several Department-wide efforts that will, among other things, help bolster our deterrence against the PRC, revitalize our network of regional

allies and partners, and accelerate the development of cutting-edge capabilities and new operational concepts.

I look forward to discussing these important initiatives more as they develop, including any resource implications.

However, we recognize that China is not our only challenge.

Our budget also invests 617 million dollars to counter the damaging effects of climate change, and additional funds to prepare for future challenges like another pandemic.

It helps us counter the belligerence that we face from Russia, particularly in the cyber realm. You'll see more than 10 billion dollars here devoted to cyber security, cyberspace operations, and cyber research and development.

With its emphasis on space, missile defense, and more sophisticated sensors, our budget will also help us counter the increasing ballistic-missile capabilities of nations like North Korea and Iran.

It funds a troop presence and counter-terrorism capabilities in the Middle East and South Asia to meet the threats posed not only by Iran but also by terrorist networks like ISIS and al Qaeda... and, in Africa, like those posed by al Shabaab.

I am also confident that this budget will help us maintain the integrated deterrent capability and global posture necessary to back up the hard work of our diplomats, and demonstrate our resolve and leadership all over the world... alongside our allies and partners.

I know that Afghanistan remains at the top of all of our minds, and today I can report that the retrograde remains ahead of schedule.

We have accomplished the mission for which our troops were sent to Afghanistan 20 years ago.

And I'm very proud of the brave men and women who made it possible, and of those who gave their lives for that mission.

I am also deeply grateful to the families of our service members who have endured so much as they sent their sons, daughters, husbands, and wives into battle.

We will now transition to a new bilateral relationship with our Afghan partners... one that continues to help them meet *their* responsibilities to *their* citizens, but one that will not require a U.S. footprint larger than what's necessary to protect our diplomats.

And that's one reason why we are asking to move overseas contingency operations funding inside the budget.

This will give us -- and *you* -- greater transparency, accountability, and predictability in the budgeting process.

And, because all necessary provisions currently established in OCO funding are retained, we expect no impact to other operations.

This is the right thing to do... and, frankly, it's *overdue*.

Now, taking care of our people is *also* the right thing to do.

Our budget request increases funding to support in-home care and support, which has become increasingly important during the pandemic.

We will also be seeking funds to improve military base pay, retention bonuses, and other incentives that will help us attract and retain the best talent.

And we will be working hard to combat challenges that make service in the ranks more difficult for all the men and women of the Department... from getting a better handle on the extent to which we experience extremist behavior, to combating sexual assault and harassment.

As you know, my first directive as Secretary of Defense -- issued on my *first full day* in the office -- was to service leadership about sexual assault.

I made it clear then, and I still believe, that we *must not be afraid* to try new approaches... to *change our minds*... so that we can truly and fully address the scourge of sexual assault in our force.

Clearly, what we've been doing hasn't been working. One assault is too many.

The numbers of sexual assaults are still too high... and the confidence in our system is still too low.

The Independent Review Commission that we established has provided me with an initial set of recommendations, starting around the issue of accountability. This line of effort is focused on *how* these crimes are investigated and prosecuted.

I've shared these recommendations with General Milley and with the civilian and military leaders of the service branches.

I am carefully reviewing the feedback they have provided me.

There will be additional recommendations coming to us from the IRC on prevention, culture, and victim support.

I look forward to receiving them as well and making my full recommendations to the President later this month.

But I will say this to you, *today*: these are attacks *by* our own people... *on* our own people. And they tear at the very fabric of *who we are* and what we represent to each other and to the American people.

As I have said before, what we are doing is not working and we need to fix it.

I want to be sure that whatever changes to the UCMJ I recommend to the President -- and ultimately to this Committee -- are scoped to the problem we are trying to solve, have a clear way forward on implementation, and ultimately restore the confidence of the force in the system.

You have my commitment to that, and also my commitment to working expeditiously with you as you consider legislative proposals.

Whatever changes we make, I believe we need to focus on effective implementation and resourcing ... and I know I will need your help.

Chairman Reed, members of the committee, we field the greatest military in human history... made up of the finest men and women who have ever donned the cloth of their nation.

We also enjoy a civilian workforce deeply committed to every mission that we take on.

For all the things we know we need to do better, no adversary can match the quality of our people.

I am immensely proud and humbled to be of service to them and to serve again *with* them and their families.

I know the values they espouse, and the oath that they took. I know what they are capable of. And I believe that I have a very good sense of what they need to do their jobs.

I can assure you that the President's budget request for fiscal year 2022 fulfills that obligation.

I look forward to answering your questions.

And I thank you for the steadfast support that you continue to provide the Department of Defense, and for all the efforts you make every day to ensure that we remain ready to defend this nation.

Thank you very much.