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SecDef Lloyd James Austin

Message on Extremism in the Military

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[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Hello, everyone. I'm Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense.

I want to thank you for participating in this stand down, and I thank your leadership for supporting this important initiative.

And let me say right at the outset that there is not a single doubt in my mind that you take seriously your oath to the Constitution and that you serve this country with honor and dignity and character; and that you believe in, and uphold, our core values each and every day.

Many of you have deployed in harm's way to defend those values. And some of you are in harm's way at this very moment. And I want you to know that I'm grateful for that. I also want you to know that your fellow citizens are grateful for that.



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You see, we understand the sacrifices that you and your families are making to defend this nation. And we know a stand down like this can seem like yet another task to undertake, another burden.

But the truth of the matter is, we need your help. I'm talking, of course, about extremism and extremist ideology -- views and conduct that run counter to everything that we believe in and which can actually tear at the fabric of who we are as an institution.

You know, I've seen this before. I've lived through it, as a soldier and as a commander. It's not new to our country and, sadly, it's not new to our military.

What is new is the speed and the pervasiveness with which extremist ideology can spread today, thanks to social media and the aggressive and organized and emboldened attitude that many of these hate groups and their sympathizers are now applying to their recruitment and to their operations.

You know it concerns me to think that anyone wearing the uniform of a Soldier or a Sailor, an Airman, Marine, or Guardian, or Coast Guardsman would espouse these sorts of beliefs, let alone act on them.

But they do. Some of them still do.

We've got to be better than that, and not just for ourselves and the sort of work environment that we want to cultivate for each other, but also for the country and the very idea of what the United States represents to the world.

And that's the discussion that I want you to have today. I want you to revisit the oath that you took when you joined the military and when you reenlisted or got promoted.

Read those words again. Consider what they really mean. And think about the promise that you made to yourselves and to your teammates and to your fellow citizens.



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I also want you to share with your leadership your own personal experiences with encountering extremists and extremist ideology in the military, should you have any. And I want your leadership to listen to those stories. And I want them to listen to any ideas that you might have to help us stamp out of the ranks the dangerous conduct that this ideology inspires.

And so, I want you to remember also that we've got important things to do, ladies and gentlemen. We have serious commitments around the world. And people depend on us. So, we can't afford actions and behavior that are at odds with our values; and that undermine good order and discipline; that harm or harass and otherwise violate the oath that we share, and the bonds of trust upon which we all rely.

Again, thank you for what you and your families do each and every day. Thank you for upholding your oath. And thank you for helping us get smarter about dealing with this very important readiness issue.

I'm proud to be on your team.