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MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
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UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
DEPUTY CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DIRECTOR, COST ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION
DIRECTOR, OPERATIONAL TEST AND EVALUATION
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
ASSISTANTS TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
DIRECTOR, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT
DIRECTOR, NET ASSESSMENT
DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES
DIRECTORS OF THE DOD FIELD ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: Message to the Department of Defense

Earlier today I was privileged to take the oath of office to become the 24th Secretary of Defense. I am humbled by and grateful for the opportunity that President Obama and the Congress have given me to once again serve our Nation.

I am especially grateful for the opportunity to work with all of you. Every day you work to defend America. The noble cause of your profession, your individual sacrifices, and your service inspire us all.

As your leader, I will always do my best for our country and for all of you – and your families. As with my friends and predecessors Leon Panetta and Bob Gates, your safety, success, and welfare will always be at the forefront of my decisions. I will build on the strong foundation of teamwork built by Secretaries Gates and Panetta, as we work together. Leadership is a team business.

I have long believed that America must maintain the strongest military on earth; we must lead the international community with a steady and sure hand to confront threats and challenges together as we work closely with our allies and partners to advance our common interests and build a more hopeful world. We must use all tools of American power to protect our citizens and our interests; America must engage – not retreat – in the world, but engage wisely.

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This is a defining time for the United States military and for our Nation. We are emerging from more than a decade of war, yet the threats facing us are no less dangerous or complicated.

Despite these challenges, I believe an historic opportunity exists to help build a safer, more prosperous, and more secure world. To achieve this goal, we must ensure that we are ready, trained, and equipped to fulfill our role of protecting the country and standing firm against aggression. To that end, the strength, well-being, and readiness of our all-volunteer force will be my top priority. This will require 21st century agility and flexibility. We must take care of our people and working with the Veterans Administration and other institutions, I will ensure that you and your families get the health care, job opportunities, benefits, and education you have all earned and deserve. My life and career have been about helping our Service members, veterans, and their families. One of my proudest accomplishments in the U.S. Senate was co-authoring with my fellow Vietnam veteran and friend, Jim Webb, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

As I assume this office, I am mindful of the sacrifices that you and your families have made for more than a decade and continue to make every day. In Afghanistan, where 66,000 of our troops remain in a tough fight, we have a clear and achievable objective to fully transition security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014. As you know, Afghan forces will step into the lead for security operations across the country this spring and over the next year another 34,000 of our troops will come home.

As we turn the page on more than a decade of grinding conflict, we must broaden our attention to future threats and challenges. That means continuing to increase our focus on the Asia-Pacific region, reinvigorating historic alliances like NATO, and making new investments in critical capabilities like cyber.

In order to accomplish our mission, we also must make wise budget decisions prioritizing our interests and requirements. Like each of you, I am greatly concerned about the impact the looming round of automatic budget cuts will have on you and your families and on military readiness. As someone who has run businesses, I know that severe budget uncertainty limits our ability and flexibility to manage and plan and use taxpayer dollars in the most efficient manner possible. I will work within the Administration and with Congress to help resolve this uncertainty in a way that does not break America's commitment to you, your families, and our veterans.

As I begin my time here at the Department, I want you to know that I recognize the immense responsibility I have and will work hard every day to fulfill my duties as Secretary of Defense as honestly and effectively as I know how. You are the greatest force for good in the world. It is the highest honor to serve alongside you. I am proud to be part of your team. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to our country.

Chuck Hagel