



April 29, 2026

President Donald J Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Rubio:

As Members of the New Democrat Coalition National Security Working Group, we write in opposition to the Administration's approach to national security and to urge an immediate course correction. At a moment of profound global instability, the U.S. needs a strategy that advances our national interests. Instead, the Administration's current approach—marked by a reckless and open-ended conflict in Iran, chaos within the Department of Defense, and the alienation of our allies—has already resulted in the loss of U.S. servicemembers and continues to place Americans and our global and domestic security at risk.

Over the past year, this Administration has treated national security as a partisan political matter, rather than a shared national responsibility, and has failed to provide Congress with timely and transparent information on key national security decisions. The result of these actions is a national security posture that is neither principled nor sustainable. There is no doubt that our defense is strongest when it is supported by a bipartisan coalition and grounded in our country's democratic values.

Members of the New Democrat Coalition National Security Working Group believe that there is a better path forward. We urge the Administration to halt the current course and adopt a strategy centered around the following priorities:

1. Reverse the damage caused by the alienation of our allies and strengthen the tools that allow the U.S. to counter adversarial influence.

On the campaign trail, President Trump repeatedly promised an "America First" approach, but the actions of this Administration are best described as an "America Alone" strategy. The Administration's reckless tariff policy has strained relationships with some of our key allies and sent a chilling message that the U.S. is an unreliable economic and strategic partner, which has already pushed several of our allies to align more closely with the People's Republic of China (PRC). At the end of January 2026, a

delegation of Canadian and European leaders traveled to China seeking to deepen their economic ties, which marked the first time a British official visited China since 2018 and Canada's first visit to the country in over a decade.<sup>1</sup> This is not American strength; it is self-inflicted erosion of U.S. leadership that weakens our leverage and makes it harder to compete with our adversaries.

If we are to face today's global challenges effectively, we must do so in collaboration with our partners, including NATO, European allies, and Indo-Pacific partners through frameworks like Five Eyes, the Quad, and AUKUS. We must be unequivocal in rejecting any alignment with Russia's war of aggression, ensuring that Ukraine has the support it needs to win the ongoing war with Russia. Otherwise, we risk emboldening an aggressive authoritarian regime and setting a dangerous precedent for dictators around the world to follow. In addition, the U.S. must reinvest in American soft power by restoring programs at the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Agency for Global Media that help build strong public health systems and support resilient democracies worldwide. This reinvestment will ensure we are better able to curb authoritarian and adversarial influence and prevent conflicts and humanitarian disasters before they even begin.

2. Realign defense planning to reflect today's most serious strategic threat: the People's Republic of China.

This Administration's escalation of the Iran conflict is fiscally irresponsible. The Penn Wharton Budget Model estimates that the first 32 days of the Iran conflict cost \$27-28 billion.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, Americans continue to suffer the consequences, with gas prices reaching over \$4/gallon and unlikely to drop for months.<sup>3</sup> The conflict with Iran has also highlighted the fragility of our defense supply chains and the need to address munitions shortages, which have been further depleted by various campaigns the Administration has carried out, including in Venezuela and Iran. This is a failure of strategy and a costly pattern of engaging in conflicts without a plan, placing American lives and taxpayer resources at risk.

U.S. defense planning should prioritize deterring and strategically competing with the PRC. In order to meet this challenge, we need to invest in strengthening the defense industrial base through modernization and innovation efforts, enhancing domestic production capacity, replenishing critical weapons and munitions inventory, and streamlining the acquisition process that's often too slow and rigid for today's security environment. In addition, we must encourage small businesses to build, test, and scale new products and technologies by removing barriers to participation and expanding access to land for testing purposes.

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/31/world/asia/trump-xi-starmer-carney.html>

2 <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/poll-trumps-approval-rating-hits-second-term-low-economy-iran-war-rcna331462>

3 <https://www.nytimes.com/article/us-soldiers-killed-iran-war.html>

3. Reaffirm the military's apolitical nature and ensure resources are used to support servicemembers.

The Administration's increasing politicization of the military creates serious dangers for servicemembers. The apolitical nature of the military ensures that its loyalty rests solely with the Constitution, not any party or individual. However, the Administration continues to undermine this nonpartisan institution by firing top generals, using uniformed servicemembers as a backdrop for partisan messaging, and deploying national guard members into U.S. cities for political theater. Speaking at the Marine Corps Base in Quantico in September 2025, President Trump suggested he intends to use U.S. cities as "training grounds for our military" to target "the enemy from within."<sup>4</sup> Using armed forces to advance partisan messaging and domestic political narratives is corrosive to civil-military norms and exposes servicemembers to unnecessary harm.

The Administration must take concrete steps to reaffirm the professionalism and apolitical nature of the U.S. military. This includes ensuring servicemembers are never given unlawful orders that could place them in ethical or legal jeopardy and preventing the use of the military against U.S. citizens for political purposes. Just as important is the need to ensure that we are investing our resources to help U.S. servicemembers and their families have the quality of life that they deserve instead of wasting valuable resources on meaningless changes in Department names. The Administration must take steps to address the lack of affordable housing for servicemembers, increase access to childcare, provide support for military spouses, and invest in mental health and primary prevention initiatives. In addition, we need to seriously invest in resources to help servicemembers leaving uniformed service find meaningful civilian employment and skill-matching opportunities.

4. The Administration must work in good faith with Congress and commit to respecting and restoring institutional checks and balances, especially in matters of war.

After declaring "Operation Midnight Hammer" a success and affirming that Iran's nuclear program "was obliterated" in June, Americans awoke on February 28, 2026 to the news that our nation is at war with Iran. Polls show that 63% of Americans disapprove of Trump's war of choice,<sup>5</sup> a clear reflection of how disconnected this escalation is from the main issues facing Americans today. The Administration has failed to provide a clear objective or end state for this operation. If the goal is deterrence, Iran continues to strike U.S. bases in the region, risking a broader regional war. If the goal is regime change, which the National Defense Strategy explicitly states was not a priority of this Administration, history has already taught us a lesson. The U.S. pursued this goal in Iraq at extraordinary costs: thousands of American lives, billions of dollars, regional

<sup>4</sup> <https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/blog/BE2026-2/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/08/business/energy-environment/iran-war-oil-gas-prices-energy.html>

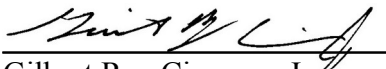
instability, and a power vacuum that empowered both adversaries and extremist groups. We cannot afford to repeat that mistake.

The war has also cost us the lives of at least thirteen servicemembers, and the Administration failed to evacuate U.S. embassies before launching the strikes, putting Americans in the region at high risk.<sup>6</sup> When President Trump was asked about the lives lost in the early days of the conflict, he stated, “There will likely be more before it ends. That’s the way it is.” American lives are not expendable, and entering another conflict in the Middle East risks enabling another generation of instability and extremism.

The Constitution gives Congress the sole authority to declare war, allowing Congress to prevent open-ended conflicts and ensure that any use of force remains lawful and tied to a clear objective. The alternative would be a great disservice to our national security.


Our national security is strongest when it’s both principled and lawful and reflects our values and interests. The Trump Administration’s current approach fails on all counts. At a time when we are facing multiple threats on the global stage, we cannot afford to adopt a strategy that undermines our democracy, alienates our allies, and risks entangling our nation in conflicts without a clear end goal that advances the interests of all Americans. We call on the Administration to halt its current approach to national security, adopt this alternative framework, and return to a bipartisan commitment to our national security.

Sincerely,

  
Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Eugene Simon Vindman  
Member of Congress

**Ed Case**  
Ed Case  
Member of Congress


  
Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.  
Member of Congress

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/11/03/trump-hegseth-politicizing-military/>




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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress




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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



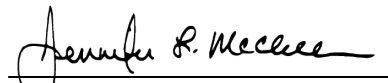
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Susie Lee  
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Ami Bera, M.D.  
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Jennifer L. McClellan  
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Rick Larsen  
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