SECRETARY OF WAR
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

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MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Reforming Professional Military Education to Forge Warfighters and Secure Victory

The fundamental purpose of the Armed Forces of the United States is to fight and win our Nation's wars. There is no substitute for victory. For too long, academic drift in our Professional Military Education (PME) enterprise, specifically our Senior Service Colleges, traded combat readiness for theory and indulged ideological distractions over practical warfighting. We are restoring these institutions as operational and strategic crucibles.

On March 12, 2026, I directed the stand-up of the Senior Service College Task Force to conduct an independent assessment of our joint PME enterprise. In parallel, the Department reviewed military education holistically to identify necessary structural changes. Together, these reviews confirm that the PME enterprise has stagnated and immediate realignment is required. Our schools must align with the 2026 National Defense Strategy, doubling down on joint warfighting curricula and rigorous historical case studies to draw vital operational lessons. Furthermore, we must confront strategic failures with unsparing honesty and mandate competitive wargaming and decision-forcing rigor. We have a responsibility to the American people to forge leaders of unmatched competence, sound moral judgment, and a resolute warrior ethos.

Incremental adjustments will not achieve this transformation. Effective immediately, all directed reform tasks detailed in the attached implementation directive will be executed across commands and institutions. We will evaluate our educational institutions by a singular standard: "Does this program forge leaders who will win America's wars?" If an activity, course, or policy does not contribute directly to lethality, readiness, and strategic victory, it has no place in this Department.

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Attachment:
As stated

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ATTACHMENT

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Implementation Requirements for Reforming Professional Military Education to Forge Warfighters and Secure Victory

This directive mandates actions across the Department of War (DoW) to implement strategic reforms in Professional Military Education (PME). To ensure comprehensive oversight and accountability, the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness (USW(P&R)) will monitor and track the implementation of all tasked requirements. To facilitate execution, the USW(P&R) will issue supplemental implementation guidance as necessary. Furthermore, the USW(P&R) will convene senior leader governance meetings no less than every 60 days to review execution progress, coordinate cross-Component activities, and address systemic implementation challenges.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall:

1. Refocus Senior Service College (SSC) and Intermediate Level Education (ILE) institution mission statements toward achieving decisive military victory in combat. Accordingly, institutional Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) must directly drive educational excellence in joint warfighting grounded in a sound foundation in military history, comprehensive understanding across all domains of warfare, proficiency in planning and synchronizing Joint All-Domain Operations, and the critical evaluation of strategic deterrence and national security decision-making. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will provide a report to the USW(P&R) detailing the changes to institutional mission statements and PLOs, and the timeline for implementation, within 90 days of this directive's issuance.

2. Establish the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy as the authoritative strategic foundation and underpinning for all national security policy and joint warfighting curricula across SSCs and ILE and integrate core coursework on strategy execution—emphasizing Homeland Defense, First Island Chain defense, the defense industrial base, and allied burden-sharing—into all Academic Year (AY) 2027-2028 programs. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will report the changes to curricula reflecting these priority areas to the USW(P&R) within 90 days of this directive's issuance.

3. Establish a rigorous, standardized culminating capstone wargame or comprehensive exam as a mandatory end-of-course event for SSCs and ILE, administered at the conclusion of the academic year or each education module, to test student mastery of core national security and joint warfighting material. This event shall be heavily weighted toward the student's final grade and overall end-of-course standing to support talent management and stratification decisions. Institutions shall complete the standardized assessment and grading framework within 180 days of this directive and fully incorporate it into all programs prior to AY 2028-2029. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall report implementation status to the USW(P&R) no later than 180 days after issuance of this directive.

4. Direct the inclusion of formal case studies analyzing recent operational and ethical successes and failures at SSCs. These standardized case studies shall institutionalize lessons learned on civil-military relations, lawful authority, and the boundaries of consent in the exercise of military power. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will report on the incorporation

of these standardized case study modules, along with the timeline for full implementation, to the USW(P&R) within 90 days of this directive's issuance.

5. Review, and, as appropriate, revise the charters of their respective Boards of Visitors (BoVs) and conduct a comprehensive audit of current membership. This review shall ensure BoV members possess substantial distinguished experience in military, DoW, or national security leadership (targeting a minimum of 15 years of relevant experience), while fully complying with all applicable provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, including fair and balanced membership and statutory requirements for the SSCs. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall submit a report to the USW(P&R) detailing any recommended charter changes, the results of the membership audit, and a proposed implementation timeline, no later than 120 days from the date of this directive.

6. Mandate recurring executive guest lecture series and industry panels at SSCs with private-sector leaders covering commercial dual-use technology, industrial mobilization, supply chain fragility, and commercial business practices. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will provide a plan for implementing the recurring lecture series and industry panels to the USW(P&R) within 90 days of this directive's issuance.

7. Formulate enterprise-level artificial intelligence (AI) competencies and learning objectives for all SSC graduates, avoiding overly prescriptive tactical mandates. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will submit the formulated AI competencies and learning objectives to the USW(P&R) within 120 days.

8. In coordination with the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security and the Under Secretary of War for Acquisition and Sustainment, develop enterprise infrastructure strategies to expand access to classified instruction, seminars, and wargames at all SSCs, including plans to mitigate accreditation bottlenecks and lengthy military construction timelines. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will provide their enterprise infrastructure strategies and funding requirements as part of their FY 2029 Program Objective Memorandum submission.

9. Establish the principles of the U.S. Constitution; the fundamentals of civil-military relations; Goldwater-Nichols Act command authorities, responsibilities, roles and limitations; and the legal and oath-bound obligations of commissioned officers as the foundational framework for professional ethics, leadership, and command education across all SSC curricula. These principles, along with related foundational materials, shall be formally integrated and emphasized throughout the respective programs. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall report to the USW(P&R) on the curricular changes made to integrate this foundational framework and the timeline for implementation within 90 days.

10. Revise grading policies at SSCs for AY 2027-2028 to ensure that the majority of a student's final grade is based on individually assessed experiential learning activities, formal writing assignments, and examinations. Course grading shall de-emphasize subjective seminar participation in favor of objective evaluations such as wargames, planning exercises, strategic essays, and decision-forcing cases, while still requiring satisfactory participation.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall report completion of their revised grading policies to the USW(P&R) within 180 days.

11. Realign the civilian-faculty ratio at SSCs to ensure that the majority of full-time faculty possess direct military experience and defense experience. Full-time civilian faculty shall primarily consist of individuals with backgrounds in honorable military service, substantial DoW civilian service, Intelligence Community service, or national security experience, while the proportion of purely technical subject-matter experts shall be limited. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will submit an implementation plan to achieve this civilian-faculty ratio to the USW(P&R) for approval within 180 days. The USW(P&R) is directed to establish policy governing the administration, adherence, and standard criteria for any exceptions to policy regarding these approved implementation plans.

12. Eliminate faculty lifetime tenure and emeritus status for all newly hired SSC faculty, consistent with statutory requirements and existing agreements. Civilian faculty positions will be converted, as appropriate, to renewable three-year performance-based term contracts, evaluated at the time of contract renewal for teaching effectiveness and national security or defense-priority research. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall report their plan to implement this directive to the USW(P&R) within 180 days.

13. In coordination with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), code qualifying military faculty positions across all SSCs as Joint Duty Assignment List (JDAL) positions to incentivize competitive, high-performing operational officers to serve as instructors. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall direct promotion boards to evaluate coded PME instructor duty with weight equivalent to similar joint-coded staff positions. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will report the completion of coding military faculty positions as JDAL to the USW(P&R) within 180 days.

14. Establish Military Service-specific manpower tracking codes (i.e., MOS, AOC, FA, or equivalent skill identifiers) for PME competencies, SSC graduation, and fellowship programs. These codes shall be incorporated into Military Service personnel systems to enhance officer identification, talent management, and post-program slating into validated, high-priority billets aligned with national defense priorities. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will report to the USW(P&R) on the establishment of these identification codes and the timeline for implementation within 270 days.

15. Convene annual, competitive Service Selection Boards to govern officer accession into all resident PME and PME granting fellowship programs. Candidates must be selected through a rigorous screening process based strictly on sustained superior command performance, combat record, and strategic leadership potential. The Secretaries of the Military Departments will confirm the establishment of these selection boards to the USW(P&R) within 90 days.

16. Direct the establishment of "Warfighter Chair" billets at all SSCs and ILE institutions. These billets shall be filled by high-performing O-5 and O-6 officers who have completed operational command within the preceding 24 months. Warfighter Chairs will be responsible

for integrating current and emergent operational lessons learned into PME curricula, campaign planning, and joint wargaming. These billets shall be coded as JDAL positions. The Secretaries of the Military Departments shall report on the establishment of the "Warfighter Chairs" billets to the Secretary of War (SecWar) within 180 days.

The USW(P&R) shall:

17. Analyze alternative institutional accrediting options for SSCs and ILE institutions to determine which best align with unique national security missions, to include the Commission on Professional Higher Education pending its formal recognition by the Department of Education. The USW(P&R) will provide updates to the SecWar until an accreditation framework is finalized.

18. Annually establish a singular, prioritized list of enterprise research questions, incorporating existing Joint Staff processes with inputs from the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW), Military Departments, and Combatant Commands, to provide critical direction aligning SSC and ILE level PME student research with current operational realities and DoW strategic priorities. The USW(P&R) shall provide the first prioritized list of research questions to all relevant institutions within 180 days to align with the beginning of AY 2027-2028

19. Develop and promulgate OSW standardized, echelon-specific DoW Learning Outcomes across SSCs and ILE to align instruction with strategic and operational priorities. The USW(P&R) shall provide the standardized DoW Learning Outcomes to the Secretaries of the Military Departments within 90 days. Extend this effort to primary PME institutions within 180 days.

20. Establish a Rapid Curriculum Development Group to identify emergent operational lessons, adversary doctrines, and disruptive technologies through direct engagement with operational commands and the Intelligence Community, and to develop and integrate relevant curriculum updates into PME institutions. The USW(P&R) will promulgate the Group's charter and implementation plan to the Secretaries of the Military Departments within 120 days.

21. Serve as the primary institutional credentialing authority for PME. Establish and administer a Department-wide PME certification process for PME institutions. This internal certification process shall evaluate alignment with DoW Learning Outcomes, academic rigor, objective assessments, graduate utilization in follow-on assignments, and faculty standards, serving as the basis for granting official PME credit. The USW(P&R) shall provide a Department-wide certification process to the SecWar within 180 days.

22. Establish a senior governance forum, incorporating participation by Military Service PME leads and the Joint Staff, as the Department's senior PME body for policy, resourcing, and curriculum standards and modernization. Guidance and policies for this governance forum will supersede all other military education governance bodies. The USW(P&R) will publish a charter for the newly established council within 90 days.

23. Establish mechanisms within the PME certification process to evaluate and audit SSC and ILE curricula, faculty hiring, and student assessment methods. These mechanisms will ensure that all curricula, instruction, personnel decisions, and evaluations are based solely on merit, individual excellence, initiative, hard work, and objective performance standards. The USW(P&R) shall establish these mechanisms and ensure their full incorporation into the PME certification process no later than 180 days from the date of this directive.

24. Conduct a comprehensive review of National Defense University's (NDU) mission, scope, and alignment with Department priorities and develop long-term solutions for its authorities, organization, faculty, staffing, and infrastructure shortfalls. The USW(P&R) shall submit a comprehensive review and long-term solutions for NDU to the SecWar within 270 days.

The CJCS shall:

25. Execute directives 1 through 24 across designated Chairman Controlled Activities for all SSC and ILE programs, reporting completion in accordance with the established timelines.

26. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the USW(P&R), establish a mandatory "PME 1.5" continuing nonresident education requirement to bridge the significant career gap between ILE and SSC. The course should leverage existing Joint Forces Staff College distance modules that cover Global Force Management, warfighting domain understanding and proficiency, multidomain campaign design, contested logistics, and algorithmic warfare. Completion of "PME 1.5" shall be a requirement for resident SSC eligibility. The CJCS shall provide a formal close-out memorandum to the SecWar upon establishment of the "PME 1.5" requirement within 180 days.

27. Prioritize certified Acquisition Workforce professionals for admission into the Dwight D. Eisenhower School's Senior Acquisition Concentration by restructuring admissions for Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act Advanced/Level III acquisition professionals, including major program managers, contracting executives, and defense software leads. The CJCS will report on the completion of the admission restructuring to the USW(P&R) within 90 days.

28. Develop options to align the Americas Counter Cartel Coalition with the Inter-American Defense College to create joint learning opportunities with alliance partners on the strategies to target, disrupt, and eradicate transnational drug cartels and narco-terrorist networks from the Western Hemisphere. The CJCS will provide the developed options to the SecWar for review within 180 days.

29. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, direct the establishment of a standardized, competitive screening process for all candidates nominated to the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS). Building upon existing Military Service selection boards, the Joint Staff and the Military Departments shall institute advanced screening mechanisms comparable to the School of Advanced Military Studies, School of Advanced Warfighting, and School of Advanced Air and Space Studies that evaluate operational planning aptitude, critical thinking, and written communication. Discretionary or non-

screened assignment to JAWS will be strictly prohibited. Waiver authority is restricted to the Director of the Joint Staff, in consultation with the respective Chief of the Military Service. The CJCS will report on the establishment of the standardized screening process for JAWS to the USW(P&R) within 120 days.

The Secretary of the Army shall:

30. Assume the role of the Joint Wargaming Exercise Authority to annually execute a major joint strategic wargame across all SSCs, such as the Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic Special Exercise. Exercise execution must expand participation to include the Reserve Component and commercial technical talent, specifically to integrate and evaluate emerging technologies—including AI, autonomous systems, cyber defense capabilities, and next-generation communication networks—within the wargaming scenarios. The Secretary of the Army, in coordination with the other Secretaries of the Military Departments, shall provide a formal execution and expansion plan for this joint wargaming framework to the USW(P&R) within 180 days.

31. Realign the Army University and its subordinate elements as a direct-reporting unit to the Secretary of the Army or the Chief of Staff of the Army. The Secretary of the Army will provide a memorandum to the SecWar confirming the realignment of Army University within 120 days.

The DoW Chief Information Officer (CIO), in coordination with the Under Secretary of War for Research and Engineering, shall:

32. Provide SSCs with secure, enterprise-approved cloud sandboxes with data-loss protections for faculty and student experimentation with emerging AI tools that can be leveraged for analytical coursework. The DoW CIO will report on the provision and status of secure cloud sandboxes to the USW(P&R) within 120 days.

33. Develop a coordinated enterprise acquisition strategy to accelerate resourcing and deployment of multi-domain AI simulations and operational wargaming suites (e.g., Palantir Maven integration) to PME institutions. The DoW CIO shall provide the coordinated enterprise acquisition strategy to the Deputy Secretary of War for review within 180 days.