THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

APR 30 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS

SUBJECT: Confronting Sexual Assault

I am taking the unusual step of writing directly to you on the subject of sexual assault because I want to state very clearly my thoughts and expectations in this regard. On February 5, I asked David Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to review how the Department handles treatment of and care for victims of sexual assault. I have received the Department of Defense Care for Victims of Sexual Assault Task Force report and associated findings and recommendations on ways to improve the Department's treatment of and care for victims of sexual assault. Several issues have been identified that need to be addressed immediately at all commands under your cognizance.

Sexual assault is unacceptable behavior. It must not be tolerated. It threatens military readiness. It is an affront to the decency owed to each human being. Sexual assault will be defeated only by commanders exercising strong leadership. Commanders and command noncommissioned officers at every organizational level are responsible for success.

I request that you meet with your direct report commanders to address this issue. In this discussion you should confront three questions:

- Are victims within your command comfortable coming forward?
- Are appropriate support, care, and protection mechanisms in place and are they effective?
- What are you doing to identify, remove, and encourage the prosecuting of those responsible for this violence?

Following this meeting, I would like each of your commanders and senior enlisted advisors to meet with their direct reports to confront these questions and others related to preventing sexual assault in our forces. This series of meetings should continue down the chain of command to include all officers in leadership positions.

You would be best served by not beginning with the presumption that the answer to each question is "yes." From there, determine what you will need to do throughout the chain of command to fix the situation. Ask hard questions and demand good answers.

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I will appreciate your full cooperation and participation in assuring that commanders at all levels take local action to fill needed gaps in sexual assault prevention and response programs. Your leadership and emphasis on taking immediate action as well as your participation in determining the best way to implement the Task Force's recommendations is required. Please be prepared to discuss your actions and the future steps we should take at the Commanders Conference in May.

Leadership is the solution to this important matter.

cc:
SECRETARIES OF MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
CHIEFS OF THE MILITARY SERVICES
SENIOR ENLISTED MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY SERVICES