



Trump's Military Overhaul: DEI and Transgender Ban, Iron Dome, Vaccine Reinstatements

Late Monday, President Donald Trump signed four sweeping executive orders concerning the military. These orders, covering issues such as transgender service, missile defense, vaccine-related reinstatements, and the elimination of diversity programs, mark significant shifts in military governance. The signing coincided with Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth](#)'s first official day in office.

Iron Dome for America

In a landmark move, Trump signed an [executive order](#) directing the implementation of a cutting-edge missile-defense system. Branded the "Iron Dome for America," the initiative aims to shield the United States from advanced aerial threats.



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The executive order outlines a comprehensive strategy to protect the homeland against ballistic, hypersonic, and advanced cruise missiles, as well as other emerging next-generation delivery systems. The plan includes:

Accelerating the development and deployment of Hypersonic and Ballistic Tracking Space Sensor Layers, proliferated space-based interceptors, a Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture, capabilities to defeat salvos prior to launch, non-kinetic missile defense capabilities, and underlayer and terminal-phase intercept capabilities.

The initiative also secures the supply chains for all components of the Iron Dome, ensuring that the system is fully developed and manufactured within the United States.

Challenges

The New American [reported](#) in December that adapting Israel's Iron Dome to the United States presents significant challenges. Israel is a small nation dealing with short-range missile threats. In contrast, the United States must defend against intercontinental and hypersonic missiles across a much larger territory. Protecting all 50 states would require a vast and expensive network of interceptors and sensors. This would far exceed the scale and cost of Israel's system.

Developing complementary technologies, such as space-based interceptors or directed-energy systems, would add significant complexity and cost.

Overall, the proposed system's scale, cost, and the need to integrate with existing defenses raise critical questions about practicality and resource prioritization.



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on January 28, 2025

Reinstatement of Covid Vaccine-related Discharges

Trump's [Executive order](#) addressing service members discharged due to the Covid vaccine mandate marks a significant redress for those affected. The order applies to individuals dismissed solely for refusing the vaccine and aims to provide reinstatement with full benefits and compensation.

The mandate, [announced](#) by the Department of Defense in August 2021, required all service members to be vaccinated. It was [rescinded](#) in January 2023.

Trump's order characterizes the mandate as "an unfair, overbroad, and completely unnecessary burden on our service members." It also criticized the mandates' impact on careers and morale.

Under the new policy, discharged service members can request reinstatement to their previous ranks and receive back pay, benefits, and any bonuses lost due to their dismissal. The order also allows those who voluntarily left the service rather than comply with the mandate to rejoin without penalty or impact on their rank or pay.

The DOD and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are tasked with reporting on the progress of these reinstatements within 60 days. The order explicitly excludes disciplinary actions unrelated to the vaccine mandate and emphasizes that the reinstatement policy will be implemented in accordance with existing laws and appropriations.

This decision impacts more than [8,400 service members](#) discharged during the mandate, as recorded by the Pentagon.

Abolition of DEI Offices

The third [executive order](#) eliminates all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices within the DOD and DHS. It argues that DEI initiatives undermine military effectiveness by prioritizing race and sex preferences over merit-based systems, eroding unit cohesion, leadership, and readiness.

The order abolishes any programs promoting race- or sex-based preferences, labeling them as discriminatory and divisive. It bans the endorsement of "un-American, divisive, discriminatory, radical, extremist, and irrational theories," including claims that America's founding documents are "racist or sexist." Additionally, all educational institutions under the DOD, including service academies, must align with these directives.

The administration frames the policy as a return to meritocracy, stating that "no individual or group within our Armed Forces should be preferred or disadvantaged on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, color, or creed."

The secretary of defense has 90 days to submit a report documenting past DEI-related actions, including instances of race and sex discrimination.

Transgender Ban

Trump's [executive order](#) rescinded Joe Biden's Executive Order [14004](#), which had allowed transgender individuals to serve openly in the military as long as they met the qualification criteria. The new executive action argues that accommodating transgender individuals undermines military readiness and cohesion.

The order stresses,

Fitness, health, welfare, and readiness standards must ensure that our military members



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are able to deploy, fight, and win.

The president justifies the decision by pointing to physical and medical challenges linked to transitioning. These include recovery times, reliance on strong medications, and ongoing care needs. He argues that such factors conflict with deployment and readiness requirements.

The new policy bans the use of identification-based pronouns. It also prohibits individuals from using facilities designated for the opposite sex. Additionally, it halts military funding for transition surgeries.

The administration maintains that the policy aligns with long-standing military standards requiring physical and mental readiness, emphasizing Trump's view:

On the battlefield there can be no accommodation for anything less than resilience, strength, and the ability to withstand extraordinary physical demands.

This change impacts an estimated 15,500 transgender servicemembers, [according](#) to a 2020 study by the Williams Institute.

Challenges to U.S. Military Readiness

While important to address, transgenderism is far from the only challenge to U.S. military readiness. The armed forces face a range of issues that collectively strain their ability to maintain a fully trained and deployable force. Recruitment shortfalls remain a critical problem, with fewer Americans meeting eligibility requirements due to physical, medical, or educational shortcomings. This has led to personnel gaps that strain operational capacity.

The new administration has taken steps to address some readiness challenges. Reinstating service members discharged for refusing the Covid vaccine is a positive move. This policy aims to bring experienced personnel back into service. Similarly, eliminating DEI offices seeks to streamline administrative processes. The administration frames this effort as a way to refocus the military on operational effectiveness and merit-based systems.

However, there are other broader concerns that need to be addressed. High operational tempo and frequent deployments may continue to strain service members and their families, leading to early departures from the military. Mental health challenges, including PTSD and stress-related disorders, also impact individual performance and unit cohesion. Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies divert resources from core military objectives.



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