

From: Department of Defense Pilots Submitting Religious Accommodation for Vaccination

To: The House and Senate Armed Services Committees

Subject: An Independent Analysis on the Threat to National Security and Readiness Posed by the DoD COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate (Addendum to our 14 October 2021 Memo)

On the 19th of October, the Senator James Inhofe requested a report from Secretary Lloyd Austin on the costs and impacts to readiness from the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. On the 3rd of November, Secretary Austin replied claiming attrition from the mandate would be “nominal” and that “COVID-19 vaccination will ensure that we remain the most lethal and ready force in the world.” **We represent more than 600 pilots, the equivalent manning of approximately 12 squadrons, facing potential discharge for their moral, religious, or medical concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines. We strongly, but respectfully, disagree with Secretary Austin’s response.**

The Department of Defense (DoD) policy to mandate vaccination in the military has, and will continue to have, significant negative repercussions on cost effectiveness, training output, and, most importantly, readiness. **If discharge or loss of flying status is the end result for the hundreds of pilots with moral, religious or medical concerns about the vaccine, there will be a noticeable degradation in military effectiveness and national security.**

A survey was conducted of 357 pilots who are exercising their Constitutional and statutory rights to request a religious accommodation. They represent a small fraction of DoD pilots seeking the same accommodation. The value of surveyed pilots, including salary, flight hours, and training, totaled to:

- \$7.8 Billion in tax dollars
- 4,842 years of cumulative service
- 14 years of service on average: **highly experienced aviators**
- 2456 cumulative years of service to retirement¹
- 677,324 cumulative flight hour experience
- 135,416 combat hours across 1114 deployments

In 2017, former USAF Chief of Staff Goldfein called a shortage of 1500 pilots a “crisis”². According to the FY21 budget request for the USAF, that shortage has grown to 2100 pilots below what is “required to execute the National Defense Strategy”³. This same strategy states: “The size of our force matters” and “Recruiting, developing, and retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success.”⁴ The loss of hundreds of pilots to a vaccine mandate would have second and third order effects on a training and replacement system that already underperforms by 200 pilots per year in the USAF alone. In the Navy, strike fighter pilot production was 25% below training requirements in FY20, further compounding a production shortfall gap of 158 pilots from FY17-19. The USMC’s fighter pilot production was 34% below requirements with a 456 pilot shortage as of FY21⁵. A deficiency in instructor pilot manning is cited as a primary factor for the shortages in all three branches as a result of already declining retention rates. Without these highly experienced pilots, who desire to

1 Assumes all pilots retire at 20 years, a conservative number given many pilots remain in an ANG or Reserve position well after 20 years

2 *Air Force Members Address Aircrew Crisis* <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1321906/air-force-leaders-address-aircrew-crisis/>

3 *FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET REQUEST FOR MILITARY READINESS* <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110633/witnesses/HHRG116-AS03-TTF-WilsonS-20200303.pdf>

4 *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

continue to serve and contribute, output of new aviators will continue to fall and exacerbate an already critical shortage.

- 69% of surveyed pilots are instructors
- 38% are check airmen who provide critical evaluations of new trainees
- 9% are Air Force Weapons Instructors or Navy TOPGUN graduates who lead pilots into war and determine tactics, training, and employment.

Most of these pilots possess qualifications that, if lost, will not only degrade the size of the force, but also the ability to train new members. The resulting impact on National Security Strategy goals will compound exponentially to a potentially unrecoverable degree.

Furthermore, national security and readiness will be at risk with the loss of these mission-critical pilots at a time when adversary capabilities across the globe are rapidly improving.

- 10% of pilots surveyed actively defend US airspace and provide necessary air support for the President, Congress, and federal agencies through Operation Noble Eagle. In a separate survey of 6 Air National Guard units, 17% of the force supporting this mission have requested religious accommodation.
- 16% are mission commanders capable of leading large, complex strike packages
- 23% provide functional check flights that require intimate knowledge of aircraft to evaluate safety and functionality.

Nuclear deterrence will also be degraded, as 19% of surveyed pilots support the nuclear mission. These nuclear qualified pilots handle nuclear weapons, refuel nuclear bombers, or participate in the emerging F-35 nuclear mission. Degradation of nuclear capability poses perhaps the greatest threat to National Security at a time when the Joint Chiefs agree “there is an increased potential for regional conflicts involving nuclear-armed adversaries” and “adversary nuclear escalation in crisis and conflict.”⁶

A willing forfeiture of this level of knowledge, training, skill, and experience is dereliction by the DoD, especially in this contentious global environment.

The loss of just these 357 pilots would have disastrous consequences for national security and readiness, and hundreds more with the same convictions are not accounted for in the above data, which was collected from a grassroots organization in just one week. It is not unreasonable to expect the numbers provided in this memo to represent only 20-30% of pilots facing similar circumstances.

These pilots may be forced to leave military service because of their moral convictions, medical concerns, and firmly held religious beliefs. They have answered the call to defend their Nation and our God-given rights. This small sample represents not just 357 pilots, but 882 dependents who have sacrificed along with them. They are providers, loving parents, and loyal children who have devoted more than two millennia in service to their country. The loss of these honorable service members will have far reaching impacts on our ability to remain a free and sovereign nation.

Respectfully,

Concerned DoD Pilots

⁵ *Strike Fighter Pilot Production* Internal Report, Pentagon

⁶ JP 3-72 *Joint Nuclear Operations* https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3_72_2020.pdf