



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

10/3/2017

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
EMPLOYEES

SUBJECT: Our Responsibility to Safeguard our Nation

Public service, notably service in the United States Department of Defense (DoD), is a public trust. That trust is bounded by the Oath of Office we took willingly. The oath is a solemn and legally enforceable obligation to support and defend our Constitution, keeping faith with our leadership and carrying out our orders in order to safeguard the American people. As I write this we have troops in harm's way, carrying out their orders and putting their lives on the line.

In order to carry out our responsibilities, we are privy to some of the most sensitive and closely held information in our land. It is a violation of our oath to divulge, in any fashion, non-public DoD information, classified or unclassified, to anyone without the required security clearance as well as a specific need to know in performance of their duties. Divulging information in violation of these precepts places at risk our troops in harm's way, our intelligence operations, and our technological advantages over our foes. Our integrity as individuals and as a Department imparts special responsibility on each of us to protect our secrets. Cavalier neglect of protecting non-public information, classified or unclassified, or intentional release of information to unauthorized persons, is a serious matter in this Department. Our duties to office and country demand we preserve and protect all matters vital to defending the Nation.

We must be vigilant in executing our responsibility to prevent disclosure of any information not authorized for release outside of the Department of Defense: All hands must be alert to prevent unauthorized disclosure of non-public information for any reason, whether by implied acknowledgement or intentional release. Misconduct cannot be tolerated and suspected or confirmed disclosure must be reported at once.

Protecting non-public information in no way inhibits reporting misconduct to appropriate officials, including those in the DoD Office of the Inspector General, nor does it restrict one's right to communicate with Congress or run contrary to whistleblower protections enshrined in law.

We are a Department at war, and the increasingly complex security challenges call for increased vigilance in protecting our secrets. We must always be mindful of the obligations we have to each other and the Nation we have sworn to protect.

John Mattis

