

United States Senate

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary for the United States Department of Defense. I enjoyed working with you when I was Governor of Florida during your time as Commander of U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base, and I was glad to support your confirmation last month given your proven record as a distinguished officer with decades of service.

The importance of your new role in enhancing the strength and security of our nation cannot be overstated. As the United States faces increasingly frequent and dangerous threats from adversaries across the globe – namely Communist China, Iran, Russia and North Korea – there has never been a more important time to ensure our men and women in uniform have every resource they need to stand strong and combat threats to our freedoms and interests. As a member of the United States Senate and the Armed Services Committee, son of a WWII veteran, and Navy veteran myself, you have my commitment to remain a fierce advocate for our military.

Communist China is undoubtedly our greatest enemy and must be treated as such. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy of genocide against the Uyghurs, theft of American technology and dangerous actions to build its military presence and threaten the security of the United States and its allies cannot be tolerated. I was encouraged by your candor regarding the threat Communist China poses to nations around the world and urge you to take the strongest possible position to ensure the Biden Administration places accountability and strength at the top of its policy agenda. We cannot forget, when the reckless actions of Communist China adversely impact our allies, especially those in the Indo-Pacific region including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, India, or Taiwan, they also threaten the safety and security of the United States.

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I am specifically concerned about the ongoing aggression Communist China displays toward Taiwan. CCP General Secretary Xi has shown his plans to take over the Indo-Pacific region and Taiwan remains particularly vulnerable. This is exactly why the United States must end its policy of “strategic ambiguity” related to Taiwan’s sovereignty and why I plan to refile my bill, the Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act, this Congress. The United States must make clear that aggression toward the peaceful, democratic nation of Taiwan will not stand and I hope that the Biden Administration will join me in taking this important step which sets firm expectations to hold Communist China accountable while further supporting freedom and democracy for Taiwan and its people.

Of course, while the threat of Communist China must be a top priority, there is so much more to the incredibly important work you have ahead. Another area of critical importance to me is the health, safety and wellbeing of our nation’s service members. Since being elected as Florida’s U.S. Senator, I and many of my colleagues have received disturbing reports of unacceptable on-base housing conditions. We owe our service members and their families a tremendous debt of gratitude for their sacrifice and commitment to defending our freedoms and cannot allow anyone to be placed in unsafe housing or deal with the health impacts of mold or pests. I am confident that as a lifelong service member yourself, you agree with the need to quickly address any housing problems and I look forward to working with you on this.

The essential mission and hard work of the dedicated Americans at the Department of Defense is both vital and unyielding. At its core, I believe the Department of Defense must shape every policy through the lens of strengthening the United States’ position as the world’s most powerful and lethal military force. I wish you the very best success in your new position and look forward to working alongside you to ensure all applicable laws are followed, advance the military interests of our great nation and support the brave men and women who answer the call to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott". The signature is stylized with a large initial "R" and "S".

Rick Scott
United States Senator