

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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## Drone smart

‘If you can be seen,  
you can be killed’ Page 2

Army Spc. Brendan Fox  
of the 1st Cavalry Division  
conceals himself  
during exercises in  
Latvia last year.

KALI ECTON/U.S. Army



## COVER STORY

# Drones inspire revisions to US training

## Recent assault by Ukraine on Russians forces recalibration

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

WIESBADEN, Germany — A recent robotic assault by Ukraine on Russian positions north of Kharkiv marked a watershed moment for how ground combat forces must prepare for war, a top U.S. general said recently.

The attack saw 50 Ukrainian unmanned ground vehicles and aerial drones seize initial positions. It pushed the Russians back and paved the way for Ukrainian troops to hold the territory.

“I think that battle right there indicates that the time to reimagine armor has begun, and we have got to think about what armor will look like in the future,” 1st Armored Division commander Maj. Gen. Curtis Taylor said July 17.

For tank units, that means thinking about protecting formations with a layered defense, similar to the way a naval aircraft carrier group maneuvers at sea.

“We need to think of a combined arms battalion more like a carrier strike group that has embedded countermeasures,” Taylor said.

Taylor and other top Army commanders discussed how the Russia-Ukraine war has upended traditional ground warfare tactics at the Association of the U.S. Army’s two-day symposium in Wiesbaden.

Defense industry leaders showcased systems for NATO militaries, while commanders stressed the need for faster innovation.

Much of the discussion revolved around how drones have transformed the modern battlefield. The shift affects everything from coordinating assaults to supplying troops and managing the stress of being under constant surveillance.

“To counter (unmanned aerial systems), it can quickly burden small unit leaders,” said Col. Donald Neal, commander of the Vilseck, Germany-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

Ground troops are working with a wide range of systems to monitor the



CHARLIE DUKE/U.S. Army

**Tanks of the 1st Armored Division return to the assembly area after an exercise in Australia. The way tank formations maneuver and are protected needs to be rethought, Army leaders said at a recent conference in Wiesbaden, Germany.**

skies, which means keeping track of large amounts of unsynchronized data. Managing that data needs to be part of combat arms training, Neal said.

“What’s hard is to get all these systems to talk to each other ... getting all the data to be centrally processed and pop up on a common operating picture so you can see the things flying in the air,” he said.

Meanwhile, the practice of convoying supplies to troops at the front lines is becoming obsolete because of the ubiquitous presence of camera-equipped drones.

“We usually have these large clusters of formations. We like to drive in convoys,” said Maj. Gen. Ronald R. Ragin, commander of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command. “I do not believe that that will be applicable on future battlefields, because if you can be seen, you can be killed.”

The situation also puts pre-positioned weapons stocks at risk, he said. Large NATO warehouses would be immediate targets.

In Ukraine, “I can tell you that ammunition depots were targeted,” Ragin said. “Any fixed facility that can be found was targeted, and it was eliminated on both sides.”



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

**Maj. Gen. Ronald R. Ragin, commander of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, listens to another speaker during the LandEuro defense symposium in Wiesbaden, Germany.**

The Army is working with allies to set up discreet, dispersed locations across NATO’s eastern flank and in Northern Europe, he said.

“Matter of fact, some of them are in Estonia, some of them Lithuania, a lot in Poland and then across the theater, so we’ve got to be dispersed,” Ragin said.

Given the high costs of such arrangements, the Army is looking to allies to spend more, he added.

For NATO, there is urgency to boost weapons production.

U.S. European Command’s Gen. Alexis G. Grynkeiwich, speaking Thursday in Wiesbaden, said allies must prepare for the possibility of a two-front war with Russia and China in the coming years.

“We’re going to need every bit of kit and equipment and munitions that we can in order to beat that,” said Grynkeiwich, NATO’s supreme allied commander.

In Ukraine, more than 70% of combat vehicle losses since January have been caused by small drone strikes, Taylor said.

It’s now cheaper and easier to take out targets than it is to protect them, he said.

“You see this all the time, with \$900 drones destroying \$9 million combat systems,” Taylor said. “We’ve got to change that cost calculus if we’re going to be able to operate on the future battlefield.”

Stars and Stripes reporter Phillip Walter Wellman contributed to this report.

## MILITARY

# General: NATO must be ready for 2-front conflict

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

WIESBADEN, Germany — The U.S.-led NATO alliance must prepare for the possibility that Russia and China could launch wars in Europe and the Pacific simultaneously, with 2027 being a potential flashpoint year, the top American commander in Europe said recently.

U.S. European Command's Gen. Alexis G. Grynkeiwich, speaking at a meeting of military and defense industrial leaders in Wiesbaden, said the situation means allies have little time to prepare.

"We're going to need every bit of kit and equipment and munitions that we can in order to beat that," Grynkeiwich said.

If China's President Xi Jinping makes a move on Taiwan, he likely would coordinate such an attack with Russian President Vladimir Putin, opening the possibility of a global conflict, he said.

"That, to me, means that both of these things could happen together," said Grynkeiwich, who also serves as NATO supreme allied commander.



Grynkeiwich

Grynkeiwich's remarks came during a U.S. Army Europe and Africa-hosted conference, where military and industry leaders are seeking ways to ramp up weapons production across the 32-nation NATO alliance. Grynkeiwich, just weeks on the job as the top military officer in Europe, also said that NATO efforts are underway to get more Patriot systems into Ukraine.

"I'm not going to reveal to the Russians or anyone else the exact numbers of weapons that we're transferring or when those will happen, but what I will say is that preparations are underway," he said.

Grynkeiwich said he also will be

convening with NATO military leaders in the days ahead to look for other ways to ramp up support for Ukraine, particularly in the area of air defense.

"We're going to move as quickly as we can on this," he said.

NATO's push to get more air defense into Ukraine comes after President Donald Trump last week said that the U.S. would provide weapons to Ukraine, via NATO, with allies footing the bill for the systems.

At the RheinMain Conference Center in Wiesbaden, military and defense industry leaders were gathered for the Association of the U.S. Army's LandEuro symposium. The two-day program, which wrapped up July 17, served as an opportunity for vendors to showcase various weapons systems.

During the event, Grynkeiwich and U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Gen. Christopher Donahue emphasized the need for closer military collaboration with industry and the need for companies to develop systems faster.

The leaders also cautioned against viewing threats posed by Russia and China as separate challenges, arguing that deterrence requires a global approach.

"Each of these threats that are out there cannot be viewed, in my estimation, as discrete challenges. We've got to think about how all of them are aligning," Grynkeiwich said.

Grynkeiwich said a key focus for him also will be making sure that NATO allies are keeping up with recent pledges to increase defense spending to 5% of gross domestic product and that those increased investments are directed toward the right military priorities.

"Time is of the essence, and I intend to keep highlighting that and letting everyone know that we've got to move out and we've got to move quickly," he said.

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## MILITARY

# 'We can solve' NATO weapons mismatch

## Head of U.S. Army Europe and Africa delivers challenge to manufacturers

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

WIESBADEN, Germany — The Army's top commander in Europe delivered a challenge this month to arms manufacturers, telling a gathering of defense industry insiders that he wants a universal rocket launcher so allies can fight as one.

Gen. Christopher Donahue, head of U.S. Army Europe and Africa, highlighted the need for a common launcher as emblematic of a larger challenge.

"It's trust," Donahue said. "That's all that is. We can solve it."

For decades, U.S. commanders in Europe have lamented a defense industrial approach that doesn't ensure that different weapons used by NATO countries can work together.

Speaking at a convention hosted by his command in Wiesbaden and the Association of the U.S. Army on July 16, Donahue said solving the conundrum that's vexed military commanders for years needs to be front and center.

At the top of Donahue's list are a launcher with offensive and defensive capability and a common fire control system that any ally can use.

Currently, many nations buy systems that are incompatible with those of other allies because of differing specifications, competing commercial interests and quirks in the procurement process.

But Donahue said the priority now needs to be on finding an alliance-wide defense industrial breakthrough that enables any ally "to take munitions from any country and shoot through them."

At the RheinMain Conference Center in Wiesbaden, scores of weapons-makers mingled with U.S. and allied defense officials.

Representatives of Ukraine also attended the two-day event, dubbed LandEuro, which was expected to examine lessons learned from the ongoing



HUNTER CARPENTER/U.S. Army

**A U.S. soldier attaches launch pods to an M270A2 Multiple Launch Rocket System while conducting uploading and downloading procedures during Saber Guardian 25, Cincu Training Area, Romania, on June 15.**

Russia-Ukraine war.

Shon Manasco, senior counselor at software producer Palantir Technologies and former acting undersecretary of the Air Force, said that when it comes to strengthening NATO's arsenal, allies should consider that simple sometimes beats fancy.

"Russians are producing munitions so fast that we can't even count them," Manasco said during a panel discussion. "So sometimes for me it feels like we're driving a Ferrari into a demolition derby."

"Pretty weapons don't win wars," he added. "Lots of ugly ones do."

The meeting comes during a time of high tension in Europe, where allies have been busy rebuilding their militaries over the past several years to deal with the threat posed by Russia.

Donahue and others speaking during the gathering talked up the need for a global approach to countering hostile adversaries.

The notion of "global deterrence" is being hotly debated in defense circles, with talk of what U.S. military priorities are and whether focusing more on countering China in the Pacific should come at the cost of the American military mission in Europe.

John Nagl, a U.S. Army War College professor speaking at the event in Wiesbaden, said there are linkages between



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

**U.S. Army Europe and Africa Commander Gen. Christopher Donahue speaks in Wiesbaden, Germany, on July 16, at an international symposium dedicated to ground forces in Europe.**

detering China in the Pacific and Russia in Europe.

"This is in fact the most important land theater in the world," Nagl said of Europe. "It has been for centuries. It will, I believe, continue to be."

Administration officials such as Elbridge Colby, the undersecretary of defense for policy, have been vocal about the need to rebalance more forces to the Pacific. That could eventually have implications for the U.S. force posture in Europe.

Nagl said that China is "a challenge right now and not a threat."

"It doesn't have to turn into a threat if we do the right things against our acute threats, which right now are Iran and Russia," he added.

Donahue said the concept of global deterrence also applies to how weapons are made.

"How do you build (weapons) to a standard that you can actually fight with it throughout an alliance?" Donahue said. "But just as important, because this is global, how do you use it in the Middle East? How do you use it in the Pacific?"

For NATO, a new agreement that calls for member countries to spend 5% of gross domestic product on defense in the years ahead could serve as a windfall that will give industry a jolt.

Alan Meltzer, the top U.S. diplomat in Germany, said American and European partners will need to coordinate to ensure that funds are put to effective use.

"We must begin by reforming procurement laws and cutting red tape at the [European Union] level," said Meltzer, the charge d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. "And of course in Germany, that will enable both U.S. and European defense companies to access the German market."

Reporter Phillip Walter Wellman contributed to this report.  
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## VETERANS

# Help for vets facing foreclosure nearing

Act awaiting Trump's signature creates program to assist with loan payments

By LINDA F. HERSEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Legislation that creates a safety net for thousands of veterans facing foreclosure with delinquent home mortgages now moves to the president's desk for his signature after passing the Senate.

The VA Home Loan Program Reform Act, which was adopted by the Senate with a voice vote on July 15, establishes a partial claim program that allows veterans who are behind on home loan payments to receive federal assistance.

A companion bill in the House was adopted by voice vote in May. It was awaiting President Donald Trump's signature at press time.

The bill authorizes the VA to purchase a portion of the debt on veterans loans in default or at imminent risk of default, according to the legislation.

The mortgage industry estimates more than 20,000 current borrowers are considered seriously delinquent and a partial claim program at the VA could help them retain their homes, lawmakers said. The goal is to help veterans catch up on payments and prevent foreclosure, they said.

"First, the bill authorizes the VA to pay the holder of a loan guaranteed by the VA an amount necessary to avoid the foreclosure of the loan, provided that the holder of the loan and the veteran obligated on the loan execute documents to ensure the VA obtains a secured interest in the property covered by the loan," according to the bill.

Leaders from the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees released a joint statement after the Senate passed the bill.

"This bipartisan and bicameral legislation will assist veterans who are facing financial hardships and provide VA with a tool to better help veterans stay in their homes and avoid foreclosure. The VA Home Loan Program provides one of the best benefits VA



Wikimedia Commons

**A safety net program for providing assistance to veterans seriously behind on their home mortgage payments cleared the Senate on July 15 after adoption in the House in May.**

**"This legislation will ensure these veterans have a viable solution to avoid defaulting on their loans, bring their mortgages current, and avoid foreclosure."**

**Statement by congressional supporters**

has to offer and has helped veterans and their families build home equity since its inception in 1944," according to the joint statement.

The VA home loan program was created under the GI Bill. More than 3.7 million veterans hold active home loans guaranteed by the VA, according to the agency.

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the committee's top Democrat, offered the formal remarks after Senate adoption.

On the House side, Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Rep.

Mark Takano of California, the top Democrat on the committee, included their names on the statement.

"This legislation will ensure these veterans have a viable solution to avoid defaulting on their loans, bring their mortgages current, and avoid foreclosure by establishing a replacement partial claims program," the lawmakers said.

The partial claims program replaces the Veterans Affairs Servicing Program, which was described as a "last-resort option" for delinquent borrowers to lower their mortgage rate and make their monthly payments more affordable.

Under that program, the VA bought the mortgage from the servicer.

But the program permanently closed May 1, after Republican lawmakers complained the VA should not be in the business of buying home mortgages. They argued some veterans might intentionally fall behind on their payments to get a lower mortgage rate from the VA.

"My focus is to ensure that veterans remain in their homes whenever possible," said Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis. "But I am concerned that this program could evolve into a financial

burden of billions of dollars in bailouts that fall on the shoulders of taxpayers."

Van Orden introduced the VA Home Loan Program Reform Act in the House for a partial claim program to allow veterans to catch up with their overdue mortgage payments while keeping the original loan.

Under the partial claim program, veterans facing financial hardship can defer missed payments without immediately facing foreclosure, Van Orden said.

The VA Home Loan Program Reform Act received support from lenders and other stakeholders, including the Mortgage Bankers Association, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion.

"We encourage the VA and mortgage servicers to continue their collaboration as this program is implemented, ensuring that they help mitigate any impact on veterans facing financial hardship while VA takes the necessary steps to establish the new partial claims program properly," lawmakers said in the joint statement.

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## MILITARY

# More time, more selection, better results

Fort Carson a trendsetter for Army's efforts to revamp dining facilities

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT CARSON, Colo. — Sgt. Adam Mazeika, a medic at the Army base, said he tries to eat in the dining facilities on base as much as possible because the food isn't bad and has helped him purposefully gain weight.

He likes to eat in the facility, but Fort Carson's grab-and-go meals are now available later after the dining room closes, which allows him to complete an extra workout and not miss a meal.

"The kiosk is nice because I eat enough and have extra food," Mazeika said. "The hours are perfect as long as you know them."

He is part of a growing number of soldiers returning this year to the dining facilities at the base after officials found a way to increase the hours of operation and create more meal options.

The 4th Infantry Division pulled the food program from a low of only serving 250 meals in a weekend to a 700% increase in 18 months. The division did so by making certain dining facilities were open with consistent weekly schedules near soldiers' living areas and any to-go options were in addition to regular meal service — not a replacement, said Sgt. Maj. Kendra Knuckles, senior chief culinary manager for the division.

By the end of the summer troops will also have the choice of grabbing meals from the division's reimagined meal prep program, which is prepackaged meals intended to be reheated later by soldiers. A previous version of the program had about six meal options. By August, the division will rotate about 20 meals each at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The division also opened the Carson Café, where soldiers grab a meal and eat in a lounge area with games and TVs.

"Be creative," Knuckles said she tells facility managers. "Set the ambiance in your facilities. If you are doing a Mexican meal, or Tex-Mex, or whatever, put some merengue on so



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

**Gregory Joell, Fort Carson food program manager, speaks with a vendor about products available to stock in dining facilities, in May at Fort Carson, Colo.**

when the soldiers come inside the [dining facility], it flushes whatever they were dealing with and they just say, 'Oh man, I like this.' "

## Listening and adapting

Knuckles and her counterpart Gregory Joell, Fort Carson food program manager and an Army retiree, couldn't point to one specific reason for the base's rebounded dining. It was a genuine response to the flood of feedback from soldiers — submitted internally and posted publicly online, including eight inquiries from members of Congress based on concerns from constituents.

The hours were confusing, so they built a consistent schedule instead of a rotating one. The portions were too small, so soldiers can now serve themselves buffet-style. The variety was stagnant, so managers have more leeway in creativity and specialty nights with themed meals. They have also added requested stations for fresh-made smoothies, burritos and do-it-yourself sandwiches.

"We are trying to support all these different folks' way of eating, the way they were brought up," Joell said.

During the week, the 4th Infantry Division culinary program serves an average of nearly 12,000 meals at all types of facilities.

About 6,000 soldiers on post are eligible for meal cards with an allow-

ance affording them three meals a day, which they indirectly pay for through a basic allowance for subsistence that is deducted from their pay. The dining facilities are also open to anyone without a meal card who wants to pay out-of-pocket.

## Army systems slow to change

Bases across the Army are making similar changes to match the changing meal preferences of its newest generation of soldiers who less frequently eat together in a dining facility. Instead, there is growing demand for food to take home.

And yet, each base is on its own to develop standards and implementation for a grab-and-go meal prep program. There is no standard program for bases to build upon, nor does the standard payment system accommodate soldiers' desire to take multiple meals home at one time.

Chief Warrant Officer Shedrick Swain, senior command food adviser for Army Materiel Command, said the Army is working to develop such a program for service-wide use, but it is in its infancy.

"It is a continually changing environment," he said. "You're moving at a rapid pace in terms of your mission, your day-to-day operations ... and you are focused on just trying to grab a quick meal that meets nutritional needs and take a couple of moments

to have some down time and enjoy your meal by yourself. That's where a lot of younger service members are focused."

About 60 facilities at 17 locations now do some form of meal prep with "pockets of excellence," including Fort Hood in Texas and Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. There are 28 kiosks operating at 16 Army locations, Swain said.

Dining facilities are funded based on interactions, so they lose out when soldiers don't come in for each meal. There's also not a simple way to scan their ID card for more than one meal at a time.

The Army is also looking for a solution to this, Swain said.

"Overall, we don't want to constrain or confine the initiative at all. This is something that has been successful in the early stages. We want this to continue to move forward and become a better product overall," he said.

Humming in the background of this work is a contract to put a private company inside a dining facility at five installations in this order: Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Stewart, Ga.; Fort Hood; Fort Drum, N.Y.; and Fort Carson, according to Materiel Command. A vendor proposal request closed this month.

Meanwhile, Knuckles has ramped up training for cooks in the division because the lack of a service-wide program also means soldiers aren't getting training on meal prep programs. Standard culinary training for entry-level soldiers focuses on field feeding and dining facility operations, she said.

Fort Carson hosts its own training opportunities for its cooks where she aims to encourage creativity in preparing meals in the dining facilities and the field. In addition, all cooks are now learning the base's new meal prep options.

Knuckles wants cooks to know and understand what they prepare for sale — not just the ingredients but the nutrition it provides.

"It's building a team that can be able to effectively communicate what is in the products if soldiers have questions," she said.

## MILITARY

# Base renamed for Confederate's father

## Camp Beauregard now named after War of 1812 soldier

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Louisiana National Guard has returned the name Camp Beauregard to its military training center in Pineville, honoring a state militia veteran from the War of 1812 instead of the Confederate general namesake it boasted for more than a century, state officials have announced.

The Guard base owned by the state will now bear the name of Capt. Jacques Toutant Beauregard, who fought in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, the last major fight of the conflict between American and British troops. The new namesake also happens to be the father of Confederate Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, whose moniker was stripped from the post in 2023 when it became the Louisiana National Guard Training Center Pineville as the state followed the federal government's lead in removing Confederate ties from military installations.

The new move also follows the federal government, as President Donald Trump's administration this year has reverted all nine Army installations renamed in 2023 to their original names but in honor of veterans who did not serve the Confederacy.

In a social media statement posted alongside a photo of a gravestone bearing the word "Wokeism," Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry announced the move.

"In Louisiana, we honor courage, not



Louisiana National Guard

**The Louisiana National Guard on Monday reverted the name of its training center to Camp Beauregard to honor a state militia veteran from the War of 1812 who is the father of the Confederate general who was the original namesake.**

cancel it," wrote Landry, a Republican who took office last year. "Let this be a lesson that we should always give reverence to history and not be quick to so easily condemn or erase the dead, lest we and our times be judged arbitrary by future generations."

Trump has long railed against the efforts to remove Confederate names from the military, which began during his first term in the White House. Under his direction, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth restored the name Fort Bragg to the Army's largest installation in March — after the North Carolina post held the name Fort Liberty for less than two years. The base now honors a World War II soldier with the name Bragg.

Hegseth in the following months ordered all the renamed posts reverted to their old names after identifying new veterans with the same names.

Camp Beauregard's new namesake served in the Third Regiment of the

Louisiana militia, the precursor to the state's National Guard, and led his troops as they formed the vanguard of the fight against British soldiers in New Orleans from the opening skirmishes on Dec. 23, 1814, through the battle's main engagement on Jan. 8, 1815.

The battle, which was fought after a treaty to end the conflict was already signed, saw the Americans route British forces, according to historians.

The British took nearly 2,000 casualties, and the Americans lost less than a dozen troops, according to statistics from the American Battlefield Trust.

A statement from the Louisiana National Guard does not mention the camp's new namesake is the father of the old namesake.

Jacques Toutant Beauregard was the owner of his family's long-held Contre-ras Plantation, a sugar cane farm outside New Orleans worked by slaves under his leadership, according to

historians.

The state's Guard said the move honors a prominent Louisianan and military figure.

"We're naming our premier training installation after an American hero and patriot who fought for the freedom of the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and the United States of America against a foreign invader," said Army Maj. Gen. Thomas Friloux, the Louisiana National Guard's top general.

Camp Beauregard was first established in 1917 just outside Pineville in central Louisiana to train infantry forces gearing up to deploy during World War I. It was purchased by the state in 1920 to support National Guard training but was federalized in 1940 to train forces preparing for World War II.

It has remained a prominent training facility for the Louisiana Guard since the 1970s, according to state officials. It spans 12,500 acres and includes various firing ranges, vehicle training simulators, an urban assault course and counter improvised explosive device lanes.

"By restoring the name Camp Beauregard, we honor a legacy of courage and service that dates back over two centuries," Landry said in a second statement. "Capt. Jacques Toutant Beauregard stood at the front lines in defense of New Orleans during one of our nation's most defining battles. His patriotism and leadership continue to inspire generations of Louisiana Guardsmen who stand ready to defend our state and nation at a moment's notice."

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# DOD not billing satellite firms adequately, GAO says

By MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Defense Department must do a better job of recouping costs from companies that use its facilities to launch satellites into space, a congressional watchdog agency said in a recent report.

Inability to calculate all the costs involved in private-sector use of federal space sites is a concern amid the

infrastructure strain from ballooning use, the Government Accountability Office said in a June 30 report.

"As a result, DOD may be missing opportunities to collect millions of dollars that could support infrastructure improvements," the GAO said.

The number of commercial satellite launches from federal sites has quadrupled from 32 to 132 since 2021, the report said.

In the face of that increase, the Defense Department has struggled to bill companies accurately for direct costs of launches at federal facilities, and it still lacks clear collection and reimbursement guidance for support services including maintenance, operations and upgrades, the report found.

The major players at the moment are Elon Musk's aerospace company SpaceX, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos'

company Blue Origin and a joint venture between Boeing and Lockheed Martin called United Launch Alliance.

The three companies received a contract award of \$13.7 billion in April for 54 launches, with the lion's share going to SpaceX, the report said.

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MILITARY

# Combat patches approved for some deployed soldiers

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — Combat patches are now authorized for U.S. soldiers who deployed to a select group of countries in the Middle East and Africa over roughly the past two years, the Army announced recently.

The countries include Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, all of which are in U.S. Central Command's area of operations.

Djibouti, home to U.S. Africa Command's Camp Lemonnier, also made the list, which was given in an Army statement.

Eligibility to wear the shoulder sleeve insignia applies to the time period between Oct. 7, 2023, and June 24, 2025, according to the statement.

"These changes acknowledge the inherent risks and challenges faced by Soldiers in these locations and timeframes," the Army said.

While the statement didn't specify what circumstances prompted the implementation of the policy, the start date of the period coincides with the Hamas attack on Israel that ratcheted

up tensions across the region.

In December 2023, the Pentagon launched Operation Prosperity Guardian, a U.S.-led task force aimed at protecting Red Sea shipping from attacks by Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen.

The Houthis began striking with increased frequency after the start of the war in Israel and Gaza.

A major U.S. assault on the Houthis in March ended weeks later, with the militants agreeing to a ceasefire.

The authorization applies to soldiers who served at least one day during the designated time frame.

The directive does not authorize monetary entitlements such as hostile fire pay, imminent danger pay or combat zone tax exclusion, the Army said.

Authorizing combat patches recognizes the sacrifices of soldiers serving in harm's way, the service said.

The combat patch is worn on the right sleeve of the uniform just below the American flag. Combat veterans are authorized to permanently wear the patch on their uniforms, according to Army regulations.

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Oklo Inc.

Oklo Inc. created this rendering of the nuclear microreactor building that the Pentagon wants to construct at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska.

## Alaska base selected as site of microreactor

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A remote Air Force base in Alaska has been selected to be the first U.S. military installation with a nuclear microreactor under a Defense Department pilot project.

Eielson Air Force Base, located near Fairbanks, was named in June by the Defense Department as the preferred site for the reactor. Pentagon officials hope to have it built and running by late 2028.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink said in an announcement that Eielson was selected because the microreactors would be most beneficial at isolated bases with fewer power options if other electrical systems failed. Eielson experienced temporary power outages in 2020 and 2024.

If the pilot project planned at Eielson proves the microreactors have value, additional models could be added to more bases in the future, Meink said.

"This initiation has the potential to shape future strategies for powering national security infrastructure — especially in the Arctic, where energy reliability is critical amid evolving threats," he said.

Eielson is home to the 354th Fighter Wing. The base operates in extreme Arctic conditions, with temperatures well below zero degrees during winter.

The reactor could keep the base's lights on and heat running and perform other missions, including possibly de-icing runways in case other systems are offline.

The Defense Logistics Agency said Oklo Inc. would design, build, own and operate the microreactor that the Air Force wants to install at Eielson. The nuclear technology company based in Santa Clara, Calif., is developing a test model of the reactor at the Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho Falls.

The Pentagon would not say how much the microreactor will cost.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission rejected Oklo's initial license application for its microreactor design in 2022, citing incomplete data for approval. Oklo has announced plans to reapply. President Donald Trump in May issued a directive that the NRC process applications in less than 18 months.

A 30-year, fixed-price power purchase agreement between the Air Force and Oklo would be finalized once the NRC grants a license.

The project is part of the Advanced Nuclear Power for Installations program, which aims to build microreactors at two military installations by 2030. The reactors are designed to generate between 3 and 10 megawatts of power and operate for several years without need for refueling.

The Pentagon described microreactors as advanced nuclear systems capable of generating electricity for several years without replenishing the nuclear fuel that do not need connection to commercial power supplies to operate.

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