



Soldiers assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) fast rope out of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during an exercise in Barbados. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. JOSHUA TAECKENS)

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## Growing threats challenge US forces

A “convergence” of adversaries is threatening global security, a development made more complex by the proliferation of battlefield technology and commercial disruptions, a senior Army officer said.

Gen. Bryan Fenton, commanding general of U.S. Special Operations Command, said he sees the security environment through three lenses, the first of which is the volatile alliance formed among the adversaries of the United States and its allies.

“The first lens would be the convergence of the adversaries that have been so named in our National Defense Strategy,” Fenton said Monday during an event hosted by the Economic Club of New York.

Topping the list, he said, is China,

which is flexing its military and diplomatic muscles.

“In singularity, the People’s Republic of China has manifested in the military space a very large military presence in the Indo-Pacific,” he said. At the same time, “they’ve got a diplomatic corps that we ... assess is all about diplomatic pressurization and combined with economic coercion at times to really turn countries in a different direction from even, at times, relationships with the United States and other partners and allies that we all have.”

Close behind is Russia, whose invasion of Ukraine is underscored by an industrial base “that’s starting to crank up again with armaments and materiel” with a speed that is chal-

lenging not only Ukraine, but NATO and its allies, Fenton said.

Iran poses a special threat with not only its nuclear capabilities, but with long-range missiles and weaponry and its use of regional proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen and Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq and Syria, Fenton said.

North Korea, which deployed some 10,000 soldiers to Russia “to add to Russian capability against the Ukrainians,” poses a nuclear threat not only on the Korean peninsula but in the Indo-Pacific, Fenton said.

“What we see is it’s Ukraine against Russia, plus Iran, plus now North Korea, and certainly in materiel solutions, [China],” Fenton said.

See **Fenton**, Page 5



**NEW FROM AUSA!**

# **2024 PROFILE OF THE U.S. ARMY**



Updated and published every two years, AUSA's *Profile of the United States Army* is an easy-to-read overview of the structure, purpose and activities of the Total Army; it serves as a useful guide to long-time Soldiers, new recruits, veterans, civilians and Army families.

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## GAO report urges better child care provider retention

**T**he Army, along with the other services, should track the effectiveness of child care employee retention efforts, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office.

“The Department of Defense operates the largest employer-sponsored child care program in the United States,” the report states. “While officials in the four military services told us retaining child care workers has been a challenge, none of the military services have established metrics to track the effectiveness of their retention initiatives.”

GAO reviewed DoD and military service documents, conducted in-person and virtual site visits to eight installations with the greatest unmet child care needs, interviewed installation commanders and child care workers and held group discussions with child care workers to come to its findings.

The Army follows almost all the leading recruitment and retention practices, except for establishing and tracking child care worker retention metrics, according to the report.

None of the other services even partially track retention numbers, GAO found.

Across DoD, 17,500 child care workers staff approximately 500 of the department’s child development



Col. Eli Lozano, commander of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, Maryland, participates in a Family and Child VIP Day. (U.S. ARMY/HANNAH COVINGTON)

centers and 250 school-age care programs, according to the report.

The report outlines several recruiting and retention challenges for DoD child care workers.

In terms of recruitment, new child care workers “must undergo a lengthy onboarding process” that could last between one and six months, and installations must compete against civilian-sector job openings, according to the report. Issues such as a “stressful work environment” and limited career advancement opportunities plagued retention, the report says.

These issues confound and foster a high turnover rate for child care workers, the report found. Though all services reported “high child care worker turnover rates,” the Army’s rate for fiscal year 2022 was 50%, the highest of the services.

The Army has taken steps to ease child care challenges, according to the report, including creating a position that closes the gap between child care workers and child development center management and establishing specialized positions for personnel to support child care workers working with children with special needs.

The report urges the Army to develop metrics to track child care program retention initiatives.

“While the military services have implemented many programs and benefits to help retain child care workers, they have not adequately assessed the impact of these retention efforts,” the report found. “By establishing and tracking metrics of success for improving child care worker retention, the military services will have information to better manage retention issues and help address reported staffing shortfalls.”

[Read the full report here.](#)

## Meet the AUSA headquarters staff

### Cynthia Gertsen

*Senior Program Manager,  
Center for Leadership*

Cynthia Gertsen has been with AUSA for nine months and has a background in the performing arts. She and her husband have been married for 17 years and have two teenage daughters and a dog. In her free time, Cynthia enjoys reading, listening to any genre of music and spending time with family.



## New DoD process eases installation access for veterans, caregivers



Individuals enter Chaffee Gate at Fort Knox, Kentucky. (U.S ARMY/SAVANNAH BAIRD)

**V**eterans and caregivers will have easier access to military installations under a new partnership between the defense and Veterans Affairs departments, DoD announced in a news release.

“The VA-DoD partnership will make it easier for our nation's veterans and their caregivers to more easily access benefits and services on military installations, including VA medical appointments,” Tanya Bradsher, deputy secretary of Veterans Affairs, said in the Nov. 15 news release.

The updated process enables eligible veterans and caregivers to enroll and be electronically verified for recurring installation access so they can more easily travel on-post for activities and services such as medical appointments, shopping at commissaries and exchanges and utilizing morale, welfare and recreation services, according to the release.

Eligible caregivers and veterans without a VA-issued Veteran Health Identification Card can enroll at their respective installation's visitor center using a REAL ID Act-compliant driver's license or identification card.

Once a Veteran Health Identification Card or REAL ID is enrolled for

recurring installation access, veterans and caregivers can go directly to the installation gate to gain access for a period of around one to three years, according to the news release.

Veterans without a Veteran Health Identification Card, and eligible caregivers, do not need to show a VA-issued caregiver patronage letter or service-connected disability letter, or VA health eligibility center form to enroll in installation access. These documents are still needed to access the commissary, exchange or other morale, welfare and recreation services, as those sites cannot electronically verify a person's eligibility.

Veterans and caregivers “deserve a smooth experience in accessing installations,” Ashish Vazirani, who is performing the duties of undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said in the news release.

“We are glad to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs on this initiative and look forward to continuing to welcome eligible veterans and VA caregivers to military exchanges and commissaries, and at eligible facilities like golf courses, movie theaters and clubs,” Vazirani said.

For more information, click [here](#).

# AUSAExtra

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**Gen. Bob Brown, USA Ret.**  
President and CEO, AUSA

**Lt. Gen. Leslie Smith, USA Ret.**  
Vice President, Leadership and Education,  
AUSA

**Luc Dunn**  
Editor

**Desiree Hurlocker**  
Advertising Manager

**Advertising Information Contact:**  
Fox Associates Inc.  
116 W. Kinzie St. • Chicago, IL 60654  
Phone: 800-440-0231  
Email: [adinfo.rmy@foxrep.com](mailto:adinfo.rmy@foxrep.com)

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## PERK OF THE WEEK

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**Fenton***From Page 1*

“That’s a fusion that concerns not only the Ukrainians and NATO, but certainly the U.S. and our security senior leaders,” he said.

On the ground in Ukraine, Fenton pointed out, the second lens shows that the character of war has been turned on its head with World War I-style trench warfare made more terrifying and deadly by unmanned technology.

“If you look up in the skies, its 21st century moving into 22nd century type warfare with uncrewed anything—big drones, little drones, one-way munitions, things you can’t see in the electromagnetic spectrum that’s knocking these things down, there’s the infusion of space and cyber, the maritime surface and sub-surface vessels that have no one in them being used for reconnaissance or kinetic effect,” Fenton said.



A soldier with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), center, prepares to assault an objective with Lebanese partners during training near Amman, Jordan. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

The threats are exacerbated by a third prism, namely shipping disruptions in the Red Sea, where over the past two years there have been bellicose actions against commercial and U.S. vessels as well, he said.

“We’re watching the markets frac-

ture,” Fenton said, recalling how the Ukrainians were interrupted trying to export their wheat.

Together, “those three prisms are making it one of the most complicated times that I certainly think I’ve ever seen,” Fenton said.



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## Volunteering aids personal growth, community connection

**W**ith the holiday season upon us, many of us are thinking about how to give back to our communities.

Last month, at the Association of the U.S. Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition in Washington, D.C., the association's Family Readiness directorate recognized Lt. Col. Tony Messenger and his family, an Army family that exemplifies what it means to give back, as the 2024 AUSA Volunteer Family of the Year.

The Volunteer Family of the Year Award recognizes an exceptional Army family whose dedicated volunteer service improves their local community. The Messenger family demonstrates how volunteering and giving back to others is something you will never regret.

Tony Messenger, his wife, Amy, and their four sons, Connor, Liam, Colin and Keegan, selflessly shared their time and talents during their tour at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

The family's volunteer efforts included creating the 72-hour room initiative, which gives drill sergeants a chance to spend time with their families during one of the most critical periods of the training cycle. They also helped form a partnership with a local high school and Fort Jackson and coordinated the first school staff visit to the installation, helping to build ties between the Army and its neighbors.

Helping in your community is an opportunity to grow and better understand how you fit into the world around you. For military families that move to a new duty station every couple of years, this can be vital to their well-being.

The Messenger family recently moved to Fort Liberty, North Carolina. "As with every PCS—this is our 11th—our family volunteers in each community we are a part of," Amy Messenger said. "Every community



Pam Swan, left, vice president of military relations and business development for Veterans United Home Loans—sponsor of AUSA's Volunteer Family of the Year Award—presents a gift basket to the 2024 award recipients, Lt. Col. Tony Messenger and his family, during the AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

has different needs, so we try to find where to best contribute at each place."

The family is settling into their new post and has started volunteering with the unit's Soldier and Family Readiness Group and Care Team, which offers short-term care and support to families of deceased or seriously wounded soldiers, she said.

"We have found volunteering at new duty assignments helps us integrate into the community and meet and get to know our new Army family and location," Amy Messenger said. "The bonus for our children is

that they meet kids with similar interests, helping them adapt to new places quickly. Each of the boys has made lifelong friends through volunteer activities on post and within the local community."

Giving back and volunteering can enrich your life. It's a great way to familiarize yourself with your community and connect with people and ideas that will impact your life. You also can gain experiences that will help you succeed in navigating some of the challenges of Army life.

One of the best ways to connect with others in your community is through AUSA chapters around the world. Chapter members are volunteers and provide a variety of events and services as ways to give back. Find your local chapter here.

We also want to remind you that Dec. 3 is this year's Giving Tuesday, created in 2012 as a simple idea: a day that encourages people to do good through acts of kindness and gifts of voice, time, talent and donations.

Whether it's helping a neighbor or contributing to a cause, everyone has something to give, and every act of kindness counts.



Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George, left, greets Lt. Col. Tony Messenger and his family—AUSA's Volunteer Family of the Year—during the association's 2024 Annual Meeting. (AUSA PHOTO)

**Cindy Risch** is AUSA's Family Readiness program manager.



## Chapter-sponsored events honor centenarian, female vets

**E**arlier this month, the Association of the U.S. Army's Puerto Rico chapter participated in two events recognizing centenarian and female veterans, advancing the association's mission to honor those who have served.

"The government of Puerto Rico observes November as the month of the veteran, with functions around the island on dif-

ferent days throughout the month," said retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Cristino Lozada Cruz, the chapter president.

"Our chapter is a member of the Puerto Rico Veterans Advocate Committee, and we sponsor and co-sponsor a variety of events," he said.

At this official Veterans Day event on Nov. 11, the theme was "Celebrating our Centenarian Veterans." "Among those honored were musi-

cians, singers and general officers, to name a few that have reached 100 years of age," Cruz said.

There were more than 300 people in attendance, including soldiers, veterans, government officials, representatives from AUSA and other veteran service organizations, and family members and friends, he said. The veterans who were recognized received a proclamation and a memorial coin from the government.

Maj. Gen. Miguel Mendez, adjutant general of the Puerto Rico National Guard, served as the event's keynote speaker.

"Your love for your country, courage and sacrifice have been fundamental to ensuring that we can all enjoy the freedom we have today," Mendez said. "The loyalty and commitment of a military veteran is an example to emulate."

Later that day, Cruz spoke at an event honoring female veterans hosted by Lions Clubs International, a global humanitarian organization for which Cruz serves as the adviser for Puerto Rico. About 25 veterans present received a certificate of recognition, he said.



Veterans that have reached 100 years of age are recognized during a ceremony in Santurce, Puerto Rico, sponsored by AUSA's Puerto Rico chapter. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

## AUSA volunteer leader addresses Bush Center forum

**R**etired Sgt. Maj. Mark Reilly, vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs with the Association of the U.S. Army's George Washington chapter in Virginia, highlighted the association's mission and partnerships during a recent panel discussion on veterans' mental health at the Bush Presidential Center in Dallas.

In his remarks, Reilly emphasized the "connective power" of music wellness for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. He pointed to the Washington Tattoo, a nonprofit based in the

Washington, D.C., area that hosts musical events to create awareness and provide support for veterans and first responders.

With programs like "Rudiments to Recovery," which uses the power of rhythm through drumming to positively impact mental health and well-being, and the organization's annual capstone event supporting veteran mental health, the Washington Tattoo "combines in-person and online events to strengthen veteran identity, bring together a trustworthy military-connected community and provide veterans with a heightened sense of purpose through culture, heritage and service," Reilly said.



Retired Sgt. Maj. Mark Reilly, vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs with AUSA's George Washington chapter, discusses the impact of music on veterans' mental health during a forum at the Bush Presidential Center in Dallas. (AUSA PHOTO)

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