

Panetta: US in need of stronger alliances, leadership

At a time when the United States is being tested on multiple fronts across the diplomatic battlefield, [former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta](#) addressed a need for the U.S. to assert itself as a global leader.

Panetta said for the U.S. to accomplish this, it needs a military that's well-equipped to deal with cyberwarfare threats, an empathetic State Department and stronger global alliances.

When it comes to the future of warfare, Panetta said the U.S. needs to invest more into its understanding of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and bolster its cyberwarfare capabilities.

"We've got to be on the cutting-edge of technology if we're going to be strong militarily," Panetta said.

[The U.S. Department of Defense's 2025 budget requested \\$143.2 billion in its overall research and development, with \\$14.5 billion of that going to cybersecurity, cyberspace operations and research.](#)

But building a strong military also includes addressing recruiting struggles of the past decade, according to Panetta.

The U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force all failed to meet their recruiting goals during the 2023 fiscal year by 41,000 recruits, [according to the Department of Defense](#). He said one solution could be

introducing a “national service system,” where young people are required to serve the government in some capacity.

While Panetta said the U.S. needs to address its internal defense requirements, he also said it needs to develop more alliances in regions where tensions are high.

“We need not just a stick, but also a velvet glove,” Panetta said.

That would include building relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, as the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan looms. It would also mean stronger alliances with Arab nations in the Middle East, Panetta said.

Panetta said he believes that type of diplomacy is on the ballot in 2024, as President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump are set for a rematch. During the Trump administration, Panetta said the former president embraced isolationism.

Trump threatened to pull the U.S. out of NATO, [the world's largest military alliance](#), during his first term. For the U.S. to keep peace around the world, Panetta said isolationism doesn't work.

“We govern by leadership or crisis,” Panetta said. “If we don't have strong leadership in this country, mark my words we will have crisis.”