



Rapporteur: Kaia Haney

On August 11, 2021, CNA held its fifth Inclusive National Security event (@InclusiveNatSec on Twitter). This initiative provides a forum for discussions on inclusive national security. This month's event (recording [here](#)) "Racism and Defense" explored the question, How can the Department of Defense build a diverse, inclusive, and resilient military? The keynote speaker was Bishop Garrison, Senior Advisor on Human Capital and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Garrison has deep expertise regarding a range of race-related challenges and is a leader in work related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for the Department of Defense. He also plays a critical role in the Department's efforts to counter extremism (including racially based extremism). The event moderator was Nilanthi Samaranayake, Director of the Strategy and Policy Analysis Program at CNA. Below are some takeaways from the discussion.

Reflections from Bishop Garrison:

- DEI is a force multiplier for the military. Diversity of thought and lived experience leads people to engage with the world, issues, and problems differently. Diversity can therefore help the military develop creative solutions to the complex challenges facing the US. DEI is a top priority not only for the Department of Defense but also for the entire national security apparatus.
- More diversity is needed across military leadership. The focus should be on trying to "build a bigger table." Rather than taking away seats or opportunities, it's about creating more opportunities for historically underrepresented groups. The military also needs to create an environment where people want to stay and where they can thrive.
- The Department of Defense reflects broader society—what is occurring outside of the military affects personnel and discussions within the military. Throughout the US, there is a desire to engage in difficult discussions and develop actionable solutions to racism and inequality, which is supporting the military's efforts to address these same challenges.
- Racism within the military has a corrosive effect on force cohesion. There is a clear intersection between improving diversity and reducing both racism and extremist activity within the military.
- The most significant challenge is recruitment and retention. The military needs to rethink how it builds pipelines of talent and values key positions, and it needs to give people more space and flexibility to deal with new concerns facing the 21st-century workforce. Through innovative solutions, the Department of Defense seeks to ensure that senior enlisted military, officers, and civilian leadership reflect the real world.
- The best way to support DEI efforts is to have thoughtful conversations. We need to be fearless in how we educate ourselves—getting out of our comfort zones and asking tough questions to understand cultures that are not our own. After we educate ourselves, we can move the messages out to our broader communities.
- Some changes will take time because of the size of the Department of Defense. Transparency about how the Department is navigating these difficult issues as well as patience are critical in the interim.

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