

July 22, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense

Dear Secretary Austin:

Thank you for your leadership and dedicated service to our country. As veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, we were disturbed to learn about the extreme abuse of animals during the annual [Cobra Gold](#) joint multinational exercise involving U.S. service members, which risks public health, dishonors the uniform, and threatens species vulnerable to extinction. **Based on the information below, we urge you to end the use of live animals in Cobra Gold immediately.**

U.S. service members are slated to travel to Thailand to attend the Cobra Gold drill, which has reportedly been postponed until August because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Disturbing [video footage](#) from last year's event showed exercises in which U.S. troops killed chickens by violently swinging them to cause traumatic injury, tore open live geckos and ate them, gnawed on live tarantulas and scorpions, and cut open cobras to drink their blood. These barbaric acts dishonor the military. They must be stopped immediately.

These exercises also pose a serious zoonotic disease threat. The World Health Organization has warned that “an estimated 70 per cent of emerging and re-emerging pathogens”—such as those that have caused the current COVID-19 pandemic, along with Ebola, Zika, SARS, MERS, smallpox, tuberculosis, and others—originated in animals. It's irresponsible to jeopardize our service members' health and safety during these bloodlust exercises.

Troops deserve the best training to survive in the outdoors, but Cobra Gold's use of live animals resembles a vulgar hazing ritual and doesn't deliver any practical survival skills. Rather, as the U.S. Marine Corps has [admitted](#), the main objective of the activity has been to build camaraderie and observe a “time honored tradition” that purportedly cements the relationship between U.S. troops and other participants. This goal could easily be achieved through other means that don't harm or kill animals.

We urge you to end Cobra Gold's deadly, dishonorable, and dangerous use of live animals.

Thank you. We look forward to receiving your response regarding this urgent matter.

Sincerely yours,

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