



**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000**

MAY 06 2020

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I would like to provide you with an update on the progress we are making towards implementation of reforms in section 922 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY17 (Public Law 114-328) since your October 23, 2019 letter. As I described in my testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 4, 2020, I am committed to empowering the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)) to provide civilian oversight and advocacy of the special operations forces (SOF) enterprise.

First, we have scheduled monthly meetings between ASD(SO/LIC) and either myself or the Deputy Secretary so we can closely track section 922 implementation. Our first meeting was held last month. I have also instructed ASD(SO/LIC) to submit bi-weekly reports to me on special operations-specific organization, training, and equipment issues, consistent with how the Secretaries of the Military Departments submit periodic reports to me.

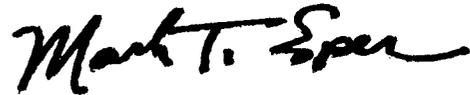
Second, I am reviewing options for a Deputy ASD position under ASD(SO/LIC) to lead the Secretariat for Special Operations (Secretariat) and to focus on the exercise of authority, direction, and control of all special operations-specific administrative matters related to organizing, training, resourcing, readiness, civilian personnel, and equipping SOF.

Third, the Department has focused on hiring actions and bringing the Secretariat back into the Pentagon. The Secretariat is currently staffed with 33 personnel and has 10 additional hiring actions in process. In addition, we have identified space within the Pentagon to move Secretariat employees back from the Mark Center, and the first personnel moved back in mid-April. We expect the move to be completed in the coming weeks once all space security requirements are met. The Secretariat, in addition to the ASD(SO/LIC) leadership team, is actively involved in providing civilian oversight of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). They are integral to USSOCOM's budget, force management, requirements validation, and readiness processes that govern the SOF enterprise.

Fourth, to further strengthen the authority of the ASD(SO/LIC) in special operations-specific administrative matters, and to clearly communicate his role in the administrative chain of command for USSOCOM, I intend to issue guidance to the Department outlining ASD(SO/LIC)'s roles and responsibilities.

I agree that empowered civilian leadership is integral to the Department's success, and I remain committed to institutionalizing the reforms taken under section 922. There is more work to be done, which has been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the workforce and our operations, but I wanted you to be aware of the steps we have taken thus far. I look forward to continuing our dialogue in this area of mutual interest and focus. I am sending identical letters to the other signees of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark T. Esper". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

cc:
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member



**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000**

MAY 06 2020

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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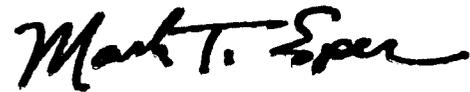
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cc:
The Honorable William M. "Mac" Thornberry
Ranking Member