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November 24, 2020

The Honorable Christopher Miller  
Acting Secretary  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Miller,

While I was not previously informed of your intent to move the position and office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC) external to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, I do support the reorganization as a means to clarify the administrative chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and ASD SO/LIC, which is consistent with section 922 of the FY2017 NDAA. Section 922 created dual responsibilities for ASD SO/LIC by: (1) providing a direct chain of command from the Secretary of Defense to ASD/SOLIC for all special operations-peculiar administrative matters and (2) directing ASD/SOLIC to “assist the Secretary and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the development and supervision of policy...”<sup>1</sup>

The reorganization appears to strengthen civilian oversight responsibilities for special operations-peculiar administrative matters, including manning, training, and equipping of special operations forces, consistent with those service secretary-like responsibilities. However, the reorganization also appears to impact the relationship between the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP) and ASD SO/LIC. Any effort to remove USDP from the development and oversight of special operations policy would be inconsistent with the congressional intent behind section 922.

Further, given that there has not been a confirmed Department of Defense official in the position of ASD SO/LIC since June 2019 – and, consequently, I have met with four different individuals acting in the capacity of or performing the duties of that position - I will urge President-elect Biden and his incoming team to prioritize the identification of the best candidate to serve in the role of ASD SO/LIC without needing to perform other duties.

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<sup>1</sup> 10 U.S. Code section 138 – Assistant Secretaries of Defense

The lack of stable and empowered civilian leadership has left special operations inconsistently represented at the most senior levels of the department, increasing risk of poor operational accountability, degraded readiness, and impacts to the conduct of the force. I look forward to a deliberate implementation of the processes and procedures necessary to further strengthen civilian oversight of those administrative matters regarding special operations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Langevin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James R. Langevin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Emerging Threats and Capabilities  
House Armed Services Committee