



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

FEB 27 2020

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As a critical partner in building a strong, lethal Navy and Marine Corps, I believe it is important that I share with you the priorities and process I have instituted to better assess the alignment of Naval force structure with the National Defense Strategy (NDS). At the same time, I want to address your expectations regarding key budget and supporting documents, including the statutory requirement for the Secretary of Defense to submit a 30-year shipbuilding plan.

The Department of Defense (DoD) remains committed to building a Navy of at least 355 ships. I personally believe the force structure required is even larger. More urgently, though, the Department also remains focused on the readiness of our current fleet by allocating an additional \$3.4 billion into the Navy's operations and maintenance accounts relative to FY 2020. A Navy of 355 ships is a priority that DoD intends to achieve, but we must avoid doing so in a way that creates a hollow force unable to modernize, outfit, crew, operate, or maintain the ships the Navy has now. I want to ensure we have a fleet that is ready to deploy, fight, and win when duty calls.

While the 30-year shipbuilding plan requires certification that there is sufficient funding across the first five years, the remaining 25 years are both speculative and not budget-informed. You have the FY 2021 President's budget request, which fulfills the certification requirement. I am committed to building and providing you a plan that aligns force mix to the NDS, is based on an approved war plan, and considers resources throughout the 30-year period.

At the same time, the character of maritime warfare is changing rapidly. Technological advancements in space, cyber, and long-range missiles increase the potential for adversaries to track, target, and threaten our ships, as well as other joint platforms. Therefore, and to maintain our maritime superiority, we must explore a range of alternative "future fleet" designs that fully meet the demands of the NDS, while being compatible with future warfighting doctrine, threat developments, and budget constraints. The "future fleet" design will be based on the following:

- Modern warfighting concepts that prioritize joint operations and Navy and Marine Corps integration;
- Operational attributes that emphasize distributed awareness and lethality; survivability in a high-intensity conflict; adaptability in a complex world; ability to project power and demonstrate presence; and the capability to deliver precision effects at long ranges;

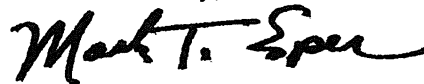
- Compositional attributes that result in fewer larger surface platforms; more smaller surface combatants; greater reliance on lightly- and optionally-manned ships; and an ample submarine force;
- Incorporation of other assets that are integral to the joint fight, such as strategic sealift;
- Emphasis on building a future fleet that will be ready and lethal over its lifetime by remaining affordable, sustainable, and adaptable in an ever-changing environment; and
- The importance of a robust and healthy industrial base, with modern shipyards and highly-skilled workers.

For the reasons outlined above, I assess that it is very prudent to take a fresh look at how we determine the composition of our future Naval forces. To this end, I have charged the Deputy Secretary of Defense with leading a comprehensive review and analysis of the Navy's proposed "future fleet" force structure. Working collaboratively with Navy and Marine Corps leadership, this team will conduct a number of war games, simulations, and detailed analyses over the coming months to assess a wider and bolder range of "future fleet" designs against key desired outcomes and parameters, including those listed above.

The results of this rigorous analysis are due back to me this summer and will drive future shipbuilding plans. It is my intention to be transparent with you regarding the methods, progress, and results of this assessment. This effort marks a unique opportunity to ensure that analysis on the fleet – the fleet that is needed to meet the NDS – better drives our shipbuilding plan into the future.

Acting Secretary Modly, Admiral Gilday, and General Berger have demonstrated a consistent commitment to ensuring the Navy and Marine Corps are integrated, not just coordinated. I look forward to working with you as we endeavor to ensure the U.S. Navy remains the most dominant maritime force and the best in the world for years to come.

Sincerely,

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

cc:

The Honorable William M. "Mac" Thornberry
Ranking Member