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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

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March 24, 2015

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary of the Air Force
3000 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary James:

I was disappointed by your decision during the hearing last week to emphasize so strongly the Air Force's 20-percent headquarters reductions.

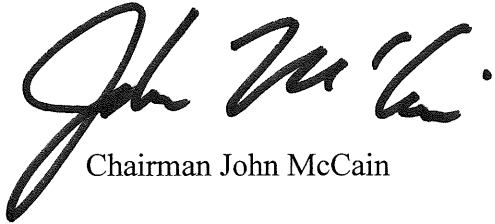
Before he was Secretary of Defense, Dr. Ash Carter released a memo as Deputy Defense Secretary indicating that the 20-percent headquarters cuts were designed to streamline DOD management functions and eliminate lower priority activities. While the 20-percent cut applies to budget dollars, Carter directed organizations to strive for a goal of a 20-percent reduction in government civilian staff. A directive from this initiative was that subordinate headquarters should not grow as a result of reductions in higher headquarters.

After touting the speed at which the Air Force had achieved a 20-percent headquarters reduction, you later conceded that none of the Air Force civilians that were part of that reduction were actually removed from the payroll of the Air Force. Lower priority activities were not eliminated, as directed by Carter. In reality, the Air Force re-designated the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Agency as the Twenty-Fifth Air Force subordinate to Air Combat Command. The Air Force also stood up an Installation and Mission Support Center (IMSC) subordinate headquarters led by a two-star general and attendant support staff. These actions are directly contrary to Carter's guidance of not growing subordinate headquarters.

The 20-percent headquarters reductions were meant to make Defense Department operations more efficient while saving money for American taxpayers. But the conduct of the Air Force in response to this guidance seems to have produced no actual staff reductions and yielded no actual savings. The Senate Armed Services Committee has received no reprogramming request from the Air Force for savings generated in the headquarters budget. In reality, the Air Force pursued a shell game that simply moved money to fund the same positions elsewhere in the service.

I strongly urge the Air Force to reexamine the guidance issued on the 20-percent headquarters cuts and take actions to reduce headquarters staff as directed. This is an issue that the Senate Armed Services Committee will continue monitoring closely.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John McCain", written in a cursive style.

Chairman John McCain