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

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MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DIRECTOR OF COST ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONAL TEST AND EVALUATION
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
DIRECTOR OF NET ASSESSMENT
DIRECTORS OF DEFENSE AGENCIES
DIRECTORS OF DOD FIELD ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: Public Display or Depiction of Flags in the Department of Defense

The mission of the Department of Defense is to provide a combat-ready military force to deter conflict, and, should deterrence fail, to prevail in war. Accomplishing this mission depends on our most important resource — our Service members and civilian employees. Supporting our people requires mutual respect, responsibility, and accountability.

Flags are powerful symbols, particularly in the military community for whom flags embody common mission, common histories, and the special, timeless bond of warriors. As Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, a veteran of the Second World War, once wrote about the United States flag: "It is a symbol of freedom, of equal opportunity, of religious tolerance, and of good will for other peoples who share our aspirations." We wear this flag on our sleeves; we honor it prominently on parade fields; we carry it into combat; and, we drape it over the coffins of those who have given their lives for our Nation.

We must always remain focused on what unifies us: our sworn oath to the Constitution and our shared duty to defend the Nation. I am committed to fielding the most powerful military force the world has known by strengthening the bonds of our most valuable resource — our people. That is why we honor the American flag, which is the principal flag we are authorized and encouraged to display. The flags we fly must accord with the military imperatives of good order and discipline, treating all our people with dignity and respect, and rejecting divisive symbols.

Consequently, in addition to the American flag, Service members and civilian employees are authorized to display or depict representational flags that promote unity and esprit de corps, including:

- Flags of U.S. States and Territories and the District of Columbia;
- Military Service flags;
- Flag or General Officer flags;
- Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed civilian flags;
- Senior Executive Service (SES) and Military Department-specific SES flags;
- The POW/MIA flag;
- Flags of other countries, for which the United States is an ally or partner, or for official protocol purposes;
- Flags of organizations in which the United States is a member (e.g., NATO); and
- Ceremonial, command, unit, or branch flags or guidons.

This guidance applies to public displays or depictions of flags by Service members and civilian employees in all Department of Defense work places, common access areas, and public areas, including, but not limited to:

- Office buildings, facilities, naval vessels, aircraft, government vehicles, hangars, garages, ready rooms, conference rooms, individual offices, cubicles, storage rooms, tool and equipment rooms, workshops, break rooms, kitchens/galleys, recreational areas, commissaries, Navy and Marine Corps and Army and Air Force exchanges, and heads/latrines/restrooms — including property and buildings off installation leased by the Department;
- Sensitive compartmented information facilities and other secure facilities;
- Open-bay barracks, berthing areas, and common areas of barracks and bachelor quarters;
- School houses and training facilities; and
- All spaces or items in public or plain view, such as the outside areas of any Department of Defense buildings and government-operated or public-private venture housing (e.g., parking lots, yards, gazebos, or porches).

The public display or depiction of unauthorized flags in museum exhibits, state-issued license plates, grave sites, memorial markers, monuments, educational displays, historical displays, or works of art, where the nature of the display or depiction cannot reasonably be viewed as endorsement of the flag by the Department of Defense, is not prohibited.

What has always united us remains clear — our common mission, our oath to support and defend the Constitution, and our American flag. With this change in policy, we will further improve the morale, cohesion, and readiness of the force in defense of our great Nation.

Mark T. Esper