

United States Senate

November 24, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Mr. Sean O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Acting Inspector General O'Donnell:

I write for a second time about an incident that occurred on the evening of Monday June 1, 2020, in which several helicopters hovered at low altitudes over densely populated areas of Washington, D.C. The first time I wrote you on June 4, I requested an independent investigation into this incident, given the risk that these flights caused to the civilian population in the area. I not aware of any investigative action on the part of your office. Additionally, it appears that the Department of the Army's internal investigation is currently being held under review by your office. This has been publicly reported, and it has been confirmed by officials from the National Guard Bureau and the Department of the Army.

Helicopters hovering at low altitudes pose very real danger to nearby human life and property, generally. However, I am also alarmed by the apparent objective of the helicopters in this specific situation. Whether or not explicitly intended, the pilots flying appeared to use crowd dispersal tactics on Americans in the nation's capital. This summer, the aggressive response to protesters in the wake of George Floyd's murder raised significant questions about politicization of the military, and this use of National Guard helicopters played a substantial role in those discussions. I am not alone in my concern: many retired generals and other respected national security professionals have since spoken out about the dangers that incidents like these pose to our democracy and civilian trust in our military.

Your office's failure to release the Army's investigation into this incident has only amplified my concern about the impact of partisan politics on the Department of Defense. My understanding, based on public reporting, is that the Army Inspector General resubmitted its report to you in September, following some revisions to its initial submission. I cannot understand why it would take two months for your office to complete its review and release the report. Even if you have a legitimate reason, this delay appears partisan and undermines faith in your office's independence. I urge you to release the report immediately.

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It is imperative that our nation's leadership review the findings related to the incident on June 1 and take action as appropriate to hold individuals accountable and reform process. I look forward to reading the Department of the Army's report in the near future. In the meantime, my office is available to you if there are complicating factors that you need to discuss or if you need support in any way to speed the publication of this investigation.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator