

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2021

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

Dear Acting Inspector General O'Donnell:

We write to request that the Department of Defense (DOD) Office of Inspector General (IG) conduct a review of security procedures relating to the President's emergency satchel, commonly referred to as the "nuclear football," as part of its ongoing review of DOD's "roles, responsibilities, and actions to prepare for, and respond to, the planned protest and its aftermath at the U.S. Capitol campus on January 6, 2021."¹

During the House Impeachment Managers' presentation before the United States Senate, the Managers revealed that a violent mob—some of whom only minutes earlier could be seen on video chanting "Hang Mike Pence"—came dangerously close to the former Vice President and an accompanying aide carrying a nuclear football as they scrambled away to safety.²

U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), which is responsible for U.S. strategic deterrence and nuclear operations, was reportedly unaware that Vice President Pence, his military aide, and the nuclear football were all potentially in danger and only came to understand the gravity of the incident several weeks later when security camera footage was played as a video exhibit during the Senate impeachment trial.

This is not the first time the physical security of the nuclear football has been jeopardized. On November 9, 2017, during former President Trump's visit to Beijing, China, Secret Service agents and former White House Chief of Staff John Kelly reportedly brawled with Chinese officers when a military aide carrying the nuclear football was denied entry to a room in order to accompany President Trump.³

¹ Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, *Review of the DoD's Roles, Responsibilities, and Actions to Prepare for and Respond to the Protest and Its Aftermath at the U.S. Capitol Campus on January 6, 2021* (Jan. 15, 2021) (online at www.dodig.mil/Reports/Project-Announcement-Memos/Article/2473376/project-announcement-review-of-the-dods-roles-responsibilities-and-actions-to-p/).

² *Military Officials Were Unaware of Potential Danger to Pence's 'Nuclear Football' During Capitol Riot*, CNN (Feb. 11, 2021) (online at www.cnn.com/2021/02/11/politics/military-officials-were-unaware-pence-nuclear-football-riot/index.html).

³ *US, Chinese Officials Scuffled Over 'Nuclear Football' During Trump's Visit to Beijing*, Military Times (Feb. 20, 2018) (online at www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/02/20/us-chinese-officials-scuffled-over-nuclear-football-during-trumps-visit-to-beijing/).

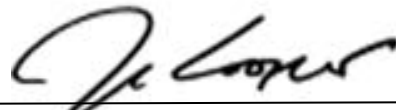
These incidents raise grave national security concerns. For this reason, we request that as part of its review, DOD IG consider whether any security protocols and procedures may have been violated on January 6, 2021, that could have jeopardized the physical security of the nuclear football; whether appropriate security procedures and policies are in place to protect its contents; and if the proper notifications are in place to alert senior DOD officials, in particular the STRATCOM Commander, should the security of the football be compromised. DOD IG should also examine how DOD is prepared to respond to an incident whereby an unauthorized user gains access to a nuclear football.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Oversight and Reform Committee staff at (202) 225-5051 or Armed Services Committee staff at (202) 225-4151. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Jim Cooper
Chairman
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
Committee on Armed Services

cc: The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Michael Turner, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
Committee on Armed Services