Navy Leaders Meet to Chart Course Following Spencer's Departure



Former Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer speaks at a commencement ceremony at U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, in June. Spencer exited Nov. 24 following upheaval over handling of the trial and disciplinary action against Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Tyler D. John

ARLINGTON, Va. – Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper is set to meet Nov. 25 with top U.S. Navy officials to discuss the way ahead in the wake of Secretary Richard V. Spencer's sudden departure, a Pentagon spokesman said in a statement. Esper has proposed a retired Navy admiral to replace Spencer.

Esper is meeting with Navy Undersecretary Thomas Modly, who is the acting civilian chief of the sea service, and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael M. Gilday, Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in the release.

Esper "has asked for the resignation of [Spencer] after losing trust and confidence in him regarding his lack of candor over conversations with the White House involving the handling of Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher," Hoffman said.

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>
> *Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper*

Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward Gallagher was tried by court martial for 10 crimes, including murder, allegedly

committed during operations in Iraq, but was acquitted of the charges in July except for one count of posing for an unofficial picture with a human casualty, for which he was reduced in rank to petty officer first class.

In a Nov. 24 tweet, President Trump said he "was not pleased with the way that Navy Seal Eddie Gallagher's trial was handled by the Navy. He was treated very badly but, despite this, was completely exonerated on all major charges. I then restored Eddie's rank."

"After Secretary Esper and Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Mark A. Milley] spoke with the commander in chief on [Nov. 22] regarding the case of Gallagher, Secretary Esper learned that Secretary Spencer had previously and privately proposed to the White House – contrary to Spencer's public position – to restore Gallagher's rank and allow him to retire with his Trident pin," the Defense Department release said.

"When recently asked by Secretary Esper, Secretary Spencer confirmed that despite multiple conversations on the Gallagher matter, Secretary Esper was never informed by Secretary Spencer of his private proposal," the release said.

"Secretary Esper's position with regard to [Uniform Code of Military Justice], disciplinary and fitness-for-duty actions has always been that the process should be allowed to play itself out objectively and deliberately, in fairness to all parties. However, at this point, given the events of the last few days, Secretary Esper has directed that Gallagher retain his Trident pin."

"I am deeply troubled by this conduct shown by a senior DOD official," Esper said. "Unfortunately, as a result, I have determined that Secretary Spencer no longer has my confidence to continue in his position. I wish Richard well."

Spencer, who assumed office in July 2017, is a former Marine Corps helicopter pilot and business leader who worked to

change the culture of the Navy and its business practices and warfighting readiness. He became frustrated with ongoing delays with the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and its progress toward fleet service. Spencer openly criticized the Navy, congressionally imposed cost caps and the builder of the carrier, Huntington Ingalls, for the problems with the ship's advanced weapons elevators.

Trump said in the Nov. 24 tweet that he was disappointed with Spencer's failure to address cost overruns from the contracting procedures of previous administrations.

In his Nov. 24 resignation letter, Spencer said, "The rule of law is what sets us apart from our adversaries. Good order and discipline is what has enabled our victory against foreign tyranny time and again, from Capt. Lawrence's famous order, "Don't Give up the Ship," to the discipline and determination that propelled our flag to the highest point on lwo Jima. The Constitution and the Uniform Code of Military Justice are the shields that set us apart and the beacons that protect us all. Through my Title 10 authority, I have strived to ensure our proceedings are fair, transparent and consistent, from the newest recruit to the flag and general officer level.

"Unfortunately, it has become apparent that in this respect I no longer share the same understanding with the commander in chief who appointed me. In regards to the key principle of good order and discipline, I cannot in good conscience obey an order that I believe violates the sacred oath I took in the presence of my family, my flag and my faith to support and defend the Constitution of the United States."

In his resignation letter, Spencer continued: "The president deserves and should expect a secretary of the Navy who is aligned with his vision for the future of our force generation and sustainment. Therefore, with pride in the achievements we've shared and everlasting faith in the continued service

and fidelity of the finest Sailors, Marines and civilian teammates on earth, I hereby acknowledge my termination as United States secretary of the Navy, to be effective immediately.”

Esper proposed to Trump that Ambassador Kenneth J. Braithwaite II, current ambassador to Norway and a retired Navy Reserve rear admiral, be considered as the next Navy secretary. Braithwaite is a former naval aviator who flew P-3 maritime patrol aircraft and who later became a Navy public affairs officer.