



POLITICS

Defense secretary pulls Trump critic Gen. Milley's security clearance and protective detail



1 of 4 | Retired Gen. Mark Milley, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appears before the House Foreign Affairs Committee about the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan on Capitol Hill, Tuesday, March 19, 2024, in Washington. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File)



BY [TARA COPP](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary [Pete Hegseth](#) is pulling security protections and clearance for Gen. Mark Milley, retired Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, and has ordered the Pentagon's inspector general to review Milley's actions while serving as the nation's top uniformed officer to determine if a demotion is warranted.

The inspector general review will include "an inquiry into the facts and circumstances surrounding Gen. Milley's conduct so that the Secretary may determine whether it is appropriate to reopen his military grade review determination," Pentagon spokesman John Ulyot said late Tuesday.

"The Secretary informed General Milley today that he is revoking the authorization for his security detail and suspending his security clearance as well," he said in a statement.

Milley served as chairman during President Donald Trump's first term. While the relationship initially went well, it soured deeply and fast, as Milley tried to advise and contain the president on a host of issues.



AP AUDIO: Defense secretary pulls Trump critic Gen. Milley's security clearance and protective detail

AP correspondent Ed Donahue reports a frequent critic of President Trump is facing scrutiny at the Pentagon.

He pushed back on the president's interest in using the military domestically to quell protesters after the death of George Floyd, and he was at the center of a controversy in 2021 when he made independent calls to his Chinese counterpart.

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Trump said those calls were an act of treason, but at the time Milley [said the calls were routine](#) and part of the scope of his job.

In his final days as chairman after Trump had left office, Milley was equally outspoken about his former boss. He said at his official retirement ceremony that " [we don't take an oath to a king or a queen](#) or to a tyrant or a dictator. And we don't take an oath to a wannabe dictator."

"We don't take an oath to an individual. We take an oath to the Constitution, and we take an oath to

the idea that is America, and we're willing to die to protect it," he said at the time.

It's unclear whether former President Joe Biden's [unusual preemptive pardon of Milley](#) would protect his rank and preclude any findings from an inspector general investigation.

Hegseth said in an interview Wednesday with Fox News that the pardon was "something President Biden was in his purview to do, just like in our purview at the Defense Department we have the opportunity to review things he may have done inside the chain of command while Trump was president that undermined those authorities."

Biden pardoned Milley in the last days of his presidency, which Milley thanked him for, saying, "I do not wish to spend whatever remaining time the Lord grants me fighting those who unjustly might seek retribution for perceived slights."

Hegseth's chief of staff, Joe Kasper, said the decision to strip Milley of his clearance and security detail was taken because "undermining the chain of command is corrosive to our national security, and restoring accountability is a priority for the Defense Department under President Trump's leadership."

Milley had security protections after Trump in his first term ordered a 2020 military strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani. U.S. intelligence and security officials say Iran is [intent on seeking revenge](#) for Soleimani's killing.

Recent intelligence assessments have concluded that there is still an active threat against Milley's life, according to an official familiar with the assessments who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the intelligence.

Trump has [revoked those protections and security clearances for other former officials](#) in his first administration who also were facing threats from Iran, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, his top aide, Brian Hook, and former national security adviser [John Bolton](#).

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday that "as for Gen. Milley, the president's position remains the same on this as it does for John Bolton and the other individuals. He doesn't believe these people should have the right to have security clearances and private details for the rest of their lives. Again, taxpayers are funding it. And the individuals you are mentioning are quite wealthy I understand, so they can get their own private security if they wish."

The moves against Milley, which were first reported by Fox News, also included removing his Army chief of staff portrait at the Pentagon. On Wednesday, the wall where it used to hang was empty, with the holes for fasteners still visible.

Another portrait of Milley, as chairman, was stripped from the wall just hours after Trump was sworn in.

A portrait of Mark Esper's time as secretary of the Army, a position he held before becoming Trump's defense secretary after Jim Mattis, was also removed as of Wednesday. In its place there were also just nail holes in the wall.

Both Milley portraits and the Esper Army secretary portrait were funded through donations from the Association of the United States Army, not taxpayer dollars, and were a gift from the Army honoring their service.

Based on what positions the men had at the time of the portraits seemed to determine where those pieces of artwork will eventually end up. Both Army leadership portraits remain the property of the Army and will be returned eventually to the Army Center of Military History. The Milley portrait as Joint Chiefs chairman, however, belongs now to the Department of Defense and it was unclear what was being done with it.

In a statement, AUSA said it had been providing the money for portraits for outgoing Army leaders and Joint Chiefs chairmen who are Army general officers for the past 30 years.

Portraits of Mattis and Esper from their times as defense secretary remained on the wall as of Wednesday.



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