



Hegseth strips Milley of his security detail, orders investigation into his conduct

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Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley speaks during a hearing with the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 19, 2024. The committee held the hearing to question retired generals on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered the Pentagon's inspector general to investigate the "conduct" of retired Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley — who at times clashed with President Trump during his first term — and determine whether it's appropriate he should be reduced in rank from his current four stars.

[Hegseth](#) also revoked Milley's security detail and suspended his security clearance.

Even though Milley is retired, he had an ongoing security detail through the Army as a result of Iranian threats in the wake of the 2020 U.S. drone strike [that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani](#). Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and then national

security adviser John Bolton recently lost their security details on orders from Trump, who clashed with them as well.



POLITICS

Biden pardons Fauci, Milley and members of Jan. 6 panel

Hegseth's chief of staff, Joe Kasper, in explaining the inspector general probe said in a statement on Monday: "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."

There was no indication how long the investigation would take.

The decision to strip Milley of his security detail was met with quick criticism from Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"General Milley and other former Trump Administration officials continue to face credible, deadly threats from Iran because they carried out President Trump's order to kill Iranian General Soleimani," Reed said in a statement. "It is unconscionable and recklessly negligent for President Trump and Secretary Hegseth to revoke General Milley's security detail for their own political satisfaction. The Administration has placed Milley and his family in grave danger, and they have an obligation to immediately restore his federal protection."

It was not immediately clear exactly what conduct amounted to undermining the chain of command. Milley disagreed with Trump and his aides on a number of issues, from using active-duty troops to restore order in American cities, to the president inquiring about whether the military [could shoot unarmed protesters](#), which Milley and other officials said was an illegal order.

At times, Milley and others convinced Trump to change course on policy. Trump wanted to remove all U.S. troops from Syria in 2018, though Milley persuaded him to have hundreds of troops remain to work with Kurdish forces and deal with a continuing threat from the Islamic State.

Milley, 66, could not be reached for comment.



POLITICS

Pete Hegseth, Trump's embattled pick for defense secretary, wins Senate confirmation

When he was elected in 2016, Trump chose Milley — then the Army's top officer — to be his principal military adviser over Air Force General David Goldfein, who then Defense Secretary James Mattis favored. Trump seemed to admire Milley's boisterous demeanor and outspoken ways. But over time the relationship deteriorated, much like it did with Trump and two other retired generals — [Mattis](#) and former White House chief of staff [John Kelly](#).

Right after the George Floyd protests in June 2020, Milley walked with Trump from the White House through Lafayette Square, where law enforcement, aided by National Guard troops, forcibly removed demonstrators. At the time, Milley was wearing camouflage fatigues. As Trump headed through the square to St. John's Episcopal Church, carrying a Bible, Milley peeled off and chatted with National Guard forces, seemingly not wanting to appear in what was clearly a political event. [Milley later issued an emotional apology](#) at National Defense University, that officials say incensed Trump.



President Trump walks with Attorney General William Barr (left), Secretary of Defense Mark Esper (center), and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark A. Milley (right), and others from the White House to visit St. John's Church after the area was cleared of people protesting the death of George Floyd on June 1, 2020. Milley later issued an emotional apology at National Defense University, that officials say incensed Trump.

Brendan Smialowski/AFP via Getty Images

"As many of you saw, the result of the photograph of me at Lafayette Square last week — that sparked a national debate about the role of the military in civil society," [Milley said in a video address](#). "I should not have been there. My presence in that moment and in that environment created a perception of the military involved in domestic politics. As a commissioned uniformed officer, it was a mistake that I have learned from, and I sincerely hope we all can learn from it. We who wear the cloth of our nation come from the people of our nation, and we must hold dear the principle of an apolitical military that is so deeply rooted in the very essence of our republic."

During this time, Milley [also assured Chinese officials that Trump wasn't looking to attack Beijing](#) during his final weeks in office. Milley has said that call was coordinated with then Defense Secretary Mark Esper and other administration officials, but Trump later said such calls "an act so egregious that, in times gone by, the punishment would have been DEATH." Officials tell NPR the call already has been investigated and nothing came of it.



POLITICS

Gen. Milley Defends His Call To A Chinese General About Trump's Rhetoric And The U.S.

When Milley retired in September, 2023, he reminded those in uniform that they take an oath to the Constitution, against all enemies foreign and domestic, emphasizing the words "all" and "and."

"We don't take an oath to a king, or a queen, or to a tyrant or dictator, and we don't take an oath to a wannabe dictator," Milley said, in clear reference to Trump. "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."

Before he retired, Milley spoke with *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward for his book about Trump.

"No one has ever been as dangerous to the country as Donald Trump," the general told Woodward. "Now I realize he's a total fascist. He is the most dangerous person in this country."

Such comments could get Milley in trouble, say some civil military experts. It is illegal under military law for any commissioned officer to make "contemptuous words" against the president or other senior officials.



INVESTIGATIONS

Trump has made more than 100 threats to prosecute or punish perceived enemies

Former President Biden provided pre-emptive [pardons to Milley and others](#), and that applies to federal and military law. But Hegseth appears to be pursuing Milley through administration efforts.

Civil military experts say it's unusual, maybe even unprecedented, to investigate a former senior officer for conduct that alleges "undermining the chain of command."

"What is unusual is for a president to punish his own appointee, after the fact, in such a public way at a time when his administration says they're worried about politicizing the military and weaponizing the Justice Department, " said Peter Feaver who teaches political science at Duke University.

Roger Petersen, a professor at MIT and author of recent book on the U.S. political dynamics of the Iraq War, *Death, Dominance and State-Building*, said such a move by the Pentagon could be a strategic effort by the Trump administration to silence any dissent, or contrary advice, within the senior officer ranks.

There are rare times when senior retired officers are recalled to active duty for criminal probes. Back in 2017, Air Force General Arthur Lichte was demoted from four stars to two stars and forfeited \$5,000 a month in retirement pay after investigators found he engaged in inappropriate sexual acts while in uniform.

Even before Hegseth's orders, efforts to distance the Defense Department from Milley's legacy were being felt at the Pentagon. Within hours of Trump taking the oath of office last week, a recently installed portrait of General Milley was removed from the walls of one of the building's corridors.

trump's presidential transition

mark milley

pentagon



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