

Gen. Milley Should Go

by Conrad Black



The recent actions and revelations of the conduct of Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Mark Milley may be the greatest acts of insubordination by a very senior officer in U.S. military history.

Milley appears overstuffed in his uniform which is more laden with decorations than were those of Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, and MacArthur combined. Milley's shoulders identify him as both a Ranger and a paratrooper.

If it had not been in the midst of an election campaign, he would have been fired for his participation in an outrageous denunciation of the walk of the president and many other senior officials to St. John's Episcopal Church near the White House the day after the effort by the "peaceful protesters" to burn it down.

His telephone call to his analogue in the People's Republic of China promising to warn them if the president whom Milley served attacked China, like his chatter with the rabidly partisan House Speaker Pelosi in which both of them referred to the president as "crazy," and the attempted interposition of himself in the chain of command regarding nuclear weapons: these were all gross acts of insubordination that merited summary dismissal.

Despite kissing the undercarriage of the new administration, in testimony in the Congress last week Milley and others claimed to have warned President Biden of the consequences of his proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Milley is grossly indiscreet in endlessly self-promoting with

scurrilous political gossip-writers like Bob Woodward, while unctuously claiming to Congress that he didn't read the books in which he was so heavily cited.

He must either accept some responsibility for the debacle in Afghanistan or resign in protest against being overruled by the president. He and the other service chiefs should also be called to account for why the United States is lagging behind China and Russia in hypersonic missiles and why they have moved so slowly to reduce the vulnerability of the Nimitz class aircraft carriers and far eastern bases, especially Guam, to sophisticated missile fire.

Nor should he and others responsible be excused for the promotion of Critical Race Theory in the Armed Forces. It is a disgraceful development.

Non-Political and Professional

Next to the principal authorship of the Declaration of Independence, the achievement of Thomas Jefferson for which he deserves the greatest gratitude but rarely receives it, is the establishment of the United States military Academy at West Point. This was intended to provide the country with a non-political and highly professional officer corps, and in general it has succeeded in both objectives.

This was never intended to ban senior officers from political life in the United States, only to ensure that serving officers did not become involved in politics. Jefferson would have known from the example of President Washington that successful senior officers were apt to be highly desirable political candidates, though Washington was obviously exceptionally meritorious.

Of course, the greatest American military-political controversy was between MacArthur and President Truman in 1950, after one of the greatest military operations in the

20th century—MacArthur had landed nearly hundred thousand men behind North Korean lines at Inchon in less than an hour and the North Korean invasion of the South collapsed in 10 days.

MacArthur's orders from the president and from the United Nations whose forces he was commanding, were to proceed across the 38th parallel and up through North Korea with the presumed intention of reuniting the country.

In the midst of this operation the People's Liberation Army, essentially a guerrilla army that had won the nearly 30-year China Civil War the year before, intervened heavily. MacArthur had been assured by his military intelligence that such a penetration by China would be impossible. The United Nations forces, (over 90 percent South Korean and American), were forced back briefly beyond Seoul, the South Korean capital, but MacArthur recaptured that city and stabilized the line at the original demarcation between North and South Korea.

Having been given the mission of reuniting Korea, he did not see why his mission should be changed although the president and other Allied leaders were waffling at the thought of conducting a war against China.

In military terms, MacArthur was undoubtedly correct. A little further effort in the West would have unified Korea; Chou En-lai confirmed to President Nixon in 1972 that Stalin would not have lifted a finger to help the Chinese. MacArthur was also basically correct when he told the Congress after Truman fired him, that a conscript army could not be sent to the ends of the earth at risk of their lives for any purpose less than victory clearly in the national interest.

He famously said to the Congress "In war there is no substitute for victory." However, it was not acceptable for him to criticize the president's policies publicly as he did, and Truman had little alternative but to remove him, though he could have done so more elegantly, given MacArthur's

distinction, (which made his dismissal an act of political suicide by Truman).

Officers in Politics

There have been nine presidents who had been generals: Jackson, both Harrisons, Taylor, Pierce, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Eisenhower, and two senior officers, Captain McKinley, and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. There have also been Vice Presidents (Colonel) Richard M. Johnson, (General) Charles Gates Dawes, secretaries of state, (Colonel) Henry L. Stimson, Generals George C. Marshall, Alexander M. Haig, and Colin L. Powell, and unsuccessful presidential candidates-Generals Lewis Cass (1848), Winfield Scott (1852), George B. McClelland (1864), Winfield Hancock (1880), and the first Republican presidential candidate Colonel Charles Fremont (1856).

Traditionally, American generals who have rendered conspicuous service are deemed to be above party, demonstrable patriots, evidently people of integrity endowed with high qualities of leadership, and trustworthy and incorruptible.

The only modern occasion where there was a trace of an active senior officer participating in partisan politics is when in 1944 General Douglas MacArthur responded to a question from a Nebraska congressman, and then to Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg, that he was available for the Republican presidential nomination but that of course because of his official and geographic position he could not conduct an active campaign. He would, however, yield to a spontaneous expression of national will that he become the president.

The idea that MacArthur imagined that he could retain his command in the Southwest Pacific while running as the absentee candidate against the incumbent commander-in-chief is illustrative of how superior the general's military judgment was to his political judgment. Roosevelt considered MacArthur

to be a potential “man on horseback” and not a fully committed believer in democracy, but he esteemed him as a military commander and believed that MacArthur was so out of touch with a popular electorate that he would be an ideal opponent. Roosevelt, running for his fourth term, was unbeatable.

General Milley, unlike all the others mentioned above, has not really been a combat general, though he puts on the airs of one: “I wasn’t born a four-star general,” he said to assure senators he had once been in war zones.

When asked why he hadn’t resigned when the president rejected his advice on Afghanistan, he replied, “My father didn’t resign in the middle of the action at Iwo Jima.” Combat in Iwo Jima required great heroism and resigning in the face of the enemy would have been desertion.

He shouldn’t be clinging to the furniture in his office after commanding a disaster like he did, and when his president denies Milley gave him the advice he claimed to have given, they should both go. But Biden can make it happen for Milley.

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