

Pentagon's Partisan Letter Against Trump, Hegseth Debunked

By Victor Davis Hanson

Recently, there's been a lot of controversy because five former secretaries of defense—that would be [Lloyd Austin](#), Jim Mattis, Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel, and William Perry—have all written a letter to Congress criticizing President Donald Trump's administration, and in particular, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Donald Trump, for firing a number of

officers, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Charles Brown.



And they said, "This is reckless, it hurts morale, and it will depress recruitment." Let's analyze that just for a second.

Recruitment reached near-record levels after the election of [Donald Trump](#). It's on the way up. It was depressed prior to that. Why would it be depressed? If you go through the Pentagon data, it's very hard to decipher.

They keep records on race, gender, sexual orientation, on

promotion, on units, composition, but they don't like to do it on combat fatalities or the particular demographics that are not signing up, according to their past percentages.

If you wade through that, you will learn that recruitment was off among white males who die disproportionately at double their numbers in the demographic. So, it's an important demographic and they were not signing. Why? I think for two reasons.

Eighty-five hundred of them, in the majority, I think, were white males who refused to get the vaccination and most had natural immunity. That was a very poor decision to drum them out of the military. Now we're trying to get some of them back.

The second is, when you had that testimony by Gen. Mark Milley and Lloyd Austin about suggestions to read professor, now the discredited professor Ibram X. Kendi, [the DEI emphasis](#), the idea that we're going to run an investigation of the rank and file to see if there were white supremacists, white rage, white privilege—that depressed recruitment. And now, that has been swept away, recruitment is coming back up.

So, I don't quite understand their worry about recruitment.

What I'm getting at is, this is not the politicalization of the Pentagon. It's the depoliticalization. And it's not new. Generals have been fired by prior presidents.

Gen. David McKiernan—the theater commander of Afghanistan—fired by [President Barack Obama](#) with very little explanation. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, an untoward remark, fired his replacement. And one of the signees of the letter, Jim Mattis, fired by Obama without much explanation. He was CENTCOM commander. He was doing a good job. He was fired. He signed the letter.

I could go on. There were three or four other generals that

were prominent that Obama fired. So, it's not new. President Joe Biden came in and he fired all of the 18 political appointments on the defense advisory board. That just happens. I was on the nonpolitical American Battlefield Monuments Commission. As soon as Obama came in 2009, he fired all of us.

So, this idea that we're relieving commanders or defense personnel or advisory boards—it's not, it's not.

The next thing is, [the Pentagon](#) has real problems. With this emphasis on DEI, they have flunked—they have neglected things.

We are short 155 mm shells. We are short certain types of cruise missiles—Javelins. Our munitions stockpiles are depleted. DEPLETED. We have failed three outside audits in the Pentagon since they were initiated in 2017.

We allowed a Chinese balloon to traverse the continental United States with impunity. I think the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, the South China Sea, and the Black Sea were pretty much off-limits to international shipping for a time because we had lost deterrents. We didn't reply to over a hundred attacks on U.S. installations in Syria and Iraq.

So, there are fundamental problems in the Pentagon—budgetary, military—and they need to be addressed.

The other thing that I thought was strange about the letter is, very quickly, Lloyd Austin was AWOL for several days. He signed the letter. He could have been fired for that, lower-ranking officers were. Jim Mattis and Chuck Hagel were fired as defense secretaries. I mean, you could argue whether it was fair or not, but they were dismissed.

But more importantly, Leon Panetta signed this letter. He was one, also, of the 51 intelligence authorities that said, right on the eve of the election and on a few days before the 2020 debate, that Hunter [Biden's] laptop, which was in the hands of the FBI and authenticated, had all the hallmarks of a

Russian information, which meant disinformation, campaign.

So, in other words, Leon Panetta is now decrying the politicalization of the Pentagon when he went out before an election and tried to use his fee days as a former CIA director and defense secretary to basically lie to the American people in order to arm Joe Biden before the debate so he could deny what was factual: The laptop was authentic. That affected the 2020 election.

So, where am I coming to in conclusion? Very quickly, this will all be adjudicated. Either the new Pentagon, for the first time, will pass an audit or it won't. Whether recruitment, which has reached almost record numbers since the election, 350 per day in the military—whether we restore recruitment or not, it will be adjudicated. Whether the defense cuts are wise or not will be adjudicated. Whether we have deterrence in the Red Sea, the Middle East, Ukraine will be adjudicated.

But before they are adjudicated, it seems to be highly irresponsible for a number of former secretaries to accuse the administration of politicalization.

I have one last statement. Gen. Brown was a political Joint Chiefs chairman, general. He, on a number of occasions, pontificated about race and gender. And that was not central to his mission. He gave editorialization to the American people about DEI. And more importantly, he followed from a Joint Chief who was very political.

Remember Mark Milley? He contacted his Chinese counterpart in the People's Liberation Army to warn him that if he, Milley, diagnosed Donald Trump as erratic, he would first warn the Communist Chinese general.

He also, remember, interrupted the chain of command. As chairman of the Joint Chiefs, he has no role in the chain of command. Milley usurped that role and told theater commanders

to report to him first, not the defensive secretary. And then, upon retirement, he called the former president and active presidential campaign a fascist.

I could go on and on. But we know that we have seen numerous violations of Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, in which retired generals have called then-President and Commander in Chief Trump a fascist, Nazi-like, Mussolini-like, a congenital liar, and comparable to the architects of Auschwitz.

Bottom line: We don't need any more letters from so-called experts. They're always partisan. And they're to no effect.

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