

## **ARMED FORCES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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On the evening of Tuesday, January 12, 2021, the eight most important military leaders of the United States signed a joint document in support of the American institutional system. The chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the service chiefs of the four Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force), the chief of the Space Force and the chief of the National Guard Bureau did so.

The document began by stating that for almost 250 years the American citizens had trusted them to protect the constitution, obeying and subordinating themselves to civil leadership, in an institutional-based approach. Regarding the attack on the Capitol, they considered it a "direct assault" on Congress and the constitutional process. They stressed that this "disruption" to the Constitution is not only against traditions and values but "against the law," and stated that on January 20, President-elect Joe Biden was going to take office as the nation's 46<sup>th</sup> Commander-in-Chief. Politically, it was an explicit endorsement to the president-elect. However, this unprecedented definition was not an isolated event, but rather a consequence of the ongoing political conflict in the United States. In June 2020, during the violent racial riots, the US military had ignored an unwritten order from President Trump to intervene in the crackdown on the protests. It was a homogeneous and unanimous military decision after some doubts from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, who finally said that they should "embrace" the constitution because "it is our North Star". Months later, General Mark Milley, appeared in a hearing before Congress. When asked by Democratic senators whether a military intervention was being considered in case that Mr. Trump would want to stay in office, refusing to recognize a Democratic victory under the argument of alleged fraud, Gen. Milley replied that "the political system in its legal and parliamentary face has the mechanisms to solve the dispute without the intervention of the Armed Forces".

On Monday, January 4, the Washington Post published an article signed jointly by 10 former Defense Secretaries to Democratic and Republican presidents, which included two secretaries under the Trump Administration: Gen. James Mathis and Mark Esper, who had resigned weeks earlier. On the article, they warned about the risk of Trump's maneuvers to try to involve the Armed Forces in actions to prevent the formalization of the election in the Electoral College, the power transition and Biden's taking office. This warning, unprecedented until it was raised, took place two days before the attack on the Capitol. It was thus evidenced that the unprecedented public demonstration on January 12 by the Armed Forces as a whole in support of the constitution and the inauguration of Biden, was the consequence of a process that was taking place since mid-2020.

On September 28, 2021, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, and the commander of the Central Area - which includes Afghanistan - General Kenneth Mackenzie testified before the US Senate. The hearing was called to analyze the withdrawal from Afghanistan, which ended up leaving a flavor of defeat. Both said that they had recommended that approximately 2,500 troops remain in that country, but that President Biden had maintained the order given in April, of a complete withdrawal before September 11, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

In other words, the Democratic President had confirmed the date stipulated in the agreement signed by President Trump with the representatives of the Taliban. Asked whether the disorderly evacuation had affected the image of the United States, General Milley replied that allies and adversaries were "intensively reviewing" credibility in the United States. He added that the Taliban "were and continue to be a terrorist organization" and that they have not yet severed ties with Al-Qaeda. "An Al-Qaeda network or a reconstituted Islamic State group, with aspirations to attack the United States, is a very real possibility," he concluded. The Commander of the Central Command (CENTCOM), General Kenneth Mackenzie, spoke in the same vein.

At the hearing, the Secretary of Defense of the United States, retired General Lloyd Austin, also testified ratifying the President's version. He stated that "The fact that the Afghan army, we and our partners trained, simply melted away - in many cases

without firing a shot - took us all by surprise.” He added that "despite having provided the Afghan Army with equipment and aircraft and the training to use them, in the end we were unable to provide them with the will to win."

On the same day, General Milley was questioned by senators about the disclosures made in journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa's new book, "Peril", where they say that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had two calls with his Chinese counterpart, Li Zuocheng, in October 2020 and in January 2021, when Donald Trump was in power. Milley explained that he had personally informed “both Secretary of State (Mike) Pompeo and the White House Chief of Staff (Mark) Meadows about the calls, among other matters. Soon after this, I attended a meeting with Acting Secretary Miller, where I informed him of the calls. "

According to the book, Milley also organized a secret meeting of the high commands after the attack on the Capitol, in case Trump tried to launch a nuclear attack on Iran and eventually China. However, the general maintained that the calls on October 30 and January 8 were coordinated before and after with then-Defense Secretaries Mark Esper and Cristopher Miller. It should be noted that the former left office in November and in January signed a statement together with former Republican and Democratic Pentagon chiefs, questioning the attitude that Trump had assumed after the defeat.

He added that "I am sure that President Trump had no intention of attacking the Chinese" and affirmed that his objective was to lower the tension and send a message to China to be calm because the United States did not intend to attack. Trump demanded that General Milley be tried for treason if his conversation with General Li "behind the President's back" was confirmed. But Biden supported Milley, noting that he has "great confidence" in him.

In conclusion: the document signed on January 12 by the eight most important Military Chiefs of the United States ratifying their commitment to the constitution, when Trump spoke of fraud, was an unprecedented event regarding the military role. This process began in June 2020, when after the racial riots in Washington, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the constitution was "the North" of the Armed Forces. On September 28, 2021, General Mark Milley,

together with the Central Commander of the United States, took a different approach from that of the Government, regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Finally, that same day Milley, in response to statements that he claimed to have warned his Chinese counterpart that the political crisis was not going to have military consequences, asserted that the Defense Secretaries had always been aware of the situation.