

NATO'S MOST IMPORTANT MILITARY CHIEF ENDS HIS TERM

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The head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, General Mark Milley, will leave his position in September 2023, after serving four years in it. In this country, the heads of the General Staff (the Joint Chiefs and those of the five Forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Aerospace) are appointed by the middle of a presidential term and replaced four years later. The system seeks to depoliticize appointments at the highest military level. The current chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, is the 20th to hold the position. He is the highest-ranking military officer and the top military adviser to the president, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council. Before coming to office, on October 1, 2019, he was the 39th Chief of the Army General Staff. He is not a graduate from West Point, where the elite of the US Army is trained. He has held various positions in his 39-year military career, most related to operational roles and tasks. While serving as the Commanding General of the III Corps, he served as the Commanding General of the Joint Command in Afghanistan. His duties in joint assignments included Director of Operations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and military assistant to the Secretary of Defense. His operational deployments led him to serve in Sinai, Egypt, Panama, Haiti, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Colombia. He has two graduate degrees, one in international relations and one in national security and strategic studies.

He had to play an important role in events such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the assault by Trump supporters on the US Congress and the war between Russia and Ukraine. He took office on October 1, 2019. In mid-2020, he had to play a role in the crisis that took place in the middle of that year due to racial protests -caused by the death of the young African-American George Floyd at the hands of the police-, who reached the gates of the White House. So, dressed for combat, he accompanied Trump to the church near the White House that had been attacked. On the occasion, the president brandished a Bible as the most important book to defend. Milley perceived the discomfort that had been generated by his presence at the event and weeks later took advantage of a graduation ceremony to expose the slogan that "We take an oath to

the Constitution." At the beginning of 2021, he had to star in the crisis generated by the seize of the Capitol by Trump supporters on January 6. Two days later, the six chiefs of staff, headed by him, and the heads of the Reserve and the National Guard, signed a public statement of position, summarized in the phrase: "As we have done for more than two centuries, we will defend the constitution", in explicit support for the president-elect in this crisis. That year he had a public role in the surprise launch of China's hypersonic missile. He explained then that it had been a "strategic surprise" similar to the one his country had in 1957 from the first Russian space flight, but said that, as it did by putting a man on the moon in 1969, the United States was going to react.

He has been characterized by having an independent position with respect to that of its government in the war in Ukraine, although always within the limits of military discipline. His opinion, expressed publicly, has shown realism and has evaded triumphalism. In May 2022, he articulated the so-called "Ramstein Contact Group", at said US airbase in German territory, and in whose meetings that have been held monthly, the NATO countries and their global allies coordinate support for Ukraine. On November 10 of that year, in a public conference, he maintained that the war could not be defined on the ground, that the two parties had suffered a similar number of casualties, around 100,000, and that a solution -which was convenient to find- had to be reached at the discussion table. He made similar statements in January 2023, showing himself skeptical about the possibility of a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in the short term and in favor of limiting the type of offensive weapons to be delivered to the Kiev government. In late March of this year, testifying before the House Armed Services Committee, he argued that the US Armed Forces "have a long way to go to build up their ammunition reserves and ensure that the country is prepared for any war on a large scale". He further said that the war in Ukraine has shown the huge amount of ammunition that is required for any global conflict. Milley and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin explained to the Commission that supplying the arsenals was imperative because of tensions with China and Russia, which continue to escalate. The outgoing Chief of Staff said that "if there was a war on the Korean peninsula, a big war between the United States and Russia, or between the United States and China, consumption rates would be soaring". For her part, the Secretary of the Army, Christine Wormuth, told legislators that at this time the Army "is comfortable that the

amount of lethal assistance that we have been providing is not undermining our readiness, but we are following the issue closely."

Speaking to Defense One on April 1, Milley said it would probably take years for the US military industry to replenish its supplies and was skeptical of the Ukrainian offensive. On President Zelensky's stated goal of "removing every Russian from occupied Ukraine", Milley said that he considers it "a very difficult military task" and that he has a "very low" chance. He also pointed out that the Ukrainian forces have improved both their equipment and their training. But also the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian forces, Valeriy Zaluzhny, said that he was briefing Milley on the progress of preparations for the counteroffensive: "I am in constant dialogue with the chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley. During the phone call, I informed him about the situation at the front and the preparations for the further steps of our Army for the liberation of Ukrainian territory." The head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff has always been more cautious in the fifteen months that the Ukrainian conflict has been going on than the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser, and downplayed the views that Ukraine can win with more weapons.

The substitute for Milley that President Biden would have decided to appoint is Air Force General Charles Q. Brown, who comes from serving as commander of the air units in the Pacific area. The announcement is expected to be made public before July and the spokesman for the National Security Council said that "when President Biden makes a final decision, he will first inform the chosen person and then communicate it publicly." Despite being African American, Brown has had a successful career as a military pilot, as he himself recounted in a video released after the death of George Floyd in 2020. With extensive experience flying F-16s, he said that "so many times I have felt that I am one with the F-16, as a result I was very confident in my abilities and the ability to participate in any situation." He has experience regarding China. As of 2020 he is the commander of the Pacific Air Force, having commanded forces in the Near East as Chief of the US Air Force Central Command. In July 2020, the Senate confirmed him as Air Force chief of staff. Brown would be apt to strike a balance between the challenge posed by China, on the one hand, and the threat posed by Russia from the conflict with Ukraine, in which NATO is increasingly involved.

In conclusion: the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, General Mark Milley, leaves office on October 1, after four years in office, as established by the military system of this country. He had to face difficult moments, such as the criticism of his presence supporting Trump in mid-2020 and the takeover of Congress by his supporters at the beginning of the following year. He has characterized himself for expressing an independent opinion regarding the war in Ukraine, but always within the framework of military discipline. He has expressed concern about the growing needs for ammunition and has been skeptical about the success of the Ukrainian counter-offensive expected in the coming months. Lastly, he would be succeeded in office by an Air Force general with experience in the Pacific, and who is currently the Chief of Staff of the Air Force: Charles Brown.