

In the days and weeks leading up to January 6, the nation's highest-ranking military officer, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, was moving in lockstep with the political anxieties of top Democratic leaders.

These Democrats grew anxious as over 140 House Republicans planned to contest the election results during the electoral college certification that day. Milley was then deeply engaged with a circle of confidants including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, former Obama National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, among others—all of whom shared a unified disdain for President Donald Trump.

At a House Oversight Committee hearing in April addressing the 3-hour and 19-minute delay in mobilizing the D.C. National Guard on January 6, Colonel Earl Matthews, one of four Department of Defense witnesses, testified about an “irrational” fear among a “clique” of senior military officers concerning the potential misuse of the National Guard by the president. He indicated that these concerns were influenced behind the scenes by Milley, who often made disparaging remarks about the president and regularly referred to his fear of a so-called potential “Reichstag moment.”

Meanwhile, Milley has insisted he maintained a posture of strict neutrality, vocally distancing his leadership of the military from the political turmoil surrounding the 2020 presidential election. "My job is to stay clean by ensuring that the uniformed military remains out of domestic politics," Milley stated during his testimony before the January 6 Select Committee. "The United States military has no role in domestic politics, period, full stop."

Nevertheless, accounts of Milley's approach to the unfolding situation during the late days of the Trump administration, as detailed in Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker's *I Alone Can Fix It* and Susan Glasser and Peter Baker's August 2022 report in *The New Yorker*, present a picture of Milley that is much different from the disinterested persona he has disingenuously cultivated.

Some excerpts follow:

- Considering resigning in the summer of 2020 during the height of the George Floyd riots, Milley ultimately decided against it. “Fuck that shit,” he told his staff, “I’ll just fight him.” Despite assurances to confidants that he would never openly defy the president—a move he considered illegal—he was “determined to plant flags.” Milley envisioned a scenario involving either a declaration of martial law or a presidential invocation of the Insurrection Act with “Trumpian Brown Shirts fomenting violence.”
- Embodying a self-styled narrative of heroic defiance, Milley was prepared to face severe consequences to counter what he perceived as a grave threat.

“If they want to court-martial me or put me in prison, have at it,” Milley told his staff, “but I will fight from the inside.”

- Milley saw himself as “tasked” with safeguarding “against Trump and his people” from potentially misusing the military, something he confided in a “trusted confidant” to ensure he remained true to this plan. “I have four tasks from now until the twentieth of January,” he affirmed, “and I’m going to accomplish my mission.”

Milley’s Cohort of Confidants

I Alone Can Fix It highlights how Milley, as the joint session approached and more than 140 House Republicans were pledged to contest the election results, shared his anxiety with “senior leaders” in Congress who sought his “comfort” amid fears of “attempted coups.” *The New Yorker’s* August 2022 report further reveals Milley’s communications with key Democrats, specifically Pelosi and Schumer.

Additionally, the *New Yorker* report describes Milley’s continued outreach to “Democrats close to Biden,” which included “regular” interactions with Susan Rice, former Obama national security advisor. Known for her role in helping to orchestrate the Trump-Russia collusion hoax, Rice’s expertise in activities aimed at undermining the former president raises this question: What was it about *her* that made Milley want to seek *her* guidance in the days leading up to January 6?

The report also references Robert Gates, former Secretary of Defense during both the Obama and Bush administrations, as another key figure in Milley’s circle of confidants. Gates reportedly advised Milley to remain in the Pentagon as long as possible, citing President Trump’s “increasingly erratic and dangerous behavior.” *I Alone Can Fix It* also depicts Gates as a mentor to Milley, urging him not to resign during the final months of

the Trump administration. He's quoted advising Milley, "Don't quit. Steel your back. It's not going to be easy, but you're the right guy in the right place and at the right time."

Liz Cheney and Milley's "Nightmare Scenarios"

During Trump's final months in office, the *New Yorker* report notes that Milley had two "nightmare scenarios" running through his mind: One was that Trump might spark an external crisis, such as a war with Iran, to divert attention or to create a pretext for a power grab at home, and the other was that Trump would manufacture a domestic crisis to justify ordering the military into the streets to prevent the transfer of power.

On December 26, 2020, the two "nightmare scenarios" then preoccupying Milley transitioned from his personal concerns to the public domain in a column by *Washington Post* reporter David Ignatius—a journalist with close ties to both (you guessed it) the Obama and Bush administrations.

Ignatius's extensive connections within these administrations are detailed in a March 2012 *Politico* report, which highlights his significant access to senior White House and Pentagon officials, including being tapped by the Obama White House for exclusive access to the Bin Laden documents in 2012. Additionally, former Vice President Dick Cheney mentioned Ignatius in his 2011 memoir, *In My Time*, co-authored with his daughter, former House Republican Liz Cheney. In the memoir, Cheney recounts concerns about leaks to the press during the Bush administration and reveals that a source had spoken to Ignatius at the president's instruction.

Coincidentally, in her 2023 memoir, *Oath and Honor*, Liz Cheney also references Ignatius's December 26, 2020, *Washington Post* column that unveiled the "nightmare

scenarios” Milley had envisioned. That evening, she notes, the column “caught my attention” as Ignatius, “a longtime journalist well-sourced at the Pentagon, reported that senior government officials feared Trump was ‘threatening to overstep the constitutional limits of his power.’” Cheney cites her discovery of Milley’s concerns in this article as the catalyst to her mobilization of all 10 living former Secretaries of Defense to sign a letter warning the current Defense Department leadership and President Trump to stay within bounds. Additionally, she reveals that when Robert Gates, a mentor to Milley, was approached to join this effort, he responded, “If Cheney’s on, I’m on.”

I Alone Can Fix It reports that on the evening of January 2, 2021, Milley was “tipped off” by a “former defense secretary” about an impending *Washington Post* opinion piece authored by those same 10 living former defense secretaries Liz Cheney mobilized for the purpose on the basis of Milley’s “nightmare scenario” fears. The book also notes that on January 7, 2021—the day after the chaotic events of January 6—Cheney called Milley to check in. “How are you doing?” he asked her. “That fucking guy Jim Jordan. That son of a bitch,” Cheney responded. What more might we learn about Milley’s interactions with Cheney in the days leading up to January 6? Surely, this was not their first conversation about the events that would ultimately unfold that day.

The January 6 Committee’s “Investigation”

In the months following January 6, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who previously had received assurances from Milley that he would not use the military for domestic purposes politically favorable to Trump, established the Select Committee on January 6 to “investigate” the day’s

events. Remarkably, Liz Cheney was appointed vice chair of the panel, a position typically reserved for a member of the majority party.

According to a November 2022 *Washington Post* report, Cheney exerted a “remarkable level” of control over much of the committee’s work. Staffers, frustrated with Cheney’s insistence on centering the final report on President Trump, expressed concerns that important findings unrelated to Trump would be withheld from the public.

Consistent with Cheney’s objectives for the committee’s investigation, General Milley offered his own criticisms of President Trump. “You know, you’re the Commander-in-Chief,” he told the committee, “you’ve got an assault going on at the Capitol of the United States of America, and there’s nothing? No call? Nothing? Zero?”

Milley and McCarthy’s January 5 Memo

During his interview with the January 6 Committee, Milley explained that in preparation for January 6, the role of the D.C. National Guard was defined in a memorandum he described as “very strict on the use of the military.” Milley detailed how the memorandum prohibited the use of any riot control agents, stating, “We’re not doing it ... and not only not doing it, you’re not going to have it. You’re not going to have the opportunity to use it.” Additionally, he mentioned that while such measures might be authorized under different circumstances on another day, they were explicitly forbidden “at that time, on this day.”

This directive was ultimately issued by Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy to Major General William Walker, commanding general of the D.C. National Guard, on January 5, 2021. Milley disclosed to the committee that he was actively involved in advising

McCarthy on the memorandum, “line by line going through this, lining it out, editing, and stuff like that, resulting in this memo.”

The January 5 memo, carefully crafted by Milley and McCarthy, authorized 340 D.C. National Guard personnel to assist law enforcement with traffic control points and metro station support, and stationed 40 personnel at Joint Base Andrews to serve as the Guard’s Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in case of an emergency. However, this memo restricted General Walker from employing the QRF without explicit personal approval from Army Secretary McCarthy—a condition previously not imposed.

In March 2021, General Walker testified before the Senate Rules and Homeland Security Committee, stating that he had the authority to employ the Guard’s QRF before January 6 and described the new restrictions as “unusual.”

He also testified to the January 6 Committee about his inability to reach Secretary McCarthy on January 6, revealing that it was the first time he found the phone number he had for McCarthy to be out of service. Additionally, General Walker noted that Colonel Earl Matthews, who had McCarthy's private number due to their social acquaintance, was also unable to reach him.

This breakdown in communication occurred just one day after McCarthy had issued the memorandum requiring General Walker to obtain explicit approval from him for employing the Guard’s QRF. What could possibly account for McCarthy's unavailability during those critical hours? Did McCarthy somehow overlook the crucial role he had defined for himself with the new restrictions imposed just a day earlier?

Where’s McCarthy?

On January 6, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller approved the deployment of the D.C. National Guard by 3:04 p.m. The protocol then required Army Secretary McCarthy to convey this authorization to General Walker to enable the deployment of the D.C. National Guard. However, McCarthy never conveyed this authorization, resulting in the more than 3 hour delay.

The January 6 Committee's final report states that after Defense Secretary Miller authorized the deployment at 3:04 p.m., Secretary McCarthy called General Walker, instructing him to “mobilize the entire Guard.” However, General Walker “categorically denies” receiving such a call. “Here’s the bottom line,” he said, “The Secretary was unavailable to me, and he never called me.”

It appears, however, that McCarthy changed his story after initially telling the committee that he had called General Walker. The committee's final report addresses this inconsistency by detailing McCarthy's actions and whereabouts on January 6 to explain the delay. It explains that starting around 3:00 p.m. on January 6—shortly after Defense Secretary Miller approved the Guard’s deployment at 3:04 p.m.—“25 minutes of Army Secretary McCarthy’s time was spent reassuring members of Congress that the Guard was indeed coming,” even though he had not yet conveyed the order to General Walker. The report continues, stating that by 3:45 p.m., McCarthy had completed his calls—none of which were to General Walker—and after picking up some items from his office, he headed to the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) headquarters to draft a concept of operations, a process that took an additional 20 minutes.

However, when Brigadier General Aaron Dean, another Defense Department witness who testified before the House Oversight Committee, was asked whether he ever saw the plan McCarthy claims to have prepared, he responded, “Not only did I not see the plan, but he was also at the wrong agency.” He elaborated that the lead federal agency for this particular event

was the United States Capitol Police, and questioned why McCarthy was at MPD headquarters instead of coordinating with Capitol Police, who were responsible for the security of the Capitol.

The January 6 Committee report also touches on this oversight, noting that no plan from Army leaders ever made it to the troops. “If they came up with a plan, they never shared it with us,” General Walker said, “I never saw a plan from the Department of Defense or the Department of the Army.”

The committee’s report further states that by 4:35 p.m., McCarthy was ready to authorize the deployment of the Guard, but “miscommunication” led to yet another half-hour delay. McCarthy told the committee that he tried to issue the "go" order through his subordinate, General LaNeve—a claim General Walker disputes, insisting the call never occurred. McCarthy rationalized not communicating directly by stating he was at the time drafting his talking points for a planned press conference with D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, explaining, “I wanted to get my thoughts collected.”

Authorization finally came at 5:09 p.m. during an ongoing video teleconference that had started at 2:30 p.m.. Defense Department witnesses present with General Walker on January 6 testified to the House Oversight Committee that General James McConville, Chief of Staff of the Army, mentioned during the conference that they had received authorization. Colonel Earl Matthews, who was present in the conference room next to General Walker, clarified that, "General McConville is not in the chain of command, so it wasn't his order to give." He added that General McConville was merely conveying that they were authorized to deploy. Matthews further specified that the actual authorization did not come from Secretary McCarthy but instead from Secretary Miller.

Who’s To Blame?

While the January 6 Committee admits that the delay in mobilizing the D.C. National Guard “seems unnecessary and unacceptable,” it attempts to rationalize and excuse McCarthy’s actions. The report suggests his preoccupation with making phone calls to members of Congress, gathering items from his office, crafting a supposed concept of operations that never reached the troops, and preparing remarks for a televised press conference as mitigating factors, justifying his absence from the day’s critical chain of command communications.

This communication breakdown, stemming from McCarthy, unfolded just one day after he, with General Milley's input, issued the memorandum requiring General Walker to receive personal authorization from McCarthy to deploy the Guard. Despite these circumstances, the January 6 Committee concluded that the military's processes that day were merely "imperfect" and found “no evidence that the delay was intentional.”

The January 6 Committee attributes the delay to “military processes, institutional caution, and a revised deployment approval process”—specifically, a process meticulously designed by Milley and McCarthy. Yet, the committee pins the blame on “Trump’s eagerness” to engage the U.S. military, alleging it compelled senior military leaders to take extreme “precautions” for the joint session. “Trump’s eagerness” must also have led McCarthy to remain completely unavailable to General Walker just one day after imposing restrictions that effectively stripped Walker of the authority to deploy the Guard without McCarthy’s explicit approval, thereby cementing the hours-long delay.

Never mind Milley’s explicitly stated mission to “fight” against the president “from the inside” and his intent to “plant flags”—intentions that appear to have materialized in the January 5 memo he meticulously outlined with McCarthy, directly undermining the D.C. National Guard’s ability to restore order that day.

Milley's Insurrection

Milley's perception of President Trump as a classic authoritarian leader, his willingness to entertain the possibility of Trump engaging in a "Reichstag moment," and his fears of supposed "Trumpian Brown Shirts fomenting violence," seems to have influenced his command decisions in the days and weeks leading up to the joint session. While Milley is entitled to his personal political prejudices, it raises the question of whether he lost sight of the fact these were, after all, just his own politically inspired opinions about the president. Did he believe his convictions were so righteous that they justified overstepping legal boundaries and authorizing actions that could be seen as undermining the president's authority?

The chaotic events of January 6, exacerbated and prolonged by the National Guard's delayed response, evidently served no benefit to Trump or his allies and instead significantly bolstered the objectives of his adversaries. It's no wonder the January 6 Committee, which appears solely focused on preventing Trump from ever taking office again, shows little interest in highlighting that Milley, who swore an oath to obey the orders of the President of the United States, embarked on a mission to defy the former Commander-in-Chief, and ultimately seems to have sabotaged President Trump on that day.

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