



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on February 12, 2024

Biden's Defense Secretary Hospitalized Again

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin is in the critical care unit at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, with what the Pentagon describes as “an emergent bladder issue.” [Fox News](#) reports that on Sunday he was transferred first to a local hospital and then to Walter Reed.

Austin's health status stirred controversy last month when the Pentagon [admitted](#) on January 5 that, “On the evening of January 1, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for complications following a recent elective medical procedure.”



AP Images
Lloyd Austin

However, in early December, Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and on December 22, he underwent a prostatectomy — surgery to remove all or part of the prostate.

This was the “elective procedure” to which the January 5 press release referred. (The term “elective procedure” only indicates the timing of the surgery. It was not necessary to perform it immediately, as would be the case with an “emergency procedure.”)

The January 1 “complications” caused Austin to be rushed back to Walter Reed in an ambulance. Doctors found a urinary tract infection and abdominal edema that were impairing his intestinal function.

The controversy stemmed from the Pentagon's failure to inform the White House until January 4. Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, who should have assumed Austin's position while he was unable to fulfill his duties, was on vacation and was informed via email about the situation.

Fox News' Peter Doocy grilled Admiral John Kirby, coordinator for strategic communications at the National Security Council, about the delay. “What kind of Commander in Chief is President Biden, that at a time when American forces are under fire in the Middle East, he can go days without knowing that his defense secretary is in a hospital bed?”

Kirby responded in part:

I think the Pentagon has been very, very honest with themselves about the challenge to credibility by what has transpired here and by how hard it was for them to be fully transparent with the American people.

We all recognize that this didn't unfold the way it should have on so many levels, not just the notification process up the chain of command but the transparency issues.

Secretary Austin released a [statement](#) on January 6, writing, “I am very glad to be on the mend and look forward to returning to the Pentagon soon. I also understand the media concerns about transparency and I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit



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to doing better.”

But it was not until January 9 that President Joe Biden learned of Austin’s cancer diagnosis, according to White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

Below is the Pentagon’s latest [press release](#) about Austin’s current situation:

Dr. John Maddox, Trauma Medical Director, and Dr. Gregory Chesnut, Center for Prostate Disease Research of the Murtha Cancer Center Director, at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland, provided the following statement regarding Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s health status:

Earlier today, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III was transported by his security detail to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to be seen for symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue. Tonight, after a series of tests and evaluations, the Secretary was admitted into the critical care unit at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for supportive care and close monitoring.

At this time, it is not clear how long Secretary Austin will remain hospitalized. The current bladder issue is not expected to change his anticipated full recovery. His cancer prognosis remains excellent. Updates on the Secretary’s condition will be provided as soon as possible.

Another [press release](#), also issued Sunday, explained the temporary transfer of Austin’s job responsibilities:

At approximately 4:55 pm today, Secretary Austin transferred the functions and duties of the office of the Secretary of Defense to Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks. The Deputy Secretary of Defense has assumed the functions and duties. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House, and Congress have been notified.

There was no mention whether Hicks will replace Austin in Brussels this week for meetings with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group and the NATO Defense Ministerial.



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