



Written by [L. R. Abel](#) on August 31, 2021

Retired Flag Officers Want Top Military Brass to Resign

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley are under fire, though not from the small arms, tanks, and aircraft they abandoned in Afghanistan. Instead, an [open letter](#) published on August 30 and signed by 87 retired flag officers — generals and admirals of the armed services — calls for the resignation of Milley and Austin after the ineptitude and dearth of planning exhibited during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The letter begins,

The retired Flag Officers signing this letter are calling for the resignation and retirement of the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) based on negligence in performing their duties primarily involving events surround the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. The hasty retreat has left initial estimates at ~15,000 Americans stranded in dangerous areas controlled by a brutal enemy along with ~25,000 Afghan citizens who supported American forces.



AP Images
SECDEF Lloyd Austin (left) and CJCS Mark Milley

Readers should be aware that the numbers used in the letter are difficult to verify, and the letter's authors do not provide sources. However, the *New York Times* recently published similar figures. What we can know for certain is that there are thousands of American citizens and visa holders now stranded in a Taliban-controlled failed state, even if precise tallies elude officials.

The officers continue,

What should have happened upon learning of the Commander in Chief's (President Biden's) plan to quickly withdraw our forces and close the important power projections base Bagram, without adequate plans and forces in place to conduct the entire operation in an orderly fashion?

As principal military advisors to the Commander In Chief CINC/President, the SECDEF and CJCS should have recommended against this dangerous withdrawal in the strongest possible terms. If they did not do everything within their authority to stop the hasty withdrawal, they



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should resign. Conversely, if they did do everything within their ability to persuade the CINC/President to not hastily exit the country without ensuring the safety of our citizens and Afghans loyal to America, then they should have resigned in protest as a matter of conscience and public statement.

Readers will almost certainly recall that during the Trump presidency, Secretary of Defense James Mattis did precisely this when ordered to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria in 2018. Mattis [explained his resignation](#) in a letter the day after the withdrawal announcement, saying, “Because you [the President] have the right to have a Secretary of Defense whose views are better aligned with yours on these and other subjects, I believe it is right for me to step down from my position.”

Mattis split with Trump on the Syria policy, among others, and saw fit to submit his resignation. Hence, Milley and Austin have a contemporary precedent to step down in the face of orders they find objectionable. They have, so far, chosen not to, perhaps indicating that they did not find the order objectionable.

The flag officers focus next on the international and domestic harm of Biden’s policies, with absconding from Afghanistan taking point, but also listing such things as “wokeness” in the military and the unsecured southern border of the United States.

They write,

The consequences of this disaster are enormous and will reverberate for decades beginning with the safety of Americans and Afghans who are unable to move safely to evacuation points; therefore, being de facto hostages of the Taliban at this time. The death and torture of Afghans has already begun and will result in a human tragedy of major proportions. The loss of billions of dollars in advanced military equipment and supplies falling into the hands of our enemies is catastrophic. The damage to the reputation of the United States is indescribable. We are now seen, and will be seen for many years, as an unreliable partner in any multinational agreement or operation. Trust in the United States is irreparably damaged.

Moreover, now our adversaries are emboldened to move against America due to the weakness displayed in Afghanistan. China benefits the most followed by Russia, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and others. Terrorists around the world are emboldened and able to pass freely into our country through our open border with Mexico.

Besides these military operational reasons for resignations, there are leadership, training, and morale reasons for resignations. In interviews, congressional testimony, and public statements it has become clear that top leaders in our military are placing mandatory emphasis on PC “wokeness” related training which is extremely divisive and harmful to unit cohesion, readiness, and war fighting capability. Our military exists to fight and win our Nation’s wars and that must be the sole focus of our top military leaders.

For these reasons we call on the SECDEF Austin and the CJCS General Milley to resign. A fundamental principle in the military is holding those in charge responsible and accountable for their actions or inactions. There must be accountability at all levels for this tragic and avoidable debacle.



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The letter concluded, and the signatories are then denoted. The list includes names familiar to many, including those of Representative Ronny Jackson, a retired RADM; Vice Admiral John Poindexter, Reagan's national security advisor; and Army Brigadier General Don Bolduc.

The observations made in the final paragraphs are largely incontrovertible. Americans and Afghans are [already suffering](#) persecution and reprisal. Abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons, vehicles, and gear totaling in the billions of dollars are now the de facto [property of the Taliban](#). The [reputation of the United States](#) is diminished on the world stage. Finally, the [military's "wokeness"](#) and the [quagmire of border enforcement](#) are well-documented.

The likelihood of Milley or Austin resigning is slim. Still, it reflects well on our retired flag officers that they would bring their collective voice to bear on the pusillanimity, moral bankruptcy, and incompetence of the Biden administrations in matters both foreign and domestic.



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