

March 14, 2021

Secretary Lloyd Austin
U.S. Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Secretary Austin,

The U.S military's subordination to civilian governance, including to the American people for whom and by whom the government is selected, is at the core of our Republic and its institutions. That structure is woven into our military at every level, including Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1344.10, which broadly forbids military service members in from engaging in their official capacities in any activities that associate the DOD with any partisan political campaign or elections, candidate, cause, or issue.

Another long-standing norm aimed at preserving civilian governance has involved restrictions and prohibitions against recent servicemembers serving in certain civilian capacities, including the position of Secretary of Defense. The United States Senate granted its advice and consent for you to become Secretary despite your recent military service, and I voted for you as well, on the basis of your stated commitments to preserving that governance.

I am deeply troubled that the commitments you made, and the military's broader obligation to avoid political endorsements and controversy, are being systematically undermined for the sake of leftwing ideology and political expediency. The last week has witnessed the Pentagon mobilize systematic, public attacks against television host Tucker Carlson that in substance, tone, and political resonance are inexplicably inappropriate.

The campaign was launched in response to criticisms by Carlson that linked gender-based reforms in the military, which are being justified using the language of social justice, with widely-recognized vulnerabilities and erosions in the military's warfighting capabilities, including and especially in the context of Great Power competition. Whatever one thinks of the merits of the argument – and I believe there is much to be said against the use of the military for social experimentation, including for those reasons – those are broadly-held concerns that have been the fodder of political controversy and debate for decades.

Instead of allowing the debate to take its course in public among American citizens and their elected leaders, military officials over the last week have repeatedly launched attacks on Carlson, including through official DOD platforms and accounts and while in uniform. The campaign has alternated between being ostentatiously childish and simply outrageous.

Multiple military leaders have tweeted video of themselves, while in uniform, as they attack Carlson, including the Command Senior Enlisted Leader of U.S. Space Command, the Sgt. Major of the Army, the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence, and the commanding officer of the II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Information Group (IG). Throughout this campaign, military leaders have suggested and insinuated that it is out of bounds for civilians to criticize the military unless they've served.

This spectacle risks politicizing the military after several centuries of efforts to keep military officials out of domestic affairs, undermining civil-military relations by having the military take a side in a contentious cultural dispute, and the perception that military leaders are happily weaponizing the institution against political critics of the sitting administration. This kind of behavior, while perhaps typical in a military-controlled Third World country, is completely unacceptable in the United States of America.

Furthermore, these actions run the risk of creating a culture of contempt for our country's civilian leadership within the enlisted ranks and among junior officers which will be corrosive to the good order and discipline of the military.

At times the campaign has been conducted in a way that is far beneath the dignity of the United States military. The official website of the Defense Department catalogued a statement by Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby under the headline "Press Secretary Smites Fox Host That Dissed Diversity in U.S. Military" and declared that Carlson had issued "insults to the entire U.S. military."

II MEF constitutes a third of the Marine Corps' war fighting capability, and so II MEF IG is the public facing public affairs unit for entirety of the east facing combat force for Marines. The official Twitter account of the II MEF IG posted absurd statements insulting Carlson, and which included criticizing Carlson's age, and then told another private citizen who responded to that attack to "[c]ome back when you've served and been pregnant."

I cannot imagine how any of the above behavior can be explained, and I am deeply concerned about what it portends for the direction that you and President Biden intend to move the military.

I therefore request that the Commandant of the Marine Corps meet with me, in person, to discuss these issues. I also request an official response from the department and implementation of a policy that insulates other units from being similarly mobilized against the speech of American citizens or in the service of left wing political causes.

Regards,

Sincerely,



Ted Cruz
United States Senator