

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 7, 2021

Mr. Christopher Miller
Acting Secretary
Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Acting Secretary Miller:

Thank you for your honorable service to this country. As Members of Congress who served in the military, we are writing to request that you and your combatant commanders consider ways to provide a check and balance on the President's nuclear strike authority in the final days of his presidency. There is precedent for such action. In August 1974, as President Richard Nixon prepared to leave office, then-Defense Secretary James Schlesinger issued orders requiring that military commanders check with either him or then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger before executing any nuclear launch order by the President. Donald Trump is detached from reality, angry and acting out. To safeguard our country from potential catastrophe, similar steps to those taken in August 1974 need to be taken now.

In his refusal to concede the election to President-elect Biden, President Trump is actively and relentlessly subverting our electoral system and challenging the legitimacy of our Constitution. The President has also proven that he is ready to place his political goals above all else, even if that means politicizing our military, as he did on Lafayette Square this past July. Gen. Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did the right thing in the aftermath of that photo-op by admitting that no military officer should have been present. The fear that the President could use the military to press his electoral claims was powerfully articulated by all ten living former defense secretaries in *The Washington Post* on January 3, 2021.

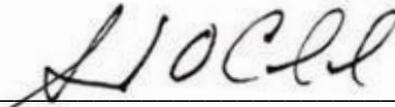
This president has proven time and time again that he knows no bounds. He does not respect the law or Constitution, much less the norms of the presidency. He has shown that he is willing to sow division and chaos to gain media attention and bolster his political standing in the eyes of his core supporters. The President incited his supporters—some of them armed—to storm the U.S. Capitol, thereby disrupting one of the pillars of American democracy: the orderly and peaceful transfer of power. One civilian was shot and died.

In the coming days, as Trump's options for remaining in the White House all but disappear, there is a real danger that the President could turn to military action at home or abroad. We are well-aware that in ordinary times, your role is to execute the President's orders. Unfortunately, we do not live in ordinary times. We believe that critical moments, like that we face today, require us to think of every possible avenue to avert disaster. We therefore ask you to implement additional measures to ensure adequate checks are placed on the President's nuclear authority at the earliest possible opportunity.

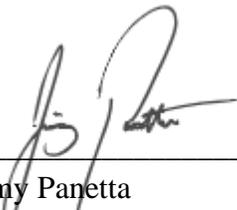
Sincerely,



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State
General Mark A. Milley, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Honorable Barbara M. Barrett, Secretary of the Air Force
The Honorable Kenneth Braithwaite, Secretary of the Navy
The Honorable Ryan D. McCarthy, Secretary of the Army