



# ***MILITARY AND VETERANS TOOLKIT***

## ***JUNE 2020***

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction	<b>1</b>
Messaging	<b>2</b>
Myth / Fact	<b>8</b>
Timeline	<b>12</b>
Traumatic Brain Injury	<b>20</b>
Military Validators	<b>23</b>

*This toolkit is a joint product of National Security Action and VoteVets, both of which are 501(c)(4) organizations. National Security Action and VoteVets stand ready to assist partners seeking more information or resources on the issues in this toolkit.*

# INTRODUCTION

**Trump has failed to live up to his responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief.** Long before he abused his command of the military in the aftermath of George Floyd's killing, the President politicized America's Armed Forces, insulted military officials, and put in place discriminatory roadblocks for Americans to serve. Instead of extricating the United States from overseas conflicts, his reckless foreign policy has prolonged America's wars, put service members at risk, and driven away critical national security expertise. Trump has worked to weaken and privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs to benefit corporate interests at the expense of our veterans.

**Taken together, the President's actions have only hurt veterans and undermined the military.**

**This toolkit showcases President Trump's failure to live up to his promises to service members and veterans.** It provides detailed examples of his attacks on the military and addresses common myths about his record on military and veterans issues. It also provides extensive examples of prominent, respected military officials criticizing the President or cautioning against the consequences of his actions.

# MESSAGING

**President Trump campaigned on prioritizing the welfare of our service members and the military more broadly, but he has failed to live up to his most basic responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief.** He consistently places his political interests over the welfare and strength of America's military. He politicizes the military and uses veterans as a prop when it suits his agenda -- as he has done in the aftermath of George Floyd's killing -- but demeans and attacks them when they disagree with him. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, he put the health and safety of service members repeatedly at risk in order to minimize the perceived severity of the situation and to stroke his ego.

**Trump's blatant disregard for the law, the chain of command, and even basic decency undermines our military.** His promotion and pardoning of soldiers accused and even convicted of heinous war crimes -- overturning orders of senior military officers -- endangers servicemembers around the world and undermines the military's discipline and readiness to defend our national security. Trump has pardoned and restored rank to those accused of violating military code and committing [war crimes](#), even [campaigning](#) with them.

- Trump [fired](#) the Secretary of the Navy for protesting undue presidential interference in disciplining former Special Operator Edward Gallagher, whose own men accused him of [war crimes](#). Trump later [brought](#) two others he pardoned onstage during a campaign rally.
- By pardoning these officers, Trump undercut and targeted the credibility of commanders who thoughtfully adjudicated these cases within the military justice system. More broadly, by excusing the inhumane and illegal treatment of combatants and civilians alike, Trump is putting our own service members at [risk](#) of retaliation.

**Trump doesn't just disrespect the military, he demands personal loyalty from military leaders and those who serve to protect our country in and out of uniform.** He has sent a clear signal that what he prizes above all -- far beyond service to the country -- is subservience to his own political agenda.

- When trying to seem “tough,” Trump is proud to [call](#) the country’s military leaders “MY generals” and our armed forces “MY military” ignoring the principle, as described by Lieutenant General (ret.) Mark Hertling, that “military belongs to the nation, not the president.”
- Trump drove away or fired top military advisors and questioned their integrity in public and in private. Trump called his top military advisors “[losers](#)” and lambasted his then-National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster for saying that evidence Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. elections was “[incontrovertible](#).”
- After former Defense Secretary James Mattis [broke his silence](#) to warn that Trump was “making a mockery of our Constitution,” and that the President “does not even try to unite Americans” amidst the George Floyd protests, Trump [responded](#) by falsely claiming he had fired Mattis, and reiterated his statement that Mattis was “the world’s most [overrated](#) general” and an expert in “[public relations](#)” rather than military strategy.
- Trump removed Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman and his twin brother Yevgeny from their positions in [retaliation](#) for the former’s cooperation with the impeachment proceedings. Yevgeny was not even involved in the impeachment proceedings, showing that no one is safe from Trump’s attacks on servicemembers and their families.
- The Trump administration [fired](#) Navy Secretary Richard Spencer for defending long-standing military laws and legal processes instead of showing loyalty to Trump when he decided to reinstate Navy SEAL Gallagher.
- In April 2020, Trump [demoted](#) DoD Acting Inspector General Glenn Fine, installing [new officials](#) who had previously served in advisory roles to the Trump administration. The demotion also removed Fine from his role as chair of the Coronavirus Relief Oversight Panel. One month later, in May, Fine [resigned](#) from the Pentagon.

**Trump says he wants a stronger military, but he has attacked trans and immigrant service members who volunteered to keep the United States safe.** People who want to serve should be able to do so without discrimination.

- Trump unceremoniously announced a [ban](#) on trans service members by tweet, in a move condemned by members of the military and Congress alike. Sixty-six percent of servicemembers support allowing transgender Americans to [serve](#) in the military.
- The Administration has made it [harder](#) for immigrants serving in the military to become citizens and has even [deported](#) service members who have fought for the only country they've ever called home.

**Trump has shown a callous disregard for the wellbeing of American troops and veterans, even when they are the victims of his own poor decisionmaking.**

- During the coronavirus pandemic, Trump has insisted on giving an in-person graduation speech at West Point, requiring all 1,100 cadets to travel back to campus amidst the pandemic. [At least 15 cadets](#) tested positive for COVID-19 upon arriving back to campus for the ceremony.
- Trump first maintained that “no Americans were harmed” in the retaliatory Iranian strikes on our bases in Iraq, but, when evidence later emerged that over 100 servicemembers had [suffered](#) traumatic brain injuries, [dismissed](#) them as merely “headaches” that he did not consider to be “serious” injuries.
- After four American troops were ambushed and killed in Niger in October 2017, Trump went golfing, but did not make a single [comment](#) on the incident for twelve days. When he finally did comment, Trump callously told one widow that her husband “[knew what he was signing up for.](#)”
- Multiple times, the President has implied that veterans struggling with PTSD are [weak](#). Veterans groups say the [comments](#) “perpetuate a false and damaging narrative that veterans are broken and dangerous.”
- Then-candidate Trump [lashed out](#) against slain soldier Captain Humayan Khan’s family, alleging that his mother was not permitted to speak in public because of the family’s Muslim faith.
- Trump [mocked](#) Senator John McCain, a decorated Navy fighter pilot who was captured and tortured for over five years during the Vietnam War. He said: "He's not a war hero. He's a war hero because he was captured. I like people that weren't captured." Trump continued

his [attacks](#) on McCain even after he passed away, prompting veterans and lawmakers to urge him to stop.

**Trump promised to bring an end to endless wars. Instead, he's increased troop deployments around the world and put our service members in unnecessary danger -- including when nonmilitary options would be far better suited to the challenges at hand.**

- Contrary to his campaign promise to end endless wars, Trump deployed some [20,000 additional troops](#) to the Middle East in 2019 and 2020 with no strategy or plan for deescalation.
- As Trump has pursued this military expansion around the world, he's tried to do it in secret. The Pentagon has misled the public about how many troops are stationed in [Syria](#) and [Afghanistan](#) by underreporting the true number by thousands.
- Trump's decisions put America's troops at added risk by increasing the likelihood of new wars. He has [abandoned](#) several international security agreements that have kept us safe -- including the Iran nuclear deal and the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty -- without a responsible plan to replace them. The administration has also [gutted](#) the State Department, making it harder for diplomats to do their jobs and leaving the brunt of the work to the military.

**This President and his administration have politicized the military, undermining American trust in the armed forces by using service members as political props.** Our military is supposed to be nonpartisan, but Trump has attempted to make it into a wedge issue.

- During nationwide protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, Trump repeatedly abused his role as Commander-in-Chief to project machismo. During [an address in the Rose Garden](#), Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 to deploy active duty military troops on Americans across the country if governors did not deploy the national guard to ["dominate the streets"](#) in their respective states.
- In Washington, D.C., the President deployed [national guard troops](#) and brought in hundreds of active duty troops to be on "standby" in the city during the George Floyd protests. Trump later used those troops, as well as various other federal agents, to deploy ["pepper balls"](#)

[and brute force on protestors](#) in order to clear a path for him to have a photo op at an Episcopal church across from the White House. The former Archbishop of Canterbury later [called](#) the stunt “idolatry.”

- Trump often makes inappropriate and ill-timed political remarks when addressing the troops; he turns routine interactions into political rallies. He autographed red MAGA hats for troops in Iraq and Germany and urged servicemembers to [pressure](#) their representatives to support his budget.
- During a visit to Japan last year, the administration ordered the USS John McCain to be “kept out sight” to [avoid offending](#) a president who constantly belittled the late Senator and his service to this country.
- Retired generals described Trump’s so-called “Salute to America” Independence Day festivities as “[a political ploy for his reelection campaign](#)” and “absolutely obscene.”
- Retired senior military officials have [criticized](#) Trump for not sharing the military’s values or [understanding](#) the military’s emphasis on order, discipline, and truth. Trump’s disregard for these values makes it harder for officers and commanders to enforce them within their own ranks.

**In the same vein, the administration diverted \$3.6 billion of FY2020 Department of Defense funding to support the border wall.** This money would have otherwise been used to improve the lives of service members and their families.

- The decision to [divert](#) funds resulted in the cancelation of 127 projects, [including](#) several daycare and school construction projects. Other terminated projects included Crash/Rescue Stations, offices, and operating facilities for military forces.
- Trump also [deployed](#) 3,900 active duty personnel and 2,600 National Guard members to the southern border at a cost of over \$500 million. These missions [detracted](#) from military readiness in other areas and separated troops from their family members over the holidays.

**The Trump Administration has worked to [weaken](#) and dismantle the Department of Veterans Affairs since day one -- endangering the wellbeing of our nation’s veterans. Instead of**

**investing in the VA, Trump has left the system with a shortage of nearly [50,000 employees](#), including [43,000](#) responsible for healthcare.**

- The VA is uniquely qualified to meet the healthcare needs of veterans, is wildly popular with veterans, and providers know how to identify service-connected conditions and deliver care specifically tailored to injuries from military service. Nevertheless, the administration has gone along with the push to privatize the Veterans Health Administration, a [years-long effort](#) funded by conservative donors, including [members of Mar-a-Lago](#), and for-profit healthcare companies.
- Trump's first Secretary of Veterans Affairs, David Shulkin, was fired after clashing with White House staff and appointees who wanted to privatize the VA. The fighting was so bad that Shulkin [posted an armed guard](#) outside of his office.
- Shuklin [defended](#) the VA system after his firing: "Privatization leading to the dismantling of the department's extensive health care system is a terrible idea. The department's understanding of service-related health problems, its groundbreaking research and its special ability to work with military veterans cannot be easily replicated in the private sector."
- Trump has repeatedly attacked and demeaned VA employees, calling them "[sadists](#)" who choose to serve veterans despite other lucrative professional opportunities.
- The Trump Administration's relentless [attacks](#) on organized labor have made it harder for VA doctors and nurses to advocate for themselves and their patients. More than [30%](#) of VA employees are veterans themselves.

# MYTH/FACT

**Myth: Servicemembers and veterans overwhelmingly support President Trump.**

**Reality: Half of active-duty troops have an [unfavorable view](#) of President Trump.** Trump's approval among veterans and servicemembers has dropped since his election. In late 2016, a Military Times [poll](#) found that 46% of troops approved of Trump and 37% disapproved. That nine point margin virtually disappeared by 2019, when a new poll showed approval at 42% and disapproval at 50%. Only 26% of women serving expressed a favorable view of the president. 41% of veterans do not trust Trump to make the right decision on military force, and 42% do not trust him on nuclear weapons.

**Myth: Trump says he is ending America's wars and bringing troops home.**

**Reality: Trump has endangered our troops by miring America further in ongoing wars and making future conflicts more likely.** Trump's erratic leadership as Commander-in-Chief has included the deployment of thousands more troops to the Middle East, empty promises to withdraw troops, and greater risks to service members around the world. Trump has no strategy for winning these wars and has not given a convincing explanation for why more troops are necessary or effective. His reckless approach and lack of planning, which often contravenes the advice of his top military and defense advisors, put troops in harm's way – just as it did in Iraq after the Soleimani strike, where over 100 service members suffered traumatic brain injuries.

**Myth: President Trump says he is supporting America's men and women in uniform by securing the largest military pay raise in nearly a decade.**

**Reality: Recent pay raises for service members are nowhere near as much as President Trump promised.** While Trump [claimed](#) that military service members would receive a 10% pay increase under his administration, service members [received](#) a 2.4% pay increase in 2018 and a 2.6% pay increase in 2019. If adjusted for annual inflation in 2018 of 1.9%, service members only saw a .5%

increase in pay—pocket change. In fact, Trump tried to [short-change our troops](#) by giving them a smaller raise, but Congress stepped in and pressured Trump into agreeing to the levels authorized by Congress .

**Myth: President Trump empowers our military commanders with broad authority in order to take the fight to our enemies, and the results are clear.**

**Reality: Trump filled top administration positions with senior military leaders only to routinely undermine them and ignore their advice, hampering the fight against adversaries like ISIS.**

Trump has [told](#) his senior military leaders: “I wouldn't go to war with you people...You're a bunch of dopes and babies.” He continued: “You're all losers, you don't know how to win anymore.” He didn't even tell his generals that he planned to withdraw from Syria in late 2018. CENTCOM commander Gen. Joseph Votel, the general in charge of U.S. forces in the Middle East, [said](#) that he “was not consulted” prior to Trump's withdrawal announcement. The withdrawal led Secretary of Defense James Mattis to [resign](#).

**Myth: Trump passed a program giving veterans access to more private doctors outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs medical system.**

**Reality: President Obama signed a bill establishing the Veterans Choice health program in response to major problems at VA facilities in 2014. The goal of this law was to temporarily allow veterans waitlisted for a VA appointment or without a VA facility nearby to seek care at a non-VA facility. When the program expired, Trump signed a subsequent law called the VA MISSION Act to define the split between public (VA-system) and private care for veterans.**

Instead of working to strengthen the VA system while implementing MISSION, the Trump Administration has [sought to weaken the VA](#) and push towards privatizing the system--which is deeply unpopular with veterans. The big winners from Trump's implementation of the MISSION Act were private companies who took advantage of the VA to [earn](#) over \$2 billion in booking fees. Senator Jon Tester, the top Democrat on the Veterans Affairs Committee, [accused](#) Trump's VA of “defying Congress' intent by using the Mission Act to dramatically expand the number of veterans going to the private sector.” Further, Trump has [tapped](#) his [unqualified Mar-a-Lago cronies](#) to direct

policy for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The “Mar-a-Lago Three” pushed out actual experts and took steps to privatize the VA, endangering the quality of care for our veterans.

**Myth: Trump increased funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

**Reality: Trump cut funding for critical areas and made it harder for veterans to qualify for benefits.** The president’s 2020 budget did increase funding for the VA, but it [cut](#) medical research by \$17 million (2%) and construction by more than \$1.3 billion (45%), potentially hurting the department’s ability to provide medical care for veterans in the long term. Veterans advocates have also [argued](#) that the new budget plan would make it harder for veterans to get medical exams and qualify for VA benefits and that Trump’s administration continues to engage in stealthy efforts to [dismantle](#) the entire VA system.

**Myth: Veteran Suicides have dropped under Trump thanks to the administration’s efforts in this area.**

**Reality: Sadly, veteran suicides are still climbing.** In June 2019, Trump [suggested](#) that veteran suicides had dropped from 23 per day to 20 per day during his time as president. His claim was based on limited data that did not capture the veteran suicide rate in all states. Revised numbers revealed the actual death rate was more like 20 per day, but this was not due to any administration actions to combat veteran suicides. In fact, the [latest](#) data from the Department of Defense says veteran suicides have increased, up to 24.8 per 100,000 in 2018 to 21.9 per 100,000 in 2017. In addition, a study by the Government Accountability Office [revealed](#) that the Department of Veterans Affairs has cut spending on suicide prevention outreach under Trump and left over \$4.7 million of funding allocated to suicide prevention unspent in 2018. The Trump Administration [established](#) a task force to study how to address veteran suicides, but the task force has not yet released any reports or taken action to address the crisis.

**Myth: Under Trump, the Department of Veterans Affairs is prioritizing the wellbeing of female veterans.**

**Reality: The administration is actively working to cover up incidents of sexual assault in VA facilities.** After a congressional aide and veteran filed a written complaint saying she was assaulted in a VA hospital, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie [sought out](#) damaging information about the aide in order to discredit her. While the department conducted a standard investigation into the incident, Secretary Wilkie conducted his own investigation with the aim of tarnishing the aide's good name. The incident was covered by the media and taken to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, harming the department's reputation and credibility. In a [statement](#), the American Legion called on Congress to investigate the allegations, saying they "bring into question the ethical suitability of the leadership at VA's highest levels."

# TIMELINE

**June 2, 2020** - At least 15 West Point cadets who were forced to travel back to campus to listen to Trump's in-person graduation speech [test positive for the coronavirus](#).

**June 1, 2020** - President Trump [threatens](#) to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 if governors do not sufficiently deploy the national guard to stop the protests. The Act allows the President to deploy active duty troops to states in order to quell civil unrest, but only upon a governor's request. Secretary of Defense Esper [later publicly rebuked Trump](#), stating that the Insurrection Act was not an appropriate response to the protests.

**May 20, 2020** - The Trump administration suggests it will [strategically cut the deployments](#) of the more than 40,000 national guard members helping states combat the coronavirus pandemic by exactly one day in order to save money and deprive thousands of them from becoming eligible for federal benefits. The decision was [later scrapped](#) after bipartisan Congressional disapproval and widespread uproar.

**May 6, 2020:** Michael Cutrone, a former top aide to Vice President Mike Pence, is reported to be moving to the Pentagon where he is expected to help [weed out civilians not loyal](#) to Trump.

**April 7, 2020:** Trump [demotes](#) long-standing and well-respected DoD Acting Inspector General Glenn Fine, relegating him to deputy IG status and installing [new officials](#) who had previously served in advisory roles to the Trump administration. The demotion also removed Fine from his role as chair of the Coronavirus Relief Oversight Panel. Fine eventually [resigned](#) from the DoD.

**April 7, 2020:** Trump [announces](#) he still wishes to deliver his commencement address for West Point's 2020 graduation in-person, forcing 1,000 cadets from around the country to travel, mostly by air, back to campus amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

**April 3, 2020:** House Armed Services Committee leaders [say](#) a lack of Pentagon guidance is forcing military commanders “to make decisions on matters outside of their expertise while under immense pressure.”

**April 2, 2020:** The U.S. Navy [relieves](#) Captain Brett Crozier from the command of the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt in response to his letter regarding the outbreak on his ship.

**March 30, 2020:** In the wake of an outbreak aboard the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt, the ship’s captain was [forced](#) to plead with Navy officials to take “[d]ecisive action” in order to prevent a “tragic outcome” aboard the aircraft carrier, where following CDC guidelines is impossible if the ship stays at sea.

**March 30, 2020:** As the Marine Corps also struggles with an outbreak at its East Coast recruit training center, military leaders -- including senior Navy and Army officials -- advocate for a pause in training exercises. Nevertheless, Secretary Esper and other administration officials [opt to continue](#).

**March 26, 2020:** Secretary Esper [directs](#) the U.S. military to stop providing detailed data about coronavirus infections within the armed forces, citing concerns that the data could be used by adversaries. Even one of Esper’s close advisors took a slightly different tone, [telling a reporter](#): “Being as transparent as possible is probably the best path.”

**March 24, 2020:** The Pentagon [announces](#) that three sailors aboard the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt had tested positive for the coronavirus. Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations, said the ship would continue its operations.

**March 16, 2020:** Even with Department-wide travel restrictions, the Pentagon [rejects](#) proposals from the military services to stop training new recruits amid coronavirus response.

**March 12, 2020:** A U.S. Central Command representative [tells](#) the House Armed Services Committee there is “no availability of testing for COVID-19” for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

**March 11, 2020:** Three days after the Army announced the same policy, Esper [orders](#) the first Defense Department-wide travel restrictions.

**March 2, 2020:** Secretary Esper [asks](#) American military commanders overseas to avoid making decisions related to the coronavirus that might surprise the White House or contradict Trump's messaging, American officials said.

**February 11, 2020:** President Trump [continued disparaging](#) Lt. Col. Vindman by suggesting that the military would take disciplinary action against him. In response, more than 1100 veterans signed an [open letter condemning](#) Trump's treatment of an American hero.

**February 10, 2020:** The number of U.S. soldiers believed to have sustained traumatic brain injuries from the bombing of bases in Iraq after the Soleimani strike rose to [109](#). The president initially [claimed](#) that "no Americans were harmed" and then minimized the injuries by characterizing them as "[headaches](#)."

**February 7, 2020:** President Trump ousted Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman from the National Security Council in an act of [political retribution](#) for his compliance with a Congressionally-issued subpoena to testify in the recent impeachment hearings. He also [retaliated](#) against Alexander Vindman's twin brother Yevgeny (also a Lieutenant Colonel) and had him escorted from the White House, despite the fact that Yevgeny was not involved in the impeachment process.

**January 23, 2020:** After a man contracts coronavirus in a Japanese prefecture where thousands of American service members are stationed, the spokesperson for U.S. Forces Japan [says](#) that the Department of Defense had not yet provided guidance to its personnel on how to manage the virus.

**January 22, 2020:** Secretary Esper tells reporters he had only seen news reports of the virus then raging in China and was "[not tracking](#)" its spread -- three weeks after China had notified the WHO of the virus and more than two weeks after a small U.S. government task force began monitoring its spread.

**November 24, 2019:** The Trump administration [fired](#) Navy Secretary Richard Spencer for attempting to negotiate a compromise between the Trump administration and the Navy with regards to the reinstatement of a Navy SEAL.

**November 19, 2019:** After Trump [characterized](#) Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman—a Purple Heart recipient and National Security Council staff member—as a ‘Never Trumper’, the official White House Twitter account [attacked](#) Vindman’s credibility and job performance.

**November 15, 2019:** Trump [cleared](#) three service members in war crimes cases, overruling military leaders who had sought to punish them.

**October 22, 2019:** Former Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin releases his book entitled “It Shouldn’t Be This Hard to Serve Your Country.” Shulkin [describes](#) the toxic influence of the “Mar-a-Lago Three,” outside advisors tapped by Trump to essentially privatize the VA.

**October 17, 2019:** Trump [attacked](#) his former Secretary of Defense, retired General James Mattis, as “not tough enough” and “the world’s most overrated general” in an Oval Office meeting with members of Congress.

**September 4, 2019:** The Trump administration announced that it would [redirect](#) funding allocated for Department of Defense construction projects to the border wall. Among the [projects put aside](#) to pay for this political stunt: improvements to dilapidated infrastructure for military families and upgrades for overseas DoD installations.

**July 4, 2019:** Trump staged a self-serving military parade, further politicizing our armed forces for his own personal gain. The stunt [cost](#) taxpayers an estimated \$5.4 million.

**June 8, 2019:** Immigration and Customs Enforcement failed to consider veterans’ deployment record and elevate decisions of veteran removal to senior officials in 70% of relevant cases, according to a [report](#) from the Government Accountability Office. Trump administration rules have made it more [difficult](#) for immigrant servicemembers to apply for citizenship and Trump has also

[sought](#) to remove protections for military families, placing a program that shields undocumented family members of active-duty troops from deportation [under review](#).

**June 5, 2019:** During an [interview](#) on “Good Morning Britain,” Trump explained that he didn’t serve in Vietnam because he “was never a fan of that war.” In the same interview, Trump repeatedly cast the transgender ban as an economic decision, suggesting transgender individuals were signing up for service as a way to have surgical costs covered.

**June 2, 2019:** The Pentagon, in the aftermath of the USS John S. McCain incident, [told](#) the White House to stop politicizing the military.

**May 30, 2019:** The White House [directed](#) the Navy to keep the warship USS John S. McCain “out of sight” during a Trump visit to Yokosuka base in Japan. A tarp was hung over the ship’s name and a barge was moved close to the ship to better obscure the name. Sailors from the McCain were not invited to Trump’s speech, making it the only American warship in the harbor that was not invited to send sailors.

**May 7, 2019:** Trump [pardoned](#) Michael Behenna, who was convicted of unpremeditated murder in a combat zone. Trump later expressed [interest](#) in pardoning additional military members accused or convicted of war crimes on Memorial Day before the conclusion of their trials, reportedly without consulting his senior military advisors or major veterans groups.

**April 12, 2019:** In March, the U.S. Department of Defense announced plans to begin discharging openly [transgender service members](#) who came out on or after April 12. From then on, the administration starts to forbid capable openly transgender individuals from enlisting.

**March 14, 2019:** In an interview with Breitbart, Trump [suggested](#) his ‘tough’ supporters, including the military, might become violent if pushed, and could ‘play it tough’ which would be ‘very bad.’ Trump also claimed he has “the support of the military.”

**January 17, 2019:** While delivering a speech at the Pentagon, officially to announce the Missile Defense Review, Trump [again](#) used the backdrop of uniformed servicemembers to launch partisan

attacks on Democrats. He joked that he received a welcoming reception “because I gave you the greatest and biggest budget in our history.”

**January 1, 2019:** After General Stanley McChrystal expressed that he would not join the Trump administration because he believes the president is immoral, Trump [tweeted](#): “General” McChrystal got fired like a dog by Obama. Last assignment a total bust. Known for big, dumb mouth. Hillary lover!”

**December 31, 2018:** Trump responded to criticism of his decision to withdraw troops from Syria by attacking “[failed generals](#).” He tweeted: “I campaigned on getting out of Syria and other places/ Now when I start getting out the Fake News Media, or some failed Generals who were unable to do the job before I arrived, like to complain about me & my tactics, which are working.”

**December 27, 2018:** Trump [falsely](#) told servicemembers during his brief visit to Iraq that he had secured for them a 10 percent pay raise, also falsely claiming that they had not received a pay increase in more than 10 years. In fact, servicemembers have received a pay increase of at least 1 percent annually for the last 30 years.

**December 20, 2018:** Secretary of Defense [Mattis offered his resignation](#) to President Trump effective Feb. 28, following Trump’s proposal to immediately withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan. Annoyed by the coverage of Mattis’ resignation letter, Trump pushed Mattis out on New Years Eve.

**November 22, 2018:** Trump repeatedly [veered off course](#) during and following conversations intended to thank deployed U.S. servicemembers, heaping praise upon himself, railing against trade deals, attacking his 2016 presidential rival, and again siding with Saudi Arabia over our own CIA on the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

**November 20, 2018:** On his way to spend Thanksgiving in Mar-A-Lago, [Trump said](#) he thinks active-duty troops are “proud” to be deployed to the southern border to help with the immigration effort there, even if it means missing Thanksgiving celebrations with their families. “Don’t worry

about the Thanksgiving. These are tough people,” Trump said in response to a question about the controversial border mission.

**November 18, 2018:** In an interview with Fox News, Trump [criticized Admiral Bill McRaven](#), a retired Navy SEAL and the commander of the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden, as a “Hillary Clinton supporter” and suggested that Bin Laden should have been killed “sooner.” The GOP soon after [echoed Trump’s attack](#) on the retired Admiral via social media.

**November 14, 2018:** Trump [urged](#) Florida election officials to call the midterm election in favor of Rick Scott and Ron DeSantis, decrying “large numbers of new ballots [that] showed up out of nowhere.” In doing so, Trump sought to ignore incoming provisional ballots of Florida-based troops serving abroad. Rather than respect the franchise of our servicemembers, Trump [referred](#) to the election after the inclusion of these ballots as “massively infected.”

**November 12, 2018:** Only two days after skipping the ceremony in France, Trump failed to attend the customary Veterans Day presidential visit to Arlington National Cemetery for the second time as President. Trump later claimed he was [“extremely busy”](#) and expressed desire for a “do-over.” (The President was tweeting throughout the day).

**November 10, 2018:** While on a visit to France to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War, Trump skipped [the very ceremony he had traveled to attend](#). Scheduled to pay tribute to American sacrifice at the Battle of Belleau Wood, one of our nation’s bloodiest military victories, Trump instead spent the day in his Paris hotel room.

**November - December 2018:** In the run-up to the 2018 midterm election, Trump deployed over 5,000 active duty soldiers and Marines to the U.S.-Mexico border in response to a group of unarmed Central American men, women, and children seeking asylum in the United States. [Estimates](#) suggest the deployment could cost up to \$200 million.

**August 17, 2018:** Trump’s plan for a military parade to mark Veteran’s Day was [officially scrapped](#) following a cost estimate by the Pentagon.

**August 8, 2018:** A [ProPublica report](#) revealed that Ike Perlmutter, the reclusive chairman of Marvel Entertainment, Bruce Moskowitz a Palm Beach doctor who helps wealthy people obtain high-service “concierge” medical care, and lawyer Marc Sherman were directing policy for the Department of Veterans Affairs from Mar-a-Lago.

**July, 2018:** [Reporting](#) emerged detailing how immigrant U.S. Army recruits were suddenly being discharged, often leaving their immigration status [in legal limbo](#). Many had already taken the Army oath and had attended training or were already serving in the Reserves.

**March 28, 2018:** Trump [nominated](#) his personal physician, Rear Admiral Ronny Jackson, to head the Department of Veterans Affairs, one of the country’s largest and most important institutions. Trump did so despite Dr. Jackson’s lack of experience managing a large organization. Dr. Jackson ultimately withdrew his name from consideration in the face of allegations of workplace misconduct.

**February 6, 2018:** After being dazzled by a military parade in France, Trump [ordered](#) the Pentagon to prepare a military parade in Washington, D.C. The plan drew immediate bipartisan condemnation as wasteful. The head of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America also [warned against](#) the idea: “We are very aware of anything that politicizes the military.”

**October 4, 2017:** A group of 50 ISIS-affiliated militants ambushed a group of U.S. special forces, killing four U.S. soldiers. Weeks passed before Trump called the families of the fallen. When he finally did, Trump told the widow of the lone African-American casualty that [her husband “knew what he was getting into”](#) when he signed up.

**July 26, 2017:** Trump banned transgender Americans from serving in the U.S. military, announcing the decision via [Twitter](#). Trump cited “the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail” even though all four service branch chiefs testified before Congress that open service for transgender patriots had not inhibited military readiness or unit cohesion. Studies have also proven Trump’s “cost” claim to be entirely untrue, estimating the cost

of providing trans-inclusive healthcare to service members as [less than 1%](#) of DoD healthcare spending.

**July 20, 2017:** [Trump reportedly went off on a tirade](#) at a Pentagon briefing, telling the generals and admirals, “You’re all losers, you don’t know how to win anymore.”

**January 29, 2017:** Navy SEAL Ryan Owens was killed and three others wounded in Yemen in the first military operation of the Trump administration. Trump casually authorized the raid [over dinner](#) with the input of Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner, rather than convene a formal meeting in the Situation Room. Trump then attempted to pass the buck to military commanders, saying “*they* lost Ryan.” The father of the slain SEAL, also a veteran, described the operation as [“a screw-up from the start.”](#)

**July 20, 2016:** Trump picked [a public fight](#) with a Muslim-American Gold Star family, the Khans, whose son, Captain Humayun Khan, died serving in the Iraq War.

**July 29, 2016:** Trump called retired U.S. Marine General John Allen, who prosecuted America’s war against ISIS, [“a failed general.”](#)

**July 18, 2015:** Early on in his campaign, Donald Trump claimed that he [“likes people who weren’t captured.”](#) while mocking Senator John McCain’s wartime experience as a POW. The remarks were widely seen as insensitive, not to just Senator McCain, but to generations of American service members who have endured capture and imprisonment.

# TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

In retaliation for the reckless strike that killed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force Commander General Qassem Soleimani, Iran [struck](#) Ain al-Asad airbase near Baghdad and another base near Erbil, both of which housed U.S. troops. US officials received early warning about incoming Iranian missiles from intelligence sources, but initially weren't sure which locations would be targeted.

The president initially [claimed](#) that U.S. forces suffered no casualties and that “only minimal damage was sustained.” When it [came out](#) eight days later that 11 troops who had been serving at the al-Asad base struck by missiles had been airlifted to Germany to receive medical care, Donald Trump dismissed the news saying:

“No, I heard that they had headaches, and a couple of other things, but I would say, and I can report, it's not very serious. I don't consider them very serious injuries relative to other injuries that I've seen. ” [\[CNN, 01/22/20\]](#)

Weeks later, the Pentagon [reported](#) that the number of U.S. soldiers believed to have sustained traumatic brain injuries from the bombings had risen to 110. The Iranian bombs that struck the bases were [up to 20 times larger](#) than the IEDs and roadside bombs our troops normally faced during the height of the conflict in Iraq.

Traumatic brain injuries are [chronic conditions](#) that can lead to mental confusion, seizures, aggression, impaired memory, and other very serious “[emotional and behavioral consequences](#).” The [American Association of Neurological Surgeons](#) estimates that 50,000 Americans die each year from TBIs, more than die from breast cancer and opioid overdoses.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has also [reported](#) that veterans with multiple traumatic brain injuries are twice as likely to consider suicide. And nearly half a million service members have suffered [mild to severe TBI](#) in the two decades that we've been fighting in Afghanistan.

These injuries are no laughing matter, which makes Trump's handling of the situation even more problematic.

The administration's response to the injuries was met with harsh criticism. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, a prominent veterans advocacy organization, [called](#) on the president to apologize for his remarks downplaying the injuries.

# MILITARY VALIDATORS

## **In Response to Trump's Misuse of the Military Following Floyd's Killing**

**Benjamin Haas, Former Army Intelligence Officer, and Kori Schake, former Pentagon and State Department Official:** A war does not exist between our military and American citizens, and the Trump administration should stop attempting to manufacture one (...) The image of soldiers controlling America's streets and engaging in law enforcement activity is evocative of the conduct of authoritarian countries from whom the United States takes pride in maintaining a distinction. Human rights abusers worldwide — traditionally admonished by the United States — must be reveling in America's eroded credibility. [[The Washington Post](#), 6/08/20]

**General Colin Powell, Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:** I mean, look at what [Trump] has done to divide us. Forget immigrants, let's put up a fence in Mexico. Forget this; let's do this. He is insulting us throughout the world. He is being offensive to our allies. He's not taking into account what our foreign policy is and how it is being affected by his actions. . . . And the one word I have to use with respect to what he's been doing for the last several years is a word I would never have used before, I never would have used with any of the four presidents I have worked for: He lies. He lies about things. And he gets away with it, because people will not hold him accountable (...) I think he has not been an effective president. [[CNN State of the Union](#), [6/07/20]

**Admiral William McRaven, Former Commander, Special Operations Command:**

This fall, it's time for new leadership in this country — Republican, Democrat or independent. President Trump has shown he doesn't have the qualities necessary to be a good commander in chief. As we have struggled with the Covid pandemic and horrible acts of racism and injustice, this president has shown none of those qualities. The country needs to move forward without him at the helm. [[The New York Times](#), 6/6/20]

**Former Secretaries of Defense Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel, Ash Carter, and 86 Other Former Senior Defense Department Officials:**

While several past presidents have called on our armed services to provide additional aid to law enforcement in times of national crisis — among them Ulysses S. Grant, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson — these presidents used the military to protect the rights of Americans, not to violate them. As former leaders in the Defense Department — civilian and military, Republican, Democrat and independent — we all took an oath upon assuming office “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States,” as did the president and all members of the military, a fact that Gen. Milley pointed out in a recent memorandum to members of the armed forces. We are alarmed at how the president is betraying this oath by threatening to order members of the U.S. military to violate the rights of their fellow Americans. [[The Washington Post](#), 6/5/20]

**Over 500 Former Senior Officials from America’s Diplomatic, Military, and Broader National Security Community:**

Misuse of the military for political purposes would weaken the fabric of our democracy, denigrate those who serve in uniform to protect and defend the Constitution, and undermine our nation’s strength abroad. There is no role for the U.S. military in dealing with American citizens exercising their constitutional right to free speech, however uncomfortable that speech may be for some...Declaring peaceful protestors “thugs” and “terrorists” and falsely seeking to divide Americans into those who support “law and order” and those who do not will not end the demonstrations. The deployment of military forces against American citizens exercising their constitutional rights will not heal the divides in our society. Ultimately, the issues that have driven the protests cannot be addressed by our military. They must be resolved through political processes. [[Just Security](#), 6/5/20]

**William Perry, Former Secretary of Defense:** I am outraged at the deplorable behavior of our President and Defense Secretary Esper, threatening to use American military forces to suppress peaceful demonstrators exercising their constitutional rights. This is a deeply shameful moment for our nation. [[Twitter](#), 6/4/20]

**General John Allen, Former Commander, NATO ISAF Forces:** The slide of the United States into illiberalism may well have begun on June 1, 2020. Remember the date. It may well signal the beginning of the end of the American experiment. The president's speech was calculated to project his abject and arbitrary power, but he failed to project any of the higher emotions or leadership desperately needed in every quarter of this nation during this dire moment. And while Monday was truly horrific, no one should have been surprised. Indeed, the moment was clarifying in so many ways. So mark your calendars—this could be the beginning of the change of American democracy not to illiberalism, but to enlightenment. But it will have to come from the bottom up. For at the White House, there is no one home. [[Foreign Policy](#), 6/3/20]

**General James Mattis, Former Secretary of Defense:** Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people—does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide us. We are witnessing the consequences of three years of this deliberate effort. We are witnessing the consequences of three years without mature leadership. We can unite without him, drawing on the strengths inherent in our civil society .... We know that we are better than the abuse of executive authority that we witnessed in Lafayette Park. We must reject and hold accountable those in office who would make a mockery of our Constitution. [[The Atlantic](#), 6/3/20]

**James Miller, Former Member of the Pentagon's Defense Science Board and Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy:** On Monday, June 1, 2020, I believe that you violated that oath. Law-abiding protesters just outside the White House were dispersed using tear gas and rubber bullets — not for the sake of safety, but to clear a path for a presidential photo op. Anyone who takes the oath of office must decide where he or she will draw the line (...) If last night's blatant violations do not cross the line for you, what will? Unfortunately, it appears there may be few if any lines that President Trump is not willing to cross, so you will probably be faced with this terrible question again in the coming days." [[The Washington Post](#), 6/2/20]

**Admiral Mike Mullen, Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:** This is not the time for stunts. This is the time for leadership (..) I remain confident in the professionalism of our men and women in uniform. They will serve with skill and with compassion. They will obey lawful orders. But

I am less confident in the soundness of the orders they will be given by this commander in chief. I am deeply worried that as they execute their orders, the members of our military will be co-opted for political purposes. Even in the midst of the carnage we are witnessing, we must endeavor to see American cities and towns as our homes and our neighborhoods. They are not “battle spaces” to be dominated, and must never become so. Too many foreign and domestic policy choices have become militarized; too many military missions have become politicized. [[The Atlantic](#), 6/2/20]

### **Former Military Officials on Trump’s Leadership**

**Admiral McRaven:** This fall, it’s time for new leadership in this country — Republican, Democrat or independent. President Trump has shown he doesn’t have the qualities necessary to be a good commander in chief. As we have struggled with the Covid pandemic and horrible acts of racism and injustice, this president has shown none of those qualities. The country needs to move forward without him at the helm. [[New York Times](#), 6/6/20]

**General Powell:** I mean, look at what [Trump] has done to divide us. Forget immigrants, let’s put up a fence in Mexico. Forget this; let’s do this. He is insulting us throughout the world. He is being offensive to our allies. He’s not taking into account what our foreign policy is and how it is being affected by his actions. . . .And the one word I have to use with respect to what he's been doing for the last several years is a word I would never have used before, I never would have used with any of the four presidents I have worked for: He lies. He lies about things. And he gets away with it, because people will not hold him accountable (..) I think he has not been an effective president.. [[CNN State of the Union Show](#), [6/07/20]

**Richard Spencer, Former Navy Secretary:** The rule of law is what sets us apart from our adversaries. Good order and discipline is what has enabled our victory against foreign tyranny time and again, from Captain Lawrence's famous order "Don't Give up the Ship," to the discipline and determination that propelled our flag to the highest point of Iwo Jima. Unfortunately, it has become apparent that in this respect, I no longer share the same understanding with the Commander in Chief who appointed me, in regards to the key principle of good order and discipline. I cannot in good conscience obey an order that I believe violates the sacred oath I took in the presence of my

family, my flag and my faith to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

[\[Resignation Letter\]](#), 11/24/19]

**General Mattis:** While the US remains the indispensable nation in the free world, we cannot protect our interests or serve that role effectively without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to those allies...My views on treating allies with respect and also being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors are strongly held and informed by over four decades of immersion in these issues...Because you 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. [\[CNN\]](#), 12/21/18]

**General Stanley McChrystal, Former Commander, ISAF:** We ought to ask what kind of commander in chief he had that Jim Mattis the good marine felt he had to walk away ... I think it's important for me to work for people who I think are basically honest. Who tell the truth as best they know it. I don't think [Trump] tells the truth. [\[ABC News\]](#), 12/30/18]

**General McChrystal:** A good leader tries to embody the best qualities of his or her organization. A good leader sets the example for others to follow. A good leader always puts the welfare of others before himself or herself. Your leadership, however, has shown little of these qualities. Through your actions, you have embarrassed us in the eyes of our children, humiliated us on the world stage and, worst of all, divided us as a nation. [\[Washington Post\]](#), 8/16/18]

**General Michael Hayden, Former CIA and NSA Director:** We now believe it is appropriate for the House of Representatives to begin the process by launching an impeachment investigation. [\[Washington Post\]](#), 1/18/19]

On Trump's Pardons

**Admiral James Stavridis, Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander:** President Donald Trump's interference on military justice is without precedent in American history, and represents a disturbing disagreement in civilian-military relations...In the past, Presidents have occasionally issued pardons to individuals adjudicated by military justice (as they do for civilians), but they have

never reached into the process while events are still unfolding. Doing so is deeply unsettling to military leaders, showing a complete disregard and indeed a disrespect for the military system of justice, called the Uniformed Code of Military Justice. [[Time](#), 11/25/19]

**Admiral Mullen:** [Trump's action] has the potential of undermining the rule of law in the military justice system completely. We can't take the law into our own hands in war. [[Slate](#), 11/18/19]

**General Charles C. Krulak, Former Commandant, Marine Corps:** [Trump's intervention] undermines decades of precedent in American military justice that has contributed to making our country's fighting forces the envy of the world. [[Wall Street Journal](#), 11/15/19]

**Lieutenant General Mark Hertling, Former Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army:** This is just not good for the SEAL community...[Trump's] just sticking up for an individual SEAL is what I would say. And this is a strategic issue in nature. You know, when you have all of the experts, the folks who are the leaders of the SEAL community, the leaders in the Defense Department, going to the President, and literally trying to beg him not to do this not to interfere with this action. It tells a story. And truthfully, that's the biggest concern I have. President Trump, now I know I'm going to sound biased when I say this, but he is not smarter than the generals in these things because he doesn't understand the second and third order effects, what's going to happen to the teams inside of the organization, what is going to happen to the discipline, and the morale of the units when people think they can get away with these kind of things. [[CNN](#), 11/25/19]

**General Martin Dempsey, Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:** Absent evidence of innocence or injustice the wholesale pardon of US servicemembers accused of war crimes signals our troops and allies that we don't take the Law of Armed Conflict seriously. Bad message. Bad precedent. Abdication of moral responsibility. Risk to us. [[Tweet](#), 5/21/19]

**Colonel Jeff McCausland, Former Dean of the U.S. Army War College:** Trump's justifications for the pardons sadly suggest the commander in chief lacks an in-depth understanding of the military, its culture, and professional ethic...Ultimately, the American military is a professional force designed

to employ the measured and disciplined application of force in behalf of the nation. It is not a 'killing machine.' The president should understand that military ethics is what separates a disciplined force from an armed mob...Unfortunately, the president's decision will likely have further deleterious effects for the military justice system as well as national security...Whatever the president's reasoning, he would be well served to consider the future impact of this decision. In doing so, he would benefit from listening to the views of a young officer — "that is not who we are."  
[\[NBC News, 11/19/19\]](#)

**Dr. Bradley Strawser, Professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and former Air Force officer, and Dr. Pauline Shanks Kaurin, professor of Leadership and Ethics at the US Naval War**

**College:** These pardons of our war criminals by Trump, and his interference in and disrespect of our own military justice system is unprecedented and should trouble all Americans. We will not pull punches — they are shameful and a national disgrace...The president's pardon of these war criminals dishonors the noble service and sacrifice of so many others who have waged war on America's behalf the right way. On this, none of us can remain silent. [\[War on the Rocks, 11/25/19\]](#)

**Andrew Exum, Former Army Ranger Platoon Commander and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy:** This is a sad day for the tens of thousands of us who led troops in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan who were proud of the way in which we maintained our good order and discipline in the face of many challenges. These men, now pardoned, remain a disgrace to our ranks. [\[Tweet, 11/15/19\]](#)

**Benjamin Haas:** Mr. Trump may believe that intervening [in military justice] pays respect to those who have served in uniform, that it shows he's "pro-military." But if this is his view, he's wrong. In reality, Mr. Trump's meddling undermines the military's institutional values, risks endangering American service members, and disrespects the honorable service of the overwhelming majority of veterans...Mr. Trump's intervention on behalf of those convicted or accused of conduct falling short of the military's crucial legal requirements and moral expectations undermines the training in which the military rightly invests so much effort. It trivializes the values the military spends so much time fostering. He could be endangering United States service members deployed to combat

zones by handing their enemies propaganda and recruitment material and by degrading support among local populations...Mr. Trump, to the detriment of the United States Armed Forces, remains fixated on condoning the aberrant conduct of those convicted or accused of flouting the laws of war. He should have left the military justice system to do its job. But perhaps this is not surprising, considering that Mr. Trump himself has recently advocated a war crime — the appropriation of oil in Syria. [[New York Times](#), 11/15/19]

**Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), West Point graduate and former U.S. Army officer:** [Trump's] disregard risks undermining the confidence of our service members in the rule of law, especially those courageous enough to bring allegations of war crimes to light and testify against their teammates...The United States military does not prosecute its own for carrying out lawful missions in service to our nation, and we do not train our troops to kill indiscriminately. We do not train them to attack noncombatants, we do not train them to violate the rule of law and Geneva Convention, because we want our troops to be protected by those same standards. To think or say otherwise goes against discipline, the selfless service of so many and the history of our military [[Military Times](#), 11/22/19]

### **On Trump's Disrespect for Servicemembers and Politicization of the Military**

**Will Goodwin, Director of Government Relations at VoteVets:** “[President Trump] has shown us time and again it is all about him. In this case, he wants to give a big speech. He enjoys the pomp and circumstance, as we know, from his military parade requests from the past. He will stop at nothing. And in this case, he will put people at risk and not only put people at risk in the travel situation but risk our military readiness. We are talking about 1,000 incoming U.S. Army officers who will be the next generation of leaders. The idea that any of those people would be put at risk is unbelievable.” [[CNN](#), 04/27/20]

**William Cohen, Former Defense Secretary:** “It is not his military. These are not his generals.” [[Newsweek](#), 07/03/19]

**Gordon Adams, Professor at American University, Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson, Former Chief of Staff to Colin Powell, and Colonel Isaiah Wilson III:** Electoral gain, not security, is this president's goal. Two of us served in the military for many years; while all troops must obey the legal and ethical orders of civilian leaders, they need to have faith that those civilian leaders are using them for legitimate national security purposes. But the border deployment put the military right in the middle of the midterm elections, creating a nonexistent crisis to stimulate votes for one party. When partisan actions like this occur, they violate civil-military traditions and erode that faith, with potentially long-term damage to the morale of the force and our democratic practice — all for electoral gain. The deployment is a stunt, a dangerous one, and in our view, a misuse of the military that should have led Mr. Mattis to consider resigning, instead of acceding to this blatant politicization of America's military. [[New York Times](#), 11/18/18]

**Lt. Gen. David Barno:** This looks like it's becoming much more of a Republican Party event — a political event about the president — than a national celebration of the Fourth of July, and it's unfortunate to have the military smack dab in the middle of that. [[Politico](#), 7/2/19]

**Major Jason Dempsey:** Military displays like this are a favorite tactic of those who want to wrap themselves in the symbols of who we are rather than really celebrating who we are...The military is playing an ever more central role in American political life. This fits into this larger, troubling trend of identifying America itself as a military state. The Fourth of July in America should be about so much more than our military and our ability to fight off the rest of the world. [[Politico](#), 7/2/19]

**General Wesley Clark, Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander:** Trump's actions and behavior have led service members and veterans to question whether he really understands who a commander in chief is, or what he does. [[Washington Post](#), 11/18/18]

**Scott Beauchamp, Former Army Infantry Officer and Iraq War Veteran:** Trump's disrespect of veterans began long before the current election cycle...When Trump does gesture at supporting the troops, it rings hollow. He offers six figures to buy veterans groups as props to use during campaign rallies, as if risking life and limb for your country can be monetized...So far, Trump has only insulted, abused and patronized service members and veterans. [[The Guardian](#), 2/26/16]

**Sergeant Richard Allen Smith:** Trump does not love the military. Rather, he views the military as an entity he absorbed through a corporate acquisition. Just as has been the case with his Trump Organization employees or cabinet members or endorsers during the campaign, he feels he must have dominance over the military. It belongs to him now, along with the American forces' most valuable yet intangible assets: the honor, loyalty and respect Trump so desires...And that's the point for Trump. For all his wealth and power, even after rising to the most powerful office in the world, there is one thing he lacks, and money can't buy it: respect. [[Rolling Stone](#), 10/27/17]

**Benjamin Haas:** politicizing the military risks undermining the public's trust in the armed forces, an institution that enjoys greater public confidence than any other in the country...If Trump continues his embellished and alarming conjecture about his partisan support from the military, an already fragile society might develop the perception that its military is more loyal to Trump than the Constitution. This would be unhealthy for our democracy. [[Just Security](#), 11/25/19]

### **On Trump's Termination of DACA**

**Bipartisan group of 13 former top national security and defense officials:** In addition to uprooting the lives of men and women who are making sacrifices for our nation, we believe deporting Dreamers would divert government resources from countering serious national security threats currently facing our nation...Deporting soldiers would be a waste of resources, but more importantly, a travesty of justice. [[Letter to congressional leadership](#), 11/14/17]

**Former Acting Under Secretary at DHS John D. Cohen:** To secure the well-being of our nation, we must devote our time and energy to real security threats. ... Targeting a group of young people seeking to better themselves through education so they can contribute socially and economically to the growth of our nation is not a good use of law enforcement resources. [[The Hill](#), 8/31/17]

**Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates:** The United States faces extraordinary security challenges that are placing growing pressure on our armed forces. Those forces are stronger when they embody the nation's diversity, drawing from a large pool of willing young people able to adapt to changing threats. That is why we need legislation that will provide a pathway to

citizenship for those immigrants who, among other attributes, are serving or have served in the military, whether they are in America legally or were brought here illegally as children. That kind of policy will help the military recruit new service members and improve readiness. [[New York Times](#), 11/8/18]

**Director of National Security Outreach at Human Rights First Bishop Garrison:** Getting rid of DACA will create a direct negative effect for hundreds of veterans and active service members who have and continue to risk their lives for our communities. Furthermore, with Trump eager to expand the numbers of our military as he views size as a projection of might, why, then, would it make sense to remove a population of capable, virtually trouble free young people such as Dreamers from volunteering to serve? To put it bluntly, this decision makes us less safe. [[Just Security](#), 9/12/17]

**Retired U.S. Navy four-star admiral William McRaven defended DACA in his role as chancellor of the University of Texas:** “Our state and nation have benefited for decades by attracting and retaining great students, scholars, physicians, and researchers from around the world. As I have said before, the men and women who show up on our shores and at our doors – ready to study, work, and participate – make us stronger, smarter, more competitive, and more attuned to the rest of our ever-shrinking globe.” [[Statement](#), 9/5/17]

**James W. Partington, retired United States Navy rear admiral and Veterans for New Americans National co-chairman; Margaret Stock, retired United States Army Reserve lieutenant colonel and Veterans for New Americans National co-chairwoman; and Scott Cooper, retired United States Marine Corps lieutenant colonel and founder of Veterans for American Ideals:** A solution for Dreamers will allow nearly 700,000 DACA recipients, and ideally others — young men and women brought to the United States as children — to continue contributing to our communities and our economy. It also would strengthen our military. Nearly 1,000 Dreamers have already enlisted in our armed forces and many more possess the skillset and talent necessary for military readiness — including medical training, language skills and core

cultural competencies that support our global strategic interests. Dreamers also participate in Junior ROTC programs nationwide. [[The Hill](#), 1/30/18]