

U.S. NEWS

# Hegseth takes aim at 'fat generals' in speech to top U.S. military officers

By Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali • Reuters

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U.S. Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** slammed "fat generals" and diversity initiatives that he said led to decades of decay in the **military** and told a rare gathering of commanders on Tuesday they should resign if they don't support his agenda.

"Foolish and reckless political leaders set the wrong compass heading and we lost our way. We became the 'Woke Department,'" Hegseth said as he kicked off the event in Quantico, Virginia. "But not anymore," he said.

Addressing a room full of America's top generals and admirals, summoned from around the world without explanation last week, Hegseth defended his firings of flag officers, which include the top U.S. general, who is Black, and the Navy's top admiral, who is a woman. He said the officers he relieved were part of a broken culture.

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Hegseth takes aim at 'fat generals' in spe...

He promised sweeping changes to how discrimination complaints are handled and how accusations of wrongdoing are investigated at the Pentagon, saying the current system has top brass walking on "egg shells."

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"If the words I'm speaking today are making your hearts sink, then you should do the honorable thing and resign," Hegseth said.

"I know the overwhelming majority of you feel the opposite. These words make your hearts full."

1:41

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Hegseth criticized the look of overweight troops, saying: "It's completely unacceptable to see fat generals and admirals in the halls of the Pentagon."

He said all fitness tests would be set to male benchmarks only and emphasized the importance of grooming standards.

"The era of unprofessional appearance is over. No more beardos," Hegseth told the audience, which sat in silence.

### Trump tells commanders 'I have your backs'

President **Donald Trump**, as he departed for the event, told reporters on Tuesday that he would fire military leaders on the spot if he did not like them.

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Trump then opened with a joke as he took the stage for a speech that lasted more than an hour, saying: "If you don't like what I'm saying, you can leave the room, of course, there goes your rank, there goes your future."

But he then spoke warmly of the military, in sometimes-wandering remarks that touched on issues like the prowess of U.S. nuclear submarines but also included fierce criticism of the media, former President Joe Biden and Venezuela.

1:57

Trump orders U.S. troops to Portland, Ore., authorizes 'full force'

He echoed Hegseth when he turned his attention to his opposition to diversity initiatives.

"Merit. Everything's based on merit. You're all based on merit. We're not going to have somebody taking your place for political reasons, because they are politically correct and you're not," Trump said.

"I am with you. I support you, and as president, I have your backs 100%," Trump said.

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The auditorium was filled with senior uniformed officials, seated in front of a stage with a large American flag, a lectern and boards that read: "Strength. Service. America."

As Trump spoke, several officers sat looking expressionless, and the room was far quieter than the crowds at Trump's usual gatherings. A naval officer took notes.

The U.S. military is meant to be apolitical, loyal to the U.S. Constitution and independent of any party or political movement. That creates pressure on the commanders to avoid reacting to overtly political comments, by Trump or Hegseth.

### Revamping defence priorities

The Pentagon has undergone eight months of blistering changes since Trump took office, including firing, banning books from academy libraries and ordering lethal strikes on suspected drug boats off Venezuela.

"If you try to poison our people, we will blow you out of existence," Trump told the audience.

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Earlier this month, Trump signed an executive order to rename the Department of Defense the "Department of War," reverting to a title it held until after World War Two when officials sought to emphasize the Pentagon's role in preventing conflict. The name change will require congressional approval.

1:31

'Sends a message of victory': Trump rena...

The administration has announced a plan to send National Guard deployments to Chicago, the latest U.S. city where Trump aims to deploy U.S. troops despite objections from local authorities.

Trump announced plans to send National Guard troops to Portland, Oregon, over the weekend and sent Guard and active-duty Marines to Los Angeles earlier this year, despite protests from local officials.

He acknowledged discomfort among his opponents for deploying the military on U.S. streets, but said America was in the grips of what he described as a war from within waged by illegal immigrants who his administration is seeking to deport.

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"America is under invasion from within. We're under invasion from within, no different than a foreign enemy, but more difficult in many ways, because they don't wear uniforms," Trump said.

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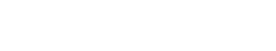
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