

January 29, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Blvd.
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

I write to express our concerns about President Trump's reported removal of Robert Storch, the independent, Senate-confirmed Department of Defense Inspector General (DoD IG)¹ and the impact of his removal on your promises to reform the Pentagon. Mr. Storch was one of over a dozen IG's that were reportedly fired by President Trump in an illegal "Friday night purge."²

I urge you to request that the President rescind this decision and that you continue to treat the DoD IG as a your "principal advisor"³ and independent investigator of waste, fraud, and abuse, including allowing him to continue and any ongoing investigations and to access DoD facilities and information as needed for these investigations, without interference.

The removal of Mr. Storch is illegal. Before the president may fire an inspector general he must provide notice to Congress within 30 days prior to such removal, including a "substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons" for the removal.⁴ Congress received no notice, and as of today, has not received a rationale.

As you noted in response to my questions for the record, the DoD IG is the Secretary's "principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense on matters involving DoD fraud, waste and abuse."⁵ In the last

¹ Washington Post, "Trump uses mass firing to remove independent inspectors general at a series of agencies," Zeke Miller, Eric Tucker, and Will Weissert, January 25, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/25/trump-inspectors-general-fired-congress-unlawful/1d918588-db3a-11ef-85a9-331436ec61e9_story.html; Military.com, "Watchdogs at Pentagon, VA Fired in Purge of Inspectors General Across Federal Government," Konstantin Toropin and Patricia Kime, January 28, 2025, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/01/27/watchdogs-pentagon-va-fired-purge-of-inspectors-general-across-federal-government.html>.

² Politico, "Trump fires independent inspectors general in Friday night purge," Megan Messerly, Josh Gerstein, Kyle Cheney, and Nahal Toosi, January 25, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/25/donald-trump-inspectors-general-firing-00200611>.

³ 5 USC 408; Response from Pete Hegseth to Senator Warren's Questions for the Record, January 19, 2025, [on file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren].

⁴ Pub. L. 117-286, Section 5202 (a)(1), December 27, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ263/PLAW-117publ263.pdf>.

⁵ 5 USC 408; Response from Pete Hegseth to Senator Warren's Questions for the Record, January 19, 2025, [on file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren].

year DoD IG has recovered nearly \$2.2 billion in taxpayer dollars,⁶ as well as identifying \$1.2 billion in unsupported costs and over \$2 billion in DoD funds that could be put to a better use.⁷ The IG's Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) was responsible for 210 criminal convictions, and for referring 187 investigations to the Department of Justice.⁸

Your responses to me made clear that you understood the critical role of IGs, and I appreciate that you personally committed “to protecting the DoD IG’s independence.”⁹ When you came before the Senate Armed Services committee you promised to be a “change agent”¹⁰ who would make sure that “[l]eaders—at all levels—will be held accountable.”¹¹ This will be impossible without an independent, Senate-confirmed IG. In fact, as recently as this month the IG condemned your predecessor, former Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III, for “unnecessarily” increasing risks to national security when he failed to inform the president, Congress, and the public about his hospitalizations in 2023 and 2024.¹² If you intend to keep your promises, the independent, Senate-confirmed DoD IG will be a critical partner.

But now that the IG has been removed, and less than 72 hours after your swearing in ceremony, you appear to be abusing your power to weaponize the government against the President’s political enemies. I am particularly concerned by reports that you are stripping General Mark Milley, the former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, of his security detail and clearance and directing the acting DoD IG to conduct a review board to demote him.¹³ Members of Congress already asked the DoD IG to investigate this matter in 2022.¹⁴ After personally reviewing “hundreds of pages of documents, including classified and unclassified records” and requesting and “additional documents”

⁶ Department of Defense Inspector General “Semiannual Report to Congress: April 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024,” p. 15, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/27/2003594907/-1/-1/1/SAR_FALL%202024_V7_SIGNED_V2.PDF; Department of Defense Inspector General, “Semiannual Report to Congress: October 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024,” p. 15, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Aug/14/2003525007/-1/-1/1/SAR_SPRING%202024_SIGNED_20240814.PDF.

⁷ Department of Defense Inspector General “Semiannual Report to Congress: April 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024,” p. 9, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/27/2003594907/-1/-1/1/SAR_FALL%202024_V7_SIGNED_V2.PDF; Department of Defense Inspector General, “Semiannual Report to Congress: October 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024,” p. 7, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Aug/14/2003525007/-1/-1/1/SAR_SPRING%202024_SIGNED_20240814.PDF.

⁸ Department of Defense Inspector General “Semiannual Report to Congress: April 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024,” p. 15, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/27/2003594907/-1/-1/1/SAR_FALL%202024_V7_SIGNED_V2.PDF; Department of Defense Inspector General, “Semiannual Report to Congress: October 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024,” p. 15, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Aug/14/2003525007/-1/-1/1/SAR_SPRING%202024_SIGNED_20240814.PDF.

⁹ Response from Pete Hegseth to Senator Warren’s Questions for the Record, January 19, 2025, [On file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren].

¹⁰ Written testimony of Pete Hegseth to the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, January 14, 2025, p. 2, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/hegseth_opening_statement.pdf.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Department of Defense Inspector General, “Review of the Responsibilities and Actions Related to the Secretary of Defense’s Hospitalizations and the DoD’s Policies and Procedures for Notification and Transfer of Functions and Duties (Report NO. DODIG-2025-058,” press release, January 15, 2025, <https://www.dodig.mil/In-the-Spotlight/Article/4029584/press-release-review-of-the-responsibilities-and-actions-related-to-the-secretary>.

¹³ Fox News, “Pentagon pulling Gen. Milley’s security detail and clearance ‘immediately,’ may face demotion in retirement,” Lucas Y. Tomlinson, January 28, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/white-house-pulling-gen-milleys-security-detail-clearance-panel-may-face-demotion-retirement>.


¹⁴ Letter from Senator Charles E. Grassley and Representative Jim Banks to Acting Department of Defense Inspector General Sean O’Donnell, April 17, 2022,

https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_banks_to_dept_of_defense_inspector_general_-_genmilley1.pdf.

from General Milley, the DoD IG “determined that further inquiry by the DoD OIG...is not warranted.”¹⁵ Retired General Milley is also among several officials provided security due to continued threats to his life from Iran.¹⁶ As Senator Tom Cotton, the Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has pointed out, “[t]he threat to anyone involved in President Trump’s strike on Qasem Soleimani is persistent. It’s real.”¹⁷ It is reckless that your actions could pave the way for Iran’s revenge. Any reopening of General Milley’s administratively determined retired grade requires prior notice to Congress, due process for General Milley, and in the case of any redetermination, the advice and consent of the Senate.¹⁸

I am concerned that the removal of the Senate-confirmed IG will result in waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer funds, undermine accountability, and open the door to an unprecedented politicization of the Defense Department and the armed forces. I urge you fulfill your commitment to protect the independence of the DoD IG and allow Mr. Storch to continue serving in the role of IG unless and until President Trump legally removes him from office.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

¹⁵ Letter from Department of Defense Inspector General Robert P. Storch to Senator Charles E. Grassley and Representative Jim Banks, May 3, 2023, https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/dept_of_defense_inspector_general_to_grassley_banks_-_genmilley.pdf.

¹⁶ CBS News, “Trump administration pulls security detail from Mike Pompeo and former special envoy on Iran,” Margaret Brennan and Aaron Navarro, January 23, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-pulls-security-detail-mike-pompeo-brian-hook-iran/>.

¹⁷ Wall Street Journal, “Tom Cotton on Trump and Pompeo, Bolton and Hook,” January 27, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/tom-cotton-donald-trump-security-protection-john-bolton-mike-pompeo-iran-8e6206f9>.

¹⁸ 10 U.S.C. 1370.