

# Opinion: 3 retired generals: The military must prepare now for a 2024 insurrection

By Paul D. Eaton, Antonio M. Taguba and Steven M. Anderson

Yesterday at 5:05 p.m. EST



*Paul D. Eaton is a retired U.S. Army major general and a senior adviser to [VoteVets](#). Antonio M. Taguba is a retired Army major general, with 34 years of active duty service. Steven M. Anderson is a retired brigadier general who served in the U.S. Army for 31 years.*

As we approach the first anniversary of the [deadly insurrection](#) at the U.S. Capitol, we — all of us former senior military officials — are increasingly concerned about the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election and the potential for lethal chaos inside our military, which would put all Americans at severe risk.

In short: We are chilled to our bones at the thought of a coup succeeding next time.

One of our military's strengths is that it draws from our diverse population. It is a collection of individuals, all with different beliefs and backgrounds. But without constant maintenance, the potential for a military breakdown mirroring societal or political breakdown is very real.

The signs of potential turmoil in our armed forces are there. On Jan. 6, a disturbing number of veterans and active-duty members of the military took part in the attack on the Capitol. More than 1 in 10 of those charged in the attacks [had a service record](#). A group of 124 retired military officials, under the name "Flag Officers 4 America," released a letter [echoing Donald Trump's false attacks](#) on the legitimacy of our elections.

Recently, and perhaps more worrying, Brig. Gen. Thomas Mancino, the commanding general of the Oklahoma National Guard, [refused an order](#) from President Biden mandating that all National Guard members be vaccinated against the coronavirus. Mancino claimed that while the Oklahoma Guard is not federally mobilized, his commander in chief is the [Republican governor of the state](#), not the president.

The potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command along partisan lines — from the top of the chain to squad level — is significant should another insurrection occur. The idea of rogue units organizing among themselves to support the "rightful" commander in chief cannot be dismissed.

Imagine competing commanders in chief — a newly reelected Biden giving orders, versus Trump (or another Trumpian figure) issuing orders as the head of a shadow government. Worse, imagine politicians at the state and federal levels illegally installing a losing candidate as president.

All service members take an oath to protect the U.S. Constitution. But in a contested election, with loyalties split, some might follow orders from the rightful commander in chief, while others might follow the Trumpian loser. Arms might not be secured depending on who was overseeing them. Under such a scenario, it is not outlandish to say a military breakdown could lead to civil war.

In this context, with our military hobbled and divided, U.S. security would be crippled. Any one of our enemies could take advantage by launching an all-out assault on our assets or our allies.

The lack of military preparedness for the aftermath of the 2020 election was striking and worrying. Trump's acting defense secretary, Christopher C. Miller, testified that he deliberately withheld military protection of the Capitol before Jan. 6. Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reportedly scrambled to ensure the nation's nuclear defense chains were secure from illegal orders. It is evident the whole of our military was caught off-guard.

With the country still as divided as ever, we must take steps to prepare for the worst.

First, everything must be done to prevent another insurrection. Not a single leader who inspired it has been held to account. Our elected officials and those who enforce the law — including the Justice Department, the House select committee and the whole of Congress — must show more urgency.

But the military cannot wait for elected officials to act. The Pentagon should immediately order a civics review for all members — uniformed and civilian — on the Constitution and electoral integrity. There must also be a review of the laws of war and how to identify and deal with illegal orders. And it must reinforce “unity of command” to make perfectly clear to every member of the Defense Department whom they answer to. No service member should say they didn't understand whom to take orders from during a worst-case scenario.

In addition, all military branches must undertake more intensive intelligence work at all installations. The goal should be to identify, isolate and remove potential mutineers; guard against efforts by propagandists who use misinformation to subvert the chain of command; and understand how that and other misinformation spreads across the ranks after it is introduced by propagandists.

Finally, the Defense Department should war-game the next potential post-election insurrection or coup attempt to identify weak spots. It must then conduct a top-down debrief of its findings and begin putting in place safeguards to prevent breakdowns not just in the military, but also in any agency that works hand in hand with the military.

The military and lawmakers have been gifted hindsight to prevent another insurrection from happening in 2024 — but they will succeed only if they take decisive action now.

---

## MORE FROM OPINIONS

 HAND CURATED



Donald Trump's Jan. 6 depravity is still not fully known

December 17, 2021

How Biden's transformation ran aground

December 17, 2021

Lawrence Summers: The Fed's words still don't measure up to the challenge of inflation

December 16, 2021

**View 3 more stories** 

---

