

Biden asserts confidence in embattled top U.S. General Milley



Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley's office says he regularly contacts foreign military leaders [File: Susan Walsh/AP photo]

Washington, September 16 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden has said he backs top U.S. general Mark Milley, who faces mounting pressure to account for reports that he may have overstepped his authority during Donald Trump's presidency.

Biden has "complete confidence" in Milley, who serves as the chairman of the joint chiefs, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Wednesday.

A day earlier reports stemming from an upcoming book by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa claimed that Milley – thinking that then-President Donald Trump was suffering a mental decline – called his Chinese counterpart twice, late in 2020 and early in 2021, to avert possible military conflict with China.

Excerpts from the book titled *Peril*, first revealed by the Washington Post, said Milley assured Li Zuocheng, the top Chinese general, that the US would not attack China and that he would inform him of an attack if it were to happen.

“If we’re going to attack, I’m going to call you ahead of time. It’s not going to be a surprise,” the book, based on hundreds of interviews, quotes Milley as telling Li.

Tuesday’s reports prompted Republican calls for Milley to step down, with Trump accusing the top general of treason. But the White House signalled that Biden is standing by Milley. “The president has complete confidence in his leadership, his patriotism and his fidelity to our Constitution,” Psaki said. Later in the day, Biden himself told reporters outside the White House, “I have great confidence in General Milley.”

Milley’s office released its own statement denying any wrongdoing by the general and stressing that he regularly contacts foreign counterparts. “His calls with the Chinese and others in October and January were in keeping with these duties and responsibilities conveying reassurance in order to maintain strategic stability,” Dave Butler, a spokesperson for Milley, said.

“All calls from the Chairman to his counterparts, including those reported, are staffed, coordinated and communicated with the Department of Defense and the interagency.”

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby also said that Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has “full trust and confidence” in Milley. Kirby refused to discuss the details of the purported revelations in the book, but he said it is “not atypical” for the top U.S. general to communicate with foreign military leaders, including those of Russia and China.

“It is not only common, it is expected that the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff would continue to have counterpart conversations,” Kirby said. But many Republicans are already coming after Milley, accusing him of violating the elected civilian leadership’s command over the military.

Senator Marco Rubio called on Biden to “immediately fire” Milley, who was appointed by Trump in 2018. He called Milley’s conduct a “dangerous precedent.” “It threatens to tear apart our nation’s longstanding principle of civilian control of the military,” Rubio wrote in a letter to Biden.

Senator Rand Paul, a Trump ally, called for a prompt investigation against the general. “Milley wasn’t elected to be president. I can’t even tell you how incredibly dangerous this is,” Paul told conservative show host Glenn Beck on Wednesday.

In an interview with Newsmax on Tuesday, Trump berated Milley and dismissed the notion that he considered ordering an attack against China. “That is a treasonous statement and I cannot tell you how many people called up about it,” Trump said of Milley’s reported call to Li. “That is a disgrace.”

For its part, the White House confirmed that it will not take action against Milley based on the information revealed in the Post journalists’ book. Psaki said Biden thinks Milley is a “man of honor.”



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