At the Pentagon, Removal of the Chief of Staff: Trump Shakes the Military

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In an unprecedented evening, **President Donald Trump** carried out a radical restructuring of American military leadership, removing the top officials at the Pentagon. According to consulted sources, Friday night saw the dismissal of the **Chief of Staff,** General Charles Q. Brown, just moments before the Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, removed two other key figures: **Admiral Lisa Franchetti**, Chief of the Navy, and **General James Slife**, Deputy Chief of the Air Force.

Admiral Lisa Franchetti, Chief of Naval Operations of the United States Navy.

A Controversial Choice

The decision to replace Brown marked an exceptional event, not only for the speed of the action but also for the nature of the replacement. Trump appointed retired Air Force Lieutenant General John Dan “Razin” Caine to lead the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This choice caused a stir, as Caine, despite being an elite pilot and a key figure in military operations, does not hold the four-star rank required by military regulations, a constraint that can nevertheless be overcome if deemed “necessary in the national interest.”

Retired Air Force Lieutenant General John Dan “Razin” Caine.

Reasons and Ideological Controversies

Behind this move lie ideological and political issues. Criticisms of General Brown were not limited to operational management but also involved themes related to “wokeism” and efforts for inclusion and diversity within the armed forces. Trump, long critical of diversity policies, had repeatedly publicly attacked the military advocating for these values. In recent months, Hegseth's controversial comments – in some statements even suggesting that Brown had obtained his position because of his skin color – further fueled the climate of tension and division.

In parallel, the Secretary of Defense's intervention also concerned the figure of military legal officers, the so-called Judge Advocates General (JAG), openly criticized as “jagoffs” and considered by some as an obstacle to the “full effectiveness” of military operations. The desire to also replace these strategic roles has raised concerns among experts and veterans, who see in such changes an attempt to introduce greater political conformity within military justice.

Gen. CQ Brown Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, meets with the designated Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on November 12, 2024. (Department of Defense photo by James Mullen)

Implications and Reactions to the Change of Chief of Staff

The dismissal of Brown, one of the few African Americans to have reached the military top, represents a harsh blow for a leadership that, until recently, was seen as a symbol of progress and inclusivity in the armed forces. His removal, occurring in a context of intense internal debates and political pressures, triggered chain reactions both within the Pentagon and in Congress. Critics and supporters have expressed concerns about the long-term impact of such a

reshuffling of leadership, which could affect the armed forces' ability to operate with customary professionalism and political independence.

While some members of Congress, including Senator Roger Wicker, have expressed confidence in the choice of the new executive, others, such as Democratic leaders, have denounced a blatant attempt to politicize military institutions, risking the balance between civilian control and operational autonomy. General Brown, in fact, had dedicated 16 months to leading the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a period marked by global conflicts, from the war in Ukraine to rising tensions in the Middle East, and his work was considered by many as a bastion of professionalism.

General Charles Q. Brown with General James Slife, during a ceremony at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Washington, D.C., on December 29, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo by Andy Morataya)

Conclusions

President Trump's action marks a decisive turning point in the structure of U.S. military leadership, with repercussions that extend far beyond the Pentagon's borders. The reorganization of the top officials and the replacement of historical figures like General Brown underscore a profoundly different vision of national defense management, where politics and ideology seem to play a central role in determining strategic choices. It remains to be seen how these changes will affect the armed forces' ability to effectively respond to future challenges and whether the balance between merit and politics can be maintained in such a highly polarized context.

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