

Bragg Soldiers Who Cheered Trump's Political Attacks **While in Uniform** Were Checked for Allegiance, Appearance



President Donald Trump greets paratroopers and soldiers in attendance during the Army 250 celebration at Fort Bragg, N.C., 10 June, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Richard Morgan)

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It was supposed to be a routine appearance, a visit from the commander in chief to rally the troops, boost morale and celebrate the [Army's](#) 250th-birthday week, which culminates with a Washington, D.C., parade slated for Saturday.

Instead, what unfolded Tuesday at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, bore little resemblance to the customary visit from a president and defense secretary. There, President Donald Trump unleashed a speech laced with partisan invective, goading jeers from a crowd of soldiers positioned behind his podium -- blurring the long-standing and sacrosanct line between the military and partisan politics.

As Trump viciously attacked his perceived political foes, he whipped up boos from the gathered troops directed at California leaders, including Gov. Gavin Newsom -- amid the president's controversial move to deploy the [National Guard](#) and Marines against protesters in Los Angeles - - as well as former President Joe Biden and the press. The soldiers roared with laughter and applauded Trump's diatribe in a shocking and rare public display of troops taking part in naked political partisanship.

For this story, Military.com reached out to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's office as well as the Army and the 82nd Airborne Division directly with a series of questions that ranged from the optics of the event to social media posts showing the sale of Trump campaign merchandise on the base, to the apparent violation of Pentagon policies on political activity in uniform.

Internal 82nd Airborne Division communications reviewed by Military.com reveal a tightly orchestrated effort to curate the optics of Trump's recent visit, including handpicking soldiers for the audience based on political leanings and physical appearance. The troops ultimately selected to be behind Trump and visible to the cameras were almost exclusively male.

One unit-level message bluntly said "no fat soldiers."

"If soldiers have political views that are in opposition to the current administration and they don't want to be in the audience then they need to speak with their leadership and get swapped out," another note to troops said.

Service officials declined to comment when asked about the extent to which troops were screened, whether soldiers displaying partisan cheers on television -- a violation of long-standing Pentagon rules -- would be disciplined or if soldiers who objected to participating in the event, citing disagreements with the administration, would be disciplined or admonished in any way.

"This has been a bad week for the Army for anyone who cares about us being a neutral institution," one commander at Fort Bragg told Military.com on the condition of anonymity to avoid retaliation. "This was shameful. I don't expect anything to come out of it, but I hope maybe we can learn from it long term."

[Experts were quick to come out and say that the public silence from military leadership](#) is a missed opportunity to reinforce the military's nonpartisan nature. Meanwhile, the political leadership at the head of the Defense Department was [far from apologetic](#).

"Believe me, no one needs to be encouraged to boo the media," Sean Parnell, a top Pentagon spokesperson, said in a statement to Military.com. "Look no further than this query, which is nothing more than a disgraceful attempt to ruin the lives of young soldiers."

Adding to the spectacle, a pop-up shop operated by 365 Campaign, a Tulsa, Oklahoma-based retailer that sells pro-Trump and other conservative-coded memorabilia, was set up on-site with campaign-style merchandise on Army property. Soldiers were seen purchasing clothing and tchotchkes, including "Make America Great Again" chain necklaces to faux credit cards labeled "White Privilege Card: Trumps Everything."

Permitting the sale of overtly partisan merchandise on an Army base likely runs afoul of numerous Defense Department regulations aimed at preserving the military's long-standing commitment to political neutrality. The Army has historically gone to great lengths to avoid even the appearance of partisanship.

Parnell did not respond to follow-up questions about the sale of MAGA campaign gear directly to troops but Col. Mary Ricks, a spokesperson for Fort Bragg, said that "the vendor's presence is under review to determine how it was permitted and to prevent similar occurrences in the future" in a statement provided after this story was first published.

Trump used much of his speech to slam California Democrats and tout his ongoing and unprecedented surge of nearly 5,000 federalized Guard soldiers and Marines to quell immigration protests.

"We will liberate Los Angeles and make it free, clean and safe again," he proclaimed to soldiers, adding that Newsom and L.A. Mayor Karen Bass are "incompetent" and falsely said they're aiding "insurrectionists" while goading troops into booing them.

"I bet none of those soldiers booing even know the mayor's name or could identify them in a lineup; they're nonexistent in the chain of command," an 82nd Airborne noncommissioned officer told [Military.com](https://www.military.com). "So, any opinion they could possibly have can only be attributed to expressing a political view while in uniform."



President Donald J. Trump attends the U.S. Army 250th Birthday Celebration at Fort Bragg, N.C., June 10, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Jaquari Lindsey)

Trump is far from the first president to use the troops as a backdrop for a speech that had political notes. But experts say this speech crossed a line and showed the military's ethics can be vulnerable.

"What I think is so remarkable about Bragg is that it's really a breakdown on the military side," Risa Brooks, an [expert of civil-military relations at Marquette University](#), told Military.com.

"It shows it's possible -- that the military's professional ethics could fail," she said.

In 2022, Biden received criticism for delivering a speech outside Independence Hall in Philadelphia that aimed to warn the public about the authoritarian impulses of then-former President Trump and his supporters.

He was flanked by two Marines in dress uniform.

Republicans and [reporters](#) immediately jumped on Biden, slamming him for politicizing the military.

"The only thing worse than Biden's speech trashing his fellow citizens is wrapping himself in our flag and Marines to do it," Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., [wrote on social media at the time](#).

Another Trump administration official, James Hutton, said [Biden "used U.S. Marines as props"](#) and slammed the move as "despicable conduct in attacking more than half of Americans."

Ari Fleischer, a conservative commentator at the time, said the speech was not only "inappropriate" but that the [Marine Corps](#) had "some explaining to do" for allowing the speech to occur.

Neither Fleischer, Hutton nor Issa appears to have made any posts criticizing Trump's speech as of publication.

Going back decades, presidents have all used troops as background and set dressing for addresses and appearances that at times skirted the line between the nonpartisan nature of the military and the politics of the presidency.

Biden's White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, [noted to reporters after Biden's speech](#) in 2022 that "it is actually normal for presidents from either side of the aisle to give speeches in front of members of the military, including President ... Ronald Reagan and President George H.W. Bush."

"It is not an unusual sight or is not an unusual event to have happened," she added.

Brooks also agreed and noted that many of the instances of troops being used as props "are mostly instigated by the civilian side."

However, many of those examples were presidents choosing the setting to speak to the troops about military policy and issues that affected them personally, and with the exceptions of polite applause and laughs at presidential jokes, troops have not been especially vocal or reactive to the rhetoric being offered.

"Trump has gone farther than any other politician in the tenor and content of his comments, overtly treating events with troops in the audience as campaign rallies, and overtly and directly criticizing his opponents," Brooks said.

Long before the unprecedented speech at Fort Bragg this week, Trump has been blurring the lines between politics and military events. In the early days of his first term, he spoke to troops at [MacDill Air Force Base](#) in Florida and told the assembled troops "we had a wonderful election, didn't we?"

"And I saw those numbers, and you liked me and I liked you. That's the way it worked," he added.

Trump also went on to use the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes to sign a ban on travel from Muslim-majority countries during his first term. [Marines appeared in a 2020](#) Republican National Committee video that he shot at the White House. That same year, then-Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley appeared alongside Trump in Lafayette Square outside the White House after federal officials forcibly cleared a street of peaceful protesters for a photo opportunity in front of a local church.

Milley later apologized for his presence.

Despite the silence from military brass this week, [other experts](#), [military observers](#) and a handful of former leaders, have condemned the speech or the ensuing silence.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, best known for serving as the task force commander that coordinated military relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina, called the speech "inappropriate."

"I never witnessed that s..t like this in 37 years in uniform," Honore [wrote on social media Tuesday](#).

"Once you see one instance of this happening, it potentially normalizes it," Brooks warned. "It opens the door to more instances and more overt violations of the nonpartisan ethic."

Editor's note: This story has been updated with a statement from Fort Bragg provided to Military.com after the story was published.