

Fact check: Trump makes numerous false claims to generals and admirals, some about the military

By Daniel Dale
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President Donald Trump arrives to address senior military officers gathered at Marine Corps Base Quantico on Monday.
Jim Watson/AFP/Getty Images

President Donald Trump made numerous false claims in a rambling Tuesday speech to hundreds of generals and admirals who were summoned to a military base in Virginia to listen to [addresses by the president and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth](#). Some of Trump's false claims were about the military itself.

Here is a fact check of some of the president's remarks, many of which have been debunked before. This article will be updated with additional items.

Former President Joe Biden's comments about the military

Trump noted that he brags that “we have the strongest military anywhere in the world,” then falsely added, “You never heard Biden say that. You never heard him say anything, but you never heard him say – did we ever hear him say, ‘We have the strongest military.’ He doesn’t say that.” In fact, Biden repeatedly said the US has the world’s strongest military.

To cite just one example, Biden [said](#) in a 2023 speech about democracy: “Our US military – and this is not hyperbole; I’ve said it for the last two years – is the strongest military in the history of the world. Not just the strongest in the world – in the history of the world.”

Biden sometimes made the same point using slightly different language. In the last week of his presidency, in January 2025, he [told](#) a Defense Department audience, “You are simply the greatest fighting force in the history of the world – in the history of the world. That’s a fact. That’s not hyperbole, that’s a fact.”

Biden and the Space Force

Trump falsely claimed that Biden said he thought he could get rid of Space Force, the military branch created during Trump’s first term, before backing down.

“When Biden came into office, he wanted to terminate it – he said, ‘And this thing called Space Force, so we can get rid of that.’ And he got hammered by the people in this room for even suggesting it,” Trump said. But Biden never said anything like that.

In the first month of Biden’s presidency, in 2021, there was a [controversy](#) over a snarky response by his White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, to a [question](#) about whether Biden had made any decisions about keeping Space Force. But even Psaki did not come close to saying “we can get rid of that,” and she [said](#) the next day that Space Force has “the full support of the Biden administration” and “we are not revisiting the decision to establish the Space Force.”

Trump and NATO

Trump touted the fact that he got members of the NATO military alliance to [pledge](#) to spend 5% of their gross domestic product on defense (by 2035), then falsely said, “It used to be 1%, then we got it up to 2(%) in my last term, and they did not like it.” Trump was not responsible for getting NATO to set its previous 2% target; the 2% figure was [agreed upon by NATO defense ministers in 2006](#) and then reaffirmed in NATO documents in 2014, the year before Trump even launched his presidential campaign. (And if Trump meant that he was the one who got the members to meet their commitment, that’s not true, either; in 2020, the last year of Trump’s first term, only [nine members](#) were meeting the 2% target.)

Biden and the war in Ukraine

Trump repeated his usual false claim that Biden “gave \$350 billion” in aid to Ukraine. That figure isn’t close to accurate. A German think tank that has closely [tracked](#) wartime aid to Ukraine says the US allocated about \$135 billion to Ukraine (and had committed about \$5 billion more) through June, at current exchange rates.

The US government inspector general overseeing the federal Ukraine response [says](#) the US had disbursed about \$94 billion as of the end of June 2025 (and had appropriated about \$93 billion more), including money that was spent in the US and in broader Europe rather than Ukraine itself.

Trump and wars

Trump repeated his false claim that he has “settled seven” wars. He cited a war between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda as one example, saying, “I got that one done,” and mentioned “Kosovo and Serbia” as another.

But those examples actually show that Trump has not settled seven wars.

For one, Trump hasn’t ended the conflict involving the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. The peace agreement brokered by the Trump administration and signed by the DRC and Rwanda in June [did not involve](#) the rebel coalition, allegedly backed by Rwanda, that has seized territory in the eastern DRC, and CNN [reported](#) from the ground last week: “The scores of militia groups that have fought for three decades in one of the most protracted and complex conflicts in the world are still engaging in deadly fighting, and US President Donald Trump’s claimed peace deal for the nation feels like a distant dream.”

And while Trump has previously [claimed](#) to have prevented the eruption of a new war between Serbia and Kosovo — providing few details about what he was talking about — those countries [weren’t in an actual war](#) either during Trump’s current term or during his first term, when they signed an economic normalization agreement brokered by Trump’s administration in 2020, so he couldn’t possibly have settled one.

Similarly, another dispute on his [list](#) of seven wars he supposedly settled, between Egypt and Ethiopia, was not actually a war, either, during Trump’s time in the White House. They have a long-running and unresolved dispute about a [major Ethiopian dam project](#) on a tributary of the Nile River, but this is [not a war](#).

Migration, ‘the Congo’ and Venezuela

Trump repeated his frequent false claim that, under Biden, “the Congo” and Venezuela opened their prisons to somehow get prisoners to travel to the US as migrants.

“They opened up prisons in the Congo. They came into our country, totally unmatched, unvetted, unchecked, and from all over,” Trump said, adding moments later, “Venezuela emptied its prison population into our country.” He said a bit later, of unspecified countries, “They would take their worst people, and they’re people from prisons, in jail, and they put them in a caravan, and they’d walk up.”

Trump has never provided any proof for these claims, which his own presidential campaign and White House have been unable to corroborate.

Experts on both the Democratic Republic of Congo and the neighboring Republic of Congo told CNN during the Biden administration there is [no evidence](#) for Trump’s claims that “the Congo” deliberately emptied prisons to somehow send inmates to the US as migrants, and the government of each of these countries [told CNN](#) that the claims are baseless. Experts on Venezuela and on international prisons agree.

“We have no evidence that the Venezuelan government is emptying its prisons or mental health institutions to send them outside the country, in other words, to the U.S. or any other country,” Roberto Briceño-León, founder and director of the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, an independent organization that tracks violence in the country, said in an email to CNN last year after Trump made similar claims.

“I do a daily news search to see what’s going on in prisons around the world and have seen absolutely no evidence that any country is emptying its prisons and sending them all to the US,” [Helen Fair](#), co-author of the prison population list and research fellow at the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research at Birkbeck, University of London, said in an email to CNN last year.

Biden and the number of migrants

Trump repeated his false claim that “25 million” migrants entered the country under Biden. The “25 million” figure is fictional; even Trump’s previous “21 million” figure was a [wild exaggeration](#). Through December 2024, the last full month under the Biden administration, the federal government had [recorded](#) under 11 million nationwide “encounters” with migrants during that administration, including millions who were rapidly expelled from the country. Even adding in the so-called gotaways who evaded detection, [estimated](#) by House Republicans as being roughly 2.2 million, there’s no way the total was even close to what Trump has said.

The 2020 election

Trump repeated his usual lie that the 2020 election was “rigged,” claiming that Russia wouldn’t have invaded Ukraine “if the election weren’t rigged.” Leaving aside the hypothetical about Russia, Trump lost the 2020 election fair and square to Biden.

Drug deaths

Trump repeated his [usual phony figure](#) about US drug deaths, saying, “We lost 300,000 people (who) died last year.” The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reported](#) earlier this month that there were 80,856 reported overdose deaths in the US in the 12 months ending December 2024 (and that, since the data is incomplete, the predicted total was 81,711). Experts say that even though drug deaths may be undercounted, there is no reasonable way to get to Trump’s “300,000” figure.

Protests in Portland

Trump, talking about the city of Portland, falsely claimed “your place is burning down” and that “unless they’re playing false tapes, this looked like World War II.” We’re not sure what “tapes” Trump has seen, but it’s [simply not true](#) that the city is burning down. While there have been some [unruly protests](#) near an Immigration and Customs Enforcement building in the city this year – and protesters were [arrested](#) in June for allegedly starting fires there – the broader city has been functioning as usual, and even the situation around the ICE building is generally [calmer than it was in June](#).

CNN’s Andy Rose [noted in an article Tuesday](#) that Trump began publicly floating the idea of deploying troops to Portland this year on the same day that Fox News, of which Trump is a frequent viewer, aired a [story](#) that mixed recent footage of standoffs at the ICE facility with five-year-old footage of rioting in Portland during a period of national unrest in 2020.

CNN’s coverage of the speech

Reviving a false claim he has [deployed for years](#) at his campaign rallies, Trump claimed that, right after he criticized CNN during the speech, CNN turned off the camera that had been filming him; Trump said, pointing toward the back of the room, “Oh, their camera just went off.” That didn’t happen. A CNN photojournalist who was there covering the speech for the media “pool” filmed it without interruption. And CNN itself aired Trump’s criticism live and in full; in fact, the network didn’t turn away from Trump’s live remarks until more than half an hour after the president claimed the camera had been turned off and more than an hour after the speech began. (CNN then moved to analysis of what he had said.)

Trump’s legal battle with the Associated Press

Trump spoke of how the Associated Press news service continued to refer to the Gulf of Mexico even after he issued an executive order renaming the body of water the Gulf of America. (The order is not binding on other countries, and the Associated Press has [customers in countries that continue to use “Gulf of Mexico.”](#)) But Trump wrongly described what happened in a [lawsuit](#) the Associated Press filed after Trump responded to the AP’s decision by barring the news service’s journalists from attending various White House events (including those in the Oval Office) and flying on Air Force One.

Trump said, “AP took us to court and we won, and the judge, who was a somewhat liberal judge, said, ‘The name is the Gulf of America.’” Trump continued moments later, “And the judge actually said that, in fact, ‘You can’t even go into the room, because what you’re doing is not appropriate; the name is the Gulf of America.’”

That’s not what happened. No judge in the ongoing lawsuit said what Trump claimed they did.

First, a Trump-appointed district court judge [sided with the](#) AP and issued a preliminary injunction against Trump’s restrictions, calling them a violation of the First Amendment. Then, on appeal, two judges on a three-judge panel of the District of Columbia Circuit Court [sided with Trump](#) and ended most of the injunction (except with regard to events in the White House’s East Room) – but these two judges are both Trump-appointed conservatives and did not declare that “the name is Gulf of America” nor that the AP’s decision to use “Gulf of Mexico” was “not appropriate.”

In reality, the two judges who sided with Trump did not make a declaration about the AP’s language decisions. Rather, Judge Neomi Rao [wrote](#) that “the White House may consider journalists’ viewpoints when deciding whether to grant access” to the specific places it was barring the AP from “because these restricted presidential spaces are not First Amendment fora opened for private speech and discussion” and so do not require “viewpoint neutral” access under the First Amendment.

The full DC Circuit court subsequently [declined to overrule](#) the panel but also did not make any statements about the AP’s language decisions. And the lawsuit is not over; the appeals court has [not yet heard oral arguments](#) on the merits of the case.