

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 13, 2022

General Mark Milley  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Department of Defense  
9999 Joint Staff, Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear General Milley:

We are writing to follow-up on your testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, regarding statements you allegedly made to the authors of several recent books, including *Peril* by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa.

In order to reconcile the apparent discrepancies between your testimony and alleged statements to the authors of these books, Senator Blackburn asked you during the hearing whether you were accurately represented in recent books. You replied: “I haven’t read any of the books. I don’t know.” She then asked you to read them and “let us know if you are accurately presented and portrayed.” You agreed to do that. As we understand it, you have not yet complied with Senator Blackburn’s request. We now join together to renew her request.

According to the account detailed in *Peril*, you allegedly learned in October 2020 that the Chinese had become concerned that President Trump would preemptively attack the People’s Republic of China (PRC). You reportedly told General Li Zuocheng of the PRC, “I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay...We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you...General Li, you and I have known each other for now five years. If we’re going to attack, I’m going to call you ahead of time. It’s not going to be a surprise.”<sup>1</sup>

These alleged statements raise alarms with us about your adherence to the U.S. military chain of command for launching nuclear weapons, as well as your commitment to civilian control of the military.

As we are certain that you are aware, the sole authority to launch a nuclear weapon rests with the president. According to the Department of Defense’s Nuclear Matters Handbook, the president may consult the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, however the decision rests with the president alone.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/14/peril-woodward-costa-trump-milley-china/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acq.osd.mil/ncbdp/nm//NMHB2020rev/chapters/chapter2.html>

**First**, we need to know whether the statements attributed to you in *Peril* are an accurate reflection of what you actually said to the authors during the interviews.

**Second**, we want to be certain that your actions were consistent with law, the statutory chain of command, and a guiding principle of our democracy and Constitution – civilian control of the military.

**Were you accurately represented in *Peril* by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa? Were your actions consistent with the law, the statutory chain of command, and civilian control of the military? If there are any discrepancies between what you said to the authors of *Peril* and what the book says you said, then please provide specific, detailed clarification for each discrepancy.**

We ask that you answer our questions promptly. Failing to do so would be unacceptable.

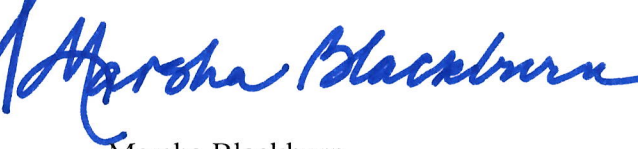
Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Charles E. Grassley in blue ink.

Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Rand Paul in blue ink.

Rand Paul  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Marsha Blackburn in blue ink.

Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator