

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2020

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

General Milley,

We write to you regarding recent reports of US troops being armed with bayonets in preparation for their potential deployment to protests in Washington, DC. Our concern with this news lies in the serious and documented risks the presence of such weapons could present to peaceful demonstrators, and the outstanding questions remaining around the use of bayonets for crowd control purposes¹.

On June 2nd, the Associated Press reported that members of the 82nd Airborne Division who were ready to be mobilized against protests in Washington, DC were armed with riot gear “as well as bayonets.”² Following this first report of troops being armed with bayonets, your June 10th letter with Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to the House Armed Services Committee also disclosed that bayonets were supplied to members of the Army’s 3rd Infantry Regiment (“The Old Guard”)³.

Despite our recognition of the deep commitment of our servicemembers to defend the Constitution and protect the American people, the prospect of troops deployed with bayonets in response to demonstrations, regardless of anyone’s intentions, raises the alarming specter of past demonstrations that have escalated and left unarmed protesters wounded following confrontations with American troops armed with bayonets.

While the tragic events in 1970 at Kent State University are most remembered for four students killed by National Guardsmen, the escalation and violence leading up to and following those killings included those same troops meeting peaceful demonstrators with bayonets and leaving several wounded.⁴ Less than a week later at University of New Mexico, demonstrations in response to Kent State escalated after protesters were met with Guardsmen who no longer carried live ammunition but instead wounded 11 people with bayonets, including a bystander and a local news photographer.⁵

Part of our concern with these reports of troops potentially being deployed bayonets, at a time where even the dangers of so-called “nonlethal” measures are being questioned, lies in how long even our military has questioned the efficacy and safety of arming troops responding to protests with bayonets. By the late 1960s, Army leaders were debating whether to ban the use of bayonets as a domestic crowd control tactic, and this

¹ [Army Techniques Publication No. 3-39.33. Department of the Army. \(4/21/2014\)](#)

² [The Latest: Thousands on New York City streets after curfew. AP News. \(6/2/20\)](#)

³ [Capaccio, Anthony. “U.S. Army Unit Was Issued Bayonets to Prep for D.C. Protest Duty,” Bloomberg, June 11, 2020.](#)

⁴ [Rosinsky, Natalie. *The Kent State Shootings*, pages 16, 18-19, 22. \(2009\)](#)

⁵ [Simonich, Milan. “Bayonets, blood and tears stained UNM in 1970,” Santa Fe New Mexican, April 30, 2020](#)

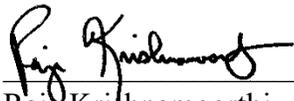
debate led to notable changes in the Army Field Manual's guide to Civil Disturbances.⁶ While the 1985 Army Field Manual on Civil Disturbances still outlined the uses of bayonets as a potential crowd control measure, it recommended their use, instead of batons, only in serious circumstances⁷. The current edition of that manual, ATP3-39.33 – Civil Disturbances, which was published in April 2014, does not even include the word “bayonet.”⁸

In light of these concerns and with regard to the reports of Old Guard and the 82nd Airborne Division soldiers being provided with bayonets for potential deployment in response to the protests of the past few weeks, please provide the following information:

- 1) At what level was the decision made to provide bayonets to soldiers in The Old Guard and the 82nd Airborne Division?
- 2) Were any civilian officials involved in or consulted in the decision to distribute bayonets?
- 3) Were servicemembers in any other units provided with bayonets for their potential deployment in response to protests?
- 4) What policies currently exist around the domestic deployment of American troops with bayonets in response to demonstrations?
- 5) Will you commit to barring US servicemembers from being deployed with bayonets in response to domestic protests?

We request answers to the above questions by June 25th, and an update on the status of the distribution of bayonets to members of The Old Guard and the 82nd Airborne Division by July 2nd.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Ted Lieu
Member of Congress

⁶ [Schieps, Paul. *Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1945-1992*, page 414. \(2005\)](#)

⁷ [Army Publishing Directorate. *Field Manual No. 19-15 \(11/25/1985\)*](#)

⁸ [Army Publishing Directorate. *ATP 3-39.33 Civil Disturbances \(April 2014\)*](#)