

US Department of Defense**Pentagon fires military newspaper staffers for insubordination**

Defence department dismisses Stars and Stripes editor-in-chief and Middle East reporter



Stars and Stripes has a long history of editorial independence but under defence secretary Pete Hegseth has become a target for being a 'woke' publication © AP Photo/Kevin Wolf

Steff Chávez in Washington

Published YESTERDAY | Updated 20:19

The Pentagon has fired the editor-in-chief of Stars and Stripes for insubordination, bringing its crackdown on dissent to the military newspaper that receives half of its funding from US taxpayer dollars.

Erik Slavin was dismissed on Friday along with the newspaper's publisher and Middle East reporter in the defence department's latest action against employees who voice views that do not align with the Trump administration.

Stars and Stripes has a long history of editorial independence but under defence secretary Pete Hegseth has become a target for being a "woke" publication. The newspaper's editorial staff are defence department employees.

Slavin said he received a separation notice from the Pentagon on Friday, citing insubordination over an interview with CBS News about the publication.

“According to the notice, I am being fired for stating in a CBS interview that hypothetical censorship of news for service members would constitute a personal red line. The Pentagon’s public affairs office has charged me with insubordination,” Slavin said on Friday.

“I stand by the principle that Stars and Stripes must remain editorially independent, as required by law and by the department’s own policies.”

Hegseth has purged two dozen generals and admirals as part of an effort to get rid of the military’s “woke culture” that he claims has weakened the armed forces. Last year, Hegseth abruptly summoned all generals and admirals, demanding a stronger adherence to his “warrior ethos” and telling them they should resign if they disagreed.

In another Pentagon shake-up, army secretary Dan Driscoll is expected to step down by the end of the year, according to a person familiar with the matter.



A spokesperson for Driscoll declined to comment. Driscoll has been in this role for 18 months and has publicly noted that the average tenure for an army secretary is 23 months.

His departure would come after longstanding tensions with Hegseth, including over the firing of General Randy George as army chief of staff. Driscoll is widely anticipated to participate in any presidential campaign by vice-president JD Vance, who is a close friend.

News of Driscoll’s expected departure was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Stars and Stripes has been published continuously since 1918 © Stars and Stripes

In January, chief Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell said on social media that the department was “returning Stars & Stripes to its original mission: reporting for our warfighters” and would “refocus its content away from woke distractions that syphon morale”, sparking concerns over the newspaper’s ability to operate independently.

Parnell's X post was followed in March by a memorandum that outlined greater oversight of the newspaper, which has been published continuously since the second world war. It reaches about 1.4mn readers daily, according to the publication.

The paper was among the military outlets that reported earlier this month on deteriorating conditions for troops aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, causing a firestorm for Hegseth and President Donald Trump.

The firings are the latest move against the press by the Trump administration.

Hegseth has curtailed the press's access to the Pentagon, and Trump has sued several media organisations for their coverage of him. Last month, the justice department issued and then revoked subpoenas sent to several New York Times reporters over a story about the security of the new Air Force One jet gifted to Trump by Qatar.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the Stars and Stripes firings but a defence official said "the separation notices are real".

Slavin said the newspaper's publisher, Max Lederer, who announced he was stepping down from his role on Thursday, also received a separation notice on Friday, though the Pentagon's reason was unclear.

The outlet's Middle East reporter Lara Korte wrote on social media that she was fired for insubordination over her participation in the CBS segment.

"Today, I was informed that the Department of Defense is firing me for insubordination after I told a CBS reporter that I work for Stars and Stripes — not the Pentagon, not any administration, and not any policy maker," Korte said on X.

"It's a shame for the institution and service members, who swore to defend the Constitution and deserve the right to a free and independent press," she added.

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2026. All rights reserved.

Follow the topics in this article

US politics & policy

Media

US Department of Defense

Pete Hegseth

Steff Chávez