

US Department of Defense

Pentagon chaos deepens after Dan Driscoll quits in clash with Pete Hegseth

Army secretary's exit leaves 'serious leadership gaps' as US military grapples with protracted Iran conflict



US secretary of defence Pete Hegseth, left, and Dan Driscoll. Driscoll resigned as army secretary on Monday © Valerie Plesch/Bloomberg

Steff Chávez and **James Politi** in Washington

Published YESTERDAY

US Army secretary Dan Driscoll handed his resignation to Donald Trump on Monday with a blunt message about Pete Hegseth's interference with the largest branch of America's military.

The departure of the army's top civilian official was the culmination of months of tension with the defence secretary about the force's technological transformation and senior military appointments, as well as intractable personal tensions between the two men.

Driscoll, a close friend of vice-president JD Vance, believed [Hegseth](#) was causing "generational damage" to the largest branch of the US military, according to a person familiar with his thinking.

He “had tried so many different ways and so many different times, but it was just clear that . . . Hegseth wasn’t willing to listen to the facts or the truth, or the reason, or any of that, because of his personal animosity”, the person said.

Driscoll’s exit brings another bout of turmoil to a Pentagon that has been rocked by infighting and Hegseth’s purge of top brass as the US struggles to end an extended conflict with Iran that is straining resources and depleting munitions.

“It’s a revelatory moment, and I think it illustrates that the Pentagon is in disarray,” said Tom Wright, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.



From centre, General Dan Caine, Driscoll, Hegseth and President Donald Trump at a dignified transfer ceremony at Dover Air Force Base in July © Daniel Heuer/Bloomberg

Hegseth has purged two dozen generals and admirals since the start of Trump’s second term through firings or forced removals. In April, he sacked army chief of staff General Randy George, which became one of the biggest flashpoints between Driscoll and Hegseth.

Driscoll's exit leaves the army, which is playing a crucial missile-defence role with its Patriot and Thaad batteries, with a leadership vacuum amid the Iran war, which has involved lengthy deployments to the Middle East for thousands of troops.

His decision to quit had been expected for weeks but was nonetheless seen by critics as a symbol of the chaos and drift at the defence department during Trump's second term.

General Randy George with 11th Airborne Division soldiers in Alaska. In April, he was fired by Hegseth © Victor J Blue/Bloomberg
“Driscoll seemed to be one of the few senior civilian political leaders who was relatively level-headed and had the trust and confidence of the troops, and actually did a competent job,” said Christopher Meagher, a senior Pentagon official in the Biden administration.

He added that the lack of a permanent army secretary or chief of staff — posts that both require Senate confirmation — was “a serious leadership gap, especially in a time of war”.

A spokesperson for Hegseth referred a request for comment to the army. In a statement, Driscoll said he would step down on Wednesday.

“I had the privilege of working . . . to modernise and accelerate how the Army mans, trains, and equips the most lethal fighting force on the face of the earth,” he wrote on X. “We could not have made the progress we did without the support of Secretary Hegseth.”

Driscoll’s exit has even unnerved some Republicans. Mike Rounds, a senator from South Dakota, told reporters on Tuesday that he was “disappointed” by the departure.

“Where is the leadership at?” Rounds said. “We’ve had some very good generals that are no longer there that we respected.”

Hegseth has installed vice-chief of staff General Christopher LaNeve to serve as the army’s top commander on a temporary basis. But he wants LaNeve, a close ally, to have the job permanently. The appointment became another point of friction with Driscoll.

Driscoll, left, with General Christopher LaNeve, army vice-chief of staff © Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

Some Senate Republicans, unhappy with how George was fired, have signalled LaNeve is unlikely to be confirmed. Driscoll’s departure after 18 months at the Pentagon is expected to add to their concerns.

“The opposition . . . is not about LaNeve himself. It’s about Hegseth, and the anger that is very much still alive on Capitol Hill over General George’s exit and Hegseth running roughshod over the army,” said a congressional aide.

Driscoll leaving would “create problems” for the Pentagon as it tries to sell a \$1.5tn budget and tens of billions in supplemental funding for the war in Iran, the aide added. “Congress is going to be very unhappy with this. Driscoll was respected.”

Current and former defence officials have described Hegseth as consumed by paranoia, personal insecurity and even jealousy, angered when the spotlight falls on others such as Driscoll.

Driscoll, who was considered a potential successor to Hegseth should Trump fire the defence secretary, became the face of the Pentagon’s efforts to build up its arsenal of cheaper drones and efforts to develop more counter-drone and missile-defence technology.

Hegseth was “attempting to stymie transformation efforts” for personal reasons, said the person familiar with Driscoll’s thinking. The army under Driscoll tasked an infantry battalion to work on integrating drones but Hegseth ultimately ordered it dismantled.

While the army has taken the brunt of Hegseth’s changes, the navy is also under strain and facing budget pressure. Naval warfare has been at the centre of Trump and Hegseth’s military operations from the Caribbean to Iran, straining warships and depleting missiles.

Navy secretary John Phelan was fired in April. Trump on Tuesday nominated Hung Cao, the acting navy secretary and a former navy captain, to succeed him.

First lady Melania Trump, vice-president JD Vance, second lady Usha Vance, Hegseth and Driscoll during a dignified transfer ceremony at Dover Air Force Base in March © Getty Images

“It’s Secretary Hegseth who should be resigning after mishandling military operations in the Middle East and around the world,” Jeanne Shaheen, the Democratic senator from New Hampshire and a member of the armed services committee, told the FT.

“It is unimaginable that Secretary Hegseth is purging the ranks of top military officials at the same time that the US is in an ongoing conflict and as security challenges mount,” Shaheen added.

But despite the pressure mounting on the defence secretary from within the Pentagon and Republicans on Capitol Hill, Trump has continued to defend Hegseth.

The president praised Hegseth when asked about speculation that the defence secretary might launch a 2028 White House run after a visit to Iowa. “He’s done a great job,” Trump said. “And right now, all he loves and all he cares about is the military and taking care of the military.”

Elissa Slotkin, a Democratic senator from Michigan and a member of the armed services committee, told CNN that Hegseth “has an audience of one that’s Donald Trump, and if someone disagrees with him or undercuts him or makes him look somehow weak, then he gets rid of them”.

“It does really start to feel like we’re on this never-ending purge,” Slotkin added.

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2026. All rights reserved.

Follow the topics in this article

US politics & policy

US Army

US Department of Defense

Pete Hegseth

Dan Driscoll