

# The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

## [President Trump Defends Disgraced Navy SEAL Chief Eddie Gallagher](#)

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper has said that President Trump ordered him to allow Navy SEAL Chief Eddie Gallagher to maintain his status in the elite division, despite Gallagher's alleged violations of military code of conduct. The President's decision comes a day after Secretary Esper asked for the resignation of Navy Secretary Richard Spencer for supporting the case against Chief Gallagher. Gallagher was accused of war crimes by his own platoon over actions during their deployment in Iraq. Gallagher's SEAL Team 7 was deployed outside of Mosul, and several members of the team reported that he had indiscriminately killed civilians and murdered a teenage Islamic State captive. Gallagher was acquitted by a military tribunal after a witness dramatically changed his testimony on the stand and told the court that he, not Chief Gallagher, had killed the ISIS fighter out of mercy due to wounds he had previously suffered.

The Navy and the White House have been at odds over the fate of Chief Gallagher ever since the case became public. President Trump, his allies in Congress, and the conservative media have portrayed Gallagher as a war hero, whereas the Navy has pushed to strip him of his rank and eject him from the SEALs. The President first criticized the Navy when news of the court-martial became public, but later praised the court for acquitting Chief Gallagher. President Trump's interference in what the Navy considers to be a military matter has frustrated top leaders at the Pentagon, who see it as political interference in military discipline, which is believed to be sacred.

Former-Secretary of the Navy, Richard Spencer, was said to be furious over the President's continued interference in the Gallagher case, and he was dismissed by Defense Secretary Mark Esper over the weekend. In his letter acknowledging the termination, Spencer used strong language to assert that he could not in good faith carry out the President's orders which undermined military tradition and creed. Spencer recently told an audience at a security conference in Nova Scotia that he believed a trial to strip Gallagher of his rank and membership in the SEALs should proceed in order to maintain "good order and discipline." Spencer's ouster comes just weeks after the President restored Chief Gallagher's rank after it had previously been stripped.

Secretary Esper disputed that Spencer's dismissal was linked to the Gallagher case, instead accusing him of violating the chain of command. Esper alleged that Spencer had been engaged in dialogue with the White House behind the Secretary's back, in an attempt to negotiate a deal that would see a trial to expel Gallagher from the SEALs occur, but with a personal guarantee that the trial would result in Gallagher maintaining his status in the elite unit. Esper was said to be unaware of this negotiation, and accused Spencer of making contradictory statements in private and public. Esper was opposed to having another trial regarding Chief Gallagher, and on Monday signaled his belief that regardless of the outcome of any such trial, the Navy would be heavily criticized. Esper wanted to move on from the entire situation, and with Gallagher due to retire at the end of the month, it appears his wish has been granted.