

Army's™ Top General Backs Leniency for Gen. Kip Ward

U.S. Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supports allowing Gen. William "Kip" Ward, a Black four-star general and former commander of the U.S. Africa Command, to retire as a four-star general, according to the Associated Press

Dempsey is among the military officials who oppose the demotion by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta of Ward, an action that would force him to retire at a lesser rank and cut deeply into his Army pension.

"It's a pretty strong endorsement and it will carry a lot of weight," said former Army JAG Greg Rinckey, now a managing partner with Tully Rinckey PLLC. "It's not dispositive, but it could have a significant impact."

A Department of Defense Inspector General's report released in August after a 17-month investigation concluded that Ward "engaged in multiple forms of misconduct related to official and unofficial travel," including using military aircraft and allowing his wife, Joyce, to travel on military aircraft and vehicles without authorization or reimbursement; and received travel reimbursement when "the predominant purpose of the travel was personal."

Panetta is said to be considering all sides before he makes a decision, the AP's military sources said.

According to Rinckey, the former Army JAG, Ward could face several outcomes.

"He could be given a letter of reprimand or admonishment, which would end his career effectively," he said, adding that since Ward was slated to retire since April 2011, such a letter wouldn't make much of a difference.

More seriously, though, "he could be demoted. That would be a pretty severe punishment," Rinckey said.

If Ward is stripped of a star, he could lose about \$30,000 in retirement pay every year, netting him about \$208,802 a year rather than \$236,650. He may also be required to reimburse the Department of Defense for the tens of thousands in misused funds and unpaid expenses he incurred while at AFRICOM.

Within military circles, opinions abound on how Ward should be penalized. Some have said that given the breadth of Ward's offenses, he should be held accountable.

According to the IG report, Ward used government vehicles to transport his wife on shopping and spa trips. The cost of accommodations during an overnight refueling stop in Bermuda resulted in Ward and his wife staying in a \$750 a night hotel suite. The report cited this as an example of lavish hotel and travel arrangements for the couple and Ward's staff during his

stint as AFRICOM chief.

In addition, Ward and his wife also accepted dinner and Broadway tickets from a defense contractor in violation of government rules. The couple met Denzel Washington backstage after the play and stayed at the Waldorf Astoria hotel with their staff.

The allegations tarnish the otherwise illustrious career of Ward, one of a few African-American generals and the first U.S. commander of AFRICOM.

“No matter what happens his legacy is going to be tainted by this,” Rinckey predicted. “People always remember how you retire. He’s a general who’s done a lot of great things, but there will always be a stain there.”