

Trump nominates Christian fascist, defender of war criminals Pete Hegseth to head Department of Defense

Jacob Crosse
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President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for Secretary of Defense, Fox News commentator Peter Hegseth, is a Christian fascist and advocate of unrestrained violence in warfare.

The Department of Defense, which Hegseth has proposed renaming the "War Department," currently employs some 2.8 million people, including 1.3 million active-duty soldiers and over 810,000 National Guard troops. Hegseth has no experience managing a battalion, much less an entire government department. Like all of Trump's appointees, his chief qualification is unswerving loyalty to Trump.

In addition to being a Fox News talking head, the 44-year-old is a 20-year veteran of the US Army National Guard, having previously deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and the Guantanamo Bay torture camp.

Born in 1980 into a comfortable Minnesota middle-class family, Hegseth's fascist ideology was cultivated in the Ivy League and on military deployments. After graduating high school as valedictorian, Hegseth went to Princeton University, where he became active in conservative politics, writing for *The Princeton Tory* magazine. In 2003, Hegseth joined the Minnesota National Guard as an officer, and Bear Stearns as an equity capital market analyst.

After deployments to Guantanamo in 2004 and Iraq in 2005, in 2007 Hegseth briefly joined the right-wing Manhattan Institute for Policy Research before leaving to work as the executive director of Vets for Freedom, a Republican political group that first ran advertisements in 2006 thanking then-Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman for supporting the Iraq invasion.

In 2012, Hegseth ran as a Republican for senator in Minnesota, but withdrew from the race before the primary was held. That same year he also deployed to Afghanistan. After his failed Senate bid, Hegseth worked for another veterans group, Concerned Veterans for America, which was founded by the Koch brothers. In 2013, he received a Master of Public Policy degree from Harvard University. Throughout the 2000s and as late as 2016, Hegseth was a proponent of both the Iraqi and Afghanistan invasions.

Moving from one billionaire patron to the next, in 2014 Hegseth began working as a right-wing political commentator for Rupert Murdoch at Fox News. A "homegrown" star, he became a regular host from 2017-2024 on the weekend show *Fox & Friends*.

On the program, Hegseth freely spread his far-right political ideology with no pushback. Previewing the ascension of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Hegseth boasted on a 2019 episode, "I don't think I've washed my hands for 10 years. Really I don't, I don't really wash my hands, I inoculate myself. Germs are not a real thing. I can't see them, therefore they are not real."

Following the emergence of COVID-19, Hegseth smoothly transitioned to anti-vaccine skepticism. In his 2024 book, *The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free*, which was published by Fox, Hegseth rails against "diverse recruits—pumped full of vaccines and even more poisonous ideologies."

In his November 12 announcement of Hegseth as Secretary of Defense, Trump touted the book, writing that it "reveals the left-wing betrayal of our Warriors, and how we must return our Military to meritocracy, lethality, accountability, and excellence."

There is no question that Hegseth is fascist. On the first page of *War on Warriors*, Hegseth admits that in 2021 when he was assigned to protect Joe Biden's inauguration as a member of the D.C. (District of Columbia) National Guard, he was "deemed an 'extremist'" and removed from duty.

Hegseth claims this was because someone in the unit expressed concern over a large Jerusalem Cross he has tattooed on his chest. The symbol is popular with white supremacists and Catholic reactionaries. However, on Friday the AP reported on an email sent by a fellow D.C. Guard member, who, like Hegseth, was assigned to protect the January 2021 inauguration. In the email to his unit's leadership, Master Sergeant DeRicko Gaither warned that Hegseth had a tattoo on his inner arm which read "Deus Vult."

"Deus Vult," Latin for "God wills," is a phrase popular with modern white supremacists and Christian nationalists for its historical ties to the 11th century Crusades. The phrase was painted on shields used by modern reactionaries and Christian nationalists during the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Virginia in 2017. For today's fascists, the Crusades serve as a positive historical example of European Christendom exerting violent influence over all of society, along with the rejection of the Enlightenment and equality.

In addition to the "Deus Vult" tattoo, Hegseth has several other tattoos denoting his zealotry, including a cross with a sword that

references the New Testament verse Matthew 10:34: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” On the same arm he has an AR-15 interspersed with an American flag. As an infantry and “counter terrorist” soldier, Hegseth views himself as a Christian “Crusader” sent to the “Holy Lands” to wage aggressive war against the “Islamists.”

It was on the *Fox & Friends* program that Trump became a fan of Hegseth and also heard Hegseth lobby for the release of Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher, a US Navy SEAL charged with several war crimes, including murdering prisoners and firing on “school age” children and “old men.” Throughout 2019, Hegseth frequently hosted champions of Gallagher, including his defense attorney.

Trump personally intervened to get Gallagher free and also fired the Navy secretary who opposed pardoning the war criminal. In appointing Hegseth, Trump is encouraging the growth of fascistic Freikorps elements within the military loyal only to the aspiring dictator.

There is also no question that Trump agrees with the fascist conceptions that under-gird Hegseth’s book. The premise of the book is a variation of Hitler’s “stab in the back” theory. Hegseth argues that the reason the US “no longer wins wars” and is missing recruitment goals is because he, and other white Christian men, are not being properly catered to by the US military, which is instead too focused on “Critical Race Theory” and “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.”

“Today’s troops are being harassed by obligatory training—and eventually standards grounded in Critical Race Theory, radical sex theories, gender policies, and ‘domestic extremism’ that are designed to neuter our fighting forces,” Hegseth fumes.

To counteract diversity initiatives, women in combat roles and transgender people in the military, Hegseth argues in favor of purging the military of all “woke” and “Marxist” ideologies and reverting to the “Western Christian tradition.”

The “return to tradition” is to be coupled with a rejection of all restraints on genocide and war crimes. In Chapter 11 of his book, “The Laws of War, for Winners” Hegseth writes, “The problem with ‘international law,’ of course, is that there’s no such thing as international police to enforce it.”

“Should we follow the Geneva Conventions?” Hegseth asks, before answering, “... if you want to win—how can anyone write universal rules about killing other people in open conflict? Especially against enemies who fight like savages...”

Lamenting any restraints on killing, Hegseth bemoans that “modern warfighters fight lawyers as much as we fight bad guys.” He continues: “Our enemies should get bullets, not attorneys. The fact that we won’t do what is necessary is the reason wars become endless. Modern wars never end, because we won’t finish them.”

Giving a green light to all war crimes should he be installed as secretary of defense, Hegseth adds: “That is why I’m with the warfighters—the trigger pullers—every single time. I will have their back, through thick and thin. They will make mistakes, but almost always for the right reason: to bring more of our boys home.”

To this end, Hegseth champions the “Greatest Generation” not “for their poetry, artistic endeavors, or their culinary brilliance,”

but “because they were two-time world war champions. ... They killed the enemy. Sometimes in ways that would offend modern sensibilities. Two nuclear bombs ended a war that could have dragged on for years, costing millions more *American* lives. They won. Who cares.”

Hegseth, like Trump’s nominee for ambassador to Israel, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, is a Christian Zionist. Both view the State of Israel not simply as a political project, but the culmination of religious prophecy that will crescendo with the return of Jesus Christ to Earth and banishment to the pits of Hell of the “unbelievers,” i.e., atheists, Muslims and Jewish people.

Speaking at the *Arutz Sheva* conference in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 2018, Hegseth rejected a “two-state” solution and signaled his support for annexing the West Bank and building a temple on Temple Mount, currently the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

“If you walk the ground today,” Hegseth said in 2018, “you understand there is no such thing as the outcome of a two-state solution. There is one state.” He added, “There is no reason why the miracle of the reestablishment of the temple on the Temple Mount is not possible. I don’t know how it would happen, you don’t know how it would happen, but I know that it could happen. That’s all I know.”

“Facts and activities on the ground truly matter and that’s going and visiting Judea and Samaria, understanding that sovereignty, the very sovereignty of Israeli soil, Israeli cities, locations is a critical next step to showing the world that this is the land for Jews and the land of Israel.”

Presaging the current ethnic cleansing campaign, Hegseth noted that given all the support Israel has in Washington, “Buy the ticket. Take your action. Do what needs to be done here in Israel because I truly believe this is a moment where America will have your back. You have Donald Trump in the White House ... you have true believers in America and Israel that have your back.”

Questioned on November 13 by reporters if he was “concerned” about the potential appointment of Hegseth as secretary of defense, Senator Chuck Schumer (New York-Democrat) replied blandly, “There will be time to analyze that later.”



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