Democrats' pro forma opposition to fascist Pete Hegseth smooths path to his confirmation as Trump's defense secretary

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On Tuesday, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of defense, Pete Hegseth—a Trump loyalist, former Fox News host, veteran and defender of war criminals—appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee in a nearly four-hour confirmation hearing.

The event had a theatrical character. Republicans overwhelmingly supported the nominee and asked favorable questions, painting him and Trump as saviors of the republic. As has been the case since Trump's reelection, the Democrats studiously avoided labeling Hegseth a "fascist" and instead focused their opposition on allegations of drunkenness, sexual assault, previous comments against women in combat roles and Hegseth's lack of experience in leading large organizations.

Despite the refusal of committee Chairman Roger Wicker (Republican from Mississippi) to allow a second round of questioning, the Ranking Democratic member, Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, thanked Wicker for his "strong collaboration" and "bipartisanship."

The Department of Defense budget rose every year under President Joe Biden and currently stands at nearly $1 trillion. Some 3.4 million people are employed by the agency across numerous branches. Throughout the hearing, both Democrats and Republicans stressed the necessity of ensuring the readiness of the Pentagon to wage war throughout the world in the service of US geostrategic interests.

In his opening statement, Chairman Wicker noted that Hegseth would assume the position "in a moment of consequence," adding that "The United States faces the most dangerous security environment since World War II." He pointed to the "emergence of an 'axis of aggressors,'" a coalition "characterized by broadening and deepening military cooperation among the dictatorships ruling China, Russia, Iran and North Korea."

Wicker lamented that "Today's Department of Defense is no longer prepared for Great Power competition" but said Hegseth would be the "change agent" needed to create a "warrior ethos."

Commenting on the Republicans' demonization of the "left" in a column published that morning in the *New York Times*, Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes wrote:

> Mr. Hegseth experienced the wars in person, serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. After initially defending post-Sept. 11 policies, he joined many on the right in pivoting to blame enemies within for America's failures abroad—a common outcome when superpowers don't win wars. Like Mr. Trump, he focused on liberals and Islam, as well as changing demographics and social mores that had crept into the military through the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, diversity initiatives and women in combat.

In his opening statement, which was echoed by Republicans on the committee, Hegseth agreed he was a "change agent." He claimed that the failure of the US military to recruit young people to die for war profiteers and the lack of US military success in Iraq and Afghanistan were the result of the injection of "woke" ideology into the military by the Democrats and Biden. He promised to reinstate a "warrior ethos," "rebuild our military" and "reestablish deterrence," specifically against "the communist Chinese."

Presenting a version of Hitler's "stab in the back" theory, which blamed Germany's military defeat in World War I on the traitorous influence of "Judeo-Bolsheivsm," Republican Senator Dan Sullivan of Alaska accused the Biden administration of injecting "woke" ideology into the military and elevating "climate change" and "transgender surgeries" above "lethality."

"I'm describing the 'woke' military here under President Biden over the last four years," said Sullivan, who asked Hegseth, "If confirmed, will you issue an order saying we are going to rip the Biden 'woke' yoke off the neck of our military and focus on lethality and war-fighting?" Hegseth replied that he would.

Ranking Democratic member Reed agreed with his "Republican colleagues" that China "is seeking to undermine our interests, intimidate our friends and challenge our standing in the world." He noted that he previously supported every nominee for secretary of defense, including Mark Esper under Trump but said he would not be voting in favor of Hegseth.

Reed boasted, "Our military is more diverse than it has ever been, but more importantly, it is more lethal than it has ever been. This is not a coincidence." He attacked Hegseth over his role in securing pardons for war criminals, noting that his "definition of lethality seems to include those that do commit war crimes rather than those who stand up and say, 'This is not right.'"

Defending his role in securing pardons for war criminals such as Eddie Gallagher, Hegseth claimed there was "prosecutorial misconduct" and declared that he "defaults to the warfighter," not "the second-guessers with air conditioners in Washington, D.C."

Hegseth, like all of Trump's nominees, was picked due to his subservience to Trump and his "America First" agenda. Throughout the hearing and in his opening statement, Hegseth emphasized that he would be a loyal conduit for the aspiring dictator, including his aspirations to deploy the US military on domestic soil to carry out police state operations, including in the service of mass deportations.

Asked nearly four hours into the hearing by the CIA Democrat, Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, if Hegseth had been privy to any conversations with Trump about using the active duty military to establish "detention camps" or police "dangerous cities," Hegseth replied:

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> Certainly, I have been involved in conversations related to doing things this administration has not, which is secure the Southern border and not allow floods of illegals into our country through an invasion that threatens the American people. There are ways in which the military is already playing a role in that; 5,000 National Guardsmen are at the border right now…

Slotkin, speaking for high-level elements in the military and intelligence establishment fearful that Trump's use of the active duty military in the United States will provoke mass opposition and discredit the military, expressed worry that Hegseth would agree to follow illegal orders issued by Trump, as opposed to former Secretary of Defense Esper, who refused to deploy the 82nd Airborne against anti-police violence protesters in Washington D.C. in the summer of 2020.

Slotkin asked Hegseth, if Trump "asked you to use the 82nd Airborne in law enforcement roles in Washington D.C., would you also convince him otherwise?" Hegseth replied that he would not "get ahead of the president."

In response to multiple questions from female senators on the place of women in combat roles, Hegseth replied, "I'm incredibly grateful for the two women who have served our military in uniform." Turning to Slotkin, Hegseth added, "And including in the Central Intelligence Agency, contributions on the battlefield—indispensable contributions—I would like to clarify, when I am talking about that issue it is not about the capabilities of women, it's about standards."

Nearly two hours into the hearing, Sen. Mazie Hirono (Democrat-Hawaii), after starting with questions focused on Hegseth's drinking and sexual assault allegations, raised the issue of Hegseth being a loyal conduit for Trump's desire to use the active duty military as his own personalist police force.

"In June of 2020, then-President Trump directed former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to shoot protesters in the legs in downtown D.C., an order Secretary Esper refused to comply with. Would you carry out such an order from President Trump?"

Hegseth affirmed he would and boasted of his service in suppressing the protests as a member of the D.C. National Guard. He said:

> Senator, I was in the Washington D.C. National Guard unit that was in Lafayette Square. ... I saw 50 Secret Service agents get injured by rioters trying to jump over the fence and set a church on fire, yea.

Asked by Hirono if Hegseth would carry out an order from Trump to seize Greenland, "a territory of Denmark, a NATO member, by force? Or would you comply with an order to take over the Panama Canal?" Hegseth refused to answer the question.

Despite presenting himself as a "change agent," Hegseth confirmed he would continue advocating for massive Pentagon budgets and nuclear rearmament. Nebraska Senator Deb Fischer (Republican) stressed that the "nuclear triad" was undergoing "generational recapitalization programs," which could not suffer "any more delays."

Asked by Fischer if he was committed to "supporting all three legs of the nuclear triad and to using every tool available to deliver these systems on schedule?" Hegseth replied:

> Senator, yes, I do, because ultimately our deterrence, our survival is dependent on the capability, the perception and the reality of the capability of our nuclear triad. We have to invest in its modernization for the defense of our nation.

Independent Senator Angus King (Maine) lamented that in Hegseth's opening statement there was not "a single mention in this statement about Ukraine and Russia! Is this code for we are going to abandon Ukraine!?" Hegseth assured the senator he knew who the "enemy was."

The beginning of the hearing was marked by several disruptions by anti-genocide protesters. In his line of questioning, fascistic Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton noted that the first protester accused Hegseth of being a "Christian Zionist."

"I'm not really sure why that's a bad thing," said Cotton. "I'm a Christian, I'm a Zionist. Zionism is that the Jewish people deserve a homeland in the ancient Holy Land... do you consider yourself a Christian Zionist?"

Hegseth replied, "Senator, I'm a Christian, and I robustly support the state of Israel and its existential defense."

Cotton, noting that another protester had referenced the "war in Gaza," asked Hegseth if he, like Cotton and Trump, supported the ongoing genocide, to which Hegseth replied, "Senator, I do support Israel destroying and killing every last member of Hamas."

In his line of questioning, Senator Mike Rounds (R-South Dakota) pointed to the very real possibility of US troops engaging in a multifront war in the near future. He said:

> Given the growing potential of a multi-theater conflict involving near-peer adversaries, what steps would you take to prepare the Department of Defense to simultaneously execute and sustain operations across multiple regions while maintaining readiness and deterrence globally?

Rounds added that "If we have a fight with one, chances are very good that we are going to have two battles, or two different battlegrounds at the same time." Hegseth said he would follow Trump's lead and provide him the "sharpest spear."

No Republicans have indicated that they will vote against Hegseth, who only needs 50 votes plus a tie-breaking vote from Vice President-elect J.D. Vance to secure the nomination. The world's richest person, Elon Musk, repeatedly tweeted in favor of Hegseth's nomination before, during and after the hearing.

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