

# Senate Democrats voice support for major surge in military spending at Hegseth briefing

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Leading Senate Democrats called Thursday for a major expansion of US military spending at the testimony by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who was briefing the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Hegseth was testifying on the Trump administration's \$1.535 trillion Fiscal Year 2027 Pentagon budget request—a near-50 percent jump in a single year that would lift military outlays to roughly 4.5 percent of gross domestic product. Funding the buildup requires a frontal assault on what remains of the federal social safety net, with Republican leaders preparing further cuts to Medicaid, food stamps and Social Security through reconciliation.

Hegseth spoke as the representative of a completely criminal government, personally advocating that US troops commit war crimes—including upon direct questioning at the hearing.

In the face of a broadly unpopular administration, the Democrats made it their highest priority to emphasize—despite tactical disagreements—their solidarity with the Trump administration's megalomaniacal program of world conquest. Their objections were that Trump's plans do not go far enough, or that the Iran war has left the United States unprepared for war with nuclear-armed China and Russia.

Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York called for doubling the number of nuclear-capable stealth bombers in the request, from 100 B-21 Raiders to 200. "We've been working together to grow the industrial base because we're all worried about how our stockpiles would hold up in a conflict against China," Gillibrand said. The B-21, she added, "will be a critical part of both our conventional and our nuclear deterrence against China and Russia."

Democratic Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona voiced

his support for expanding military spending, saying: "I've always been supportive of defense spending in my entire time here. After 25 years in the Navy, I want to make sure our folks have what they need."

Democratic Ranking Member Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the senior Democrat on the committee, opened his remarks by saluting the war against Iran. "Tactically the United States military performance against Iran has been remarkable," Reed said, "and I salute the service members who executed this mission with skill and bravery."

His criticism was that the war has left the United States less prepared for war with China. Three carrier strike groups have been pulled into the Middle East, leaving the Pacific thinly covered. "In terms of ... where we're putting ... the most powerful part of our Navy," Reed asked, "can you explain again what that means in terms of the situation in INDOPACOM where China is watching?" His argument was for a larger war, redirected at Beijing.

Democratic Ranking Member Adam Smith of Washington took the same line at the parallel House hearing Wednesday, telling Hegseth he had heard "the chairman on the need for an increased" budget and attacking popular opposition to the war: "I strongly disagree with the folks on the far left who say that we don't really face any threats."

The *New York Times* editorial board joined in Thursday with a piece titled "The U.S. Military Was Losing Its Edge. After Iran, Everyone Knows It." The Iran war, the *Times* argued, exposed weaknesses adversaries can now see. "The good news is that Congress, the administration and the Pentagon can all now see our military shortcomings," the editorial concluded.

At Thursday's hearing, Republican Chairman Roger

Wicker of Mississippi endorsed the Trump administration's military budget as necessary to prepare for military conflict with China.

"First and foremost, we're locked in a competition with Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party," Wicker said. "The competition is high stakes, and it is about whether this will be an American-led century or a century defined by authoritarian, autocratic regimes that care little for the needs of their citizens or those in neighboring countries. The Chinese Communist Party has accelerated its historic military buildup and its predatory economic practices against Americans and countries the world over. Xi Jinping leads not only China, but also an axis of aggressors." Of the budget: "Every penny of it should be money well spent."

Hegseth said during Thursday's hearing the administration was "putting our defense industrial base back on a wartime footing" and building "a military that ... instills nothing less than unrelenting fear in our adversaries." He detailed the composition: "\$65 billion for shipbuilding, \$120 billion for the defense industrial base, \$331 billion for munitions, \$44 billion for quality of life, \$71 billion on our nuclear triad."

The \$71 billion nuclear figure is a massive expansion of the US nuclear arsenal—new submarines, bombers and intercontinental missiles aimed at China and Russia. A further \$54 billion goes to a Defense Autonomous Warfare Group for drone war.

Hegseth dismissed his critics as "reckless naysayers and defeatist ... congressional Democrats and some Republicans—defeatists from the cheap seats."

The Democrats had funded the buildup before the war began. The House passed the FY26 National Defense Authorization Act 312 to 112 on December 10, 2025, with the entire Democratic leadership voting yes; the Senate cleared it 77 to 20. The House approved an \$839 billion defense appropriations bill 341 to 88 on January 22. On February 2, 21 House Democrats supplied the margin for a continuing resolution. The US-Israeli assault on Iran began 26 days later. Both chambers then defeated War Powers resolutions to halt it.

The criminal character of the administration was on open display at Thursday's hearing. Asked to retract his March 13 order that US troops give enemies in the Caribbean "no quarter, no mercy," Hegseth refused. Kelly read him the definition from his own department's Law of War Manual—that no "legitimate

offers of surrender will be refused or that detainees will be executed"—and asked twice whether he stood by the statement. Twice Hegseth replied: "We fight to win."

The character of "the mission" the Democrats endorsed was thus on the record. Democratic Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan told Hegseth: "I agree with the Chairman ... that the world has never been more dangerous and complicated, and ... we can all agree that we want our military to come out of it safely and successfully." A successful mission, by the secretary of defense's own definition, means offering "no quarter" to those targeted by US imperialism and the destruction of "a whole civilization," in the words of Trump.

Thursday's hearing took place as the administration moved to defy the 60-day War Powers Resolution clock on the Iran war. Friday is the statutory deadline by which the president must either seek congressional authorization or certify in writing that more time is required to withdraw US forces. The administration intends to do neither. Hegseth said the White House takes the position that a current ceasefire pauses the clock—a reading with no basis in the statute.

Trump was scheduled to be briefed Thursday evening by U.S. Central Command chief Adm. Brad Cooper on new military options against Iran, including, per news reports, a "powerful" series of strikes on Iranian infrastructure, a ground operation to seize part of the Strait of Hormuz and a special forces mission to secure Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

The Senate Democrats speak for the same capitalist oligarchy as Donald Trump. Their disagreements were operational—anxiety that the Iran war is going badly, anxiety that the United States is unprepared for the larger conflict with China both parties expect. On the question of whether US military spending should surge toward \$1.5 trillion to wage that war, Thursday's hearing revealed no disagreement at all.



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