Democratic Party runs more than 60 military-intelligence candidates for Congress

Part One

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This is the first part of a five-part series.

Eight years ago, the WSWS first exposed and analyzed the remarkable and unprecedented influx of military-intelligence operatives into the Democratic Party, with dozens of former military officers, intelligence agents and State Department and National Security Council officials seeking Democratic congressional nominations.

Eleven of these candidates won seats in the House of Representatives, and in the three elections that have followed, in 2020, 2022 and 2024, that number has held roughly constant, as new candidates from a military-intelligence background have replaced those who have moved on, either to higher office, reelection defeat or retirement.

In the 2026 elections, the role of former military, intelligence and civilian national security officials within the House Democratic caucus is likely to vastly increase. A staggering 67 Democratic congressional candidates with a national security background, more than double the number who ran in any of the last four elections, are on the November ballot.

These 67 range from former flag officers (so-called because they rank high enough to have their own personal flags), who oversaw tens of thousands of troops, to commanders of combat units in the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, to military intelligence agents, involved in the most sensitive secret operations, to former State Department and White House aides. A smaller number were rank-and-file soldiers, many of these are career soldiers with multiple combat deployments, and there are a few whose role in the military was medical only.

Perhaps the most-publicized of these military-intelligence candidates is Cait Conley, who is challenging incumbent Republican House member Mike Lawler for a mid-Hudson Valley seat, the 17th Congressional District of New York. The race is already one of the most expensive in the country, with the two candidates raising more than $12 million between them as of June 30, 2026.

Conley is a West Point graduate who deployed six times to Afghanistan and Iraq with the Army special forces. She spent 16 years in the military before going to work at the National Security Council in the Biden White House and then the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). A video on her campaign website sums up her experience as “West Point Graduate. Special Operations. Terrorist Hunter.” Her website declares: “Cait lives by the Special Ops saying ‘run to the sound of the guns.’”

On the National Security Council under Biden, Conley was director for counterterrorism, which would have included drawing up and gaining presidential approval of targets for drone missile assassination. Her website boasts that this White House position “led to her being banned from Russia.” It proudly displays a cutting from a Russian Foreign Ministry document showing that she was among 500 Americans denied entry to that country, including former President Barack Obama and comedian Stephen Colbert.

Another example is **Frederick Wellman**, who is challenging longtime incumbent Republican Ann Wagner in Missouri’s 2nd Congressional District. Wagner has held the seat for 14 years and has a sizeable monetary advantage, but the contests in the suburban St. Louis district have frequently been close, and the only poll taken shows a near-tie.

Wellman is a graduate of West Point who was commissioned as an Army aviator and flew OH-58 scout helicopters, first in South Korea, then in Operation Desert Storm, the 1990-1991 war against Iraq. According to his campaign website, he later “attended and graduated from the Army’s famed Ranger School.” Mobilized in the Army Reserve after the 9/11 attacks, Wellman volunteered for active duty and took part in the initial US attack on Iraq in 2003. Again, citing his website: “Fred deployed with the

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famed 101st Airborne (Air Assault) for the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom as a UH-60 battalion Operations and Executive Officer."

After further training, Wellman worked at Army Headquarters in the Pentagon, deployed one last time in Iraq, and finally retired from the military in 2010. He has since worked as an advocate for veterans, particularly disabled veterans like himself, and sought to aid translators and other Afghan civilians who worked for the US military during its 20-year-long occupation of that country.

Like Cait Conley, Wellman cites his multiple combat deployments and declares:

> I support continued military assistance to help Ukraine defend itself and a strong, united NATO capable of deterring further Russian aggression. We cannot reward Vladimir Putin by allowing him to redraw international borders through violence or dictate Ukraine's future.

Then there is **Bale Dalton**, running against Republican Ryan Elijah in the 7th Congressional District of Florida. Elijah defeated incumbent Cory Mills in the Republican primary after the congressman was accused of sexual assault and campaign finance violations. Dalton had raised nearly $1.4 million by June 30 and was tied in the polls.

Dalton was a career Navy officer, as well as working as a State Department foreign affairs officer and as chief of staff of NASA, where his role "included work on space-security issues," according to his campaign website. A helicopter pilot, he deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, where he directed combat air support. According to his web site, "He commanded the Navy's dedicated special-operations-support helicopter squadron and remains the Navy Reserve lead at the Defense Innovation Unit."

In a statement Dalton issued for the campaign, he said:

> I've spent 24 years and counting in the Navy and Navy Reserves, fighting the terrorists who said "Death to America" after 9/11. I know there's a cost to freedom because I have lived it—flying injured troops to safety as a medevac pilot, leading combat operations against Al-Qaeda, ISIS and the Taliban, and helping the families of fallen service members when the worst happens.

As we have argued in previous such studies, the large number of military-intelligence operatives entering politics as Democratic Party candidates is the result of a two-way process. The Democratic Party leadership is openly encouraging the recruitment of such candidates, as it seeks ever-closer ties to the Pentagon and CIA. And large sections of the military-intelligence apparatus view the Democratic Party as their preferred political vehicle, in opposition to the erratic policies of Donald Trump and particularly his pullback from direct involvement in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

This new influx of "CIA Democrats," as we first labelled them in 2018, is one of the most important aspects of the 2026 elections, but one that goes virtually unreported by the corporate media. There have been only a handful of articles about the enormous number of ex-military and ex-State Department officials nominated by the Democratic Party, compared to the massive publicity given to the much smaller number of "left" Democrats who have won primary contests in New York City, Denver, Michigan and Florida.

The 67 military-intelligence Democrats include 10 incumbents running for re-election and 26 more who are favored or considered to be competitive, based on polling, fund-raising or promotion through the Democratic Party's "red to blue" campaign. Another 31 are candidates in traditionally Republican-held districts, mostly in the Midwest and South, who have much less of a chance to win.

If, as appears likely based on pre-election polling, the Democratic Party makes significant gains in November, the military-intelligence "caucus" inside the Democratic delegation could double or triple in size. They will vastly outnumber the relative handful of self-proclaimed "democratic socialists" to whom the corporate media has given so much attention, and whom pseudo-left groups cite as evidence that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left.

Regardless of the outcome, the sheer number of military-intelligence candidates is staggering. There are 184 Democratic House members seeking reelection, including 10 from the military-intelligence apparatus. That means that 251 seats are open for Democratic challengers. Of these, 57 are being contested by candidates whose major credential is their national security experience, nearly one quarter. Of the seats that are genuinely competitive, the proportion is even higher.

To be continued

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