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

Part two

Patrick Martin
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This is the second part of a five-part series.

The record of the first wave of CIA Democrats

Before exploring further the background of the new wave of military-intelligence candidates for the Democratic Party, let us review briefly the growing role of those CIA Democrats who ran for Congress in 2018. A total of 30 won primary contests (or were the sole candidates) and became Democratic nominees in the midterm election (compared to 67 this year). Of these, 11 won seats in Congress, including a number who have since become well-known political figures.

• Former CIA agent Elissa Slotkin is now a US senator from Michigan.

• Former CIA agent Abigail Spanberger is now the governor of Virginia.

• New Jersey has two such statewide office-holders: Former Navy helicopter pilot Mikie Sherrill is the governor, while former National Security Council Iraq desk officer Andy Kim is a US senator.

In the House itself, former Army Ranger Jason Crow of Colorado has emerged as a leading figure, serving as an impeachment manager against Trump, selected by then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The CIA Democrats played a significant role in triggering the first impeachment of Trump, over his temporary withholding of military aid to Ukraine after a phone call to President Volodymyr Zelensky. Trump demanded Zelensky help him politically by digging up dirt on former Vice President Joe Biden, whom Trump correctly viewed as his likely Democratic opponent in the 2020 election.

Seven House Democrats with national-security backgrounds issued a joint letter in September 2019 calling for Trump's impeachment. They included Crow, Slotkin, Spanberger, Sherrill, former Air Force officer Chrissy Houlahan, former Navy commander Elaine Luria and former Navy officer—and later assistant Navy secretary—Gil Cisneros. This was followed shortly by then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi throwing her support behind the impeachment drive.

Reinforcements and replacements, 2020-2024

Each election since 2018 has seen another 30 or so military-intelligence candidates winning Democratic congressional nominations, with enough elected in November to maintain the strength of that faction in the House of Representatives. This held true even after the Democrats lost their majority in 2022, and the Republican Party maintained a razor-thin margin in 2024.

Of the original 11, four moved on to higher office, three were defeated for reelection, one was defeated running for the Senate, and one is retiring this year. The remaining two, Crow of Colorado and Houlahan of Pennsylvania, are completing their fourth terms in the House. They have been joined by Sara Jacobs of California in 2020, and Jake Auchincloss (Massachusetts), Pat Ryan (New York), Chris DeLuzio (Pennsylvania) and Don Davis (North Carolina) in 2022, and Maggie Goodlander (New Hampshire), Eugene Vindman (Virginia) and Gil Cisneros (California) in 2024.

These ten are all running for reelection this year, while Elaine Luria, who lost her seat in 2022, is seeking to regain it, running again in the Second Congressional District of Virginia, against Republican incumbent Jennifer Kiggans, who ousted her four years ago.

The national-security background of some of those elected after the first wave of 2018 is worth recounting briefly. Goodlander, a military-intelligence officer in the Navy Reserve, is the wife of Jake Sullivan, who was Biden's National Security Advisor. Auchincloss, a captain in the Marine Corps who led patrols in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, has become one of the most strident critics of the Trump administration's China policy, claiming it is "too soft" on Beijing. Sara Jacobs, a State Department counter-terrorism official under Hillary Clinton, is a granddaughter of Qualcomm billionaire Irwin Jacobs. Pat Ryan is a West Point graduate with two tours of duty in Iraq, including as intelligence officer for a battalion of 1,000 soldiers fighting in the Mosul area.

Eugene Vindman, a Ukrainian-American and career Army officer, played a key role in the first impeachment of Donald Trump. Both he and his twin brother Alexander Vindman were dispatched by the Pentagon to work at the White House National Security Council on East European affairs. There they objected to Trump's threat to withhold military aid to Ukraine, in a phone call which Alexander Vindman was monitoring. He later testified before the House Intelligence Committee which investigated the charges on which Trump was impeached.

Admirals and generals join the CIA Democrats

The new group of national-security recruits for the Democratic Party does not include any former CIA agents, at least according to their campaign biographies (as in previous studies, we report only the

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information publicly available on their campaign websites and local press reports, which is damning enough).

Since Elissa Slotkin and Abigail Spanberger have moved on to higher office, the House Democratic caucus will include large numbers of former national-security officials and military officers, but no acknowledged former CIA agents. We will nonetheless retain the label "CIA Democrats" for convenience, although it should be understood that this refers to any Democratic candidate whose primary background is in the military-intelligence apparatus.

The most important figures among the new candidates are the four former admirals and generals who are among the best-funded and most-publicized of the Democratic candidates for Congress in seats currently held by Republicans. The four combined had raised more than $20 million by June 30, about half of that for **retired admiral Eileen Laubacher,** who is running against notorious right-wing Republican incumbent Lauren Boebert in Colorado's 4th Congressional District.

Laubacher graduated from the US Naval Academy and spent seven years in naval intelligence, before joining the reserves. She returned to active duty and deployed to Afghanistan in 2009, eventually moving up to admiral in 2018. She then became defense attache at the US embassy in New Delhi, India, before returning to the US and working in the Biden White House as Senior Director for South Asia on the National Security Council. The US-India relationship is at the center of Washington's plans for war against China.

The other retired admiral is a direct expression of the disaffection with Trump within the military brass. **Vice Admiral Nancy Lacore,** commanding 60,000 sailors and Marines in the Navy Reserve, was forced out of the Pentagon by Trump's Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, as part of his purge of minority and female command officers. In announcing her campaign, Lacore made direct reference to this action, declaring: "After decades of service to our country, a career that started as a Navy pilot and finished as a three star admiral, I was removed from my position without cause, along with dozens of other senior military leaders."

Lacore was initially challenging right-wing Republican incumbent Nancy Mace in South Carolina's 1st Congressional District, which includes Charleston and much of the state's Atlantic coast, and is home to a large number of veterans. Mace dropped her reelection bid to seek the Republican nomination for governor in a primary where she finished a poor fifth. She remains in Congress for the rest of this year, but the Republican candidate to retain the seat is lawyer Jennifer Honeycutt.

In August, former admirals Lacore and Laubacher issued a joint statement in response to the reports of brutal conditions aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* during an extended deployment in the war against Iran:

> This ill-conceived and unnecessary war is having terrible consequences for our national security and taking a serious toll on our sailors, Marines, and military families. The damage to morale, readiness, and recruitment could last for years. This is a failure of leadership at the Pentagon and in Congress. Pete Hegseth has failed to provide the leadership our service members deserve, and Congress has failed to demand accountability or a clear path forward.

Like the Democratic Party as a whole, the two former admirals oppose the Iran war because of its negative impact on the US military, not because it represents a criminal act of aggression against a country of 93 million people. Both were in high-level military positions during the last two years of the Biden administration, which aggressively intervened against Russia in Ukraine and backed the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

brigadier general Leela Gray is the Democratic candidate the 13th Congressional District of Florida, running against incumbent Republican Anna Paulina Luna, another fascist Trump acolyte. Gray enlisted in Army ROTC in college for the tuition assistance, but declares, "I fell in love with the Army as a cadet at Fort Knox, firing a 50-caliber machine gun at old beat-up tanks. It became so much more than a ticket to school. I learned to see myself as a soldier."

Gray spent a decade commanding troops at various bases within the United States, then entered the Army Reserve. In 2003, she returned to active duty, serving several tours, including a deployment to Iraq. She retired after 30 years in uniform, but went on to additional positions in the national security apparatus. According to her campaign website:

> In 2014 and 2015, while working at the State Department, I collaborated to create new initiatives to take down terrorists' narratives—propaganda that could be used to radicalize and recruit others to attack the United States—with strategic partnerships between the U.S. and countries around the world. In 2019, I served as a strategic advisor to the United States Army Cyber Command.

The other retired Army general running as a Democratic candidate for Congress this year is **Shawn Harris**, who has run twice before in the 14th Congressional District of Georgia. He challenged fascist Republican incumbent Marjorie Taylor Greene in 2024. When she resigned from Congress after a rift with Trump, he was the Democratic candidate in a special election in March 2026, leading the field narrowly, but losing in the April runoff to Republican Clay Fuller. Harris and Fuller are on the ballot again in November.

Harris began his 40-year military career in the Marines, later switching to the Army, in the course of which he "deployed as an infantry commander in Afghanistan, where he saw extensive combat," according to his website. His final posting overseas was as US defense attaché in Israel.

When we profiled his 2024 campaign, we reposted the graphic above, in which he baited Marjorie Taylor Greene as "Moscow Marge" because of her opposition to US military aid to Ukraine. We wrote: "Harris has clearly made the decision to attack Greene largely from the right, as a traitor to the interests of American imperialism, particularly in relation to the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine."

To be continued

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