Democrats rescue War Secretary Hegseth a week after election repudiates war

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On Tuesday evening, one week after midterm elections that delivered a massive popular repudiation of the Trump administration and its war against Iran, the Democratic Party saved War Secretary Pete Hegseth from impeachment.

The House voted 211-204 to refer to the Judiciary Committee a resolution containing eight articles of impeachment against Hegseth, killing the measure for the remainder of the lame duck session. Every Democrat who voted opposed the referral, but 11 Democrats did not vote. Had they all cast their ballots, the motion would have failed 215-211, and the House would have been compelled to vote on impeachment itself.

The reasons given for the Democratic Party absences are rubbish. Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi was in San Francisco receiving a "Lifetime Advocate for Veterans Award." Four others blamed traffic. Representative Haley Stevens of Michigan offered no explanation at all. Nine days earlier, Stevens endorsed Trump-backed Republican candidate Mike Rogers for Senate, against the party's nominee, Abdul El-Sayed, in particular over the latter's criticism of the Gaza genocide.

All claims that the missing 11 Democrats were the product of unfortunate traffic patterns or important "lifetime" awards are rubbish. Had the vote been for funding Ukraine, the members would have been raised from their death beds if necessary.

This was a political decision made in coordination with the White House and the first major political test since the midterms. Under the banner of "bipartisanship," the Democrats chose not to inflict a political defeat on the administration over the war, in the midst of their discussions with the White House on Russia and the military budget.

The Republicans understood what they had been given. Trump hailed the outcome as an "EXONERATION of a Great American Patriot" and declared that the impeachment had "miserably FAILED!" Hegseth, for his part, answered the impeachment effort at a press conference earlier in the day by calling it "sabotage" and implying those who backed it were traitors.

The calculation behind the vote was spelled out the following day in a *Newsweek* analysis headlined "The 11 Missing Democrats Saved Pete Hegseth—and the Party From Itself." Its author, senior editor Shane Croucher, argued that Democrats "don't need the chaos of impeachment to scrutinize Hegseth." What "chaos" means here is anything that might encourage popular opposition to the war or disrupt the bipartisan operations of American imperialism.

The entire maneuvering around the impeachment was thoroughly cynical. Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries declared himself a "hard yes" on impeaching Hegseth, and the party then made sure the vote would fail. Meanwhile, toward the criminal at the head of the government, Trump, the Democrats' opposition to impeachment has been absolute.

The resolution the Democrats allowed to die was itself introduced by Thomas Massie, not the Democrats themselves. Massie is a libertarian Republican, but the content of the resolution is significant in that it sets down as formal charges what the Democrats would not say. It charges that the war against Iran was "unlawful" from its inception. It describes the US strike on an elementary school in Minab on the first morning of the war, which killed at least 120 children, and charges that Hegseth "effected the murder of civilians."

It accuses him of the "extrajudicial killings" of at least 243 people in the boat strikes in the Caribbean and Pacific, including "secondary strikes against shipwrecked survivors." It calls the January seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro "an act of war against a sovereign country," carried out to "assert U.S. control over Venezuela's oil reserves," and charges that the

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bombing of Yemen last year killed an estimated 224 civilians in less than eight weeks.

It also records that on June 3 and June 23, both houses of Congress passed a resolution under the War Powers Act directing the president to withdraw US forces from Iran, the first such action since the law was enacted in 1973. The administration ignored it, and for nearly five months the Democrats did nothing to enforce Congress's own decision.

None of this language figured in the Democrats' election campaign. To the extent that Democrats referred to the war, it was almost entirely in terms of its cost.

In fact, the Democrats support the aims of the war and have ensured that it has been funded since its inception. In June 2025, when Al Green introduced articles of impeachment against Trump over the bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities, 128 Democrats, including the entire leadership, voted to table them. In January of this year, 149 House Democrats voted for the $839 billion military appropriations bill that paid for the assault on Iran launched five weeks later.

Their main complaint has been that Trump has failed to realize the objectives of the war and thereby strengthened the position of Iran, including over the Strait of Hormuz. As Senator Gary Peters of Michigan told Hegseth at a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on July 21, "You don't have a strategy. You don't have a long-term plan to actually win this war. Win the war!"

However, in their conflicts with the administration, the issue that has animated the Democratic Party's leadership is the war against Russia in Ukraine. Senator Adam Schiff has said that Hegseth should be brought before the Senate to testify not over Minab or the Caribbean boat strikes, but over the throttling of Starlink satellite service to the Ukrainian military. At the same July hearing, Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois objected to spending on Iran when "we're in a moment in history where we can win the war in Ukraine."

According to Senate sources cited by the *Hill*, Senate Democrats have floated his removal as the price of their cooperation on defense legislation during the lame duck session, with Pentagon funding set to expire December 11. The Democrats prefer to keep the threat in reserve for January, when they will hold majorities in both houses, and to use it in their maneuvers with the White House over Ukraine and the military budget.

The Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. Its differences with Trump are over how best to defend the global interests of American imperialism, not over whether to wage war.

The faction of the party most directly bound up with this orientation is what the *World Socialist Web Site* has termed the "CIA Democrats," candidates drawn from the military and intelligence agencies. The Democrats ran 67 of them for Congress this year. Thirteen won House seats, joining all 10 incumbents and more than doubling the faction's ranks.

The Democratic Socialists of America and its representatives in Congress provide the political cover. Their central claim, that the election has shifted the Democratic Party to the left and that it can be pushed further, is a fiction.

Since the election, from the *New York Times* editorial board to Bernie Sanders and Zohran Mamdani, the chorus has been for "bipartisanship." What this means is collaboration with Trump and the Republicans: an agreement on war, and a joint assault on social programs and the working class to meet the dictates of Wall Street. The DSA's function is to direct the opposition to war and inequality back behind a party controlled by Wall Street and the intelligence agencies, in which the CIA Democrats count for far more than the self-styled socialists.

The midterm elections expressed the deep opposition of the working class to the war, to social inequality and to the drive toward dictatorship. The sentiments expressed in the vote are on a collision course with the entire political system. This conflict must and will find its expression in the class struggle. The fight against imperialist war and dictatorship can be waged only on this foundation: the independent mobilization of the working class, internationally, against the capitalist system that is the source of both.

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