



“Recovering Neocon” Hegseth Pledges “Peace Through Strength”

Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump’s [nominee](#) for Secretary of Defense, faces a heated confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee today. A former Fox News host and Army combat veteran, Hegseth has promised broad changes to the Department of Defense (DOD), aiming to restore what he terms the “warrior ethos” and prioritize “peace through strength.” His nomination has drawn sharp criticism and heightened media attention due to his controversial past and unconventional qualifications.



AP Images
Pete Hegseth

Peace Through Strength

In his prepared [opening statement](#) to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Hegseth outlined a transformative agenda for the DOD, centered on rebuilding the military’s core values, operational efficiency, and technological superiority. Framing his approach as a departure from the status quo, Hegseth stressed that his leadership would restore the Pentagon’s focus on “warrior culture,” readiness, and accountability.

“The President [Trump] has given me a clear vision, and I will execute [it],” Hegseth said, pledging that “The Defense Department under Donald Trump will achieve Peace Through Strength.” He prioritized “defend[ing] our homeland — our borders and our skies” and vowed to “responsibly end wars to ensure we can prioritize our resources — and reorient to larger threats.”

This reorienting to “larger threats,” Hegseth explained, includes bolstering defense against emerging global challenges such as advanced cyber warfare and modernizing military capabilities. He underscored the strategic imperative of working with allies to address aggression in the Indo-Pacific, specifically highlighting the growing challenge posed by “the communist Chinese.”

“Warrior Ethos”

Hegseth emphasized a “return to the warrior ethos” as central to his vision, aiming to rebuild the military’s fighting spirit and operational effectiveness. “The strength of our military is our unity — our shared purpose — not our differences,” he said, pledging to address recruitment and retention issues by ensuring every soldier is “fully qualified on their assigned weapon system.” Hegseth’s approach likely aims to replace the [divisive DEI programs](#) promoted under the Biden administration with a focus on meritocracy and operational effectiveness. “Our standards will be high, and they will be equal (not equitable, that is a very different word),” he added, suggesting that DEI initiatives have undermined readiness.

Accountability and Leadership

Hegseth sharply criticized what he described as the politicization of military leadership, vowing to hold leaders accountable for readiness and performance. Promotions, he emphasized, would be based purely



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on merit. Summarizing his approach, he said, “Build the plan. Work the plan. And then work harder than everyone around you.” He pledged to ensure that the Pentagon, the nation’s largest agency, can finally pass an audit — a feat it has failed for seven consecutive years, [most recently](#) struggling to account for its \$824 billion budget.

Modernizing Military Capabilities

Hegseth called for sweeping modernization to address evolving threats and inefficiencies, promising “no more ‘Valley of Death’ for new defense companies.” He outlined plans to overhaul the defense acquisition process, modernize the nuclear triad, and enhance cybersecurity.

Hegseth also highlighted the importance of operational adaptability in countering threats such as China. He warned, “We can no longer count on ‘reputational deterrence’ — we need real deterrence.” Hegseth advocated for strategic investments in cutting-edge technologies to maintain America’s military edge. That includes artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and autonomous systems.

Tech Oligarchy and Defense

Hegseth’s emphasis on investments in emerging technologies aligns with the interests of a select group of tech oligarchs with strong ties to President-elect Donald Trump. These individuals and their companies stand to benefit significantly from the administration’s defense priorities.

Among them are tech pioneers whose firms are deeply embedded in the defense- and national-security sectors. Companies such as Anduril Industries and Palantir Technologies have already secured lucrative government contracts, leveraging their advanced AI capabilities and surveillance tools. SpaceX, with its cutting-edge aerospace technology, plays a growing role in military operations, from satellite launches to hypersonic advancements. It is poised to benefit from the prospected projects such as the [Iron Dome for America](#).

These oligarchs, including prominent Trump supporters such as Palmer Luckey, Elon Musk, and Peter Thiel, represent a convergence of political allegiance and financial opportunity. Their ventures are poised to gain further as Hegseth’s proposed reforms focus on integrating advanced technologies into the Pentagon’s arsenal. This symbiotic relationship between the administration and its influential backers raises questions about the impartiality of defense spending and whether these investments truly serve the broader interests of national security.

“Recovering Neocon”?

While Trump heavily campaigned on an “end the endless wars” slogan, Hegseth appears to be rather sympathetic to American interventionism.

A self-described “[recovering neocon](#),” Hegseth, who indicated he shifted from his pro-war positions in 2018, has yet to overcome his “condition.”

Investigative journalist Michael Tracey posted an [exposé](#) detailing Hegseth’s recent, highly problematic positions:

If Hegseth really spent the past six years rehabilitating himself from his bygone days as a “neocon,” we might expect this to be evinced at some point in his opinionating on Fox News, the activity which Trump apparently decided qualified him for Defense Secretary. He was an aggressive backer of US interventionist policy in Ukraine, often criticizing the Biden Administration for what he considered its failure to arm Ukraine quickly and aggressively enough, and [demanded](#) that the Pentagon, which he now wants to lead, secretly ship high-



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grade weapons to Ukraine without informing Congress or American taxpayers. In the early stages of the Ukraine war, Hegseth [dismissed](#) any possibility of a cessation of hostilities, saying of Putin: “Ceasefires? You know what ceasefires are for him? An opportunity to reload.” He hosted a Fox Nation special in which he gravely [intoned](#) that “the future of America and the Western world” were on the line in Ukraine, [declaring](#) Putin a “war criminal” who wanted to reconstitute the Soviet Union. He [called on](#) Trump to bomb Iran, including mosques and schools if deemed necessary. He [said](#) a “preemptive strike” on North Korea would be “merited.” His bombast in favor of the Israeli pulverization of Gaza and Lebanon has few rivals.

Given his history of public rhetoric, it’s unclear whether this “recovering neocon” can truly break the habit — or if he’s simply auditioning for a new role as Secretary of War.

Rocky Road to Confirmation

Pete Hegseth’s confirmation as secretary of defense is currently uncertain due to several factors. His nomination has faced significant scrutiny over allegations of sexual assault, excessive drinking, and controversial views on women in combat roles. Senator Tammy Duckworth, a combat veteran, [has expressed](#) strong opposition, citing his lack of qualifications and past misconduct.

The slim Republican majority in the Senate Armed Services Committee remains divided on his nomination. Hegseth can afford to lose only a few Republican votes if all Democrats oppose him. [According](#) to *The Wall Street Journal*, some Republican senators have voiced concerns, particularly regarding the sexual-assault allegations and his limited experience in managing large organizations such as the Pentagon.

Despite these challenges, President-elect Donald Trump and his team have [reportedly](#) mounted an intense campaign to secure Hegseth’s confirmation, applying pressure on senators and utilizing dark-money groups to influence the process.



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