

IMPACT: Pete Hegseth is a former Fox News political commentator, author, and former Army National Guard officer who served in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He has tattoos that are associated with white nationalism and has a history of making Islamophobic statements. Hegseth has also been accused of sexual assault and has had several incidences of alleged sexist behavior. In 2025, Hegseth was confirmed as the secretary of defense in the Trump administration.

- Peter (Pete) Hegseth was born in Minnesota and identifies as an Evangelical Christian. **Shortly after graduating from Princeton in 2003, Hegseth was deployed to Guantanamo Bay where he served as a guard at the facility**, which imprisoned hundreds of Muslim men and boys largely without charge or trial. In his [memoir](#), *In the Arena*, **Hegseth described Guantanamo as a “dirty place” that “housed some of the world’s most dangerous Islamic extremists.”** In 2006, he volunteered to serve in Iraq and in 2012, he volunteered again to serve in Afghanistan. Describing his time in Afghanistan, where he [trained](#) Afghan security forces, Hegseth [said](#): “Afghanistan didn’t want freedom and our commitment wasn’t enduring”.
- Following his deployment in Iraq, **Hegseth turned his focus to advocacy for veterans. In 2007, he became the executive director of Vets for Freedom (VFF)**, a conservative advocacy group dedicated to supporting America’s [War on Terror](#) in Iraq and Afghanistan and addressing issues affecting veterans. **By 2012, Hegseth was forced to step down as a result of years of financial mismanagement, personal misconduct, and sexual impropriety.** In 2012, he went back on [active duty](#) and volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan.
- **From 2013 to 2016, he served as the CEO of Concerned Veterans for America (CVA), where, according to internal sources, he stepped down under pressure due to a “difference of opinion in the organization’s future.” Other reasons not mentioned were Hegseth’s internal handling of the organization’s finances** and his [treatment](#) of “the organization funds like they were a personal expense account—for partying, drinking, and using CVA events as little more than opportunities to ‘hook up’ with women on the road.” **One of the complaints against Hegseth describes a stop on the CVA’s Defend Freedom Tour when Hegseth and someone from his group allegedly chanted “Kill All Muslims! Kill All Muslims!” in a bar in “a drunk and violent manner.”**
- **In 2014, he joined Fox News and co-hosted weekend Fox & Friends until 2024.** During his time at Fox News as a host, Hegseth made several anti-Muslim comments. **In a February 2016 news segment on Hamtramck, Michigan, the first Muslim-majority city in America, Hegseth stoked Islamophobic fear by asking local residents whether the mosques “raise an eyebrow” and probed questions on “integration” of Muslims.** In the same segment, Hegseth referenced the December 2015 San Bernardino mass shooting, [stating](#), “Obviously, San Bernardino, there are fears, there have been over 120 arrests of ISIS members in the United States, is there no reason for other Americans to be worried?”. A February 2016 piece by Media Matters [reported](#) that Hegseth’s comments implied “a likeness between the shooting and the Michigan city.”
- **In May 2017, Hegseth criticized then-Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges (Democrat) for giving her State of the City address in a mosque.** Hegseth [remarked](#): “This is the left doing everything they can to fall over themselves to fawn over a new community,” and further [stated](#) that “Mayor Betsy Hodges will probably put on a head scarf.”
- **In May 2018, Hegseth blamed Muslim demography for a stabbing attack in France. In the segment, he said: “They’ve got a slow-motion 9/11 happening in their borders in France. Demography matters. Muslims are having 2.6 kids, whereas French-born folks are having 1.6 kids. It’s a demographic equation and it’s not to say that every Muslim is a terrorist, no one’s saying that. But the reality is, they’ve got an ISIS radical Islamic problem there** that they don’t have their arms around and they’re not taking it seriously.” The preoccupation with birth rates has been a common talking point amongst the right-wing and white nationalists. “It’s the birth rates. It’s the birth rates” was also the [first phrase](#) in the New Zealand mosque shooter’s 74-page manifesto.

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- Hegseth has made many inflammatory comments regarding Islam and Muslims in his books. **In 2020, he published *American Crusade*, which is described as a guide on how to protect the nation from the “leftist agenda.” In this book, Hegseth claims Islam has been “almost entirely captured and leveraged by Islamists.” A November 2024 *Washington Post* piece noted that in his book, Hegseth also made a false claim that “Islamists account for 25% of the global Muslim population and have a mission to force the rest of the world to submit or be killed.” Hegseth also added that “all modern Muslim countries are either formal or de facto no-go zones for practicing Christians and Jews.”** Further, Hegseth warned that “Our present moment is much like the 11th Century. We don’t want to fight, but, like our fellow Christians one thousand years ago, we must. Arm yourself – metaphorically, intellectually, physically. Our fight is not with guns. Yet.” **In his book, Hegseth also supported Trump’s Muslim ban, stating it was “right” to call for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.” In the book, Hegseth argued that “The ‘Islam = Peace’ narrative is a naive and cowardly worldview” and asserted that “all modern Muslim countries are either formal or de facto no-go zones for practicing Christians and Jews”.**
- In January 2021, Hegseth stated he was “pulled by his District of Columbia National Guard unit from guarding Joe Biden’s inauguration.” **A fellow service member reportedly flagged him as a possible “insider threat” due to a tattoo on his bicep that’s associated with white nationalism.** The service member shared with the Associated Press an email he sent to the unit’s leadership alerting them to one of Hegseth’s tattoos, which read “Deus Vult [God Will It]”. **The email sent by Dericko Gaither read, “‘Deus Vault’ has enjoyed popularity with members of alt-right because of its perceived representation of the clash of civilizations between the Christian West and the Islamic world.”** The phrase has also been used by violent white nationalists, including Brenton Tarrant who opened fire on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, killing 50 Muslims.
- In November 2024, during his appearance on Shawn Ryan’s podcast, Hegseth showed the tattoo that he claimed resulted in him being flagged and banned from President Biden’s inauguration, describing it as a “Jerusalem Cross tattoo, which is just a Christian symbol.” A November 2024 *Washington Post* piece noted that “the Jerusalem Cross was made into a prominent Christian symbol by Crusaders in the 11th century.” Following the incident, Hegseth resigned from military service.
- **A November 2024 piece by Eric Hananoki for *Media Matters* also provided a list of excerpts from Hegseth’s *American Crusade* book that were hostile to Islam and Muslims and promoted anti-Muslim stereotypes. One excerpt included Hegseth stating that “Islamists—and even mainstream Muslims—use aggressive tactics to exploit American “tolerance” as utter weakness in order to achieve accommodations that would never otherwise be tolerated.”** Comparing the present time to the medieval Christian past, **Hegseth wrote, “Just like the Christian crusaders who pushed back the Muslim hordes in the twelfth century, American Crusaders will need to muster the same courage against Islamists today.”**
- In a November 2024 *Guardian* piece, **journalist Jason Wilson noted that in his *American Crusade* book, Hegseth “tries to connect - an expert says falsely - an aspect of Islamic history with the purported ‘capture’ of Europe.”** Hegseth writes: “In Islamist circles, there’s a principle known as hegira,” and then claims: “This term refers to the nonviolent capture of a non-Muslim country.” The article also adds that **Hegseth claimed “countries that do not restrict Muslim immigration ignore that ‘Islam itself is not compatible with Western forms of government. On the other hand, countries that want to stay free ... are fighting like hell to block Islam’s spread.”** In response to these claims, **Jasmin Zine, professor of Sociology and Muslim Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, described Hegseth’s narrative as an “Islamophobic conspiracy theory distorting the practice of ‘hijra’ or the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD looking for safety from persecution,” and “is now being used to promote the xenophobic idea of a Muslim ‘takeover’ of the west.”** Zine further added: “These ideas are also linked to white nationalist demographic replacement conspiracies about Muslim birth rates in the west (AKA ‘demographic jihad’) and scare stories about ‘creeping shariah’, which have

spawned retaliatory ‘crusader’ narratives in far-right subcultures.”

- **Hegseth has also fueled the “[great replacement theory](#),”** a far-right conspiracy theory that claims a group of elites is promoting the immigration of people of color to the West to overtake the white majority. **Hegseth claimed Muslims will “seed the West with as many Muslims as possible” and then, “thanks to their very high birth rates relative to native populations and their strategically insular culture — the sons and daughters of those migrants and refugees multiply in greater numbers than do native citizens.”** By implying the “great replacement” theory, Hegseth frames the birth rates of Muslims as a threat, arguing that the purpose behind it is to infiltrate American communities and exploit government resources. Contrary to Hegseth’s claim, Muslims in America only make up [about one percent of the population](#), and his claim of a large “radicalized” Muslim population is not evidence-backed.
- **Hegseth also has an [extensive history of sexual misconduct](#).** Much of this was outlined in a December 2024 New Yorker [profile](#) on Hegseth. In the article, writer Jane Mayer provides a historical overview of Hegseth’s sexist behavior, including referencing a report on Hegseth while he was president of Concerned Veterans for America (CVA). **The report stated that “under Hegseth’s leadership, the organization became a hostile workplace that ignored serious accusations of impropriety, including an allegation made by a female employee that another employee on Hegseth’s staff had attempted to sexually assault her at the Louisiana strip club.”** On November 29, 2024, the New York Times [reported](#) that while Hegseth was going through his second divorce in 2018, his mother, Penelope Hegseth, sent him an email calling him as “an abuser of women” who “belittles, lies, cheats, sleeps around, and uses women for his own power and ego.”
- In the New Yorker piece, **Mayer further [revealed](#) that Hegseth had allegedly sexually assaulted a woman after drinking at a hotel bar in 2017. Despite denying the claim, Hegseth paid the woman to sign a nondisclosure agreement for fear that it “would result in his immediate termination from Fox” and his lawyer claimed it was a “[consensual](#)” encounter.**
- Hegseth is a strong supporter of Israel. A 2024 Guardian [piece](#) stated that Hegseth “presents his support for Israel as a renewal of medieval crusades.” In his book, American Crusade, Hegseth wrote, “For us as American crusaders, Israel embodies the soul of our American crusade – the ‘why’ to our ‘what’...faith, family, freedom, and free enterprise; if you love those, learn to love the state of Israel. And then find an arena in which to fight for her.”
- **In 2018, Hegseth called for a new Jewish temple at Al-Aqsa, [saying](#) there is “no reason why the miracle of re-establishing the temple on the Temple Mount isn’t possible”.** A November 2024 NPR [piece](#) featured an interview with **Matthew Taylor, a senior scholar at the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies in Baltimore, who noted that “Hegseth has also spoken about the possibility of reconstructing the so-called ‘Third Temple’ in Jerusalem, a project that would require the destruction of Islam’s third-holiest site. Such an effort would almost certainly trigger a major international war.”**
- In a November 2024 [video](#) posted by Eye on Palestine, Hegseth was seen addressing a Jewish group, stating “Zionism and Americanism are the front lines of Western civilization and freedom in our world today. Anyone that wants to take the stage and talk about dual loyalty is dead wrong.” Hegseth further [added](#): “It is an eternal bond, an unbreakable bond, that represents faith and freedom and fidelity to historic, religious, and cultural traditions: the opposite of secularism and Islamism and anti-Semitism.”
- Hegseth has enjoyed a close relationship with President [Donald Trump](#). **In 2019, Hegseth lobbied then-President Trump to pardon US service members who had been accused of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.** Hegseth made public comments stating pardons from Trump “would be amazing,” and defended the individuals saying, “[they’re not war criminals, they’re warriors.](#)” A November 2024 PBS News piece [stated](#) that Hegseth’s “effort was successful, with Trump that year pardoning a former U.S. Army commando set to stand trial in the killing of a suspected Afghan bomb-

maker, as well as a former Army lieutenant convicted of murder for ordering his men to fire upon three Afghans, killing two”.

- Many in the public sector have criticized Hegseth’s nomination as the Secretary of Defense. Margaret Hoover, host of the PBS program "Firing Line" and a former adviser to Vets for Freedom, described Hegseth’s management of the organization as "very poorly." Hoover expressed concern about his ability to run the Defense Department when he struggled with a staff of less than 10 people and a budget of under \$10 million.
- Adam Smith, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement: "The job of Secretary of Defense should not be an entry-level position, and I question President-elect Trump's choice of a television news host to take on this immensely important role, while I respect and admire Mr. Hegseth's military service, I am concerned about his inexperience given the security challenges we face around the world."
- **Paul Rieckhoff, founder of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America Association and an Iraq War veteran, described Hegseth as the “ferocious media, culture and political warrior for MAGA. And beyond loyal to and trusted by Trump” and said that Hegseth is “the least qualified nominee for SecDef in American history...and the most overtly political.”**
- In a December 2024 piece, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) analyzed Hegseth’s records on key civil liberties issues and cited multiple concerns about Hegseth’s nomination. Among them, **the ACLU stated that Hegseth has made “hateful stereotypes about Muslims” and made “virulently anti-Muslim statements,” including asserting that Muslim Americans represent “an existential threat” to the country.**
- In November 2024, the National Deputy Director of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Edward Ahmed Mitchell, said: “Mr. Hegseth’s war-mongering, defense of those accused of war crimes, call for the destruction of Al Aqsa mosque, and his virulently anti-Muslim views should disqualify him from any role in our nation’s government. If President-elect Trump is serious about pursuing peace abroad and putting American interests above the interests of foreign governments, he should withdraw Mr. Hegseth’s nomination, and failing that, his nomination should be rejected by the Senate.”
- In a December 2024 Politico piece, **Jasper Craven warned that if selected as the next Secretary of Defense, it is likely that Hegseth will bring “his aggressive combination of conservatism and Christian ideology — the one vividly displayed in the tattoos — into the role...he will aim to undermine the military’s long-standing nonpartisan pluralism by scrubbing diversity from the ranks, banning women in combat...and orienting the military’s mission around his fixation on the Muslim world, which he feels represents an existential threat to Western civilization”.**
- In November 2024, in an appearance on MSNBC, Angelo Carusone, author, media advocate, and the president of Media Matters for America, raised concern about the potential impact if Hegseth gets elected. **Carusone claimed, “It’s his world’s view. It is poisoned by not just Islamophobia, it’s something even broader and bigger than that, which is that he sees the world through crusader terms. That — and he sees the military...sort of as a flaming sword for Christ. That it is engaged in a ... it’s also engaged in a religious battle.** And that is important to sort of stamp out and snuff out the rise of Islam across the globe; one of the things he's lamented on several occasions is that Muslims are simply having too many babies by comparison to Christians, and that that presents a problem for cultural dominance.”
- **On January 24, 2025, the Senator confirmed Hegseth as the US secretary of defense.** Every Democratic senator along with three Republican senators – Mitch McConnell, Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins – voted against his confirmation, leaving him with 50 votes. Vice President J.D. Vance cast the tie-breaking vote. As the head of the Defense Department, Hegseth “will oversee a department of some three million employees and a \$849 billion budget.”