**November 18, 2024 / Team America**

**[BILLBOARD]**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

NOEL: Donald Trump is picking his National Security team, quickly.

NOEL: His choices run the gamut. Respected normies like Li’l Senator Marco Rubio for Secretary of State

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpXnAFoGaps)*> AP:*

*Senator Marco Rubio: It’s a tremendous honor that the president would place his confidence of me in a position of such importance, it’s also a tremendous responsibility*

Mike Waltz, a China hawk, advisor to Dick Cheney - who Trump chose as National Security Advisor / is the first Green Beret in Congress!

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?538775-1/after-words-rep-mike-waltz)*> CSPAN:*

*Rep. Mike Waltz: In our training we have to learn multiple languages, we have to blend in, we have to specialize in certain parts of the world…*

Culture warrior, immigration hardliner, RIP Cricket, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, arguably has the experience to lead Homeland Security?

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLfPa9V64Mc)*> THE HILL:*

*Governor Kristi Noem: When Texas and Arizona asked for help, I sent my National Guard troops down to help…*

Then, there are the provocative choices. The weekend Fox News host, Pete. The — fill-in Fox News host, Tulsi. Are they prepared for this moment? We’ll ask, on Today, Explained.

**[THEME]**

NOEL: Im Noel King. Dan Lamothe of The Washington Post has covered the U.S. military and the Pentagon for the last 16 years. Tell us what you know about Pete Hegseth - who Donald Trump has picked to lead the Pentagon.

DAN: Yeah Pete Hegseth is currently a Fox News host. He's one of the hosts of Fox and Friends Weekend.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eT-qUjMLeWQ)*> FOX NEWS:*

*Pete Hegseth: I don’t think I’ve watched my hands for 10 years, really I don’t wash my hands. I inoculate myself. Germs are not a real thing. I can’t see them,....*

Prior to that, he led a couple small veterans, nonprofits, and prior to that, he served in the Army National Guard. He had a pretty serious deployment to Iraq in a infantry unit and then also served as a military advisor in uniform for a deployment to Afghanistan.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJ0PFuKZen4)*> FOX NEWS: HEGSETH: I SERVED IN IRAQ BEFORE I DEPLOYED TO AFGHANISTAN. BEFORE I LEFT TO DEPLOYMENT TO IRAQ I HAD A PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE WAR. NEGATIVE HEADLINES WERE EVERYWHERE. WE WERE TOLD IT WAS A QUAGMIRE. INSTEAD AFTER A YEAR OF COMBAT I CAME HOME CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC…. [FADE OUT HERE]*

NOEL: Is this typically the kind of experience that the person leading the Pentagon has?

DAN: No. Most typically your Defense Secretary is not only somebody who's got experience around the defense department in some capacity, but often they've got very serious CEO level experience running major institutions, be that a different government agency, know, somebody that maybe ran the CIA or something like that first, or someone who's coming into this with serious experience running a major corporation. I mean, the Pentagon is really both. It is both a national security institution and a major, major, major business.

NOEL: So why did Donald Trump pick him if he doesn't have the experience?

DAN: I think first and foremost, they're aligned on a lot of the issues. I think this is someone who has the impulse to go after the Pentagon, go after the senior officers who have made decisions over the years that they disagree with. I think a generous interpretation would be he will shake up the status quo. I think the concern that a lot of people are sharing with me is that he's going to tear down the institution in any way he can.

NOEL: You reported this weekend that a fellow member of the National Guard at one point questioned whether Hegseth has ties to extremism. Why was this accusation made and by whom?

DAN: Yeah, this starts with If we can set it, guess, around the inauguration period of Joe Biden.

SCORING IN – (dorian) And The Moustache Was His Name-02

*<CLIP> BIDEN: on this hallowed ground, where just a few days ago, violence sought to shake the Capitol’s very foundation, we come together as one nation…*

We had January 6th, the attack on the Capitol that had just happened, you know, early in January. And then you had this period where there were tens of thousands of National Guard members who were stationed all over the city, particularly all over the federal part of the city.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x_Y_0vgGwE)*> ABC NEWS: Probably about a third of them will be carrying weapons as we came in today you could see it on the street corners in DC. You've got National Guardsmen with m16s over their shoulder.*

You had guardsmen that were sleeping in the parking garages of the city. They mean they were kind of everywhere at that time. And Hegseth was a member of the DC Guard. The DC Guard was activated more or less in full.

And as that happened, Travis Akers flagged a couple of the tattoos that he had

and that generated an internal report to DC Guard leadership, basically questioning whether the tattoos he had would indicate that he may have been a white nationalist or had some sort of sympathies along those lines.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7ICFNM9EdQ)*> PBD PODCAST:*

*Pete Hegseth: I was supposed to be guarding the inauguration. I had orders like everybody else - remember that half the National Guard was there and I quietly got a phone call from a member of my unit saying your orders are revoked, you don't need to show up.*

SCORING OUT

NOEL: What are those tattoos? Can you explain?

DAN: There's two, and I think the challenge here is there's dual meanings for both of these things. These are things that have been co-opted. One of them is a Jerusalem cross. It's basically a cross with four smaller crosses around it. That's on Hegseth's chest. And then there's a saying, “Deus Vult,” that is on his bicep. And “Deus Vult” means “God wills it.” It goes back to the Crusades. So does the Jerusalem cross in a lot of ways. But they've also been increasingly adopted by the far right. So Hegseth has said repeatedly,

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7ICFNM9EdQ)*> HEGESTH: It's a religious tattoo. It has nothing to do with white nationalism or nationalism or extremism – it's it's a cross you'll see in Jerusalem when you visit. Christianity is near and dear to who I am.*

It's really, you know, there's a number of ways you can interpret this. And I think that's one of the challenges when symbols and locals and mottos get co-opted like this is, you know, there's often a sort of, you know, very visceral reaction to it. But then you got to dig deeper. And I think, you know, we're still going to be looking for more explanation for why would you choose to get that? What were you thinking? Things, things like that.

NOEL: All right. So there's an investigation conducted into Pete Hegseth, and then what happens next? What happens to his standing in the National Guard?

DAN:He he left by choice. And it's like, I don't need to be here. I don't need to deal with this. That sort of vibe to it. He has written basically that that helped motivate him to really scrutinize the military on whether it had become too political.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7ICFNM9EdQ)*> HEGSETH: whether it's woke stuff, social justice stuff, gender stuff, environmental stuff, the obsession with electric tanks, stuff that doesn't make us more lethal, it doesn't point toward meritocracy and poisons the ranks. I saw it firsthand. I joined the army to fight extremists. 20 years later, I was deemed an extremist because of a tattoo I have on my chest.*

He has really gone to some length since then to portray the military as a very partisan organization, an organization that has become too woke, too left wing. And obviously, there are a broad spectrum of people that would disagree with that assessment.

NOEL: So there was another big story this weekend about Pete Hegseth, and it has to do with a woman who claims he paid her off. Can you tell us what happened with this woman, what is alleged to have happened?

DAN:So we're talking 2017. He was out giving a speech of sorts at a hotel in California. He appears to have met this woman in the bar nearby after doing the engagement. The allegation is that they ended up in the room. She alleges sexual assault. He says it was consensual. The police looked into it. They didn't file charges. And then in 2020, Hegseth’s lawyer is now alleging that she approached again. She was seeking on the civil side recompense for this, and Hegseth decided to settle an undisclosed amount, but basically try to make the problem go away.

Apparently, right after the nomination of Hegseth, a report was generated to the transition team going back to this incident. It seems to have caught the transition team by surprise. At the moment, Trump is still standing by Hegseth, but there are at least other people on that transition team that are that are now, I think, running a serious assessment of whether they have a problem here.

NOEL: Okay. So if they do have a problem here, what does that mean? Does it mean he can't get through the Senate? He can't be confirmed?

DAN:I mean, that that I think first and foremost is a question for the senators. I think we're running into a situation where we're not sure what it would take for a Republican-led Senate in the year 2025 to knock down a nominee.

NOEL: All right. Aside from these things that have been dug up, reported on and dug up about Pete Hegseth, there's a bunch that did not have to be dug up because he's a media personality and he talks a lot. What has he said in the past that has kind of sent a shiver through the spines of sort of normie D.C.?

**DAN:** Right before the nomination, he appeared on a podcast called Shawn Ryan Show. It's become very popular, particularly among a lot of veterans. And they were discussing what would it take to sort of fix the, quote unquote, woke military. And he said, well, first of all, I would start by firing the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the Pentagon's top general, CQ Brown. This is somebody that Trump himself selected to run the Air Force.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eT-qUjMLeWQ)*> MSNBC:*

*Pete Hegseth: You gotta fire the chairman of the joint chiefs and you gotta fire this.I mean, obviously you're gonna bring in a new secretary of defense but any general that was involved, General admiral, whatever that was involved in any of the D E I woke BLEEP it's gotta go*

Hegseth's point of view is that he's too woke, has leaned into diversity issues too much, you know, basically is not focused on lethality and other issues that the Pentagon should be concerned with foremost. And basically, they need to reset.

NOEL: Is there any argument for Pete Hegseth as head of the Pentagon? Any argument that you've heard beyond just Donald Trump wants this guy?

DAN:Yeah, I think the argument you hear from people who know Hegseth From people who. Want something different is that Hegseth is a well-spoken individual who has served, does have experiences in these wars on the ground level, who is willing to look at this from a critical point of view, not a sort of institutional “I'm going to be a figurehead at the top.”

NOEL: All right. So you've been on this beat for sixteen years. And so, you know, the type of reaction that usually comes when a president's picks are announced. What do you think about the reactions this time around?

DAN:I mean, I think it's just the idea that these are – these are not serious people. These are not serious nominees in the eyes of the overwhelming institution, the institutions they will lead, the people that work around them, the people that have spent their entire lives focused on this sort of thing. And I think there is a very fair discussion, particularly coming out of 20 years of war in Iraq, Afghanistan and so forth, about whether or not the institutional perspective here often is missing other things. That is a very fair discussion to have.

SCORING in – Uneasy Street (relaxed, sad, beat)-01

But I think that the counter point here, the fear here, is whether or not if the response to that very fair criticism is going to be all right, we need to fire X number of generals. We need to, you know, more or less turn the clock back 20, 30, 50 years where you're like, this is culture war stuff that on one hand will make our point. But on the other hand, actually turns off a significant number of people who may want to serve.

NOEL: Dan Lamothe, The Washington Post. Coming up: what Donald Trump’s picks tell us about his priorities.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: Katherine Kuzminksi is the Deputy Director of Studies and Director of the Military Veterans and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security. Her friends call her CNAS. Katherine we learned in the first half of the show that Donald Trump likes Pete Hegseth in part because he is a veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is VERY critical of those wars which America was in an out of for a generation. What does Donald Trump want when it comes to war?

KATE: So there's a couple of things.

SCORING IN << Ah Nevertheless>>

One is in line with what we see in our current national security strategy that was rolled out during the Biden administration, a strong emphasis on deterrence against China, specifically in terms of a near-peer threat.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8ia1io90d4)*> FOXNEWS:*

*Donald Trump: China doesn’t want me to win, obviously. Because I was kicking China’s ass.*

There's been a lot of rhetoric against the forever wars, so considering the wars in the Middle East, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLpltkmBM1M)*> TRUMP WHITE HOUSE ARCHIVE:*

*Donald Trump: A big part of my campaign: I want to bring our troops back from the endless wars. We have endless wars. They’ve been going on for 19 years in the area.*

And then also not being drawn into large scale conflict, specifically into Russia-Ukraine, which has been a focus on the campaign.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L07fMoafVh4)*> CNN:*

*Donald Trump: I want everybody to stop dying. They’re dying! Russians and Ukrainians I want them to stop dying. <<applause>>*

But also a recognition that there are strong threats coming from, certainly from China, also Iran and North Korea.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygiwNDZ8NJw)*> ABC NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: If we take that option, it will be devastating for North Korea, devastating. That’s called the military option. If we have to take it, we will.*

The focus there is on deterrence, so he essentially wants to build a strong military but not use it.

We saw as he was leaving the administration, in his previous administration, he called for a removal or a moving of troops out of Germany back to the United States.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcMh5aeOJS4)*> DW NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: We’re going to be reducing Germany very substantially down to about 25,000 troops. We actually had about 52,000. Germany’s paying a very small percentage of what they should be paying.*

That didn't actually occur even though he he called for that, because that requires quite a bit of resources from Congress to wholesale move troops internationally and that that plan did not play out, but I do think that we should expect to see that he will be pushing to move troops from overseas stations back to the United States for other missions,

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYQG2Kd9cbA)*> CNN:*

*Donald Trump: Until we can have a wall and proper security, we’re gonna be guarding the border with our military. That’s a big step*.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: Let's talk about Pete Hegseth, Donald Trump's nominee for defense secretary.He says he doesn't think the U.S. should be fighting forever wars like the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan. What do we know about what he might mean for the Department of Defense if he's confirmed?

KATE: There are things that are consistent with any nominee we would expect from President Trump. And then there are things that are specific to potential confirmation of Secretary Hegseth. So on the one hand, we would expect that any secretary of defense who is serving under President Trump, some of the first policies will expect are a rollback of the DOD abortion travel policy that was put in place by the previous administration. Where we saw some of the commentary from from Pete Hegseth moving forward, that might not align with all nominees, are his views on women in combat units and in specific military occupational specialties.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://rumble.com/v5nkthb-pete-hegseth-military-industrial-complex-and-the-war-on-warriors-shawn-ryan.html?e9s=src_v1_ucp)*> SHAWN RYAN SHOW:*

*Pete Hegseth: Because I'm straight up just saying we should not have women in combat roles.*

KATE: In his opinion, women in combat put other troops at risk, put male troops at risk.

*Hegseth: Everything about men and women serving together makes the situation more complicated. And complication in combat means casualties are worse.*

KATE: This has been an area of contention even within the military services since women have been allowed to serve in all combat positions.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEAp65rkTxE)*> AP:*

*Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta: Everyone, everyone – men and women alike – everyone is committed to doing the job. They’re fighting and they’re dying together. And the time has come for our policies to recognize that reality.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URGhMw1u7MM)*> CBS THIS MORNING:*

*USMC Cpl. Janelle Lopez: It’s not that we can’t carry the weight. We can carry the weight. It’s the pace. You’re looking at our size and we have males that almost 6 foot with longer strides, and it's hard to catch up with them and keep up with them*

So one way that Hegseth could move forward on the outcome he is after without banning women from frontline combat units would be to have a single standard for particular units or roles.

NOEL: The Wall Street Journal had a blockbuster story last week. Donald Trump's transition team is crafting an executive order that would establish a ‘warrior board.’ What is this and what would it do?

KATE: The initial warrior board occurred after World War Two, examining the performance of sitting general officers against their jobs.

SCORING IN <<Circular fifths drone>>

There was a belief that they were staying on too long and they weren't opening up positions for junior officers who needed to promote through the ranks, who were bringing a lot of vigor and vitality to the job. This warrior board is something a bit different. It appears to not be focused on performance in the job, but rather partisan loyalty. The reporting indicates that Trump will ask for the resignation of all general officers who were involved in the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2aCpmWha1E)*> CNN:*

*Donald Trump: He should have fired every military man that was involved with that Afghan, the Afghanistan horror show. The most embarrassing moment in the history of our country.*

Holding general officers accountable for operational outcomes is something that has been called upon multiple presidents to do and something we haven't necessarily seen in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But on the flip side, what this executive order also lays out, is essentially loyalty tests for those who are currently in senior general officer positions. Senior military officers serve careers upwards of 40 years across multiple administrations, and you want to see the continuity and that uniform leadership that will carry the nation's security regardless of the partisan issues that happen in transitions between administrations.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: For the for the skeptics in the audience, for the people who voted for Donald Trump because they like the way he operates, what problems could arise if a president is allowed to fire generals because he doesn't think that they're loyal enough to him?

KATE: The biggest challenges for a from a national security perspective is that particularly with your chairman and your Joint Chiefs of Staff, so the leaders – the uniformed leaders – of each of the individual services, their role is to seek out the blind spots that the president might not be seeing. And so if the president prefers to install yes-men into these positions, there's the potential that plans, operational plans, the next national security strategy – that there are are real risks that are not being identified, particularly if the, the perspectives of senior military officers are either disregarded or if the individuals who are appointed to those positions don't feel comfortable sharing bad news.

NOEL: What effect might this move have on the way Americans think about the military and trust the military?

KATE: Yeah, so I think one of the biggest challenges is that for the military and general officers in particular, they are political instruments. They interact with foreign leaders, they interact with the civilians on the National Security Council, they interact with Congress, they interact with the other departments and agencies. But they are not partisan tools. They are not tied to the agendas of a given administration. They don't set policy. They implement policy that is set by the commander in chief.

SCORING IN <<in the basement, pensive>>

One of the biggest challenges is that the way Trump has spoken about general officers over the last 8 or 9 years has referred to them as though they are partisan tools. So the use of the term “my generals” versus, you know, “Biden's woke generals" misunderstands the role of senior military leadership and drives a narrative that general officers are themselves partisan actors.

NOEL: Kate Kuzminski, Center for a New American Security. Peter Balonon Rosen and Victoria Chamberlin produced today’s show. Miranda Kennedy edited. Grant Chamberlin turned 4. Happy birthday to him. Patrick Boyd and Mr. Rob engineered. Laura Bullard checked the facts! I’m NOEL: King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**