

The CIA Democrats in the 2024 elections

Patrick Martin
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There are 34 Democrats drawn from the ranks of the military-intelligence apparatus who are running for Congress this year, a continuation of the influx that began in force in 2018. For the fourth consecutive election, the CIA Democrats will grow in influence and numbers, further cementing the ties between this big business party and the most lethal agencies of the capitalist state.

The continued influx of military-intelligence Democrats is an essential component of making America “ready for war,” in the language favored by imperialist strategists. It entirely dwarfs the entry of a handful of members of the Democratic Socialists of America and other fake lefts, constituting the heavily publicized “Squad” led by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Indeed, the two processes are moving in opposite directions. While the number of CIA Democrats is steadily increasing, and already dwarfs the “Squad,” two members of the supposed “left” have been purged this year, with Jamaal Bowman of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri both defeated in Democratic primaries because of their tepid criticisms of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

As for Ocasio-Cortez, she has long since dropped any hint of radicalism on US foreign policy, denouncing demonstrations against the Gaza bloodbath as “antisemitic” and voting for massive military aid to both Ukraine and Israel.

Besides the numerical increase, the influx of CIA Democrats is escalating qualitatively. Two of the original class of CIA Democrats who won seats in the House of Representatives in 2018 are now seeking to move up to the Senate. Former CIA agent and Pentagon official Elissa Slotkin is giving up her Michigan House seat to run for the Senate seat left vacant by the retirement of three-term Senator Debbie Stabenow. Former National Security Council official turned congressman Andy Kim is running in New Jersey to replace incumbent Democratic Senator Bob Menendez, who was convicted on corruption charges and resigned. Both are favored to win.

Two other military-intelligence Democrats are seeking statewide office. Jeff Jackson of North Carolina, elected in 2022, is running for state attorney general after he was gerrymandered out of his seat by the Republican-controlled state legislature. He currently has a lead in the polls against his Republican opponent.

In Virginia, former CIA agent Abigail Spanberger is not seeking reelection to her House seat, announcing plans instead to run for governor of Virginia next year, when Republican Glenn Youngkin leaves after the single term he is allowed under the state constitution. Spanberger is the heavy favorite to win the Democratic nomination.

Spanberger’s replacement in the House is likely to be the most prominent new military-intelligence Democrat: Eugene Vindman, a career military officer born in Ukraine.

Vindman and his twin brother Alexander, also a serving military officer, were detailed by the Pentagon to the National Security Council during the Trump administration, where they had key responsibilities for US policy towards Russia and Ukraine. The Vindman brothers played a central role in the first effort by the Democrats to impeach Trump in 2019.

The Democrats impeached Trump over his holding up military aid to

Ukraine in an effort to force President Volodymyr Zelensky to dig up political dirt on his future opponent, Democrat Joe Biden, and Biden’s son Hunter, who enjoyed a lucrative position on the board of a Ukrainian energy company.

Besides Eugene Vindman, another high-profile military-intelligence operative is seeking a House seat as a Democrat: Maggie Goodlander, the wife of National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and herself a veteran of the national-security state, won the Democratic nomination September 10 for the 2nd Congressional District of New Hampshire.

As her campaign website declares, “She began her career working as a foreign policy advisor in the United States Senate ...” The senators she advised included warhawks like Democrat Joe Lieberman and Republican John McCain. After that, “She went on to serve as an intelligence officer in the United States Navy Reserve for over a decade.”

Goodlander married Sullivan in 2015, at a ceremony attended by Bill and Hillary Clinton, Antony Blinken, now US Secretary of State, and then Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. Her husband was the chief foreign policy adviser in Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign. Five years later, both Sullivan and Goodlander were picked for high positions in the Biden administration, Sullivan at the White House, Goodlander as counsel to Attorney General Merrick Garland, then as a deputy assistant attorney general.

While Vindman and Goodlander stand out, there are a total of 23 new military-intelligence candidates seeking House seats as Democrats, nearly all of them coming directly from the national-security apparatus to electoral politics. We will examine them in detail shortly.

But first, there are nine military-intelligence Democrats running for reelection to their House seats. They include Jared Golden of Maine, Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey, Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania and Jason Crow of Colorado, all first elected in 2018. Two more, Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts and Sara Jacobs of California, were elected in 2020, and three in 2022: Pat Ryan of New York, Chris Deluzio of Pennsylvania, and Dan Davis of North Carolina.

Seven of these nine are prohibitive favorites for reelection, while Golden and Davis are in competitive races. Of the 23 new candidates, at least nine are either favored to win or in competitive races, meaning that the military-intelligence “caucus” among the House Democrats is expected to grow.

The total of 32 Democrats seeking House seats on the basis of their military-intelligence credentials continues at the scale of the previous three elections. In 2018, 30 CIA Democrats ran in the general election, and 11 won Republican seats, one-quarter of the total 40-seat gain for the Democrats. In 2020, there were 35 CIA Democrats on the November ballot, including 11 running for reelection. Their number rose to 12, despite the Democrats losing seats overall. In 2022, there were 34 CIA Democrats on the ballot, again with 11 seeking reelection. There was a net gain of two, bringing the total up to 13.

These numbers demonstrate that the influx of State Department, National Security Council, Pentagon and CIA operatives into Congress, by means of the Democratic Party, is not an accidental phenomenon, or the product of one election cycle. It is the outcome of a definite policy,

which has two components. First, the Democratic Party leadership is deliberately cultivating military-intelligence candidates and creating opportunities for them to run in Democratic-leaning congressional districts where they are likely to be elected. Second, sizeable sections of the national security apparatus see the Democratic Party as their preferred vehicle for advancing the interests of American imperialism, to which they have devoted their own careers.

As in previous WSWS analyses, we rely on the accounts of their careers provided by the candidates themselves on their campaign websites. There is not the slightest reluctance on the part of these Democratic candidates to reveal their connections to the military-intelligence apparatus. They regard this as a top qualification for office, something to boast about, not to be discreet, let alone ashamed.

The nine new CIA Democrats running in competitive races, either favored to win or being heavily backed by the party and the financial interests behind it, include Goodlander and Vindman, favored to win the 2nd District of New Hampshire and the 7th District of Virginia, respectively. There are seven more who could well win seats if the Democratic Party sustains its current position in pre-election polling.

Ashley Ehasz is running in the 1st Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which comprises the Bucks County suburbs of Philadelphia. This is her second race against incumbent Republican Brian Fitzpatrick, a four-term congressman and former FBI agent. She lost in 2022 by a margin of 55-45 percent, about 35,000 votes.

Ehasz declares on her campaign website, “If elected, I would be the first woman serving in Congress to have graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.” She trained to become a pilot of an Apache attack helicopter, and was the only woman in her class. She has deployed to Kuwait, Iraq and South Korea, rising to command two aviation units of the 6th Cavalry Regiment.

Missy Cotter Smasal, a former naval officer, is challenging incumbent Republican Jennifer Kiggans in Virginia’s 2nd Congressional District, which includes most of the Norfolk-Hampton Roads area, headquarters of the US Navy’s Atlantic Fleet.

The seat was held for two terms by Democrat Elaine Luria, another naval officer and a member of the House Select Committee on the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Luria was defeated for reelection by Kiggans in 2022.

Smasal was a Surface Warfare Officer in the U.S. Navy and deploying aboard the U.S.S. Trenton during Operation Enduring Freedom (the “war on terror” and the war in Afghanistan).

Michael Kripchak is running in Ohio’s 6th Congressional District, which includes the southeastern, Appalachian portion of the state along the Ohio River. His district was not thought to be competitive, but he ran well in the June special election to replace Republican Bill Johnson, who resigned to take a more lucrative position as president of Youngstown State University. Kripchak lost to Republican state senator Michael Rulli by only 55-45, despite spending only \$7,000. Since that vote, there has been an influx of funding and Democratic Party support for Kripchak for his general election rematch with Rulli.

Kripchak was a research science and acquisition officer in the Air Force, after graduating in 2004 with a degree in physics. “Apart from Classified programs and other duties, I worked in the Air Force’s quantum computing initiatives where I designed real-time visualizations for the research and development of advanced weapon systems,” he writes on his campaign site. “I oversaw the transition of several advanced capabilities to our men and women deployed overseas fighting the War on Terror.”

Lanon Baccam is the Democratic candidate in Iowa’s 3rd Congressional District, currently held by Republican Zach Nunn, who narrowly defeated Democratic incumbent Cindy Axne in 2022, in one of the closest contests of that year.

The child of Laotian immigrants who arrived in Iowa in 1980, Baccam

enlisted in the Iowa National Guard at the age of 17 and according to his website, “was deployed to Afghanistan in 2004 as a combat engineer, focusing on explosive demolitions and force protection in and around Kandahar.” He has since been a veterans’ advocate in the US Department of Agriculture.

Phil Ehr, a career Navy aviator and officer, is the Democratic candidate in Florida’s 28th Congressional District. Ehr ran twice for Congress previously in the heavily Republican 1st Congressional District in the Florida panhandle, where he lost to Republican fascist Matt Gaetz. He has moved to south Florida where he has been parachuted into the race for a competitive seat held for two years by Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell and then captured by Republican Carlos Gimenez in 2020.

Ehr’s own website makes it clear that he has spent his entire adult life in the service of American imperialism, which he describes as “a full career in the Navy and beyond—often in harm’s way—fighting communists, fascists and terrorists.” His campaign biography continues: “Flew classified electronic reconnaissance missions in the Cold War and combat support in Desert Storm. Provided space technology support to federal agencies and strategic advice to senior leaders in Washington, London, and NATO.”

His biography directly links his first naval mission, “the Mariel Boatlift in the Florida Strait rescuing men, women and children who risked their lives escaping brutality in Cuba,” to his carrying out of “dozens of humanitarian aid delivery missions in Ukraine for people who—like the Cuban exiles he saw four decades earlier—risked it all for freedom.”

Greg Whitten is the Democratic nominee in Arizona’s 8th Congressional District for the competitive Phoenix-area seat vacated by the retirement of Republican Debbie Lesko. Media coverage of this race has been dominated by the primary contest on the Republican side, in which Abe Hamadeh, the defeated Republican nominee for state attorney general in 2022, outpolled Blake Masters, the defeated Republican nominee for US Senate the same year. Hamadeh was backed by Trump, Masters by billionaire Peter Thiel, his former boss. Both the Republicans are ardent election deniers, claiming Trump won the 2020 election in Arizona (where he lost narrowly to Joe Biden) and nationally.

Whitten’s own biography is reactionary, even sinister. His campaign boasts of a more than 15-year career as a bioweapons expert, including six years at the Pentagon, where “Greg served as the Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs.”

This included working with the White House on the role of the Pentagon and the Veterans Administration in the establishment of data systems used in Obamacare, and otherwise monitoring data collection to detect the outbreak of diseases like Ebola, which could be the byproduct of biowarfare efforts either of the US itself or potential adversaries.

His biography continues: “After his service at the Pentagon, Greg has continued to work in national security, healthcare, and pandemic preparedness,” including positions as Director of Strategy and Plans for Defense Healthcare Management Systems, and Deputy Director for Strategic Relations, International and Interagency.

Perhaps the most ominous aspect of this bureaucratic career was working with giant US corporations on the Pentagon’s plans for biological warfare. His website describes him as the “Director of all government industry relations for the office of the Assistant Secretary for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Program, to include organizations and companies such as Google, the X Prize Foundation and Palantir.”

In this capacity, Whitten led “the first Public Private Partnership Working Group for the Office of the Secretary of Defense to develop the first strategic guidance plan to engage public, private, and nonprofit actors for combating weapons of mass destruction.” He also led “high-level bilateral negotiations pertaining to Chemical and Biological Defense and

technology development with the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Korea, France and Germany.”

Jessica Morse is another repeat candidate for the CIA Democrats, after losing a race in 2018 in the 4th Congressional District of California against incumbent Republican Tom McClintock. After redistricting, she is challenging one-term Republican Kevin Kiley in the 3rd Congressional District of California. Since her defeat six years ago, Morse has been working in a management position in the Democratic-controlled state government. Her new district is considered competitive, with Kiley winning his seat 54-46 percent in 2022.

In 2018, the WSWS described Morse as follows:

Jessica Morse was Iraq country coordinator for the State Department in the course of “over a decade as a national security strategist,” according to her website. She worked for the US Agency for International Development, a longtime CIA front, then as adviser to the US Pacific Command, where she “strengthened the US-India defense relationship ... and worked to counter terrorist threats in South Asia.”

The remaining 14 Democratic House candidates with a military-intelligence background are considered heavy underdogs in their races, although, as the example of Philip Ehr shows, such a contest can be a precursor to being given a more favorable race later.

Nonetheless, the backgrounds of many of these candidates and their declarations of why they are running as Democrats are worth taking note of, demonstrating the ongoing and dramatic shift to the right in this capitalist party.

Blane Miller III is running in the 1st Congressional District of Maryland, based on the rural Eastern Shore, against seven-term Republican Andy Harris. After an eight-year Navy career specializing in aviation and underwater combat, according to his website, Miller “took the knowledge that the military taught and instilled in him and started working as a high-speed photographer and deep-water technical diver supporting the war-fighter in the testing and evaluating of military equipment for a larger military contractor on APG (Aberdeen Proving Grounds).”

Ken Mitchell is running in the 6th Congressional District of Virginia, based in the heavily Republican Shenandoah Valley, against three-term incumbent Ben Cline. He is a retired career Army officer, and according to his website, “His last six years of active duty, he served in the White House in an apolitical role, supporting two Presidents of different political parties.”

Steven Wendelin is the Democratic candidate for the 2nd Congressional District of West Virginia, comprising the southern half of the impoverished, mountainous state, running against three-term incumbent Carol Miller. He enlisted in the Navy at age 18 and his naval career included, according to his website, “combat deployment in Iraq as a telecommunications and information systems officer to the Coalition Provisional Authority,” and “two combat deployments in Afghanistan where he served as a senior military advisor to both Afghan civilian and military authorities.”

Chris Dziados is running in the 14th Congressional District of Pennsylvania against three-term incumbent Guy Reschenthaler. The district covers the southwestern corner of the state, once a stronghold of mining and steel-making, now largely devastated economically. Dziados went to college on an ROTC scholarship and was commissioned as an Army officer after graduation.

According to his campaign website, Dziados “deployed to Balad, Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, where his unit provided regional security

for the main logistics base in Iraq. Chris deployed to Iraq a second time in November 2005, where he trained Iraqi Army forces for national defense.”

Going on to specialize in military space systems, Dziados then “supported the development of the U.S. Space Force and co-led the team responsible for establishing the United States Space Command, enabling the consolidation of all U.S. military space operations into one organization. In his final assignment, Chris worked with the U.S. Space Force to develop strategy and plans for the new military service.”

Deborah Pickett is the Democratic candidate in the 5th Congressional District of Indiana, which has been effectively ceded to incumbent Republican Victoria Spartz, the only Ukrainian-American in Congress. In 2020, Spartz retained her seat narrowly, but soon afterwards the Republican-controlled state legislature redrew the district lines to exclude the Indianapolis metropolitan area, and Spartz won reelection in 2022 without serious opposition. Pickett is a career Army non-commissioned officer, specializing in behavioral science and later an intelligence analyst, before working at the Hudson Institute, a top national-security thinktank.

Trygve Hammer is the Democratic candidate for North Dakota’s at-large seat in Congress, facing Republican state public service commissioner Julie Fedorchak. The seat is being vacated by three-term Representative Kelly Armstrong, who is the Republican candidate for governor. A graduate of the Naval Academy and career Marine officer, Hammer was a helicopter pilot, forward air controller, embassy military attaché, and deployed to Iraq in 2003 as a Marine infantry officer. Retiring after 20 years in the military, he worked as an airline pilot, a defense contractor, and a security consultant.

Justin Dues is the Democratic candidate in the 8th District of North Carolina, which includes the rural and small-town region stretching from Charlotte to Fayetteville, site of a huge US military base. He faces Republican Mark Harris, a fundamentalist preacher, for the seat previously held by Representative Dan Bishop, now the Republican candidate for state attorney general. Dues enlisted in the Marines in 2003 and left after 10 years, citing, among other things “rampant fraud and abuse” in both the Pentagon and the defense contractors, while continuing to take “great pride ... in my service.”

Maura Keller, Democratic candidate in the 3rd Congressional District of Georgia, is a retired career military police officer. She rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and then “transitioned to a role that supported the readiness of our forces as a Senior Readiness Analyst...” She is challenging Republican Brian Jack in the west Georgia district long held by Republican Drew Ferguson, who is retiring.

Shawn Harris, a retired Army brigadier general, is perhaps the most high-profile of the long-shot Democratic candidates. He continues the pattern of the Democrats running high-ranking retired military officers against incumbent fascist Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene in the 14th Congressional District of Georgia, the state’s northwestern corner.

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. He writes of his decision to run: “When people first suggested I should run a campaign to unseat Marjorie Taylor Greene, it sounded a little crazy to us. But if my combat experience taught me anything, it’s that the way to make clear decisions is to make them free of fear.”

As the above image shows, taken from his campaign Facebook page, 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.

Jay McGovern is also following a well-worn path, as a retired Navy aviator running against an entrenched Republican, John Rutherford, in the

5th Congressional District of Florida, based in Jacksonville. The disparity in resources is typical of many such races: on July 31, Rutherford reported \$475,817 cash on hand, McGovern reported \$1,601. McGovern graduated from the Naval Academy, trained as a naval aviator, and flew helicopters from aircraft carriers for three decades.

Marcus Jones is a retired Army colonel who is campaigning to provide “Battle-Tested Leadership for Arkansas,” according to his website. He is running against five-term incumbent French Hill in the 2nd Congressional District, based in Little Rock. Hill has raised more than \$2.2 million for the contest, and has 40 times the cash on hand of his Democratic opponent. In his 30-year career, Jones was responsible for leading “hundreds of soldiers during multiple deployments to Iraq and Kuwait and coordinating secret and top-secret missions to eliminate extremist terrorist groups...” He also held command artillery positions with US forces in South Korea and Norway (NATO) and was a senior adviser to the Arkansas National Guard during 11 deployments.

Ernest Lineberger is a naval nuclear power officer now running as the Democratic candidate in the 26th Congressional District of Texas, long held by Republican Michael Burgess, who is retiring. Lineberger spent 27 years as an executive with Texas Instruments, but gives his previous military career top billing in his campaign biography, and has never run for office before. His Republican opponent, Brian Gill, has raised 40 times as much money and spent most of it in winning the primary election, considered the real contest in this Dallas-area district once held by former Republican Majority Leader Richard Armey.

Dennis Baker is a career FBI agent running as the Democratic candidate in Tulsa, Oklahoma’s 1st Congressional District, against three-term incumbent Kevin Hern. After several years at the Tulsa Police Department, Baker trained to be an FBI special agent, becoming a firearms expert and SWAT team member at the Atlanta Olympic Games. He moved on to the Counterterrorism Division on the unit tasked with finding Osama bin Laden, then on up the chain, retiring as FBI Special Agent in Charge in St. Louis, and the highest-ranking Native American official at the FBI. One of his main campaign themes is that the American people should not regard the FBI as the enemy.

Carmela Conroy is the Democratic candidate in the 5th Congressional District of Washington state, long held by retiring Republican Cathy McMorris Rodgers. Conroy is a retired career Foreign Service officer, who went to law school, became a local prosecutor in Spokane, then went on to a career in which she “has built connections with veterans, active-duty military personnel, and professionals in national security.”

Her campaign website gives no further account, but there are other published reports that detail her State Department activities, including in New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Japan, including Okinawa, site of the huge US military base. She held high-level positions in Washington coordinating the US response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Burma, and at the State Department’s Operations Center after the 9/11 attacks. In 2011, she received the Agency Seal Award from the CIA for her performance in interagency collaboration.

The rise of the military-intelligence candidates in the Democratic Party shows the false and cynical character of the claims by “left” politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and their apologists in the Democratic Socialists of America, that the Democratic Party can be reformed and turned into an instrument for social justice and peace.

Asked by a WSWS reporter in 2018 how she could square her ostensibly “anti-war” politics with so many running mates from the CIA and Pentagon, Ocasio-Cortez replied that she did not believe “a person’s life experience in one way or another necessarily precludes them from running for office.” Even if that “experience” included direct involvement in or apologetics for war crimes of the worst description.

As we noted at the time, a conclusion that holds with even greater force today, “There is nothing socialist about a campaign that is waged shoulder-

to-shoulder with CIA agents, war planners and military commanders—and with multimillionaire capitalist politicians like Nancy Pelosi and Debbie Dingell.”

To that we can only add that support for the Democratic Party in 2024 includes embracing the crimes that have been committed under the administration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, from the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, and the even greater crimes being prepared by American imperialism in wars against Russia, Iran and China.



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