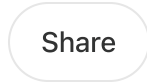
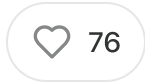


# Trump's New Team Is a Gift to America's Enemies

Their incompetence will weaken the United States. Their instability will leave them vulnerable to being compromised.



A.B. STODDARD  
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Tulsi Gabbard (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

ON SUNDAY, WHEN A GOP SENATOR was asked whether Pete Hegseth's excessive drinking could imperil his ability to serve as secretary of defense the senator responded that members of Congress and people in the news media drink a lot too. He **encouraged** the media to “move on” from such questions.

A fellow Republican senator who had concerns about allegations of sexual assault facing Hegseth is now the **target** of an online mob demanding she consent to giving him one of the most important jobs on the planet.

The Heritage Foundation is going to spend **\$1 million** to pressure Republican senators to approve Hegseth's nomination. Trump ally Mike Davis, a former GOP Senate aide who is helping lead the online assault, told Playbook he will **hire** private detectives to investigate the past of any Republican senator who opposes Hegseth's nomination.

This pressure campaign has materialized because Hegseth is both unqualified and unfit to lead the Pentagon. He is a blackmail magnet—a reckless man controlled by urges, from adultery to alcohol. And Donald Trump wants him anyway.

The choice of Hegseth, and the fight to force him on the Senate, epitomizes how the next Trump presidency will differ from the first. No longer are there even passing nods to substance or credentials in the battle for raw power.

Affairs. Addiction. Secrets. Conspiracies. Compulsions. From Trump's point of view, a cabinet composed of people with such baggage is a cabinet that will remain loyal to him.

But from the point of view of America's enemies, this is like Christmas morning. Nominees with personal troubles and scandals are nominees who can be compromised. America's enemies knew that another Trump term would feature additional foreign financial conflicts for the Trump family, more **nepotism**, and an explosion of grifting as the president-elect and many of his allies hawk merch from **perfume** to **pills**. They knew Trump didn't release his tax returns the first time he was president, nor meaningfully divest from his business interests, so he certainly won't do so now.

But the team that Trump is assembling represents capitulation.

No matter how MAGA markets them, these nominees are not "outsiders" who are going to disrupt the status quo, they are people who are ill suited to their posts and whose priorities threaten our security, our values, and what is left of our national unity.

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Hegseth is a handsome, decorated combat veteran who has neither the experience nor the temperament to steer a vast bureaucracy of three million people and an

annual budget of \$800 billion, develop military strategy, lead the armed forces, and manage crises.

The 44-year-old's career has been marked by allegations of sexual misconduct, financial mismanagement, and intoxication. He reportedly bought the silence of a woman who alleged he raped her—though police did not charge him. He has a dizzying history of infidelity, divorces, and out-of-wedlock children.

His lack of character and abusive behavior toward women prompted his own **mother** to berate him in unsparing terms in an email she later disavowed.

Putting Hegseth in such a consequential job, replete with stressors that could trigger more urges and reckless behavior and endanger our national security, is self-sabotage.

Yet after a week of silence amid shocking new revelations, Trump backed Hegseth with an emphatic Friday **post** on Truth Social in which he noted Hegseth's Ivy League degrees and his "Military state of mind," and declared "Pete is a WINNER, and there is nothing that can be done to change that!!!"

What makes Hegseth a "WINNER" to Trump is his defiance; he was pleased to see Hegseth "fighting like hell," according to Marc Caputo's **reporting**. With his mom pleading on *Fox & Friends* for her son's confirmation and calling senators on his

behalf, Hegseth's mess serves to distract from the other toxic nominations pending before the Senate, as Caputo wrote. "Hegseth is a heatshield," a senior Trump adviser told Caputo.

So while the world ponders a compulsive, undisciplined Hegseth as the secretary of defense, Trump is hoping his other choices sail on by.

His choice of Matthew Whitaker—a lawyer with no foreign policy experience—as NATO ambassador was a swift kick in the teeth to our allies and will make it through.

More problematic, but just as pleasing to Vladimir Putin, is the selection of former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard to be the director of national intelligence. A Russian talk show host **called** her "our girlfriend" in 2022.

Gabbard's habit of spreading Russian propaganda and her warmth toward authoritarians, like now-deposed Bashar al-Assad, has caused grave concern among experts that she cannot be trusted to lead our intelligence agencies. Former officials from both Republican and Democratic administrations have urged Senate leaders to conduct closed-door hearings to review the government's files on her, according to the Associated Press. The nearly one hundred "alarmed" officials **wrote** that her record calls "into question her ability to deliver unbiased

intelligence briefings to the President, Congress, and to the entire national security apparatus.”

Meanwhile, Kash Patel is so alarming a choice for FBI director that Trump's own advisers **warned** him against it. Patel has been called untrustworthy and seems to have told at least one lie that could have **killed** people. He also thinks QAnon is **fine**.

Russian media **rejoiced** that the choices of Gabbard and Patel “will dismantle America brick by brick.”

And then there is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has been invited to “go wild” at the Department of Health and Human Services. RFK Jr. is an erratic egomaniac with his own history of addiction, bizarre behavior, and sexual compulsions. His second wife found his journal of sexcapades with dozens of women, each given a satisfaction rating, some time before she took her own life.

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The prospect of Kennedy having oversight of the FDA, the CDC, and the NIH is frightening. In that perch he will indulge his conspiracy theories and deploy

controversy for the attention he craves. He will widen already deep divisions over medicine and science in this country while kneecapping our ability to respond to crises or invest in future cures. Kennedy's tenure is likely to inject far more distrust and paranoia in our raging culture war than a healthy understanding of processed food into the culture.

As Mona Charen **wrote**, “to the degree that Trump knows Kennedy is a kook and nominated him as part of a larger project to destroy trust in everything, it's depraved.”

And to Trump, Kennedy is critical. It turns out he and Gabbard are priority picks for Trump, purely for political purposes.

Caputo **reports** that Trump would “go to war” for those two nominees because they are seen, according to quotes from Roger Stone, as part of a historical political realignment that has helped expand the MAGA coalition beyond Republicans. “The two are considered Blue MAGA rock stars among the Trump faithful,” Caputo writes. “They're both loved by the new influential podcasters whom Trump courted this election and give Trump the chance to burnish his anti-establishment bona fides.”

Even if Hegseth's nomination were to fail, and that seems increasingly unlikely, the slew of people Trump has elevated to power for his second term has sent an



unmistakable message to our allies and adversaries.

Competence, experience, and integrity are no longer requirements for positions of the highest authority and responsibility in the U.S. government.

Trump's nominees are a threat to our national security and the rule of law. They will weaken, isolate, and divide us.

Putin couldn't have asked for more.



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