

“THE ANSWER IS ZERO:” WHEN FRAGILE WHITE SUPREMACISTS DISCOVER ... THEY AREN’T

There’s a line in Kerry Howley’s entertaining profile of Whiskey Pete Hegseth’s incompetence that, along with the URL title – “Could these be Pete Hegseth’s last days in the Pentagon?” – made me wonder whether she and her editors rushed to publish it in fear that it was about to be Overtaken By Events.

To illustrate her best quote, describing that Whiskey Pete is only *playing* at Defense Secretary, Howley used the (apparently paraphrased) hypothetical crisis, Israel bombing Iran, to explain what nearly led a longtime Pentagon employee to cry when contemplating how poorly Whiskey Pete’s Pentagon would function.

“Pete is playing secretary,” a source says. “He’s not being secretary.” In crisis – an unplanned evacuation, Israel bombing Iran, China moving on Taiwan – there will be no one with experience to lead. “For any sustained operations, we’re screwed. There’s nobody in the SecDef’s office at this point that has any ... they’re not heavyweights. They don’t have the sophistication. They don’t have the experience.” One source described a longtime Pentagon employee discussing the lack of readiness in the office, “close to tears,” saying “the department is so fucked.”

Having spent months crafting a great story about Trump’s woefully incompetent Defense Secretary (though before she had gotten the full story; for example, she didn’t describe the suspected role of DOGE implant Justin Fulcher in

fabricating a claim about NSA intercepts), she published it before it became irrelevant.

And here we are, Israel is bombing Iran and Iran is returning fire, and there are probably people crying at the Pentagon and they're not alone.

Israel's attack on Iran is not even the biggest risk of having someone as unhinged as Whiskey Pete in charge: the Los Angeles invasion is.

Indeed, over the course of a long week of disastrous Congressional appearances for Whiskey Pete, it became fairly clear he knows fuckall about the invasion of California he has personally authorized. And that is dangerous – inconceivably dangerous – not least because Whiskey Pete also spent the week facing his own inadequacy.

As things (and not just Whiskey Pete's things) begin to spiral out of control, it's time we talk about the problems created when people who believe they – a Christian white man with an addiction problem – are supreme, face the kind of public humiliation that destroys the core of their identity.

Whiskey Pete knows fuckall about the Los Angeles deployment

Let's start with the risk.

Friday, Reuters reported on the first known temporary detention carried out by Marines deployed to Los Angeles. As the shocking video portrays, there were at one point at least *five heavily-armed men* engaged in detaining Army veteran Marcus Leao.

Leao, who is brown-skinned, was a veteran on his way to the VA office.

Speaking to reporters after he was released, the civilian identified himself as Marcos Leao, 27. Leao said he

was an Army veteran on his way to an office of the Department of Veterans Affairs when he crossed a yellow tape boundary and was asked to stop.

Leao, who gained his U.S. citizenship through military service, said he was treated "very fairly."

"They're just doing their job," said Leao, who is of Angolan and Portuguese descent.

[snip]

The troops are authorized to detain people who pose a threat to federal personnel or property, but only until police can arrest them. Military officials are not allowed to carry out arrests themselves.

There's no hint of what probable cause they had to detain him, at all.

He was going to the VA office.

Imagine what's going to happen when the target is actually doing something that an itchy trigger might view as a real threat?

Meanwhile, the Secretary of Defense has repeatedly confessed he doesn't know what is going on with the deployment.

On June 9, for example, the Secretary of Defense claimed the deployed Marines were coming from Camp Pendleton.



Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth  
@SecDef



Due to increased threats to federal law enforcement officers and federal buildings, approximately 700 active-duty U.S. Marines from Camp Pendleton are being deployed to Los Angeles to restore order.

We have an obligation to defend federal law enforcement officers - even if Gavin Newsom will not.

11:24 PM · Jun 9, 2025 · 7.6M Views

There was, to be fair, some as yet unexplained uncertainty whence DOD was deploying 700

Marines, from Pendleton or Twentynine Palms. But within hours of this tweet, the Marines were deploying from the latter base, not the former (where protests against the deployment had already been staged, which is on the edge of San Diego's suburbs). The Secretary of Defense's tweet, posted hours before the deployment, ended up being inexplicably wrong.

The next day, Whiskey Pete appeared before the first of three appropriations hearings this week. Pete Aguilar asked some basic questions: Why were the Guard sent without housing or food? How much will it cost? Where is the money coming from?

Each time, Whiskey Pete answered with bluster rather than facts (the Acting Comptroller, Bryn MacDonnell, did an exceptional job all week, and in in this case revealed the deployment would cost \$134 million, mostly TDY costs, which would be paid out of contingency funds).

Then Aguilar asked Hegseth what the legal justification was. Hegseth again blustered.

Aguilar pointed to the statute: 10 USC 12406 – the statute cited in Trump's Executive Order mandating the deployment, and asked which of the three justifications was triggered.

The Secretary of Defense said he didn't know.

I don't know. You just read it yourself. And people can listen themselves. But it sounds like all three to me. If you've got millions of illegals and you don't know where they're coming from, they're waving flags from foreign countries and assaulting police officers, that's a problem. The government of California is unable to execute the laws of the United States. The Governor of the [sic] California has failed to protect his people along with the Mayor of Los Angeles and so President Trump has said he will protect our agents and our Guard and Marines are proud to do it.

This was the statute Hegseth had *already* relied on in the two memos he issued to deploy the Guard – the first dated June 7, the second dated June 9.

And yet days after deploying the Guard, Hegseth confessed that he had no fucking idea which of those three clauses justified the deployment.

Fully 15 pages of Judge Charles Breyer's opinion enjoining the use of the National Guard addresses this issue and Breyer even scolds DOJ for attempting to retcon their justification, precisely what Hegseth himself tried to do in the hearing.

It is concerning, to say the least, to imagine that the federal executive could unilaterally exercise military force in a domestic context and then be allowed to backfill justifications for doing so, especially considering how wary courts are of after-the-fact justifications even where the stakes are lower.

Hegseth had relied on the law, without any sense of how or why (he claimed) it applied, just as Breyer found DOJ itself had done.

Hegseth had another Appropriations hearing on Wednesday, this time before the Senate. In response to a question from Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Jack Reed whether the troops would use drones and detain Americans, Hegseth refused to answer.

Since then, the military has indeed deployed drones and (as noted) detained at least one American citizen. Reed was correct: The answer Hegseth refused to give was, yes.

Hegseth also stated that both the Guard and the Marines were on the streets.

Only, the Marines weren't, yet. They hadn't finished the scant training they were being given.

Some of these gaffes – announcing the wrong base whence Marines would deploy, claiming they were deployed when they weren't, yet – may represent confusion or DOD changing its mind, which is interesting enough, given the artificial claim of an emergency. But Hegseth disclaimed even *knowing* the legal basis on which he had deployed 4,700 service members.

Whiskey Pete's humiliation snowballs

Meanwhile, even as Hegseth is presiding over an invasion of a blue city, even as Howley's profile was in the works, even as DOD's Inspector General finalizes a report expected to rebut Hegseth's claim that he didn't share classified information on a Signal chat, on the third day of testimony (the Appropriations hearing with Aguilar was Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations hearing with Reed was Wednesday, he had a hearing before the full House Armed Services Committee on Thursday), things got worse.

Here, Democrats, and several Republicans, were far less interested in appropriations; they were teeing up on Hegseth's manifest incompetence.

Three key exchanges went straight to Hegseth's incompetence.

Early in the hearing, as many others did and would, Seth Moulton hammered Hegseth on his Signal scandal. As many others did and would, Moulton asked Hegseth to take some accountability for his actions.

But when Hegseth answered (as he did elsewhere) that it didn't matter if he shared classified information in a Signal chat, that it didn't matter *because* the operation itself was successful, Moulton mocked that claim.

Moulton: You talked about the success of the Houthi operation. About how much did it cost? How much money did you spend on

missiles, shooting at the Houthis?

Hegseth: Well, you'd have to compare that with what it cost –

Moulton: I'm just asking how much did it cost?

Hegseth: – to divert our shipping lanes.

Moulton: I'm told it's several hundred million dollars, maybe close to a billion dollars. How many US-flagged commercial ships have transitted the Red Sea since your so-called successful operation?

Hegseth: Well, thankfully, unlike the previous Admin –

Moulton: The answer is zero.

Hegseth: Military vessels transitt–

Moulton: No I didn't ask you about military vessels.

Hegseth: Which would be the precursor for –

Moulton: How many commercial vessels? It has been several weeks. How many commercial vessels, US-flagged, have transitted –

Hegseth: Well, would you, Mr. Congressman, put civilian ships–

Moulton: The questions are not to me, Mr. Secretary, they're to you. The answer is zero.

“The answer is zero.” Hegseth tried to cover up the utter pointlessness of the failed operation kicked off on that Signal chat with boasts that two military vessels had sailed through the Red Sea unscathed. But zero US commercial vehicles have, the very opportunity cost Hegseth had tried to use to dismiss the cost of the operation. That's what success looks like for a

guy like Pete Hegseth.

About halfway through the hearing, it was Mikie Sherrill's turn, fresh off her win in the NJ gubernatorial primary. She started by observing how Hegseth had been using Fox News tactics to try to cover up his incompetence.

Mr. Secretary, your testimony over the last several days before Congress – I've heard you speak about all your supposed accomplishments from your time at the Pentagon. I have to say, your training at Fox News has let you spin months of dangerous dysfunction and incompetence into catchy phrases, like "restoring the warrior ethos" and "increasing lethality," but the truth is it's really been chaos at the Pentagon under your leadership. You've clearly shown you're unable to manage the Department of Defense but what I'm most concerned about are three specific areas: Your operational incompetence, your managerial incompetence, and your budgetary incompetence.

She then walked through individual incidents substantiating those three kinds of incompetence:

- **Operational:** How Hegseth mistakenly believed Trump wanted to cut off all aid to Ukraine. Hegseth said it was a fake news headline, a Fox News tactic.
- **Managerial:** Why Hegseth fired CJCS CQ Brown and the Chief of Naval Operations Lisa Franchetti without cause – Sherrill said it seemed like it was because

Brown is Black and Franchetti is a woman – and when Hegseth would get around to replacing Franchetti. Sherrill asked if qualified Admirals keep turning offers down. Hegseth again claimed it was fake news, but had no answer for why he hadn't yet replaced Franchetti.

- Budgetary: Why Hegseth is blowing money on vanity projects for President Trump – Sherrill listed the Qatari plane, the parade, the Houthi campaign, and the Los Angeles invasion – and what priorities he has cut funding for to pay for them. Again, no answer.

Each time, Hegseth dodged Sherrill's questions, and she restated the question – the last time, in a sing-song voice like she was speaking to a surly toddler.

On top of the substantive issues, the exchange proved that, yes, Hegseth is treating oversight questions like they're Fox News games.

Eugene Vindman (Alexander's brother, and like him ousted after blowing the whistle on Trump), almost the last questioner, chose a different approach to demonstrate Hegseth's manifest incompetence.

He quizzed him.

He set it up by explaining that,

Many believe you are unqualified – underqualified – for this role. You’ve been Secretary of Defense for four and a half months now, for the sake of the American people and our service members, I hope you’ve done your homework since.

Then, like the questions Tammy Duckworth posed at his confirmation hearing, Vindman asked about topics that demonstrate several American vulnerabilities: China’s growing naval superiority, a key bottleneck that could cut the Baltics off from land reinforcements, and the rise of sight-directed small drones.

- What year can the US fight a war with China?
- How many ships does China have?
- How many ships does the US have?
- How many ships will China field by 2030?
- What is the name of a corridor central to NATO reinforcements of the Baltic?
- What heavily militarized Russian territory, connected to the Suwalki gap, containing nuclear capable missiles, it threatens all of NATO – it’s right there in the middle of Eastern Europe?
- What percentage of frontline Ukrainian casualties are caused by FPV drones?
- Which US service has written doctrine or standardized

procurement of FPV drones?

Hegseth's attempt to cover up his ignorance about the specifics of these vulnerabilities adopted similar tactics – those Fox News tactics Sherrill had raised – each time.

First, give a pat answer.

Then, falsely claim the answer is classified.

Then, use a political talking point answering a different question.

Then give up.

The one answer he thought he knew – that the Army had a written doctrine on FPVs – was wrong (to be fair, it was a trick question).

That's when Vindman shifted to the same topic that Moulton had raised: Hegseth's refusal to take accountability for placing attack information on a Signal chat. Only Vindman had a twist: He conveyed the opinion and request of the *mother* of one of the men who had piloted that first attack.

She believes that you need to resign. She also had several questions but one thing: she said she would appreciate an apology, an apology for putting classified information – her son couldn't even tell her where the Truman was going – into the Houthi PC Small Group Signal chat that risked her son's life and the mission. Mr. Secretary, yes or no, do you think you owe her an apology?

Hours after Moulton demonstrated that the mission accomplished nothing, Hegseth still resorted to the same ploy that failed with Moulton, claiming "it was an incredibly successful mission, and her son did great work, and thankfully the Houthi campaign was successful. ... I don't apologize for success."

He doesn't have to exercise any personal

accountability because a mission that failed to achieve its stated objective was a great success.

Perhaps because the House Armed Services Committee is so big – the full hearing went on over seven hours, perhaps because a chunk of Republicans didn't bother to show up to defend Hegseth (as noted, several joined the fun in thwacking the Secretary), perhaps it was because Whiskey Pete had no answer for his own actions, for DOD's budget, and still, for how to keep the US safe. But the very process of the hearing showed that there's no there there, under Hegseth's non-stop politicization and Fox News answers.

We always knew he was an empty suit. This hearing exposed that.

Turns out you're not supreme at all!

And that's what has me worried.

Kerry Howley seems to think Whiskey Pete may be finished, and she's not alone. The NBC story on the White House difficulties finding Hegseth babysitters – which is, substantively, far more damning than the Howley profile – ends with a prediction that the Inspector General will issue findings adverse to Hegseth. Two days after WSJ dedicated an entire story to that topic, it published a story describing what a failure the Houthi campaign was.

It's not just Democrats and some Republicans in Congress who have lost patience with Hegseth. It appears most of the Pentagon has, which is why (as both Sherrill and the NBC story point out) people aren't applying for key jobs. (Some people speculate it's why some of the soldiers marching in yesterday's parade couldn't be fucked to march in lockstep.)

I'm not so sure. Politically, Trump should fire Hegseth, to minimize the surface area of easy

attacks on himself, including from Republicans. Operationally, there's no question that Hegseth's continued tenure makes the US far less safe (and just as importantly, mucks up the finely tuned bureaucracy of the Pentagon).

Trump could even use the dud of yesterday's military parade as an excuse. His Fox News hire couldn't even make Trump's long-sought military parade into rousing propaganda.

But Trump just invaded California relying on the authority of a guy who couldn't be bothered to figure out *why* he was invading.

To carry out his (or Stephen Miller's) attempt to pursue a reverse Reconstruction, he needs cabinet members like Kristi Noem and Hegseth who don't care about the legal niceties but are happy to parrot lines about liberating the largest state, and the world's fourth largest economy, from its elected leaders.

Without that, Trump himself, the entire project, becomes vulnerable.

If I were Hegseth I might resign on my own, to avoid any further public humiliation like I experienced this week. You had Democrats, women, Latinos (Salud Carbajal's contempt for Hegseth was particularly scathing), Black people, and LGBT people, all looking smarter than Hegseth, hour after hour, a tremendous advertisement for the proposition that diversity is our strength, which Whiskey Pete loathes so much.

Over the course of seven hours, the contrast between the prepared members and Hegseth's evasions dismantled Hegseth's claims to Christian white male superiority. And that's before he had no answer to Jason Crow's question about what distinguishes the US from al Qaeda or ISIS.

All Hegseth had to fall back on were Fox News evasions.

It will never get better for Pete Hegseth.

Whiskey Pete will never catch up on mastery of these facts. Worse still, a masterful Howley euphemism suggests the stress of trying to do so has allowed his demons to take hold again.

Hegseth was different after Signalgate, according to six people in a position to know. He was more prone to anger and less likely to be clean-shaven in the morning.

This is a man who is failing because he came in without qualifications, quickly proved an easy mark for political infighting, and as a result keeps making decisions that threaten greater and greater catastrophe.

Whiskey Pete Hegseth has become a perfect advertisement for the lie of white supremacy. Couching your decisions in some claimed inherent superiority, over and over, doesn't work in a bureaucracy like the Pentagon.

More importantly, for the same reasons he can't accept accountability for Signalgate, I don't know how Hegseth could, emotionally, quit. He can't do so because Trump would turn on him (which Trump will eventually do anyway). He can't do so because it would cause permanent psychic damage.

If he admits Mikie Sherrill is right, it will destroy him, because his assumed superiority is the core of his identity.

Escalation is no off-ramp

It turns out, freed from the guidance of adults counseling his decisions, that Trump is discovering he was wrong, over and over. In the weeks before Israel started what could be a catastrophic escalation, Trump was pitching what was basically the JPCOA he had overturned eight years earlier. In light of Israel's attack, Voice of America ordered all its Farsi workers

to return to work, just months after Trump ordered the entire service disbanded.

The U.S. Agency for Global Media told employees placed on administrative leave to immediately return to their roles providing counter-programming to Iranian state media as the conflict between the two nations escalated Friday, according to an email seen by POLITICO and three people familiar with the situation.

“Effective immediately, you are recalled from administrative leave,” said the email from USAGM’s human resources department. “You are expected to report to your duty station immediately.”

There are 75 full time employees within VOA’s Persian wing – the language predominantly spoken in Iran – and it’s believed most, if not all, have now been brought back after being put on administrative leave for three months.

In recent days, Trump discovered that Stephen Miller’s immigration jihad is too costly for powerful lobbying interests, so he is reversing course on part of that, too.

In another immigration gulag failure, Kristi Noem thought a smart way to deal with Newark’s concerns about Delaney Hall’s use as an immigration facility was to arrest Newark’s Mayor. Then they changed their mind and charged Congressman LaMonica McIver, instead. In the very same week they indicted McIver, four people (two accused of burglary, the other two accused of more violent crimes) in Delaney Hall escaped through a “drywall with a mesh interior” wall leading into a parking lot after days of unrest because GEO had repurposed the cafeteria to manage detainee movements and so not fed detainees sufficiently. Admittedly, DHS has not yet *admitted* that they can’t use this facility, but they certainly substantiated Newark’s concerns about its fitness to hold detainees,

some of them dangerous.

The problem is, even as Trump is – with his actions – proving that the experts, Barack Obama, and Kamala Harris were right after all, he cannot admit they were right, because his entire political identity is based on a claim that they're wrong or (in the case of Black politicians) inferior.

At least in Whiskey Pete Hegseth's case, being confronted with his incompetence only caused him to double down.

The only sign of this disastrous seven-hour hearing on Whiskey Pete's Xitter timeline, below his pinned "Never back down" tweet, and now sandwiched among the inaccurate claim he was deploying Marines from Pendleton, an RT of a DOD Rapid Response attack showing his refusal to respond to Pete Aguilar, both a DOD Rapid Response and a Rapid Response 47 celebration of his contempt in response to questions from Ranking Appropriations member Betty McCollum about the LA deployment, eight [!!!] posts from the politicized rally at Fort Bragg (about which, Hegseth would claim in the HASC hearing, not to know DOD had imposed political litmus tests on the attendees), various false claims about Los Angeles, various false claims about US involvement in Iran, and various claims to a recruiting bonanza partly debunked in this WaPo article, the only sign of the seven hours of Whiskey Pete's life when he was publicly and repeatedly exposed as an incompetent hack was this DOD Rapid Response attack on Sara Jacobs' questioning of him, edited to focus on Hegseth's response.

The full exchange is rather instructive.

Jacobs starts by noting that she represents the largest military community in the country and noting it was National Women's Veterans Day. She sandbagged him, getting him to first reiterate his prior statements hailing the service of women. "With your focus on and emphasis on merit, standards, I wanted to tell you about

three incredible women.” She then described the most recent performance evaluation of three women described as exceptional. (She didn’t name them, but they might be Erica Vandal, Emily Shilling, and Kate Cole.)

Jacobs: Given their stellar qualifications and accomplishments, and their record of surpassing standards, I assume that you agree that the Pentagon and the Services should do everything they can to retain women like these, correct?

Hegseth: I would commend the Major, the Aviator, and the Instructor for their service.

Jacobs: Great. I’m glad you agree because I also believe we should be recruiting and retaining the very best and brightest to serve in the military. And yet, you’re actually kicking out these three highly qualified solely because of their identity. These are trans women. And you are using the very same arguments used against desegregating the military or allowing women to serve or allowing gay people to serve. And in all those cases, those arguments were wrong. So I think it’s clear that this is actually *not* about standards or – I’m quoting you again – “an equal, unwavering, gender-neutral merit-based system,” because if it were you would be keeping these women in. Instead, you’re the one injecting culture wars into the military. And it’s at the detriment of our readiness and national security.

What DOD’s Rapid Response thought made Whiskey Pete look good was where he interrupted Jacobs’ next question, to label these women as, “Men who think they’re women.” Hegseth’s own propagandists had to censor the part where Jacobs described the excellence of trans women

that Hegseth has ejected from the military, claiming they pose a threat to national security.

It was just another feeble Fox talking point, one that affirmatively buried the actual facts.

The problem with exposing the inadequacy of someone like Hegseth is the logical response – his suppression of the proof of excellence in favor of his forceful Fox redefinition of what excellence among trans servicemembers really is.

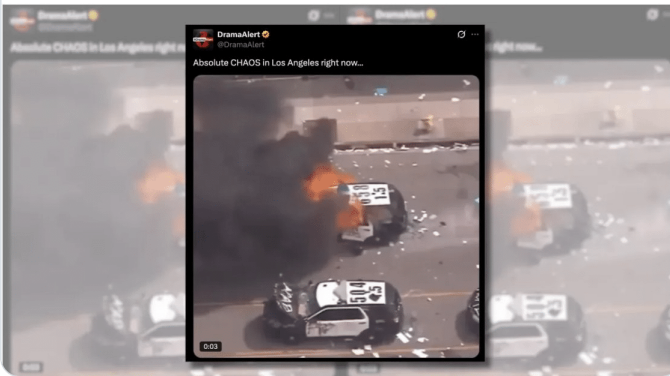
The same thing is happening with his Los Angeles invasion. Not only did Hegseth himself tweet false claims about the extent of the violence in Los Angeles, but as Gavin Newsom's press team exposed, his Rapid Response account has started posting disinformation – old riot footage – as part of its campaign to support the Los Angeles invasion.

Fact Check

Don't fall for old footage showing burning police cars in Los Angeles

The footage circulated as protests flared in Los Angeles in June 2025.


Published June 9, 2025



DOD Rapid Response @DODResponse · 17h

The mission in Los Angeles isn't about lethality.

It's about maintaining LAW AND ORDER...



11:30 PM · Jun 13, 2025 · 61.6K Views

Pete Hegseth's DOD is disseminating Russian-style disinformation to justify their invasion of Los Angeles (as Newsom's staff noted, DHS has started doing the same).

Whiskey Pete's response to being exposed as incompetent, DOD's response to launching an invasion with no basis, has been the same: To double down on the lies, to double down on the dehumanization.

Sure, Whiskey Pete may soon be gone. Blaming him for the failed birthday party would be the easy way to do it.

But he remains particularly dangerous unless and until then, not least because he has ordered the military to be something they are not, and to do so based on his transparently false claims about

what America is.

Because Pete Hegseth cannot admit who he is –
and more importantly, what he is not – he is
demanding that the men and women who serve under
him be something they are not.