The CIA Democrats in the 2020 elections

By Patrick Martin
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In the course of the 2018 elections, a large group of former military-intelligence operatives entered capitalist politics as candidates seeking the Democratic Party nomination in 50 congressional seats—nearly half the seats where the Democrats were targeting Republican incumbents or open seats created by Republican retirements.

Some 30 of these candidates won primary contests and became the Democratic candidates in the November 2018 election, and 11 of them won the general election, more than one-quarter of the 40 previously Republican-held seats captured by the Democrats as they took control of the House of Representatives.

In 2020, the intervention of the CIA Democrats continues on what is arguably an equally significant scale: besides the reelection campaigns of the 11 representatives who won seats in the House in 2018, half a dozen of those who lost 2018 races are running again in 2020. Some of these are running for House seats again, while others have been promoted by the Democratic Party leadership and are running for the US Senate. And an entire new crop of military-intelligence operatives is being brought forward, some running for Republican seats targeted by the Democratic leadership as possible takeovers, others in seats not currently considered competitive.

The bottom line: at least 33 Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives have a primarily military-intelligence background, up from 30 in 2018, as well as three of the party's 35 candidates for the US Senate, compared to zero in 2018. For each branch of Congress, this represents about 10 percent of the total.

As we explained in 2018, the extraordinary influx of candidates coming directly from the national-security apparatus into the Democratic Party is a two-sided process: the Democratic Party establishment welcomes such candidates as a demonstration of the party's unshakeable devotion to the interests of American imperialism; and military-intelligence operatives are choosing the Democratic Party over the Republican Party in large numbers because they are attracted by the Democrats' non-stop campaign against the Trump administration as too "soft" on Russia and too willing to pull out of the Middle East war zone.

CIA Democrats for US Senate

Three Democrats seeking US Senate seats in November have a primarily military-intelligence background, including two who ran unsuccessfully for House seats in 2018. In each case, the CIA Democrat won a contested primary, with the support of Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), defeating a more liberal candidate.

Cal Cunningham was the choice of the Democratic Party establishment to be the party's candidate for US Senate from North Carolina, challenging first-term incumbent Thad Tillis. He defeated Erica Smith, an African-American state senator who ran on a more liberal platform, supporting Medicare for All and the Green New Deal.

While Cunningham served one term in the North Carolina state senate, beginning in 2001, his principal role has been as an attorney, both in private practice and in the military. He enrolled in the Army Reserve after the 9/11 attacks, joining the Judge Advocate General (JAG) corps, and was sent to both Iraq and Afghanistan to handle criminal cases involving members of the US military and military contractors in the two war zones.

According to his campaign biography, "Cal has served with various units from Fort Bragg, including XVIII Airborne Corps and First Special Forces Command (Airborne). In recent years, Cal has trained special operations forces at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. Cal continues to serve in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel with an Army Reserve unit that trains one weekend a month."

Cunningham is relying heavily on his association with the military in a state which hosts the fourth largest number of military personnel, including such bases as Fort Bragg (Army) and Camp Lejeune (Marines). His campaign web site declares, "At Fort Bragg and abroad, the paratroopers, Reservists and special operators Cal served with in the Army taught Cal a deeper form of patriotism and honor."

Also running for US Senate seats are two female former pilots, **Amy McGrath** and **Mary Jennings Hegar,** who are challenging Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in Kentucky, and former Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn in Texas, respectively. McGrath defeated Charles Booker, an African American state legislator backed by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, to win the Democratic nomination in Kentucky. Hegar defeated state senator Royce West of Dallas, also African American, to win the Democratic nomination in Texas.

McGrath was perhaps the most heavily publicized of the military-intelligence candidates in 2018, when she narrowly lost a race against Republican Congressman Andy Barr in Kentucky's 6th Congressional District, centered on Lexington. She has been able to raise phenomenal amounts of money, partly because of her high-profile military career—she retired as a lieutenant colonel as a Marine Corps fighter pilot—and partly because her opponent, McConnell, is so widely hated.

Despite her war chest of more than $40 million, however, McGrath is a decided underdog against McConnell, who himself has a huge campaign fundraising machine and is finishing his sixth six-year term in the Senate.

MJ Hegar was an Air Force helicopter pilot who spent three tours of duty in Afghanistan on search and rescue operations, in the course of which she was shot down once by Taliban fire, wounded, and received a Purple Heart. She came to prominence through a lawsuit against the Pentagon policy of barring women from combat. She narrowly lost a 2018 race against Republican Congressman John Carter in a district outside Austin, Texas, in the course of which her five-minute campaign video, promoting her military record in a noxious combination of militarism and feminism, became a viral sensation and raised millions in donations over the internet.

Hegar received the nod from the DSCC after former congressman and failed presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke declined to challenge Cornyn. She survived a primary and runoff, but is considered a longshot candidate against Cornyn, a three-term incumbent.

Eleven campaigns for reelection

All 11 CIA Democrats first elected in 2018 are running for reelection. Five are considered prohibitive favorites to win: Mikie Sherrill in New

Jersey, Chrissy Houlahan and Connor Lamb in Pennsylvania, Elissa Slotkin in Michigan, and Jason Crow in Colorado. The remaining six are in competitive races: Jared Golden in Maine, Max Rose in New York, Tom Malinowski and Andy Kim in New Jersey, Abigail Spanberger and Elaine Luria in Virginia.

That distinction made, however, "competitive" is a relative term. All six are favorites to win reelection, particularly because President Trump is projected to lose heavily in each of their states—Maine, New York, New Jersey and Virginia. Only in Maine, where the state awards its electoral vote by congressional district as well as statewide, is Trump mounting a significant campaign, seeking to take the electoral vote of Golden's 2nd Congressional District, as he did in 2016.

From a fundraising standpoint, the most reliable indicator of success—and ruling class support—in American legislative contests, the 11 CIA Democrats must be considered overwhelming favorites to retain their seats. They have raised a combined total of $42 million. Their 11 Republican opponents have raised a combined total of $10 million. Only Republican Thomas Kean, opposing Malinowski in New Jersey's 7th Congressional District, has a campaign war chest comparable to the incumbent's, but still only half as large.

Let us recall briefly who these 11 representatives are and their military-intelligence background:

Jason Crow, Colorado's 6th Congressional District: Paratroop commander in Iraq war, then Army Ranger special forces in Afghanistan for two tours.

Jared Golden, Maine's 2nd Congressional District: The only rank-and-file soldier in the group, spent four years as a Marine infantryman, deploying to Afghanistan in 2004 and to Iraq in 2005-2006.

Chrissy Houlahan, Pennsylvania's 6th Congressional District: A 10-year veteran of the Air Force, leaving it as a captain.

Andy Kim, New Jersey's 3rd Congressional District: Civilian war planner and adviser to US military commanders in Afghanistan, Iraq director for National Security Council under President Obama.

Connor Lamb, Pennsylvania's 17th Congressional District: Marine Corps captain and Judge Advocate General (prosecutor) until 2013, now major in the Marine Corps Reserves.

Elaine Luria, Virginia's 2nd Congressional District: Navy commander, deployed six times to Middle East and Western Pacific, commanded assault craft supporting a Marine Corps deployment.

Tom Malinowski, New Jersey's 7th Congressional District: Assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor in the Obama administration.

Max Rose, New York's 11th Congressional District: Army combat officer in Afghanistan 2012-2013, still in the active reserves.

Mikie Sherrill, New Jersey's 11th Congressional District: Navy helicopter pilot, with 10 years' active service in Europe and the Middle East.

Elissa Slotkin, Michigan's 8th Congressional District: CIA agent with three tours in Iraq, National Security Council for both Bush and Obama, assistant to Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte, then principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

Abigail Spanberger, Virginia's 7th Congressional District: CIA operations officer stationed in Europe for nearly a decade.

In each case, the candidates moved seamlessly from positions as military commanders, intelligence operatives or foreign policy officials to running for Congress as candidates of the Democratic Party. Only Golden ran for a lower office, winning a seat in the Maine state legislature, before seeking a seat in Congress.

In their first two years in Congress, the CIA Democrats carried out two significant common actions. The five women—Houlahan, Luria, Sherrill, Slotkin and Spanberger—formed a joint fundraising committee to promote female candidates who shared their military-intelligence background. And six of them—Crow and the five women—co-signed an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in September 2019 calling for an impeachment probe into President Trump's dealing with Ukraine. This was a crucial turning point in the effort that culminated in Trump's impeachment three months later.

Likely reinforcements for the CIA Democrats

Four of the military-intelligence candidates who lost congressional races in 2018 are running again in 2020, and are likely to win seats in Congress.

Dan Feehan, Minnesota 1st Congressional District: A military officer who served two tours in Iraq between 2005 and 2009, where he headed an Army Ranger sniper team, Feehan then joined the Obama administration, first as a White House aide, then as an acting assistant secretary of defense. He narrowly lost a race in 2018 for the southern Minnesota seat previously held by Democrat Tim Walz, now governor of Minnesota. Republican Jim Hagedorn, who won by only 1,312 votes in 2018, announced in February that he was being treated for stage-four kidney cancer, but he remains a candidate for reelection. Feehan has substantially outraised Hagedorn, by $2.2 million to $1.6 million, according to reports filed with the Federal Election Commission through July 15.

Gina Ortiz Jones, Texas 23rd Congressional District: An Air Force intelligence officer in Iraq, Ortiz Jones followed up a 12-year military career with continued work as a US government adviser in Latin America, South Sudan and Libya, then reviewed foreign investments from a national security standpoint for the Office of the US Trade Representative. In 2018 she lost a tight contest, by a margin of 340 votes out of more than 200,000 cast, against Republican incumbent Will Hurd, himself a former CIA agent, in the congressional district that comprises most of the Texas-Mexico border region, from El Paso to Laredo. Hurd has now retired, leaving Ortiz Jones the likely favorite to succeed him. This will be another "spy vs. spy" contest, against whichever Republican hopeful prevails in a lengthy primary recount. Tony Gonzales is a 20-year Navy veteran and intelligence officer specializing in cryptology; Raul Reyes is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel specializing in cyberwarfare operations. Ortiz Jones has raised a massive $4.1 million for her campaign, more than double the sums raised by Gonzales and Reyes combined, and leads them by 10-1 in terms of cash on hand.

Sara Jacobs, California 53rd Congressional District: An Obama State Department official turned Hillary Clinton campaign aide, Jacobs was engaged in counterterrorism work in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, according to her campaign website, and advised Clinton on foreign policy. She lost a Democratic primary in 2018 in the adjoining 49th Congressional District, where millionaire attorney Mike Levin went on to win the seat for the Democrats. After longtime incumbent Representative Susan Davis announced her retirement in the heavily Democratic 53rd District, Jacobs switched districts in an attempt to capture the vacant seat. She finished first in the all-party primary in June, and will face another Democrat, state legislator Georgette Gomez, in the November election. While Gomez is a local elected official who is running on the basis of her Hispanic identity, Jacobs has far more financial resources, as the granddaughter of Qualcomm founder and CEO Irwin Jacobs.

Sri Preston Kulkarni, Texas 22nd Congressional District: After running an unexpectedly competitive race in 2018 against Republican Representative Pete Olson, Kulkarni is now considered the favorite following Olson's decision to retire rather than seek reelection. Kulkarni is a career State Department official who boasts of his role in defense of American imperialism. His campaign website declares: "From Jerusalem to Iraq to Russia, Sri served in some of the toughest places in the world, representing the interests of the United States..." Of South Asian descent on his father's side, Kulkarni is running in a district in the southwest suburbs of Houston—once held by right-wing Republican Tom

DeLay—which has undergone rapid demographic change due to an influx of Asian immigrants.

There is a fifth military-intelligence candidate who is considered a likely winner in 2020, **Jackie Gordon**, a retired career military police commander, who is seeking the seat left vacant by the retirement of Republican Peter King in the 2nd Congressional District of New York, on Long Island. Gordon spent 29 years in the military, including multiple tours of duty in combat zones: "as a battle captain in Baghdad during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and as Commander of the 310th Military Police Battalion in Afghanistan in 2012" according to her campaign website, as well as "an operations officer at Guantanamo Bay," the US base which is the site of a notorious prison and torture center. Gordon, who is African American, was elected to the Babylon Town Council while still on active duty and retired from the Army Reserve in 2014 with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

To be continued

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