

# Department of War quotes Bible on social media

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The United States Department of War Rapid Response X account on Sept. 7 posted a clip showing military personnel completing outdoor training as the words “Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you, wherever you go” faded into the screen.

The video, which quotes the biblical book of Joshua, received more than 2,000 likes as of Tuesday.

Similar videos praising the military while quoting the Bible have flooded the former Department of Defense’s social media accounts over the past few weeks.

The department—renamed the Department of War—has joined other branches of the federal government in embracing a Christian nationalist tone in its official communications. Some warn the new social media strategy could indicate how Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s conservative Christian faith is revamping the military branch.

In an email to RNS, Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said the videos exemplify Hegseth’s efforts to celebrate the country’s Christian roots “despite the Left’s efforts to remove our Christian heritage from our great nation,” and that “Secretary Hegseth is among those who embrace it.”

“Secretary Hegseth, along with millions of Americans, is a proud Christian,” Wilson said in the email. “The Christian faith is woven deeply into the fabric of our nation and shared by America’s wartime leaders like

President George Washington, who prayed for his troops at Valley Forge, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who gifted Bibles to American soldiers during WW2 and encouraged them to read them.”

In early August, the Department of War posted another video on X captioned “We Are One Nation Under God,” a motto from the pledge of allegiance, showing military aircraft and soldiers in operations as “I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed” from Psalm 18:37 appeared onscreen. The 12-second video was shared 1,600 times and received 8,000 likes.

## **Baptist minister says Scripture being misused**

Brian Kaylor, a Baptist minister and the author of the upcoming book *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists*, said the videos thwart the original meaning of these verses.

“Those verses were not about the United States military,” Kaylor said. “They weren’t really even about any imperial military force, and quite the opposite. These were passages about marginalized people, people under attack. It’s a very dangerous conflation of scriptural ideals with the U.S. military.”

The Department of War videos, like the Department of Homeland Security’s Bible-quoting social media posts, also promote a literal interpretation of Scripture, a key feature of Christian nationalist rhetoric, said Kaylor, who is also president and editor-in-chief of *Word & Way*, a Christian media company in Missouri.

“Christian nationalism is itself selectively literal. ... The irony about this Christian nationalism is that they’re justifying themselves with the Bible,

but they're only able to do it because they're being very selective on what verses they choose," he said.

One post, shared on the Department of War Rapid Response X account on Aug. 24, quotes Psalm 23: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for YOU are with me." The video shows U.S. military members equipping each other, firing weapons and jumping out of helicopters.

The inclusion of this prayer, written by King David, asking God for support and guidance in difficult times, Kaylor said, was particularly inappropriate, as the passage talks about God leading someone away from the fight.

## **'Completely dividing members of the military'**

Michael Weinstein, a former Air Force officer who founded the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, which seeks to ensure freedom of religion in the U.S. military, raised a concern that the Department of War's favoritism of Christian Scriptures in its communications could jeopardize cohesion among armed forces.

"This is completely dividing members of the military," he said. "We see it around the clock. I've talked to generals who said, 'Look, for the first time in my life, I still love the sailors and the soldiers and the airmen and the Marines that I command, but I hate the Navy, the Army and the Air Force that I work for because I see what it has become.'"

Moreover, the posts suggest non-Christian military members aren't "worthy or honorable or trustworthy human beings to be able to fight for your country," said Weinstein, who is Jewish.

He was referring to Article Six of the U.S. Constitution, which bans

religious tests for positions in the federal government—including military personnel—adding, “but there is a de facto test.”

Recently, his foundation documented an increase in religious freedom violations in the military. He said some of his clients have flagged as examples the DOW’s “evangelization efforts” through events like the lunch break “Christian prayer and worship service” convened by Hegseth’s office in the Pentagon auditorium earlier this year.

The department’s rebranding and its embrace of Christian references on social media could lead to an escalation of conflicts, Weinstein said.

“This is nothing more than a fast-ticking time bomb that will blow up in our faces,” said Weinstein, who served 11 years in the Air Force. “It is encouraging a tremendous response by our enemies who are out there, many of whom follow their own extremist religious views.”

## **Christian Crusader aesthetic**

The Department of War also seems to have adopted a Christian Crusader aesthetic, aligning itself with Hegseth’s declarations, Weinstein added.

The defense secretary is known for his Crusader cross tattoo on his chest. The Crusaders’ battle cry, “Deus Vult” (“God wills” in Latin), has long entertained an idea of Western Christianity clashing with non-Christian civilizations. And in a March 25 X post, Hegseth showed a bicep tattoo that reads “kafir,” meaning “unfaithful” in Arabic.

On his own X account, Hegseth, who served as an infantry officer in the Army National Guard and was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, also has numerous posts that promote military operations alongside religious discourse.

On Aug. 17, he posted a video of himself reciting a “commander’s prayer,”

asking God for protection, wisdom and courage on the battlefield.

“When time and task pull in different directions, grant me clarity to see the way and peace to calm those around me,” Hegseth can be heard saying in the clip, liked 21,000 times.