

Behind State Department, CIA shake-up: Bush-Cheney regime prepares a second term of all-out militarism

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The resignation of Secretary of State Colin Powell and the forcing out of a whole layer of top CIA officials is a signal that the Bush administration is clearing the decks for an even more aggressive and unilateral foreign and military policy during the second Bush-Cheney term.

Powell's resignation was made public Monday, and was followed the next day by Bush's announcement that he was nominating his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, to be the new Secretary of State. Rice will be confirmed swiftly by the Republican-controlled Senate, and could take office even before Bush's second inauguration on January 20.

Throughout the first four years of the Bush administration, Powell and the State Department have been viewed with suspicion or outright hostility by right-wing neo-conservative elements entrenched in the civilian leadership of the Pentagon and in Vice President Cheney's office.

Neither Powell nor his chief deputy, Richard Armitage, opposed the Bush administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but they were regarded as too closely aligned to the traditional foreign policy methods of American imperialism favored by career State Department and CIA officials, based on utilizing alliance structures like NATO and international institutions like the UN.

Powell repeatedly clashed with Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the principal advocates of a more hard-line policy, not only towards Iraq, but in relations with Iran and North Korea, classified like Iraq as part of Bush's notorious "axis of evil." These conflicts paralyzed US policy towards Iran—in four years, the Bush administration never succeeded in drafting a coherent position paper—and led to a series of erratic shifts in relation to North Korea.

There were also reported clashes over US policy

towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Powell resisting the White House inclination to give a blank check to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in favor of preserving the illusion that Washington could act as a broker between the two sides.

In the long-running interagency battles over Iraq, the State Department lost far more than it won. Powell prevailed in August 2002 when he urged Bush to seek a UN Security Council resolution as a cover for the US decision to attack Iraq. But the Pentagon was given full authority, not only over the invasion proper, but over all post-conquest planning, and the Coalition Provisional Authority and its chief, Paul Bremer, worked under the direction of Rumsfeld. It was not until the establishment of the puppet Allawi government on June 30, 2004 that the State Department, through the new ambassador in Iraq, US proconsul John Negroponte, was given the leading political role in the occupation regime.

The removal of Powell and Armitage, while Rumsfeld continues in the Pentagon together with his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, marks a clear victory for the most bellicose faction in the administration. Rice generally sided with Rumsfeld and Cheney in the internecine battles over policy, although she played no independent role and was regarded as hopelessly over her head, even by supporters of the war in Iraq.

The *New York Times* observed Tuesday that what Rice actually thought on key issues was something of a mystery. "Ms. Rice has kept her foreign policy views largely to herself over the last four years," the newspaper's front-page article on the nomination said. This is remarkable, given that the *Times* is describing the person who has occupied the position of national security adviser for the past four years, and whose principal claim to fame is that she was Bush's tutor in foreign policy.

Rice's main role as Secretary of State will be to install more hard-line officials in the second and third-tier positions in the department and suppress any criticism of Bush administration policy from within the career Foreign Service. Such criticism has reflected concern, based on actual knowledge of the countries targeted—something in very short supply in the White House and Pentagon—that the Bush administration's methods will actually undermine the long-term interests of American imperialism.

The purge of top officials in the CIA is an even more glaring case of suppressing any potential source of internal criticism or restraint on Bush administration foreign policy. On November 12, deputy CIA director John McLaughlin resigned, to be followed three days later by the deputy director for operations, Stephen Kappes, and his top deputy, Michael Slusick. This brings to nine the number of top-ranking CIA officials to depart since former director George Tenet was replaced by Porter Goss, a Republican congressman and head of the House Intelligence Committee. Only two of Tenet's top aides still remain.

McLaughlin's retirement had been expected after he was passed over for the position of CIA director in favor of Goss. He had been the number two official in the agency since 2000.

Kappes and Slusick, however, had just assumed their posts in the summer, moving up after the retirement of longtime operations chief James Pavitt. They quit after an angry confrontation with Goss's top aide, Patrick Murray. Slusick reportedly referred to Murray, a former House committee staffer, as a "Hill puke," while Murray demanded that Kappes fire Slusick, an instruction that Kappes refused.

It was the outcome of the November 2 election that apparently brought the tensions within the agency to the point of a shouting match. Goss, whose committee produced a report on the September 11 attacks that described the CIA operations directorate as "dysfunctional," was widely regarded as a lame duck appointee who would be out of office in January in the event of a Kerry victory.

Sections of the CIA officialdom were effectively aligned with the Democratic campaign, providing a series of leaks to the press demonstrating that the White House had lied about prewar planning for postwar Iraq and debunking various Bush lies about the "war on terror." The agency even authorized one top CIA official, Michael Scheuer, former head of the bin Laden unit, to publish a

book—under the pseudonym "anonymous"—denouncing the White House for failing to take the threat of bin Laden seriously before the 9/11 attacks. Scheuer also quit the agency, on November 11.

Goss has brought with him into the CIA four top aides from the House Intelligence Committee, all far-right Republican Party activists determined to remove any political opponents from the agency's leadership.

The right-wing press, spearheaded by the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, has demanded such a purge of both the CIA and the State Department. At the time the pre-election leaks, the *Journal* published an editorial denouncing the CIA for "declaring war" on the Bush White House. The newspaper greeted Powell's resignation with an editorial demanding that Bush stamp out similar opposition in the diplomatic corps.

In both the State Department and the CIA, it should go without saying, the opposition to Bush is within the framework of the defense of imperialist interests. Both agencies are staffed by battle-hardened defenders of American imperialism who have participated in countless crimes against working people on every continent. Their opposition to Bush arises largely from the debacle produced in Iraq by a policy that deliberately ignored the complex politics of the country and the Middle East as a whole, in favor of a crude doctrine that the United States could have its way by force alone.

The result of the bureaucratic infighting is that the Bush White House is moving to concentrate power in fewer and fewer hands, riding roughshod over the established institutions of American imperialism. As the Knight-Ridder news service observed: "by agreeing to Powell's departure and approving an apparent purge by new CIA chief Porter Goss, Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney appear to be eliminating the few independent centers of power in the US national security apparatus and cementing the system under their personal control."

This trajectory leads inexorably to new and bloodier disasters, not only in Iraq itself, but in other countries and regions targeted by the White House gangsters, and for the American people as well, who will pay the price for a new round of military adventures.



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