

Sudden resignation of CIA Director Goss: Another tremor in Bush administration

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The resignation of CIA Director Porter Goss, announced abruptly by the White House on Friday, is another demonstration of the instability and vicious infighting within the Bush administration. Goss ends a relatively brief 18-month tenure at the agency, a period during which he conducted a political purge in which at least a dozen top CIA officials were driven out.

The Goss resignation is the outcome of a protracted and murky conflict within the military and intelligence agencies. It involves John Negroponte, Bush's choice as the first Director of National Intelligence; the Pentagon intelligence apparatus, headed by Stephen Cambone, the most trusted deputy of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; and multiple factions within the CIA itself.

Negroponte apparently has emerged as the victor in this infighting, with his deputy, Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael V. Hayden, former head of the National Security Agency, named by White House officials as the likely choice to succeed Goss at CIA. In an indication that the conflict is continuing, however, the Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Peter Hoekstra, appeared on "Fox News Sunday" to oppose the as-yet-unannounced selection of Hayden, saying that the career military intelligence official has experience only in electronic information-gathering, not in covert operations.

There are no clear policy differences among Negroponte, Rumsfeld, Cambone and Goss. They all share responsibility for the Bush administration's criminal war of aggression in Iraq, and for the debacle that the US occupation of the oil-rich country has become. To some extent, there is an institutional conflict between the Pentagon, which controls 85 percent of the vast intelligence budget, and Negroponte's new agency, established in 2005 to centralize control over all 16 US intelligence agencies, including the CIA.

The immediate impulse for Goss's ouster, however, is his apparent link to the sex and bribery scandal involving former Republican Congressman Randy Cunningham, who resigned from Congress last fall and has been sentenced to prison for steering military contracts to several favored companies in return for cash and other payoffs.

Three major newspapers—the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *San Diego Union-Tribune*—have

published articles in the last 10 days reporting that the investigation into Cunningham's corrupt practices, once thought to be limited to several defense contractors, had been expanded to include other congressmen and government officials, including the number-three official at the CIA, executive director Kyle (Dusty) Foggo, who was installed in that position by Goss.

One contractor named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Cunningham case, Brent Wilkes of San Diego, California, is reportedly suspected of arranging for a Washington-area limousine company to provide prostitutes for Cunningham. These services were provided in conjunction with weekly poker parties in the capital, attended by Republican politicians, government officials and businessmen, which Wilkes has hosted for the past 15 years. A CIA spokesman has confirmed that Foggo, a boyhood friend of Wilkes, had been a regular at those parties.

Christopher Baker, president of Shirlington Limousine and Transportation Inc., the company which provided the limos for these parties, was awarded a \$21 million contract by the Department of Homeland Security last year to provide transportation services for top DHS officials. This was despite Baker's criminal record for drug possession, attempted petty larceny, and two felony charges for attempted robbery and car theft, two personal bankruptcy filings and a tax lien from the Internal Revenue Service, which seized his house in 1998.

The *Post* said that the source of the allegations against Wilkes and Baker was Mitchell J. Wade, one of the defense contractors who admitted bribing Cunningham. Wade has pled guilty to charges in that case and is cooperating with prosecutors. "Wade said limos would pick up Cunningham and a prostitute and bring them to suites Wilkes maintained at the Watergate Hotel and the Westin Grand in Washington," the newspaper reported. The *Union-Tribune* cited a statement from Baker's attorney confirming that Baker had provided limousine services for Wilkes's poker parties from 1990 on, but denying any link to prostitution.

Baker's business arrangements with the DHS were highly unusual. In addition to his own criminal record, which would ordinarily make him an unlikely candidate for a contract to transport top officials in charge of US domestic security,

Shirlington Limousine was in poor financial shape. It lost a contract with Howard University for non-performance, and was repeatedly sued for non-payment. At a critical time, in April 2004, the company was awarded a \$3.8 million DHS contract for which it was the sole bidder. A year later, Baker succeeded in escaping bankruptcy, paying \$125,000 to his creditors. In October 2005, his company won a much larger one-year contract for \$21.2 million.

A DHS spokesman sought to explain the relationship with the preposterous claim that while the department conducted criminal background checks for all the limousine drivers, no such check was required for the company's owner. The agency was unaware of Baker's long record of petty crime, the official said.

The connections between Foggo and the Cunningham case may go beyond the seedy questions of gambling and prostitution. Several press reports indicate that the CIA inspector general is examining whether Foggo rigged any contracts from the agency to companies associated with Wilkes. Foggo has told his CIA associates that he will follow Goss into retirement, stepping down as the CIA executive director.

The *New York Daily News* reported Saturday that Goss himself "may have attended Watergate poker parties where bribes and prostitutes were provided to a corrupt congressman," adding that Foggo could soon be indicted in the case. The newspaper cited statements by former CIA operative Larry Johnson, a frequent critic of the Bush administration, that Goss and Foggo "share a fondness for poker and expensive cigars," and that he understood Goss had occasionally attended the parties thrown by Wilkes. According to the *News*, "One subject of the FBI investigation is a \$3 million CIA contract that went to Wilkes to supply bottled water and other goods to CIA operatives in Iraq and Afghanistan, sources said."

While the tabloid newspaper focused attention on sex and bribery, the more establishment press—particularly the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*—were careful to distance the Goss resignation as much as possible from the sordid details of the case. The *Times* went so far as to publish separate articles on the two subjects Sunday, as though it were possible to consider the political conflicts within the Bush administration outside of the gross corruption that is such an essential part of its character.

Foggo is a career CIA mid-level official who was suddenly vaulted into the top ranks when Goss became director and forced out the previous number-three executive, Michael Kostiw, as part of a purge of allegedly anti-Bush officials in the upper reaches of the agency. Foggo reportedly became a Goss crony while serving as chief of logistics at the CIA station in Frankfurt, Germany, during the period when Goss, then chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, was on inspection trips to CIA offices overseas.

Goss's tenure as CIA director has been one of near-continual crisis, particularly the last eight months, since the existence of

clandestine CIA detention centers overseas was made public by the *Washington Post*. This was followed by a frenzied anti-leaking campaign spearheaded by Goss personally, in an effort to find the source of the *Post* report. Last month, a veteran CIA official in the inspector general's office, Mary McCarthy, was fired only a week before her scheduled retirement, allegedly for failing a lie detector test about contacts with the press, including the *Post*. But McCarthy has subsequently denied even knowing of the secret prisons, let alone being the source, and CIA officials admitted that there was no evidence against her on that leak.

The nomination of Hayden could prove to be a political time-bomb for the administration, since confirmation hearings would likely feature questioning about his work at the NSA, where he was responsible for the secret electronic surveillance of American citizens, an operation whose existence was revealed to the *New York Times* in December. This leak produced another high-pressure internal security investigation, although no one has yet been fired or charged with being the source.

The leaks and counter-leaks demonstrate the increasingly Byzantine atmosphere in official Washington. With all political issues funneled through the increasingly dysfunctional channels of a two-party system in which the nominal opposition, the Democratic Party, offers no alternative to the Republicans, policy disputes within the ruling elite cannot find expression in open debate.

Moreover, so great is the chasm between the official rhetoric of the "war on terror" and reality of predatory seizure of oil resources and strategic positions to benefit American imperialist interests, that no one in the Bush administration, Congress or the corporate-controlled media can discuss foreign policy and security issues publicly in a realistic and serious way.

Hanging over all these debates is the question of the 9/11 attacks and the ample warnings that the military and intelligence agencies received in advance. After countless toothless investigations, not a single top official has been punished for what was either colossal incompetence or deliberate malfeasance. Instead, the conflicts within the intelligence apparatus are taking on the character of a veiled struggle within a palace court.



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