

Who's who in the Obama cabinet

Part three: National security and foreign policy

Patrick Martin
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This is the third in a series of profiles of the major appointees to the cabinet and top White House staff of Barack Obama. Part one, "Who's who in the Obama cabinet—Economic and budget policy" was posted January 19. Part two, "Who's who in the Obama cabinet - Internal security" was posted January 20.

National security and foreign policy is the area of the most obvious continuity between the Bush administration and the Obama administration. The erstwhile "antiwar" candidate of late 2007 and early 2008 has long since made the transformation into flag-waving commander-in-chief, grimly vowing to use military violence against anyone who stands in the way of the geo-political interests of American imperialism.

Obama took the oath of office Tuesday only hours after a truce temporarily ended the US-backed slaughter of innocent Palestinians in the Gaza strip, a bloodbath backed by the incoming Obama foreign policy team as fervently as the outgoing Bush retinue.

Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense

First selected by George W. Bush in November 2006, Gates is being retained in his post by Obama, the first time that a Pentagon chief has been held over when control of the White House has passed from one of the two US ruling parties to the other. Gates, a former CIA director and career functionary of the military-intelligence apparatus, symbolizes the militaristic character of the incoming Democratic administration.

The selection of Gates has been hailed by the most fervent supporters of US aggression in Iraq, like Obama's opponent in the presidential election, Senator John McCain, and his fellow right-wing Republican, Senator Lindsey Graham. "Picking Gates is a good statement that they are not going to pull out of Iraq in a way that undercuts the gains achieved," Graham told the *New York Times* last week.

Those gains have nothing to do with the welfare of the people of Iraq, who have suffered more than 1 million deaths,

countless wounded, physically and psychologically, 5 million people internally displaced, and the eruption of sectarian violence stoked by the wholesale destruction wreaked on Iraqi society by the US invasion.

The "gains" associated with Gates—who implemented Bush's order for the escalation of the war in Iraq with the "surge" of an additional 30,000 US troops—were another thousand US deaths, countless thousands of Iraqi deaths, and a dramatic increase in the bomb tonnage. The US control of the conquered country has only been temporarily stabilized through the implementation of a "divide and rule" strategy, arming Sunni tribes in Anbar province and parts of Baghdad, Kurdish militias in the north and the Shiite-dominated central government, which sets the stage for the outbreak of even bloodier civil wars, or a regional conflict drawing in neighboring states.

Along with Gates, Obama has retained all the key military officers responsible for the last two years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan: the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, who is likely to be reappointed for a further two years when his first two-year term runs out in September; General David Petraeus, the former Iraq commander, now head of Central Command, with jurisdiction over both wars; and General Raymond Odierno, the field commander in Iraq.

Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State

It is significant that Obama selected his main rival for the Democratic presidential nomination to fill his top foreign policy post. Clinton consistently attacked Obama from the right on foreign policy during the campaign for the nomination, a tactic that served to reinforce Obama's support among the rank-and-file Democratic voters, who overwhelmingly oppose the war that Senator Clinton voted to authorize.

Clinton gained some traction against Obama, after a series of primary defeats in February, by repositioning herself (however hypocritically, given her own standing as a multimillionaire member of the ruling elite) as a fighter for working people. But Obama did not choose her for a position where this talent for

populist demagoguery would be put to use, as the head of his healthcare or economic policy initiatives. Instead, he chose Clinton to lead the State Department.

Like the retention of Gates, the selection of Clinton was thus a signal that Obama was moving to the right on foreign policy, and that he would not fulfill the hopes of antiwar voters but rather the mandate of the American corporate aristocracy, which sees an aggressive and militaristic foreign policy as the key to beating back its international rivals like China, Russia and the European Union.

At her confirmation hearing, Clinton reiterated her support of the traditional foreign policy and defense policy nostrums of American imperialism—a strong military, the use of alliances and institutions like the United Nations to promote US interests, all-out support for Israeli violence against the Palestinians.

James Jones, National Security Adviser

A retired Marine general, Jones was commander in chief of NATO forces under the Bush administration and advised McCain (a longtime friend) during the election campaign, as well as Obama. The 64-year-old Jones served for 40 years in the Marines, beginning as a platoon commander in Vietnam.

After retiring from the Marines in 2007, Jones was appointed by Bush as his special envoy for Middle East security and also chaired a congressional panel, the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, that was to assess the readiness of Iraqi troops (and by extension, the possibilities for drawing down American military forces while maintaining the US-backed puppet government in Baghdad).

During his brief retirement, Jones cashed in quickly on his expertise in the Middle East, chairing the Institute for 21st Century Energy, an arm of the US Chamber of Commerce aimed at promoting US access to oil resources. He also became a director of Boeing Corp., one of the biggest Pentagon contractors, and of the giant oil company Chevron. He served on the board of both companies until Obama named him to the White House post.

Jones is most closely identified with Obama's proposal for a major escalation of the US military intervention in Afghanistan, which Obama has declared (aping Bush's description of Iraq) to be "the central front of the war on terror." Jones will retain much of the National Security Council staff assembled by the Bush White House, including Lt. General Douglas Lute, who coordinates policy for both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Susan Rice, ambassador to the United Nations

A former assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Clinton administration, Rice (no relation to the outgoing State Department chief) is the scion of a black bourgeois family in Washington, D.C. Her father Emmett is a professor of economics at Cornell and a former governor of the Federal Reserve Bank. She graduated from Stanford and was a Rhodes Scholar.

Now 44, Rice has spent nearly her entire career as a foreign policy adviser to Democratic presidents and candidates, first working for the 1988 presidential campaign of Michael Dukakis. During the first Bush administration, she worked for the consulting firm McKinsey & Co. before joining the Clinton administration as a member of the National Security Council staff.

After leaving the Clinton administration, Rice worked at Intellibridge Inc., a consulting firm run by former Clinton national security adviser Anthony Lake, which was acquired by Eurasia Inc., a firm specializing in advising large corporations on the oil-rich Caspian Basin region. She joined the Brookings Institution in 2003, advised the Kerry campaign in 2004, and then finally enrolled with the Obama presidential campaign in 2007.

Rice was in charge of US Africa policy during 1998, when twin bombings hit the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and Clinton ordered a retaliatory missile strike that destroyed a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. She has espoused a far more aggressive interventionist policy in Africa, particularly in relation to Darfur and Zimbabwe, than that carried out by the Bush administration.



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