

# Who's who in the Obama cabinet

## Internal security

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*This is the second 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 three, "Who's who in the Obama cabinet—National security and foreign policy", will be posted January 21. Part four, "Who's who in the Obama cabinet—Domestic policy", will be posted January 22.*

President-elect Obama has assembled a cabinet drawn from the upper echelons of American society and the right wing of the Democratic Party. The right-wing character of the Obama nominees is described by the media under the approving labels of "centrist," "moderate," and—most of all—"pragmatic." This terminology signifies that the incoming Obama team consists entirely of individuals who pass muster with the corporate financial aristocracy.

The *New York Times* reported Monday that Obama has repeatedly discussed his cabinet selections with his defeated Republican opponent, Senator John McCain, and that McCain has told colleagues "that many of these appointments he would have made himself," according to Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and arch-conservative who has also had input into the formation of the new administration.

McCain, Graham and Co. have a far greater role in the selection of Obama's cabinet than the millions of young people and working people who supported Obama in the belief that he would put an end to the war in Iraq and reverse the right-wing, pro-big business policies of the Bush administration.

Today's series of profiles deals with those cabinet and other high-ranking officials in the incoming administration responsible for the Justice Department, intelligence and Homeland Security—i.e., the domestic repressive functions of the US government.

### **Eric Holder, attorney general**

While Holder is being hailed as the first African-American to hold his position, his selection does not represent a reversal of the anti-democratic policies pursued by the Justice Department under the Bush administration. Holder is a trusted defender of both corporate America in general and the American capitalist state, having served as deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration (1997-2001) and then as a high-priced lawyer at Covington & Burling, where he represented an assortment of major corporations.

Most notorious was his role defending the food giant Chiquita Brands International, Inc., whose multimillionaire executives were facing potential charges of aiding terrorism because of their financing and arming of right-wing death squads in Colombia. Using his Justice Department connections—and taking advantage of the Bush administration's sympathy for the Colombian fascists—Holder managed to

get Chiquita off the hook with a small fine, despite overwhelming evidence that it had hired gunmen to kidnap, torture and murder Colombian workers, peasants and union officials.

With support emerging from prominent Republicans, it is likely Eric Holder will be confirmed as attorney general in the incoming Obama administration. Holder's nomination has withstood somewhat muted criticism from the Republican right. This related to Holder's involvement, as deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration, in the presidential pardon for billionaire fugitive investor Marc Rich, as well as in commutations for 16 Puerto Rican nationalists who had been imprisoned for decades on politically motivated convictions for nonviolent crimes.

Republicans announcing their support for Holder include Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, who serves on the Judiciary Committee; Mel Martinez of Florida; Frances Townsend, President George W. Bush's homeland security adviser; William P. Barr, attorney general under President George H.W. Bush; and Larry Thompson, who served as attorney general in the current Bush administration. After Holder expressed agreement with Sen. Lindsey Graham that the nation is at war with terrorists, Graham responded, "I'm almost ready to vote for you right now."

Republicans may fondly remember Holder's critical role in expanding an independent counsel's investigation of Bill Clinton that ultimately led to his impeachment over his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Holder advised then-Attorney General Janet Reno to allow for the expansion of the investigation's scope.

Under John Ashcroft, Alberto Gonzales and Michael Mukasey in the Bush administration, the office of attorney general served as a center of conspiracy against democratic rights, authorizing torture, illegal wiretapping, and firing United States Attorneys who did not completely toe the Bush administration line, among other nefarious activities. Holder will attempt to effect a change of image. In congressional hearings, he said that he considered "waterboarding"—that is, drowning—torture. The Bush administration has defended the procedure as a "harsh interrogation method."

However, in other areas, Holder has made clear that he intends to carry on the policies of the Bush administration. He both supported the initial passage of the Patriot Act in 2001 and played a key role in the talks that led to its reauthorization in 2005—when Obama himself voted for it.

As attorney general, Holder would be obliged to investigate the crimes of the Bush administration. In his nomination hearings, he said he would do no such thing. "The decisions that were made by a prior administration were difficult ones," he said. "It is an easy thing for somebody to look back in hindsight and be critical of the decisions that were made." He indicated that, while he favors closing the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, this will be a lengthy process in which prisoners' legal status will remain indeterminate.

## **Leon Panetta, director of the Central Intelligence Agency**

Panetta was a surprise selection to be the next director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the US spy agency and long a center of counterrevolution, because of his lack of hands-on experience in intelligence work. This was almost a requirement for the job, however, under the current circumstances, since Obama was seeking to rehabilitate the image of an agency that has become identified worldwide with kidnapping, secret imprisonment and torture. Obama initially intended to name a CIA veteran, John Brennan, who was the candidate's top intelligence adviser, but Brennan faced criticism over his role in decisions on interrogation during the Bush administration.

Panetta would play the same political role as George H.W. Bush, another "outsider" but a trusted ruling class figure, brought in to refurbish the agency after the assassination scandals of the early 1970s. He began his political career as a Republican working in the administration of Richard Nixon, but switched to the Democratic Party in 1971, and was elected to the US Congress from California in 1976, serving there for 16 years and specializing in budgetary matters. Clinton chose him as his first director of the United States Office of Management and Budget.

In 1994, Panetta became White House chief of staff, serving in that capacity until 1997, the critical years in which Clinton governed in collaboration with the Republican congressional leadership that took control of Congress in 1994. The single "achievement" of those years was the elimination of the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, in a bipartisan deal.

More recently, Panetta has shifted his focus to foreign affairs, working as a member of the Iraq Study Group, the bipartisan establishment group that sought, beginning in 2006, to effect a tactical change in US policies in Iraq. Also serving on the group were Robert Gates, secretary of defense in both the Bush and Obama administrations, and former secretary of state in the first Bush administration, James Baker.

## **Admiral Dennis C. Blair, director of National Intelligence**

Blair is one of a record four retired military officers chosen for high positions in the Obama administration, and the second Navy man in a row, following retired Vice Admiral Michael McConnell, to hold the position of DNI, created to oversee the entire intelligence establishment in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Blair is a career military man who rose to the rank of commander-in-chief of United States Pacific Command, which is the highest-ranking position for all US forces in the Asia-Pacific region. He also served as director of the joint staff in the Office of the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff. After retiring from the US Navy in 2002, Blair has been involved in US military and foreign policy circles, holding a chair at the US Army War College and serving on and holding a chair at a geo-strategic think tank, the National Bureau of Asian Research. He also served as president of the important US-government think tank, Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA).

Blair could be prosecuted for war crimes in relationship to the 1999 East Timor massacres, which took place during his period as head of the Pacific Command. Apparently, Blair disobeyed orders from the Clinton administration on two occasions. As the massacres against the pro-independence movement in East Timor became an embarrassment for the Clinton administration, which presented its simultaneous imperialist adventure against Yugoslavia as a "humanitarian mission," Clinton called on Blair to meet with General Wiranto, head of the Indonesian military,

and order him to end support for the pro-Indonesian militia. Blair instead presented Wiranto with an offer of increased military assistance and invited the Indonesian strongman to be his personal guest in Hawaii. Wiranto took this as an American blessing for an escalation of violence in East Timor. When State Department officials learned that Blair had not delivered the message to Wiranto, they called on him to do so again. Again he refused. Only several months later, after many more independence supporters had been killed, did Blair act to cut off US military assistance to the Indonesian army.

Blair's career also highlights the incestuous relationship between the military and the defense industry. In 2006, the US Department of Defense inspector general determined Blair had violated IDA's Conflict of Interest regulations by recommending the US government purchase production contracts for F22 Raptors. Blair served as the president of the IDA, which made the recommendation, and on the board of directors for EDO Corporation, which did subcontracting work on the F22. He received only a slap on the wrist, and there is no congressional opposition to his appointment.

## **Janet Napolitano, secretary of Homeland Security**

The two-term governor of Arizona, Napolitano has built a reputation for being "pro-business" and a proponent of increased militarization of the US border with Mexico, much of which lies in her state. In state politics, Napolitano supported Arizona's ban on same-sex marriages, opposed restrictions on gun ownership, and supported the death penalty. Her nomination has been warmly received by the Republican Party, with Arizona's two Republican senators, Jon Kyl and John McCain, lobbying on her behalf.

Napolitano has criticized the "Federal government's failure to fulfill its responsibilities in securing our border," and it is her supposed expertise on immigration that was her prime qualification for the Department of Homeland Security. Napolitano made her political name in Arizona through her opposition to immigration, signing into law reactionary legislation that made possible the prosecution of illegal immigrants as felons. She also deployed the Arizona National Guard along the border with Mexico, winning praise from anti-immigration zealots.

In questioning during Congressional hearings related to her nomination, Napolitano spoke in favor of the militarization of the Mexican border, saying that border fences should be used to separate urban areas from Mexico, but that higher technology should be used in the more remote expanses of the border area. She did not oppose the "Real ID program," which would create an internal passport system in the US, saying only that the financial burden it will impose on states needs to be lessened.

Napolitano leaves Arizona just as the state budget has been plunged into crisis by the economic slump, and in particular the housing crisis. The state faces a current deficit of \$1.25 billion and a deficit of \$2.65 billion for 2010. Napolitano has proposed major cuts to higher education to lessen the deficits. As part of proposed spending cuts of \$975 million, \$100 million would be cut from the state's university system and \$40 million from community colleges. Also, \$145 million will be slashed from the state highway fund.



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