General who says “It’s fun to kill people” picked to oversee US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq

Barry Grey
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Last week, the Obama administration named Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis to replace Gen. David Petraeus as chief of US Central Command, giving the Marine officer overall command of US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and across the Middle East and Central Asia.

The elevation of Mattis is further confirmation that last month’s firing of Gen. Stanley McChrystal and appointment of Petraeus to take command of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan signaled a major escalation of US military violence against the Afghan people. Mattis, also known, according to Wikipedia, as “Chaos,” “Warrior Monk” and “Mad Dog Mattis,” is notorious inside and outside of the military for his bloodlust and enthusiasm for killing.

He has a long record leading combat operations in US wars of aggression in the Middle East and Central Asia. He served as a lieutenant colonel in Operation Desert Storm (the US invasion of Iraq in 1991), commanded the first ground troops that went into southern Afghanistan after the 2001 US invasion of that country, and led Marines in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In April of 2004 he headed up the first US assault on the Iraqi city of Fallujah and helped plan the siege later that year that destroyed the city and killed thousands of its residents.

In February of 2005, at a public forum in San Diego, Mattis said that “it’s a hell of a lot of fun to shoot” Afghans. He continued: “Actually, it’s a lot of fun to fight. You know, it’s a hell of a hoot. It’s fun to shoot some people. I’ll be right upfront with you, I like brawling.” A bit later he spoke of the “emotional … satisfaction you may get from really whacking somebody.”

Mattis received an official rebuke for his comments. They were, however, not an aberration. In his 2006 book *Fiasco: The American military Adventure in Iraq*, Thomas Ricks writes that one of the rules the Marine commander gave his troops to live by was, “Be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everybody you meet.”

In a speech to Task Force Ripper during Desert Storm, he reportedly said, ‘It’s the mission of every Marine in the battalion to send one dead Iraqi home to Mama.”

In announcing the appointment, Defense Secretary Robert Gates lauded Mattis as “one of our military’s outstanding combat leaders and strategic thinkers, bringing an essential mix of experience, judgment and perspective to this important post.” He shrugged off the official rebuke against Mattis, saying the incident was five years old.

Obama’s elevation of this fascistic killer to the overall command of two major wars, covert and overt military operations in Yemen and Somalia, and the planning of new wars evoked no protest either from prominent Democrats, the major media, or supposedly “left” liberal organizations such as the *Nation* magazine. On the other hand, it drew enthusiastic praise from the *Wall Street Journal*, which published an editorial Friday headlined “An Obama Home Run.” The *Journal* declared that “it is to Mr. Obama’s credit that he has chosen to draw a line from Iran to Afghanistan with the one-two punch of Petraeus and Mattis.”

It has not taken long to expose the gullibility of all those who hailed the sacking of McChrystal—ostensibly because of disparaging remarks about Obama and other

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civilian officials made by the general and his aides in a *Rolling Stone* article—as a powerful affirmation of civilian control over the military. The *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the issue of civilian control was being used to give a democratic gloss to a decision to intensify the military slaughter in Afghanistan.

McChrystal had fallen out of favor because of his failure to suppress the growing popular insurgency against the US-led colonial occupation. His position was fatally undermined in June when he acknowledged that last February's offensive against the town of Marjah in Helmand province had failed to dislodge the Taliban, and then postponed for several months the long-planned offensive against the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.

Of particular concern in the military, the intelligence establishment and the Obama administration—as indicated by the *Rolling Stone* piece and articles in the *New York Times* and other newspapers—were McChrystal's rules of engagement, which somewhat restricted the use of American firepower against Afghan towns and villages in the name of limiting civilian casualties.

No sooner had Petraeus been nominated to replace McChrystal than the former commander of the US surge in Iraq announced that he would review the rules of engagement with an eye to enabling US troops to more freely kill and maim Afghan civilians. Petraeus also made clear at his Senate confirmation hearing that the war would continue indefinitely, notwithstanding Obama's token "drawdown" date of July 2011.

The entire political and media establishment immediately swung behind the shift in military tactics, as symbolized by the Senate's unanimous confirmation of Petreaus within days of his nomination.

Petraeus has yet to officially loosen the rules of engagement. But in the week since he formally assumed command, a series of US and NATO massacres of Afghan civilians has occurred—although, it must be added, the US media has barely reported them.

On July 7, US forces killed two civilians and arrested three others during a pre-dawn raid in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Hundreds of residents protested Saturday, carrying banners reading, "Death to America!"

NATO claimed that a commando raid in the eastern province of Paktia last week killed a Taliban operative and captured eight others. Villagers protested outside of government offices Saturday, insisting that the men were innocent civilians.

On Wednesday, a NATO airstrike in Ghazni province in the east killed five Afghan soldiers and wounded two others.

The next day, NATO artillery shells killed six civilians and wounded several others in the Jani Khel district of Paktia province. NATO officially admitted the massacre on Friday, issuing the usual perfunctory statement of regret.

At the same time, the killing and wounding of US and other NATO forces continues to escalate. Last week, at least 14 American soldiers were killed, bringing to a total so far this month to a minimum of 23. June was the most deadly month for US and other occupation troops since the US invasion nearly nine years ago, with 102 killed, including 60 Americans.

In the face of growing popular support in Afghanistan for the entirely legitimate resistance against US colonial domination, a deteriorating military/security situation for the US and NATO in the country, and rising opposition to the war at home, the Obama administration has decided to step up the killing in an attempt to drown the resistance in blood.

This is a war crime. It must be stopped by the development of a mass working class movement against imperialist war and the capitalist system that breeds it.

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