

# General Petraeus and the CIA

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A senior official in the Obama administration confirmed Wednesday afternoon media reports of a major reshuffling of top positions in the US military-intelligence apparatus. Gen. David Petraeus, the senior commander of US occupation troops in Afghanistan, will assume the position of director of the Central Intelligence Agency, while the current CIA director, Leon Panetta, will take over the position of defense secretary from Robert Gates, who is quitting the Pentagon at the end of June.

It has been reported that the 58-year-old four-star general, Petraeus, will retire from the US Army before assuming the post as head of the top US intelligence agency. Nonetheless, the appointment reflects the unrelenting growth of the integration and power of the military-intelligence complex—a state within the state—that increasingly dominates the affairs of the American government.

Sources quoted by the CNN news network praised the pending appointment. One gushed that it would “bring the perspective of a battlefield commander to the intelligence community.”

Others were quoted as saying that Petraeus never wanted the top military post as chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff. “Instead, Petraeus wanted to be in a ‘command’ rather than the joint chief chairman’s advisory role to the president, the sources said.”

The CIA post, CNN added, “gives him an important command position that tends to stay out of the public spotlight, which could be important given Petraeus’ strong personality.”

That the corporate media advances such arguments in favor of the Petraeus appointment is a measure of the profound decay of democratic sensibilities within the ruling establishment as a whole. That an individual who demands the power of an independent command rather than a position as a mere adviser to an elected president is being placed in charge of a powerful intelligence agency operating “out of

the public spotlight” should be the cause for immense concern.

The decision by Obama—even before he had won the 2008 presidential election—to support Petraeus as the commander of US troops in Iraq was one of the earliest confirmations that the candidate of “change” was committed to continuing the criminal wars of aggression initiated under his predecessor, George W. Bush.

Loathed by many within the senior officer corps as a political general and a sycophant of the Bush White House, Petraeus was the architect of the “surge” policy in Iraq that Obama claimed to oppose. The Democratic candidate purported to support a fixed timetable for the withdrawal of US troops, which Petraeus rejected. Nonetheless, once in the White House, he deferred on matters of policy to the general, who had been bumped up by Bush—and maintained by Obama—as the head of Central Command, assuming responsibility for both the Iraq and the Afghanistan-Pakistan wars, as well as US military operations in Yemen and elsewhere in the region.

Petraeus is credited with masterminding the cult of counterinsurgency, or COIN, within the US military, supposedly placing a premium on winning “hearts and minds” and extolling the value of “non-kinetic” actions.

In practice, however, this puffed up doctrine has consisted largely of attempts to bribe off sections of the hostile populations in Iraq and Afghanistan while assassinating and massacring those who continue to resist. In neither country has it proven an effective means of overcoming the irrepressible popular hostility to a foreign neo-colonial occupation.

After taking over from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the former special operations chief, as the senior US commander in Afghanistan, Petraeus escalated the use of force, quadrupling the number of air strikes and increasing the special forces night raids that together have been blamed for

the bulk of civilian casualties.

One argument that is no doubt being made within the political establishment for Petraeus taking over as CIA director—aside from the fact that his appointment will be assured support from congressional Republicans—is that the bloody work that he carried out as the senior military commander in Iraq and Afghanistan was conducted parallel to similar, complementary operations conducted by the CIA. He is intimately familiar with these operations and amply prepared to direct them.

Among them is the Predator drone war against Pakistan, in which the pilotless CIA aircraft have launched nearly 250 strikes since 2004, killing over 2,300 people, the vast majority of them civilians.

The operations of the CIA's special activities divisions have been substantially expanded under the Obama administration, with its operatives—many of them former Special Forces and other military special operations troops—deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and now Libya.

The use of these forces holds the attraction of being covert, with the CIA routinely refusing to comment on their activities, the scope of which are systematically concealed from the American people.

The appointment of Petraeus to the head of the CIA signals the further militarization of an agency that has already arrogated to itself immense power both at home and abroad.

Within his first two and a half months in office, Obama bowed to the pressure of this covert agency, following the recriminations over his release of the so-called torture memos used by the Bush White House and the US Justice Department to grant a pseudo-legal justification for the CIA's use of waterboarding and other criminal torture methods.

After making a pilgrimage to the CIA's Langley, Virginia headquarters and offering what amounted to an apology to its personnel, Obama offered blanket protection from prosecution for all those within the agency responsible for torture, extraordinary rendition and other criminal acts carried out under the Bush administration. And he sent Justice Department lawyers repeatedly into court to argue the state secrets privilege as a means of quashing any attempt to expose these crimes.

It was Harry Truman who in retirement commented, "I never would have agreed to the formulation of the Central Intelligence Agency back in forty-seven, if I had known it would become the American Gestapo."

Today, the agency he founded has gone far beyond the "Murder, Inc." that became so infamous in the period of the assassination plots of the 1960s and 1970s and proxy wars that included the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the civil war in Angola, the contra terror war in Nicaragua and the US-backed Islamist insurgency in Afghanistan.

Now CIA murder has become mechanized and computerized, performed by operatives sitting at computer screens at the agency's Langley headquarters and firing Hellfire missiles into impoverished villages thousands of miles away.

It deploys its own armies of assassins while recruiting even larger forces of mercenaries and private contractors.

This growing and interlocking complex of armed forces and intelligence agencies that dominates the US government, no matter which of the two big business parties are in power, poses the threat of both new and greater criminal atrocities abroad and police state dictatorship at home. Under conditions of deepening financial crisis combined with continuously widening social inequality, the financial oligarchy that rules America has become ever more dependent upon this repressive apparatus.

These threats can be answered only by a counteroffensive by the working class fighting for the socialist reorganization of society and the dismantling of the entire so-called national security apparatus, including the CIA, NSA, FBI and other intelligence agencies and the disbanding of the US military.

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