

The Petraeus affair

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12 November 2012

According to the official story surrounding the sudden resignation of Central Intelligence Agency Director David Petraeus, the departure of the former commander of US and allied forces first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan was the result of a personal moral lapse, unrelated to political or intelligence issues.

As the *Washington Post*, quoting a “senior intelligence official,” wrote on Sunday, “This is a very personal matter, not a matter of intelligence.”

On Friday, Petraeus released a statement to CIA staff in which he said President Obama had accepted his request, submitted the previous day, to resign from the agency. The retired four-star general gave as the sole reason for this step his involvement in an extramarital affair. “Such behavior is unacceptable,” he wrote, “both as a husband and as the leader of an organization such as ours.”

The claim, generally being promoted by both the media and the political establishment, that Petraeus’ resignation has no political dimension is not credible. From the reporting thus far of the circumstances surrounding his exit, it is impossible to determine with any precision the specific political issues involved. However, given who Petraeus is and the nature of the various institutions affected, his resignation cannot fail to involve significant political questions.

Regarding the circumstances leading up to his resignation, various media reports, in virtually all cases citing unnamed sources, have converged in general terms on the following narrative:

Last spring, a female associate of Petraeus, identified Sunday as 37-year-old Jill Kelley of Tampa, Florida, reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that she had received threatening emails from Paula Broadwell, a 40-year-old writer who recently authored a glowing biography of Petraeus.

Kelley and her husband are friends to the Petraeus family. Broadwell is a wife and mother, graduate of the

US Military Academy, and Army reserve officer. She spent a year in Afghanistan in close contact with the general when he was commanding the occupation forces there.

The FBI, an agency of the Justice Department, launched an investigation several months ago and came across emails between Petraeus and Broadwell making clear they were involved in an extramarital affair. Some press reports speak of unwarranted access by Broadwell to Petraeus’ personal email account as well as unspecified classified documents.

At some point the FBI interviewed both Petraeus and Broadwell. However, the FBI and Justice Department purportedly concluded that there had been no security breach and no laws had been broken.

For reasons unexplained, neither Congress nor the White House was informed of the FBI investigation of the CIA director until after last Tuesday’s election. James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, nominally Petraeus’ superior, was supposedly informed only Tuesday afternoon. The White House was told Wednesday, but Obama himself learned of the affair only Thursday when he met with Petraeus. Obama told the CIA head he wanted 24 hours to consider his request to resign, and on Friday accepted the resignation.

Various members of congressional intelligence committees interviewed on Sunday news programs said they had no advance knowledge at all of either the investigation or the resignation. Some called for a congressional probe into the FBI handling of the case.

This bizarre scenario, very possibly involving violations of laws requiring disclosure to Congress of significant intelligence matters, itself strongly suggests unstated political agendas and conflicts. For one thing, all of this was taking place in the run-up to the presidential election and being concealed from the electorate.

Moreover, Petraeus was scheduled to testify this week in closed session before both the House and the Senate intelligence committees on the role of the CIA in connection with the September 11 assault on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the death of the US ambassador and three other Americans, including two CIA operatives. Both committees now say he will not appear before them this week, although some committee members have suggested he might be called to testify at a later point.

The events in Benghazi have far-reaching implications, since they involve Washington's alliance with jihadist forces, including those linked to Al Qaeda, in last year's war to overthrow Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. This alliance continues in the current drive for regime-change in Syria.

The fact, as well, that one of the US ruling class' chief police-intelligence agencies launched a probe resulting in the downfall of the head of a rival agency suggests that questions of policy as well as "turf" and status were involved.

Last month, the *Washington Post*, in a series of articles on Obama's expansion and institutionalization of extrajudicial drone assassinations, took note of differences between Petraeus and Obama's counterterrorism chief, John Brennan. Pointing out that Petraeus was pressing for an expansion of the CIA's fleet of armed drone aircraft, the *Post* wrote:

"Brennan is leading efforts to curtail the CIA's primary responsibility for targeted killings. Over opposition from the agency, he has argued that it should focus on intelligence activities and leave lethal action to its more traditional home in the military, where the law requires greater transparency."

Regardless of how the crisis engulfing Petraeus arose, the decisions regarding its handling were political. If one accepts the official narrative, the question arises: Why did Obama decide, after being told of the sexual affair by Petraeus on Thursday, to accept his resignation? As some commentators have pointed out, in light of the reported absence of a security breach or violation of law, Obama could very well have treated the entire affair as a merely personal matter that did not warrant Petraeus' departure.

This brings us to another important aspect of the Petraeus affair: the perverse political environment in which a fairly commonplace event in marital affairs is

treated as something akin to a felony, often becoming the pretext for settling political scores.

Petraeus is a deeply reactionary figure, but he has not been brought down because of war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. Rather, he has been declared unfit because of perhaps the first reported act that indicates he is human.

As military journalist Tom Ricks told CNN: "You put an officer out there on repeated tours and if he doesn't slip, I'd be surprised. What we have today is shocking proof that Gen. Petraeus is a human being."

The fall of Petraeus is but the latest example of the extraordinary degree to which sex has become a powerful instrument of political and personal control.



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