

Obama reshuffles national security staff

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US President Barack Obama announced Wednesday that his national security advisor, Thomas Donilon, will resign at the beginning of July, to be replaced by the current US ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice. To replace Rice at the UN, Obama announced his nomination of another long-time foreign policy advisor, Samantha Power.

The announcement was made yesterday afternoon in the White House Rose Garden.

The personnel shake-up comes amid bitter conflicts within the state over how to intensify the US proxy war in Syria and intervene in Iran, as well as over the legal implications of Obama's extra-judicial drone killings. These concerns were reflected in Obama's May 23 speech at the National Defense University. (See, "Obama offers tortured defense of targeted killings")

The nomination of Rice and Power, who are considered "liberal hawks," makes clear there will be no backtracking on the administration's militarist, anti-democratic and illegal policies in the aftermath of Obama's speech.

The two played critical roles in the 2011 war in Libya, in which Washington-led NATO air strikes and Special Forces deployments, in alliance with Islamist opposition militias, were used to topple the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Rice and Power, working with then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, overcame opposition to US-NATO war plans against Libya from other officials, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Rice and Power were reportedly instrumental in persuading Obama to seek a UN Security Council Resolution authorizing war in Libya, cynically arguing that the war was necessary to protect Libyan civilians against Gaddafi.

Washington has carried out a similar strategy in the current war to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, against whom the US has armed and supported forces

tied to Al Qaeda, such as the Al Nusra Front.

Under these conditions, Obama's ritualistic invocation in the Rose Garden of a struggle for "American values" was both empty and repugnant. The résumés of the officials replacing Donilon make clear that the escalation of war in the Middle East will continue, with disastrous consequences for the people of both the Middle East and the United States.

Obama praised Rice for her service, saying she "has stood up for innocent civilians, from Libya to Côte d'Ivoire"—an African country targeted for intervention by France, with US support, shortly after the outbreak of the Libyan war.

In fact, the Libyan war ended with tens of thousands of deaths, the NATO carpet-bombing of cities including Tripoli and Sirte, and the turning over of Libya to a patchwork of far-right Islamist militias.

Some of the unintended consequences of this reliance on Islamist forces have provoked controversy in Washington, affecting Rice herself. She has come under criticism from Republicans in Congress for claiming that the attacks on the US embassy in Benghazi, Libya last September were part of a spontaneous protest. The attack was launched by an Islamist militia that seized control of part of the city during the NATO war—prompting Republicans to charge Rice with a cover-up.

As part of Obama's White House staff, however, the national security adviser is not subject to confirmation by the Senate, so Rice's elevation is not threatened by Republican opposition.

In his Rose Garden remarks, Obama thanked Donilon, citing his role in helping to organize the US assassination of Osama bin Laden, imposing sanctions against Iran, and formulating US policy in the Asia-Pacific.

Donilon was a key architect of the "pivot to Asia"—a strategy of containing China by building up US military

forces in East Asia and cementing anti-Chinese alliances with other countries in the region. He also set up Friday's meeting between Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping, to be held at the estate of billionaires Walter and Leonore Annenberg in Rancho Mirage, California.

In brief remarks, Donilon praised Obama for making "difficult decisions" on war and for his supposed "commitment to the core values that define us as Americans, our Constitution, civil liberties, the rule of law."

It is difficult to decide what is most reactionary and contemptible in such comments. Is it Donilon's presentation of Obama as a defender of the US Constitution—though Obama has ordered extra-judicial drone murders, including of US citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, expanded domestic spying, including on the press, and signed bills authorizing the indefinite military detention of Americans, in practice shredding the Bill of Rights? Or is it the fact that Donilon posed as a defender of the Constitution and of civil liberties only minutes after having been praised as the organizer of the extra-judicial killing of bin Laden?

Washington's intervention in the oil-rich Middle East is perhaps the clearest example of the fundamental contradiction between the American "values" cynically invoked by Obama and the American (imperialist) "interests" he also invoked. As it ruthlessly pursues its imperialist interests in the Middle East, through war and murder, the American ruling class is trampling on the democratic values and rights embodied in the US Constitution and other basic documents of the American Revolution.

Concluding his remarks in the Rose Garden, Obama praised the three officials, saying: "They have made America safer. They have made America's values live in corners of the world that are crying out for our support and our leadership."

It is safe to say, in fact, that no corner of the world is "crying out" for the drone strikes and military invasions through which Washington exercises its "leadership."



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