

# US government, media silent on sacking of top nuclear officers

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A week has passed since the unprecedented back-to-back firings of two top US nuclear commanders, and the silence of the political and media establishment on the matter is deafening.

While expert sources acknowledge that the firings of Vice Admiral Tim Giardina and Major General Michael Carey constitute an unprecedented crisis in the US military, the media have accepted the US military's presentation of it a matter of the two officers' personal problems. Air Force General Robert Kehler's assertion that both firings were the result of vaguely defined "unfortunate behavioral incidents" has been accepted, and the matter largely dropped.

Such accounts are not only not credible, they entirely evade the issues involved in the sudden cashiering of officers controlling the most powerful nuclear arsenal on the planet, capable of destroying humanity many times over. As military sources or specialists of military affairs acknowledge, the firings reflect a deep crisis of the US military. In such a situation, neither the possibility of potentially catastrophic technical problems with the US nuclear arsenal nor of threatened military action against the US civilian government can be ruled out.

A report on the firing of Vice Admiral Tim Giardina in the *Marine Corps Times* noted that such an event "is exceedingly rare and perhaps unprecedented in the history of U.S. Strategic Command, which is responsible for all American nuclear war fighting forces, including nuclear-armed submarines, bombers and land-based missiles."

Speaking to the WSWS, Peter Feaver, Professor of Political Science at Duke University and Director of the Duke Program in American Grand Strategy, observed: "If you look over the last 4-5 years there have been quite a few senior officers who have been relieved for

cause, quite a number of those in the last several years... The military has been struggling to come to terms with why there are so many firings."

Feaver's remarks point to anger in the military over the extraordinary number of high-ranking officers who have been sacked with little or no public explanation. Other top officers removed from command positions under Obama include General James Mattis, Maj. General Mark Gurganus, Maj. General Gregg Sturdevant, General Stanley A. McChrystal and General David Petraeus.

McChrystal was removed as commander of US occupation forces in Afghanistan after making fun of Vice President Joe Biden in an interview with *Rolling Stone*, while Petraeus—a former commander of US forces in Iraq—was replaced, ostensibly due to a sex scandal.

Carey was fired by the US Air Force on October 11. He commanded the 20th Air Force, including 450 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in silos across the northern US. Carey was on an unspecified "temporary duty assignment" at the time of the alleged infraction. Though US officials suggested alcohol was involved, they also denied that Carey had an alcohol problem. It remains unclear why he was sacked.

Vice Admiral James Giardina was second in command of the US Strategic Command, having previously commanded a squadron of 10 Trident submarines armed with nuclear warheads. He allegedly was dismissed for playing at a casino with \$1,500 worth of fake gambling chips.

As for Mattis, the commandant of the Marine Corps who infamously declared in 2005 that it was "a lot of fun" to shoot Afghans, he stepped down as head of US Central Command earlier this year, reportedly over differences with the White House over US war policy

against Syria and Iran. Known for advocating an aggressive US strategy against Iran, he pressed for aggressive moves to cut off Iranian aid to the Syrian regime, declaring: “Absent Iran’s help, I don’t believe [Syrian President Bashar] Assad would have been in power the last six months.”

It is significant that the sudden cashiering of Giardina and Carey follows the Obama administration’s decision to postpone a war with Syria, which it nearly launched last month.

More broadly, a decade of escalating US imperialist interventions across the Middle East and Africa has placed rising strains on the US military and its relations with civilian authorities. At the same time, the weight of the US military and security forces in the country’s political life has grown immensely, as the White House relied on them to fight wars and promote the hysterical atmosphere of the “war on terror.”

The risk of military rule in the United States was underscored by the unprecedented lockdown of the entire city of Boston by US security forces in April, after the Boston Marathon bombing.

In a 2008 article “Coming Soon: A Crisis in Civil-Military Relations,” University of North Carolina Professor Richard Kohn bluntly wrote: “The president elected in November will inherit a stinking mess, one that contains the seeds of a civil-military conflict as dangerous as the crisis that nearly sank the Clinton team in 1993. Whether the new president is a Republican or Democrat makes only a marginal difference. The issues in military affairs confronting the next administration are so complex and so intractable that conflict is all but inevitable.”

Five years later—after further US military actions in Pakistan and Libya, a US-led proxy war in Syria, and constant threats of war with Iran—such tensions have simply grown deeper. Professor Feaver told the WSWS, “There are concerns about a military that has been at war for a dozen years now, putting strain on the force. There were obvious disputes about the way the Syrian issue was handled.”

“When the US was debating what to do about Syria, and the president was threatening to conduct air strikes, there was concern in the military that the administration did not have a clear strategy for how to deal with it. The administration seemed to be flailing about,” Feaver added.

WSWS also spoke with Richard Kohn. He told the WSWS that the Obama administration is “far more intrusive than his predecessors” in its handling of military affairs, citing this as a cause of significant “tension and suspicion and conflict between civilian and military leaders and the top of the government.”



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