

Special operations commander to head University of Texas

Ed Hightower
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The governing board of the University of Texas educational system last week unanimously selected Admiral William H. McRaven as its next chancellor. McRaven currently heads the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the military apparatus in charge of various elite commando units, and comprising some 60,000 personnel. He has zero experience in academic management. His selection as head of a prominent state university system represents a deepening integration of the US military brass into academia and its increasing grip on American public life in general.

McRaven served in the elite Navy SEAL force, earning notoriety for supervising the 2011 mission where special forces operatives illegally entered Pakistan and killed Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The special forces units under McRaven's command are some of the deadliest military units on the planet, and some of the most secretive.

In 2010, special forces troops under McRaven's command executed a raid in the Afghan village of Khataba, killing five civilians, among them two pregnant women. McRaven received critical attention for the civilian deaths and apparent cover-up of the incident in the Oscar-nominated documentary film *Dirty Wars*.

The University of Texas system encompasses nine university campuses and six hospital-related campuses. UT employs 90,000 workers and hosts a student body of 215,000. Its annual budget exceeds \$14 billion. The UT system is governed by a board of regents, whose members are appointed by the state governor.

McRaven will enter the chancellorship during a time of political turmoil that has spilled over into the Texas state legislature.

Just last month, UT regents gave an ultimatum to the president of the prestigious University of Texas at

Austin, William C. Powers that he must resign his position or be fired. Powers ultimately agreed to resign by June 2015.

UT regents have repeatedly clashed with Powers over Texas governor Rick Perry's agenda for reforming the UT system along the lines proposed by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank. The foundation suggests implementing a ratings system for professors, ratings for academic programs based on the revenue they generate, and the separation of research from teaching.

Perry has also pressured leaders at UT universities and at the Texas A&M universities to have his political supporters placed in lucrative managerial positions.

The move to oust Powers resulted in hundreds of emails and letters of protest from alumni and other supporters. A similar campaign to oust Powers failed two years ago. As a result, the state legislature took steps to impeach UT regent Wallace Hall, who investigated Powers for alleged mismanagement of UT Austin.

Curiously, the selection of Admiral McRaven garnered praise from all official corners, regardless of previous support for or opposition to Powers. Powers himself welcomes the selection of McRaven, as does Powers' supporter, former US senator and UT alumni group leader Kay Bailey Hutchison. Governor Rick Perry, too, supports McRaven's selection. It appears that the high stakes players are eager to bury past controversies and view McRaven's military credentials as the proper means for doing so.

That an intellectual nonentity—McRaven's closest possible claim to academic experience is authoring a book on commando tactics—has been selected to head one of the largest and most prestigious university systems in the world has political significance. Putting

a man with a brutal background in the US dirty war machine in charge of a network of institutions of higher learning sends a definite signal to the UT academic community and student body: it is time to take orders, not talk back.

When we wrote last summer on the appointment of Janet Napolitano as head of the University of California system, we noted that this would allow the university to streamline research for the US military-intelligence complex.

Likewise, it was an anticipation of political radicalization among faculty, students and campus workers, and a preparatory step in meeting that radicalization with brutal methods. McRaven's selection to head the UT system flows from the same fundamental needs and fears of the ruling class.



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