

# A Trump junta?

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9 December 2016

The selection Wednesday of Marine Gen. John Kelly, the former head of US Southern Command, to head the Department of Homeland Security brings to three the number of recently retired generals tapped by president-elect Donald Trump for his incoming cabinet.

Before nominating Kelly, Trump named the rabidly anti-Muslim Lieut. Gen. Mike Flynn, the retired former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, as his national security adviser.

He has also announced his choice of the former head of US Central Command, retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, nicknamed “Mad Dog” for his repeated statements expressing a love for killing, to head the Defense Department. Securing the nomination of Mattis as defense secretary requires congressional approval of a waiver exempting him from a law barring commissioned military officers who have served in uniform over the previous seven years from taking the post. Mattis retired in 2013 and took a seat on the board of directors of major military contractor General Dynamics.

There are other so-called flag officers waiting in the wings. Retired Gen. David Petraeus, also a former US Central Command chief who briefly served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is reportedly under consideration for Secretary of State. He would have to secure permission from his probation officer to work in Washington or travel outside the US. Petraeus was sentenced to two years probation last year after pleading guilty to handing over top secret intelligence documents to his mistress.

Retired Adm. James Stavridis, the former supreme allied commander of NATO, who met with Trump in New York Thursday, is also reportedly being vetted for the post of Secretary of State. Previously, he was considered a possible running mate for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. And Adm. Michael Rogers, currently head of the National Security

Agency, is said to be a contender for Director of National Intelligence.

The number of senior military officers being assembled in the Trump cabinet makes the incoming administration resemble more and more a Latin American military junta. The placing of both the Defense Department, overseeing the massive US war machine, and the Department of Homeland Security, which coordinates a ballooning police-state apparatus, in the hands of two recently retired Marine Corps generals is particularly chilling, suggesting a government that aims to seamlessly coordinate war abroad and repression at home under the tight control of a military camarilla.

Trump, the billionaire conman who secured five deferments to avoid the draft during the Vietnam war, appears to revel in surrounding himself with military brass, shouting out idiotically “‘Mad Dog’ Mattis” at rallies, as if association with the architect of the slaughter of Fallujah will somehow strengthen his image. But there is an objective source of the rise of the military into the top positions of the government.

It is now more than 55 years since President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the former senior allied commander in World War II, made a farewell speech in which he cautioned against the “conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry” whose “influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government.”

Eisenhower warned, “We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist.”

It is highly unlikely that Eisenhower could have imagined in his wildest dreams either the scale of the “disastrous rise of misplaced power” expressed in the

incoming Trump administration or the vast growth of the US military apparatus.

At \$580 billion, the Pentagon's budget consumes more than half of the discretionary spending of the federal government each year. Adding on the slush fund for unending overseas wars, money spent on atomic weapons and other military expenses, the real cost of Washington's war machine is more like \$1 trillion a year.

Along with the Pentagon budget, the power of the military brass has grown uninterrupted, particularly over the past quarter century of unending wars. The creation of a professional "all-volunteer" armed forces has increasingly isolated the military from civilian society, creating a distinct social caste that has asserted its independent political interests in the affairs of state ever more aggressively. So-called "unified combatant commanders," like Mattis, Kelly, Petraeus and Stavridis, exercise vast power over entire regions of the globe, far overshadowing any ambassador or other civilian representative of the US government.

While the rank-and-file of the US military appears to have heavily favored Trump in the election—partly out of the misguided hope that he would halt the unending wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East—Democrat Hillary Clinton was the favorite of the top US military brass, who considered her a veteran supporter of militarism and a more reliable backer of their strategic preparations for war against Russia.

Outside of Flynn, none of the ex-military commanders being nominated or considered for top posts had endorsed Trump. Some of them had clashed with the Obama administration, Mattis over Iran and Kelly over Guantanamo, for example.

As much as Trump is choosing ex-generals, the generals may themselves be choosing to join his administration, confident that they can ultimately dictate policy.

The Obama administration and congressional Democrats signaled Thursday that they will place no obstacles in the path of Mattis' appointment as defense secretary. A measure has been added to a stopgap spending bill set for approval before Congress adjourns this weekend that will fast-track the waiving of the legal ban on recently serving officers taking the post. Debate on the waiver in the Senate is to be limited to 10 hours, even though this will be the first time such a

waiver has been granted in over 60 years.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said that Trump "should be given wide latitude in assembling his team," and that Obama "believes this is an important principle."

More important, apparently, than civilian control of the military. That this bedrock constitutional principle has been transformed into all but a dead letter, supported by no significant section of the political establishment, is among the starkest manifestations of the decay and collapse of bourgeois democratic institutions in the United States, which have found their consummate political expression in the advent of the Trump presidency.

What is being assembled in the ongoing sessions at New York City's Trump Towers is a government of class war, comprised of billionaires and generals. It is turning to the military as it prepares to implement policies of social reaction at home and war abroad, and to confront the massive popular opposition that these policies will provoke from within the working class and the youth.



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