

White House upheaval continues as General Kelly takes the reins

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General John Kelly took office Monday morning as the new White House chief of staff. He asserted his authority immediately by forcing out Anthony Scaramucci, named White House communications director only 11 days before by President Trump.

The dismissal of Scaramucci served as a public demonstration of Kelly's supremacy at the White House on the day he was sworn in. It came at 9:30 am, only half an hour before Kelly presided over his first meeting with Trump's cabinet, devoted largely to discussing plans for a massive tax cut for US corporations and the wealthy.

Three top administration officials—National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House legislative director Marc Short—said that President Trump saw the tax cut plan as the centerpiece of legislative efforts going forward, in the wake of last week's collapse of the planned repeal of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).

Scaramucci's tenure as communications chief is even briefer than the 29 days in which retired General Michael Flynn served as national security adviser. In the course of those 11 days, Scaramucci provoked the resignation of press secretary Sean Spicer and the firing of chief of staff Reince Priebus, before he was himself fired by Kelly.

The rapid-fire series of appointments and ousters testifies to the deepening crisis of the Trump administration, which is barely a half-year old but already on its second chief of staff, second deputy chief of staff, second national security adviser, second press secretary and third (soon to be fourth) communications chief.

The struggle for influence within the White House was so murky that on a Sunday television interview

program, only hours before Kelly took office, White House counselor Kellyanne Conway refused repeatedly to say whether she and other top aides would continue to report directly to Trump or would now report to Kelly.

The next day, Kelly met with the White House staff and made it clear that everyone, including Conway, political counselor Steve Bannon, Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner and daughter Ivanka Trump, would report to him. This directive was underscored by the firing of Scaramucci, who had repeatedly told reporters that he reported only to Trump, not to the chief of staff.

In welcoming his new military strongman, Trump gave gushing praise for Kelly's performance as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). "He will do a spectacular job, I have no doubt, as chief of staff," Trump declared. "What he's done in terms of Homeland Security is record-shattering."

Such comments underscore the deeply anti-democratic character of the Trump administration, which brings together retired military officers, billionaires and Trump family members and cronies in a noxious and reactionary cabal.

The most significant political fact of Kelly's appointment is the support he has received from the Democratic Party. Democrats remained silent on Monday, while those who commented over the weekend, like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, praised Kelly as someone who could bring much-needed order to a chaotic presidency. Pelosi said on Sunday that she "looked forward to working" with Kelly.

In January, Kelly was confirmed 88-11 by the US Senate to his previous position. Vermont Senator and Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who voted for the confirmation, said that he

hoped Kelly and Defense Secretary James Mattis, another retired general, would have a “moderating influence” on the Trump administration.

Kelly has spent the past six months spearheading the vicious persecution of immigrants and refugees. He vigorously enforced Trump’s unconstitutional Muslim ban, repeatedly struck down by lower courts but largely restored by a 5-4 vote of the Supreme Court. He leaves the DHS as it is preparing the next stage of Trump’s attack on democratic rights through the building of a network of immigrant detention camps.

Arrests of immigrants have risen by 40 percent over previous years, while the stepped-up brutality of the ICE and Border Patrol have created a widespread atmosphere of fear in immigrant communities.

Kelly rescinded previous policies of prioritizing the deportation of immigrants convicted of violent felonies in favor of targeting any undocumented immigrant encountered by DHS personnel. Any “chargeable criminal offense” became grounds for prioritization, including common civil infractions like using a false Social Security number or ignoring a deportation order.

Moreover, Kelly gave free rein to rank-and-file ICE agents and border patrolmen, authorizing them to pursue any immigrant who “in the judgment of an immigration officer” posed a risk to US national security. The result was a series of cases in which immigrants with longstanding ties to the United States, with citizen children and spouses, who had faithfully reported for years to ICE offices, were suddenly seized and deported.

Kelly also formally rescinded Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, also known as DAPA, under which parents of children who were either US citizens or eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) were given limited protection from deportation. DAPA was announced by Obama but never implemented because of court challenges.

DHS is now moving towards two even more drastic and sweeping actions: repeal of DACA itself, affecting 800,000 young people brought to the US as children; and the expansion of the program of expedited removal, under which recent immigrants apprehended within 100 miles of the border can be summarily deported without a trial. Under a draft plan now being considered, expedited removal would now be applied to any

immigrant detained anywhere in the United States who cannot prove residence in the US for longer than 90 days.

Kelly’s elevation to the White House marks a further stage in the erosion of such democratic traditions as civilian control of the military. A veteran of 40 years in the Marine Corps, including years in the Pentagon and years in battlefield commands, will now be in charge of the staff of the civilian commander-in-chief.

While avowedly non-partisan, in the sense of preferring one bourgeois party to the other—he told *Foreign Policy* magazine last year that he would be equally willing to serve in a Democratic or a Republican administration—Kelly is hardly without politics, and those of the most reactionary type. He aggressively defended the Guantanamo Bay detention camp when the Obama administration sought to have it shut down. He said both Clinton and Trump were deceiving the American people by claiming it was possible to defeat ISIS without committing US combat troops to Iraq and Syria.

Kelly appeared with Trump recently at a Coast Guard graduation ceremony, offered him a ceremonial saber, and suggested that this would be an appropriate instrument to use against the president’s critics in the media. He also said, speaking of congressional complaints about his crackdown on immigrants, “If lawmakers do not like the laws they’ve passed and we are charged to enforce, then they should have the courage and skill to change the laws. Otherwise they should shut up and support the men and women on the front lines.”



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