

Trump installs ex-general and anti-Islam bigot in top Pentagon post

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In an action that combines authoritarian contempt for Congress and a direct appeal to racist and fascist sentiments, President Trump has installed retired Army Gen. Anthony Tata in a top policy-making position in the Pentagon.

Trump took the action after Tata withdrew his name Sunday from consideration for the post of undersecretary of defense for policy, the third-ranking position in the Department of Defense. Tata withdrew following the cancellation—with only an hour’s notice—of a July 30 confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

According to the Pentagon announcement, Tata “has been designated as the official Performing the Duties of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy reporting to the Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Dr. James Anderson.” Anderson had been named as a temporary fill-in for the post after the previous undersecretary, John Rood, was forced out for opposing Trump’s action in withholding military aid to Ukraine—the decision that led to his impeachment last December.

Under the thoroughly anti-democratic procedure employed by the White House with increasing frequency, when the Senate declines to confirm his nominee, Trump simply appoints the person to fill the position of top deputy to the vacant post, and the new “acting” deputy becomes a temporary replacement filling the vacancy more or less indefinitely.

Trump applied the same technique last fall when Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell opposed the nomination of former Virginia state Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli for the number-two position in the Department of Homeland Security. Cuccinelli is now the acting deputy, serving under the acting Secretary Chad Wolf, meaning that the huge department, with

more than 240,000 employees, is entirely run by Trump nominees who have not been confirmed by the Senate.

Tata, former planning director of the 82nd Airborne Division and later deputy commander of the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan, was forced to retire as a brigadier general in 2009 after an investigation into allegations of adultery (considered a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice). He went on to hold several high-level positions in the Republican-run state government of North Carolina. His nomination for Pentagon policy chief was called into question after his record of Islamophobic remarks on Twitter came to light.

Among other things, in tweets posted in 2018, Tata called former President Barack Obama a “terrorist leader” and a Muslim who “did more to help Islamic countries than any president in history.” He also described Islam as the “most oppressive violent religion I know of.”

A political supporter of President Trump, Tata was a regular commentator on Fox News before taking a position with the Pentagon as a senior adviser to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. He at one point accused former CIA Director John Brennan of having issued a coded order for the assassination of Trump and urged Brennan to commit suicide rather than be prosecuted for treason.

After Democrats on the Senate Armed Service Committee called on Tata to withdraw, a Pentagon spokesman issued a disclaimer, saying, “The general himself has stated that he does not believe or support the comments he made. He issued a letter to the committee retracting those statements.”

Tata’s letter dismissed his attacks on Obama and Islam as a “few misstatements,” which, “while grievous, are not indicative of who I am.” He deleted

the remarks only after his nomination to the top Pentagon job led the media to dig up his social media history.

Senator Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), a former paratrooper who is the ranking Democrat on the Armed Service Committee, condemned Trump's appointment maneuver for undermining the military, saying that his "goal is to hollow out, politicize, and undermine the Pentagon the way he has the State Department and Intelligence Community. ..."

"This is an offensive, destabilizing move," he added, calling the method of Tata's appointment an "insult to our troops, professionals at the Pentagon, the Senate, and the American people. ... Clearly, President Trump wants people who will swear allegiance to him over the Constitution."

The other Democrats on the committee—Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, Mazie Hirono, Richard Blumenthal and Gary Peters—all backed Reed in opposing the nomination. Besides the Democrats, at least two committee Republicans, Joni Ernst of Iowa and Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, had indicated they were likely to oppose Tata's confirmation.

The installation of General Tata is part of a larger process in which Trump is seeking to fill positions in the national security apparatus with fascist-minded individuals completely loyal to him personally, while removing anyone with ties either to previous administrations or to his own former defense secretary, retired Gen. James Mattis.

Four top Pentagon officials announced in late June that they were leaving the administration, including the two top technology officials, Michael Griffin and Lisa Porter, the top foreign policy official, Kathryn Wheelbarger, and the acting comptroller, Elaine McCusker. Previous departures, according to an account in the *New York Times*, included Esper's chief of staff, Eric Chewning; Randall Schriver, the assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific affairs; and two Navy secretaries, Thomas Modly and Richard Spencer.

Trump has also installed an ultra-right figure, filmmaker Michael Pack, a longtime associate of former Trump counselor Stephen Bannon, as head of the US Agency for Global Media, which oversees the Voice of America. Pack carried out a full-scale purge of all the agencies that broadcast American government propaganda to the world, installing ultra-right figures

loyal to Trump.

Voice of America Director Amanda Bennett and Deputy Director Sandy Sugawara announced their resignations after Pack took over. He then dismissed the heads of Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Middle East Broadcasting Networks, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Open Technology Fund.

Trump appointed another former Bannon associate, Sebastian Gorka, for a four-year term on the National Security Education Board, which oversees a program aimed at training US citizens in foreign languages useful for the pursuit of the foreign policy interests of American imperialism.



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