

# A Cabinet of Generals: Trump appoints John Kelly to lead Department of Homeland Security

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*President-elect Donald Trump's transition team announced yesterday it will nominate retired Marine General John Kelly to head the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Kelly is the third ex-military general slated for a top cabinet position. His nomination follows those of James Mattis for Secretary of Defense and Michael Flynn for National Security Advisor.*

The unprecedented prominence of the military in the incoming cabinet is a sign that the American ruling class is preparing for war abroad and domestic repression at home.



Marine Major General John Kelly commanding an occupying force in Iraq, 2008

Kelly is a 40-year veteran of the Marine Corps whose career and personality embody the brutal and deeply reactionary American political culture in a period of permanent war. In a speech delivered in 2014 on the ongoing wars, Kelly said: "If you think this war against our way of life is over because some of the self-appointed opinion-makers and chattering class grow 'war weary,' because they want to be out of Iraq or Afghanistan, you are mistaken. This enemy is dedicated to our destruction. He will fight us for generations, and the conflict will move through various phases as it has since 9/11."

The Department of Homeland Security is a massive bureaucracy of state violence and repression. Its new director will command 240,000 employees comprising an army of border guards, police, detectives, investigators, deportation administrators, trial attorneys and judges who catch, process and deport hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers

each year.

Created in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, DHS has served as a Petri dish for a police state. It was founded one year before the Northern Command (NORTHCOM), and the two semi-parallel institutions are aimed at preparing the Armed Forces and police for military activities within the United States.

Kelly will be the first military general to lead DHS. With an extensive history leading US military forces in South America, he will combine “border security” with the expanded involvement of American imperialism throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Kelly’s speeches are filled with attacks on the “chattering class” and “all those who doubt America’s intentions.” He rants against the Washington “bureaucracy” and “materialist” youth who “can’t understand the price paid so they and their families can sleep safe and free at night.”

Kelly is an open defender of torture who vocally opposed calls to close Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba. He told the US Senate in 2015 that “the only people not treated humanely or having their human rights protected [at Guantanamo] are the guards,” and that the prisoners have “better healthcare down there than probably the veterans in our country have.”

Kelly commanded troops during the invasion and occupation of Iraq, in which up to 1 million civilians were killed. He helped lead the brutal offensive against the ancient city of Baghdad and told a reporter: “Baghdad ain’t s\*\*t.”

Following Obama’s 2012 reelection, Kelly was selected to command US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the military organization responsible for Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

Kelly is, to use the phrase of Smedley Butler, “a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers.” In 2015 Senate testimony, he criticized the Obama administration for cutting funding for the military, noting in Senate testimony that SOUTHCOM was “just barely” able to keep the “pilot light of US military engagement” on in the border region.

He called for the US to detach fair labor and human rights standards to arms sales in Central and South America and explained that “homeland defense does not begin at the ‘one yard line’ of our Southwest border, but instead extends forward, throughout the hemisphere, to keep threats far from our nation’s shores.”

He praised “private-sector economic dynamism” as the “greatest element of our national power,” and said he is “hopeful American businesses will help advance our President’s goal of a stable, prosperous, and secure Central America.”

Kelly was selected over Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, who “some conservatives found ... insufficiently tough on border security,” according to the *Washington Post*. McCaul wrote an op-ed on FoxNews.com last week in which he said, “We are going to build the [border] wall. Period...We are talking about a historic, multi-layered defense system...”

That this was the program of the candidate who was passed over for being “insufficiently

tough on border security” shows the urgent danger posed by the incoming administration.

In addition to Kelly, Mattis and Flynn, Trump is reportedly considering retired General David Petraeus as Secretary of State. The prominence of such figures in the government is the product of a long-term process in which the military-intelligence apparatus has exercised an ever more dominant role in the state. After 25 years of unending war, under both Democrats and Republicans, the United States is taking on the character of a garrison state.

The ex-generals in Trump’s cabinet will join the corporate executives and extreme right-wing figures who have been selected for every cabinet position. On Monday, the media reported that Trump is selecting Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt, a close ally of the oil industry and a denier of climate change science, has declared war on virtually all environmental regulations.

The extreme character of the incoming administration makes all the more glaring the efforts by the Democratic Party and the Obama administration to minimize and cover up the dangers that it represents.

On Trump’s DHS appointment, Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said: “We hope that General Kelly is willing to stand up for facts, families and the Constitution.”

Leon Panetta, Obama’s Secretary of Defense from 2011 to 2013, said Kelly was an “excellent choice,” while the *New York Times* called him “blunt-spoken and popular with military personnel.”

The corporate press has sought to build sympathy for Kelly, whose own son was killed during the war in Iraq. The *Washington Post* wrote that Kelly is “known inside the Pentagon as a thoughtful man who continued serving his country even after his son was killed in combat.” The *Post* passes no judgment on the fact that the young man died fighting a war his father helped launch.

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