

Admiral Fabuloso: Hillary, Syria and the Destructive Career of James G. Stavridis

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At least for a moment, Donald Trump seriously considered picking retired General Michael Flynn, fired as DIA chief for correctly predicting that Obama's covert Syrian intervention would generate a jihadist monster such as ISIS. Hillary Clinton meanwhile is reportedly pondering the selection of retired Admiral James G. Stavridis, a former Rumsfeld lickspittle who helped destroy Libya and thinks it would be a fine idea to hook up with Al Qaeda in Syria. Clinton's putative defense secretary, Michelle Flournoy, herself an ardent proponent of escalation in Syria and elsewhere, acclaims him as "one of the finest military officers of his generation." One might think that for a candidate politically burdened by her vote for the invasion of Iraq, not to mention the Libyan disaster, Stavridis, currently Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, might not be the best choice.

Stavridis' military record exhibits all the signs of an accomplished courtier, ably negotiating the reefs and shoals of service politics as he shinned up the ranks faster even than David Petraeus. The key accelerant on his progress came in 2004, when he was picked by the odious Larry di Rita, Rumsfeld's Svengali-spokesman, as the secretary's Senior Military Assistant. In the process, he was "frocked," vaulting from his former rank of one-star admiral straight to three stars – an almost unprecedented leap. Occupying this immensely powerful post, Stavridis oversaw the secretary's schedule, travel and, crucially, controlled the flow of information reaching Rumsfeld's desk. Reveling in the perks of his lofty position, Stavridis insisted on the provision of a special car for himself in motorcades, while junior officers, whom he importuned to do his shopping when traveling, staggered under the weight of his bags.

In a gratifyingly acerbic memoir, "[Speech-Less](#)," former Rumsfeld speech writer Matthew Latimer recalls Stavridis' assiduous toadying, offering fawning toasts to the secretary at dinners on overseas trips and busying himself with such humble but career-enhancing tasks as fixing a squeak in his master's office chair. He was, reports Latimer, "surprisingly political for a military man" helping the speechwriters craft statements defending the secretary from political attacks – his favorite word being "fabulous" – and taking charge of a project to promote Rumsfeld's accomplishments while also penning reams of groveling mash-notes to the man himself. Promoting an image as a "warrior-scholar," he wrote fluently in the pabulum that passes for wisdom in the debased culture of the Washington defense-intelligentsia. Thus in 2005 his treatise "Deconstructing War," which opened with the fatuous proposition that "War is changing, and not for the better" and headed downhill from there, won wide acclaim among the Osrics of the think-tank/op-ed circuit.

In 2006, the hard work with chair-repair and mash-notes paid off when he was nominated by the boss to head Southcom, the military satrapy controlling Central and South America, not

to mention Guantanamo, along with a fourth star. This was clearly the post for which he had been angling; officemates had noticed him listening to Spanish-language tapes for some months prior to the announcement. "This prompted some of us to wonder," recalled Latimer, "how long does it take to learn *fabuloso*?"

Obama brought change, but only for the better for "Stav" whose courtship of the incoming team paid off in his apotheosis to SACEUR, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, complete with lodging befitting this imperial rank at Chateau Gendebien, set in 23 acres of parkland, close by NATO headquarters at Mons, Belgium. The job offered perks far beyond those he had enjoyed in humbler days at Rumsfeld's feet, so much so that word of Stavridis' habitual use of official jets and other appurtenances for the private use of himself and family eventually prompted an official investigation although, as is customary with such probes of senior officers, he was totally absolved of any blame or sanction.

Meanwhile, and unfortunately for the people of Libya, he was given the opportunity to burnish the "warrior" part of his favored appellation. When Hillary Clinton fatefully bounced Obama into agreeing to attack Libya, Stavridis was on point, overseeing the deployment of Nato air power. Later, he boasted in Foreign Affairs that "Nato's operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention. The alliance responded rapidly to a deteriorating situation that threatened hundreds of thousands of civilians rebelling against an oppressive regime. It succeeded in protecting those civilians." In reality, the record clearly [indicates](#) that, despite some bombastic rhetoric, Qaddafi did not in fact make any attempt to massacre civilians, though he did use military force against the Nato-supported armed rebellion. Nevertheless the operation left a fatal legacy to democrats regarding the efficacy of interventionism, and this despite Libya's subsequent and entirely predictable descent into bloody chaos and ascendant jihadism.

Retiring from the military in 2013, Stavridis eased into the Deanship of the Fletcher School, a perfect platform for ponderous ruminations on modish topics such as "smart power" which he defines as combining "hard power" with "soft power." Among his ongoing and remunerative connections to the former is his chairmanship of the International Advisory Board of mega-defense contractor Northrop-Grumman, whose overseers can find little fault with Admiral Fabuloso's enthusiastic tub-thumping for the new cold war. From Ukraine to Syria, "Stav" is in the front lines, figuratively speaking, urging escalation against Russia. The Ukrainians should have "lethal aid" from the U.S., he announced in 2015, and when asked if that might not lead the Russians to escalate in turn, he conceded blithely, "when you release ordnance, everything changes."

But it is the Syrian war that has excited the warrior-scholar's most martial instincts, an ominous indication of where the wind is blowing in the national security set. So eager is he to show that he is firmly on board that he actually touts in public what others dare only murmur in private: in confronting Russia for mastery of Syria, it's OK to ally with Al Nusra, as Al Qaeda calls itself in Syria. "It is unlikely we are going to operate side by side with cadres from Nusra, but if our allies are working with them, that is acceptable," he told Yaroslav Trofimov of the *Wall Street Journal* in June last year. "I don't think that is a showstopper for the U.S. in terms of engaging with that coalition." Such is the intellectual bankruptcy of the Clinton campaign on national security that this dangerous time-server should be deemed a serious candidate for a slot on the ticket.

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covered national security topics in this country for many years. In addition to publishing numerous books, he co-produced the 1997 feature film The Peacemaker and the 2009 documentary on the financial crisis American Casino. His latest book is [Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins](#) (Henry Holt).

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