

Petraeus Resignation Fuels Political Warfare over Benghazi Attack

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The resignation of retired four-star General David Petraeus as Central Intelligence Agency director has reignited partisan political warfare over the September 11 attack on the US consulate and a CIA station in Benghazi, Libya that left US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans dead.

Petraeus, who commanded US and allied forces first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan, announced his resignation November 9, acknowledging an extramarital affair with Paula Broadwell, a reserve Army officer and author of a glowing biography of him. The general insisted that his departure from the CIA was entirely a personal matter, having no political or intelligence dimensions, a narrative that continues to be promoted by the media and the political establishment.

This claim is belied not only by the nature of Petraeus' position and the state agencies most directly involved—the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the CIA—but also by the political furor that has been set off by his sudden resignation.

Last week, the scandal surrounding Petraeus spread to the top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Allen, after the FBI turned over to the Pentagon tens of thousands of pages of emails, including allegedly “inappropriate communications,” between Allen and the Tampa, Florida woman, Jill Kelley, whose complaint to the FBI initiated the probe that led to Paula Broadwell and then Petraeus.

Kelley, married to a prominent Tampa surgeon and generally described in the press as a “socialite,” is a personal friend of both Petraeus and Allen.

Congressional Republicans have seized on the resignation of Petraeus as an occasion to revive their pre-election campaign of accusations of an Obama administration cover-up in connection with the Benghazi events.

They are concentrating their fire on Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations. Rice appeared on several interview programs on September 16 and cited US intelligence agencies in describing the attack on the Benghazi consulate and the so-called “annex” as an outgrowth of a spontaneous protest against an anti-Muslim video that was made in the US and circulated on the Internet. Rice did not call the incident a terrorist attack or point to Al Qaeda-linked organizations as likely perpetrators.

Several days later, the CIA and the administration revised their explanation, calling the event a terrorist attack that may have involved Al Qaeda affiliates or sympathizers.

Petraeus, who returned from a fact-finding trip to Libya shortly before his resignation, was originally scheduled to testify in closed session before the intelligence committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate last Thursday. That appearance was canceled after he announced his resignation, but under pressure from both Democratic and Republican members of the committees, Petraeus went before the two panels on Friday.

Following the hearings, notwithstanding their supposedly classified nature, congressmen and senators from both parties went before the media to give their opposed versions of Petraeus' testimony. They all agreed, however, with Petraeus' insistence that his resignation had nothing to do with the Benghazi attack.

Republicans stressed that Petraeus affirmed he and the CIA had concluded early on that the attack in Benghazi was a planned terrorist assault likely involving Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and a local pro-Al Qaeda militia called Ansar al-Sharia. They suggested that the Obama administration altered the CIA assessment in its public statements for political and electoral reasons.

As Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said on Sunday's "Meet the Press" program: "I think one of the reasons that Susan Rice told the story she did, if the truth came out a few weeks before the election that our consulate in Benghazi, Libya had been overrun by an Al Qaeda-sponsored or affiliated militia, that destroys the narrative we've been hearing for months that Al Qaeda has been dismantled, bin Laden is dead, we're safer."

However, as Democrats emphasized, Petraeus acknowledged that he signed off on the final unclassified version of the CIA talking points, which excluded mention of a terror attack or the names of suspected perpetrators and linked the attack to protests over the anti-Muslim video. He told the intelligence committees that Rice had followed these talking points in her television appearances and denied that there was any political interference from the Obama administration.

Other congressmen, including some Republicans, noted that Petraeus, when he testified on the Benghazi attack on September 14, downplayed any possible involvement of Al Qaeda elements and connected the assault to spontaneous protests.

Whether or not the Obama administration concealed the role of Al Qaeda-linked forces for electoral reasons, the more fundamental political significance of the Benghazi events is being buried by both parties and the entire media. The attack on the US consulate and the CIA annex exposed the fact that Washington had financed and helped arm Al Qaeda-linked Islamist and jihadist forces in its bloody 2011 war to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi and install a more pliant regime.

Stevens was the Obama administration's point man in funneling arms and money to groups linked to Al Qaeda that played a major role in the ground operations, backed by US-NATO air strikes and aided by Special Forces trainers, that ultimately toppled the Gaddafi regime. The US then sought to push these forces into the background and install a puppet government with more "respectable" credentials and one that would be more reliably subservient to Washington.

But Islamist militias, including those linked to Al Qaeda, continued to dominate much of the country and, feeling they had been double-crossed, struck back against the US in what intelligence agencies call a case of "blowback."

This collusion with Al Qaeda forces in Libya, which is continuing in the US-engineered war for regime-change in Syria, totally exposes the fraud of the so-called “war on terror,” which has been used to justify major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and countless drone strikes and other military interventions, along with a frontal assault on democratic rights within the US. That, above all, is what the intelligence agencies, the military, the White House, Congress and the media are determined to obscure.

Some press reports have focused on aspects of conflicts that are raging between and within intelligence and military agencies, the White House, the State Department and other parts of the state apparatus. The very fact that the FBI, a highly secretive police-intelligence agency, has conducted an investigation leading to the toppling of the head of the rival CIA and has undercut the top US commander in Afghanistan, testifies to the political dimension of these events.

Last month, the *Washington Post* reported a conflict between Petraeus and Obama’s counterterrorism chief, John Brennan, over control of the expanding drone assassination program. Petraeus, the newspaper noted, wanted to expand the CIA’s fleet of armed drones, while Brennan was leading a drive to curtail the CIA role in the program and give more control to the military.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported last Thursday, in a front-page article, that in his final days at the CIA Petraeus clashed with his nominal superior, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, as well as the Pentagon, the State Department and “other agencies, over his response to criticisms of the CIA over the Benghazi attack. Over objections from all of these quarters, Petraeus released to the press a timeline of the CIA response to the attack.”

The *Journal* reported a “senior military official” as saying: “We conveyed our objections. Multiple agencies did.”

Clapper, the newspaper said, was unaware that the timeline would be made public. One week later, on Election Day, the FBI reportedly informed Clapper of its investigation of Petraeus. Clapper promptly told Petraeus he should resign.

The Benghazi events are a factor in a deepening political crisis within the US ruling class and the state that is exacerbating internal differences over aspects of US foreign policy. It is a long-established pattern for sex scandals to be used to settle such political scores.

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