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## Trump's Reliance on the Military

Given how militaristic the State Department has become, it might make sense for President-elect Trump to turn to generals for his national security team, but there are risks in that, too, says ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

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President-elect Donald Trump probably never read Fletcher Knebel and Charles Bailey's *Seven Days in May* in 1962 and never saw John Frankenheimer's film version in 1964, which dealt with the threat of a military coup due to opposition to a nuclear disarmament treaty with the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

President John F. Kennedy read the book after the Cuban missile crisis and found the scenario credible, probably because of the opposition and bizarre antics of Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis LeMay, during the crisis. Perhaps Donald Trump should become familiar with the book or the movie before he names one more retired general to his national security team.

In a very few weeks, Trump has surrounded himself with a group of erratic advisers and has appointed several pugnacious and partisan figures to key national security positions. As a result, the appointment of retired Marine General James Mattis has been welcomed by the mainstream media, including the staid *New York Times*. The media's consensus appears to be that, since Mattis, a four-star general, once outranked the controversial national security advisor, General Michael Flynn, a three-star, and, unlike the President-elect, actually reads and collects books that he will bring a voice of reason to the policymaking circle in the White House. Not so fast!

What Trump has done since his election one month ago is to threaten the balance that is needed between the civilian and military communities in national security decision making and to threaten civilian control over the military that has been in place since the Founding Fathers made it so.

Over the past 40 years, we have watched the military lose wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, while the Pentagon has accumulated greater influence over foreign policy. Since the creation of the all-volunteer military in the 1970s, the military has drifted too far away from the norms of American society, has become inordinately right-wing politically, and has become much more religious (and fundamentalist) than the country as a whole.

Over the past several decades, the officer corps has actively opposed the service of African-Americans, women and gays in their ranks. Anyone familiar with the military can testify to the “Republicanization” of the officer corps.

The often-ignored Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986 enhanced the political and military role of regional commanders-in-chief (CINCs) and marginalized the Department of State and the civilian leadership of the Department of Defense. The CINCs have become more influential than U.S. ambassadors, who actually represent the interests of the President, and various assistant secretaries of state responsible for sensitive Third World areas.

The act created a more powerful Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and made the chairman of the JCS the key military advisor to the president. During Desert Storm in 1991, the chairman often ignored the Secretary of Defense and personally briefed the President on war plans. It is noteworthy that the act passed the Senate without genuine debate and not even one vote of opposition.

### **Bill Clinton’s Role**

President Bill Clinton made major contributions to the civilian-military imbalance in the 1990s, when he abolished the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the United States Information Service and substantially reduced funding for the Agency for International Development. Clinton also bowed to the opposition of the Pentagon when he walked away from international agreements that supported the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the International Criminal Court, the ban on cluster bombs, and the ban on land mines.

President Barack Obama also tilted in the direction of the military in making key national security appointments. His national security adviser was a retired Marine General, James Jones, who failed miserably, and his first intelligence tsar was Admiral Dennis Blair, who also failed. Jones was replaced by Tom Donilon, whose expertise was in domestic affairs and who couldn’t stand up to the Pentagon in decision making on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama’s unwise decision to retain Robert M. Gates as Secretary of Defense also catered to the interests and preferences of the JCS. The President seemed to have no concern for Gates’s Cold War ideology, let alone his politicization of intelligence on behalf of the Reagan administration

throughout the 1980s. When Obama appointed General David Petraeus director of the CIA, the militarization of the intelligence community was virtually complete.

During Obama's presidency, the Pentagon has taken control over security aid to foreign countries, including allied nations overseas, which was once the province of the Department of State. The Pentagon has permanent control over certain aid programs and, by virtue of its counterterrorism activities in more than 80 countries, has greater control over U.S. policy options.

Once upon a time, the Department of State and the Agency for International Development controlled foreign aid; today the Pentagon can claim the title. Instead of building up foreign militaries, the Pentagon is far more concerned with assistance in assuring U.S. troop readiness.

In view of the international problems that will confront the new president and his national security team throughout the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, let alone bilateral relations with Russia, China and North Korea, it is worrisome that a purely military and authoritarian cast will be making key decisions. There is an important role for negotiation and diplomacy, including coercive diplomacy, in virtually every geopolitical challenge, but the president-elect has no interest in searching these fields for expertise. Similarly he will be making important decisions on defense spending and weapons acquisition, depending on advisers and cabinet secretaries who never have enough financial resources or weaponry.

There is the additional danger that Generals Flynn and Mattis will reinforce the President-elect's "garrison mentality," the notion of Fortress America, which is strategically insolvent and could become economically stagnant. American use of force since the end of the Cold War has served only to weaken the nation, draining resources, and costing the lives of far too many fighting men and women. It isn't reasonable to assume that the authoritarian style of the senior officer class will reverse these trends.

General James Mattis will need a waiver from both the Senate and the House of Representatives in order to be confirmed as Secretary of Defense. Since the Department of Defense was created in 1947, only one general, George C. Marshall, has received such a waiver. Mattis should not be confused with George C. Marshall.