

MILITARY ENCROACHMENT ON CIVILIAN AUTHORITY & SEVEN DAYS IN MAY

Via Digby comes this unsettling article by David Wood in Politics Daily about the growing militant contempt among military leadership for civilian authority and control.

The military officer corps is rumbling with dissatisfaction and dissent, and there are suggestions from some that if officers disagree with policy decisions by Congress and the White House, they should vigorously resist.

Officers have a moral responsibility, some argue, to sway a policy debate by going public with their objections or leaking information to the media, and even to sabotage policy decisions by deliberate foot-dragging.

This could spell trouble ahead as Washington grapples with at least two highly contentious issues: changing the policy on gays and lesbians in the military, and extricating U.S. forces from Afghanistan. In both cases, senior officers already have disagreed sharply and publicly with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and President Barack Obama, and in some cases officers have leaked documents to bolster their case.

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“The military officer belongs to a profession upon whose members are conferred great responsibility, a code of ethics, and an oath of office. These grant him moral autonomy and obligate him to disobey an order he deems immoral,” writes Marine Lt. Col. Andrew

R. Milburn in Joint Forces Quarterly, an official journal published by the National Defense University under the aegis of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

That is especially true if his civilian leaders are incompetent, writes Milburn, who currently is assigned to the U.S. Special Operations Command in Stuttgart, Germany.

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“When the results of bad decision-making are wasted lives and damage to the Nation; when the customary checks laid down in the Constitution – the electoral voice of the people, Congress, or the Supreme Court – are powerless to act in time; and when the military professional alone is in a position to prevent calamity, it makes little sense to argue that he should not exercise his discretion,” Milburn writes.

Read the entire article; please.

Now, there is no sense of any direct coup type of trend afoot in all this so much as an accelerating trend to the militarization of government and resigned acceptance by the proletariat. Digby touched on this:

This coincides with our new fetish for everything military, including the president of the United States announcing over and over again that he would “listen to the commanders on the ground” which likely gave more than a few of them the idea that they were the ones in charge. When you add that to the canonizing of the The Man Called Petraeus during the Bush years, this seems like a logical outcome. (I would also add that more than a few of them may be part of the religious “crusade” that some of the evangelical military

brass are involved with.)

But the paradigm goes much deeper than the relative autonomy granted Petraeus in Afghanistan and the lionization of the US military. That is now; the question is where the trend heads in the future, and that is the even more troublesome thought. The concern is not so much one man such as David Petraeus (although I remain convinced he is the strongest and most worrisome politician the political right could coalesce around, not Sarah Palin). To me, the bigger problem is the militarization of the civilian government itself; the merging of military thought with command and control of civilian modalities.

One of the movies and books that has always stuck deep with me since my days as a child in the 60s was Fletcher Knebel's *Seven Days In May*. The story takes place in a deeply divided country, after a stalemated war in Iran that has left the country depleted financially and devastated economically, causing despair, frustration, sense of powerlessness and unrest in the citizenry. The President is seen as weak and increasingly feckless. Into this dynamic steps a military establishment that surreptitiously built up the ability to exercise complete command and control of the communications and electronic media distribution capabilities via a program known as ECOMCON. And a larger than life narcissistic hero General named James Mattoon Scott decides he is the one to lead.

Hey, wait a minute, actually there is at least some similarity between Petraeus and Gen. James Mattoon Scott. The only difference is in reality, the civilian government has authorized the communications and surveillance capability that makes ECOMCON look quaint. And a disillusioned public may be close to being ripe for a daddy figure like The Man Called Petraeus. Leave it to a Brit paper, the Telegraph, to point out the obvious while the craven Yank press twiddles with Palin and O'Donnell:

In this toxic climate, perhaps the only public institution that has increased in prestige in recent years is the American military. Its officers are looked upon, as General George Patton once noted, as “the modern representatives of the demi-gods and heroes of antiquity”.

Where better to look for Obama’s successor, therefore, than in the uniformed ranks? Not since 1952, when a certain Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe during the Second World War, was elected President, have the chances of a military man winning the White House been more propitious.

Within those ranks, no one stands out like General David Petraeus, head of United States Central Command, leader of 230,000 troops and commander of United States forces in two wars. Having masterminded the Iraq surge, the stunning military gambit that seized victory from the jaws of defeat, he is now directing an equally daunting undertaking in Afghanistan.

Petraeus, 57, has survived the collapse of his parachute 60 feet above the ground. After he was shot in the chest during a training exercise and endured five hours surgery, the then battalion commander refused to lie in hospital recuperating. Demanding that the tubes be removed from his arm, he declared: “I am not the norm.”

The Constitution has been systematically hollowed out by the unitary executive power grab geared up in full by the Republican Bush/Cheney regime and ingrained and, in many regards not just ratified, but accelerated by the supposedly more enlightened Democratic Administration of Barack Obama. There is economic desperation in the streets with more and more homeless and

unemployed citizens. It all adds to a toxic, stewing unease and detachment from governance, preached by the noisy Tea Partiers and long bought by the ill educated rural "real Americans". The conditions are ripe for a military hero daddy to "save us".

Think corporations and the capitalists on Wall Street will object to a military savior? Heck no, not so long as they are left free by the new paradigm to run free and pillage as they have grown accustomed to. And that is not in the least inconsistent with a more militarized rule. Not at all. In fact, the military and corporations are aligned and both worried about the populists, egalitarians and environmentalists, so they are a natural fit.

If the public malaise from tepid and ineffectual governance is not remedied by the Democratic leaders in charge, the electoral upshot may not be the cackling ineptness of Sarah Palin, but the polished narcissism of ~~Gen. James Mattoon Scott~~ Gen. David Petraeus.