



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 2, 2016

Trump Names Retired Marine General Mattis as Defense Secretary

President-elect Donald Trump [announced his selection](#) of retired Marine four-star General James Mattis to be his Secretary of Defense on Thursday. Trump, on a post-election “thank you tour,” told an audience in Cincinnati that Mattis is “the closest thing to General George Patton that we have.”



The comparison is apt: Mattis (shown) spent 43 years in the military service with much of it in front-line action. A voracious reader of military history, Mattis, referred to as a “Warrior Monk,” built a personal collection of more than 7,000 volumes before he gave many of them away to a library. It didn’t matter: by that time he’d read them all.

His opinions over the Iranian nuclear deal and his sharply-voiced disgust with President Obama’s “strategy free” approach to Middle East problems got him fired as Commander of the U.S. Central Command in 2013. As the [*New York Times* noted, that made Mattis “an attractive choice” for Trump.

As a one-star general in 2001 he led the first Marine force into Afghanistan one month after the September 11 attacks. In 2003, he led the 1st Marine Division during the invasion to topple Saddam Hussein and in 2004 commanded U.S. troops during the battle to retake Fallujah from Sunni insurgents.

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Support for Trump’s decision came from places expected, including former Marine Corps Lt. Colonel Oliver North. Surprisingly, support also came from the individual mostly like to have been named to the same position had Hillary Clinton won the election: Michele Flournoy. A Harvard and Oxford graduate, Flournoy was under secretary of defense for policy in the Obama administration for three years, at the time the highest-ranking woman in the Pentagon. Said Flournoy before Mattis was nominated: “General Mattis is a storied and much respected military thinker. He would be an outstanding candidate.”

Much like Rep. Mike Pompeo (Trump’s nominee to be CIA director), Mattis is a hard-liner on Iran, openly stating that the principal threat to stability in the Middle East isn’t Al-Qaeda or ISIS, but Iran. As for the Iran nuclear deal, he is more pragmatic: It would be costly in many ways to tear it up unilaterally. He said: “We are just going to have to recognize that we have an imperfect arms control agreement.... What we have achieved is a nuclear pause, not a nuclear halt.” The nuclear inspections, however, have a side benefit, said Mattis: “If nothing else, at least we will have better targeting data if it comes to a fight [with them] in the future.”

He supports the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, calling the present situation “unsustainable.”



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He opposes water-boarding as a means to elicit information from an enemy, which came as a surprise to Trump. During an interview with Mattis last month, Trump asked him “What do you think of waterboarding?” Mattis responded: “I’ve never found it to be useful. I’ve always found: give me a pack of cigarettes and a couple of beers and I do better with that than I do with torture.”

Mattis is CFR-free, giving comfort to those concerned about the degree of influence that the world-government-promoting group may be able to exercise through its members in the new Trump administration. Mattis, at this point, looks like a good sparring partner for Trump, and a good fit with another four-star Marine general who currently chairs the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford. During the Iraq invasion, Dunford was a colonel who led a Marine regiment that reported to Mattis.

Before confirming him for the position Congress would need to grant Mattis a special waiver to current federal law that stipulates that he be out of uniform for at least seven years.

Photo of Gen. James Mattis in 2013: AP images

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