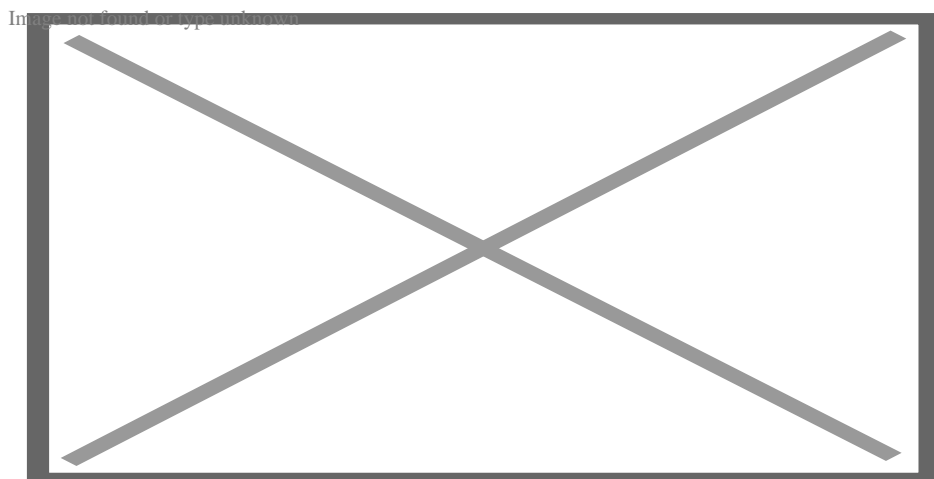


23-Jan-17 The General of PR Trump's "Mad Dog" — one of the most controversial figures in the American military establishment

Description



by Pavel Ivanov Originally appeared at [VPK](#), translated by Alice Decker via [SouthFront](#)

The US Congress approved the candidacy of the former head of the Central Command of the Armed Forces (CENTCOM), General James Mattis, for the post of secretary of defense. It is noteworthy that for the appointment of the future head of the Pentagon, a special procedure was created.

Under US law, a retired military man can serve as secretary of defense only after at least seven years since his dismissal. And Mattis resigned in 2013. Therefore, his appointment required special coordination with the Congress and the Senate, as well as individual hearings in the Committee on Armed Services.

“In Afghanistan and Iraq, the future head of the Pentagon was nicknamed ‘Poser’ and ‘PR man’ ”

Judging by statements from experts and analysts, the nomination of the ex-general who has served for 41 years was based on simple military talents. There is an opinion that the appointment of Mattis was opposed by the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, in particular by the outgoing head of the department Ashton Carter. Reports have been published in the American mass media many times about conflicts among the Defense Department's civilian leadership, who have little understanding of the military and approach the armed forces like a corporation. So the appointment of the distinguished general as head of the Pentagon is seen as a victory for the “war lobby.”

Meanwhile, the appointment of James Mattis signals a big problem ahead. In reality, the Marines general is an ambiguous figure. It was not only some abstract “civic leaders” who opposed his candidacy but specific generals in the US Army Command and Special Operations Forces. During operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, this very same future head of the Pentagon earned the unflattering nicknames ‘the Poser’ and ‘the incompetent PR man.’

Afghan hyper-cautious syndrome

In November 2001, a Special Forces team, ODA 574, was abandoned in Afghanistan. The “Green Berets” had quite a difficult task: to help the future Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s forces prepare an attack on Kandahar. It’s noteworthy that he went with the advisors to the rear of the Taliban with the ODA 574 and instructors from the CIA.

At that time, there were no regular units or divisions of the US military in the country except the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit on objective “Rhino” — an abandoned airfield 190 kilometers from Kandahar. Brigadier General James Mattis was commanding the Unit.

On December 5, due to a targeting error by the gunlayer, a bomb dropped from a B-52 hit the ODA 574, killing and wounding several soldiers. The Commander of the 5th Special Operations Group appealed to Mattis, requesting evacuation. But he was refused: allegedly, the general was not aware of what was going on in the area, and did not want to risk the helicopter.

Despite the fact that the headquarters of a battalion of special forces, and a “Delta” squadron which guaranteed helicopters cover from ground fire, were already operating in the area, Mattis remained adamant. He didn’t change his decision even after he was informed that a number of the injured needed urgent surgery or they would die.

MH-53 helicopters from Uzbekistan had to be used for their evacuation. Two “Hercules” flew to “Rhino” with special medical modules in the cargo hold and teams of doctors. The helicopters made it in time. However, due to lack of fuel, the crews were forced to conduct aerial refueling over Kandahar at an altitude of just several hundred meters, under Taliban fire. Well, none of the MD-53 was hit.

But Mattis did not want guests at the “Reno” and barred a C-130 with physicians from landing. The aircraft circled in the air for several hours. At some point, the crew decided to land on their own. Then General Tommy Franks, the head of CENTCOM and the commander of Operation Enduring Freedom, stepped in. He made Mattis allow the landing and ensured that MH-53 with the wounded would be accepted.

But despite Franks’ personal intervention, Mattis turned to minor mischief as “Green Berets” later described. While medical operations were being conducted, Marines began to warm up the engines of the AH-1 helicopters and then to operate them. This caused shaking of medical C-130 and hindered the work of the surgeons.

The Unified Command of Special Operations Forces (OKSSO) of the US Armed Forces demanded an investigation into the conduct of James Mattis at the “Reno” facility. After some time, the proceedings were closed, but Mattis had won himself enemies in the OKSSO.

A Dubious victory

It is believed that Mattis earned the nickname Mad Dog, and a reputation as a harsh and brilliant warrior, during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But the general’s merits are rather controversial.

‘Mad Dog’ stuck to him after the publication of the book “Generation Kill” (a chronicle of the actions of the Marine reconnaissance battalion in Iraq) and the eponymous series. A few snippets show the general as a charismatic leader, not afraid of danger. Suffice it to recall how Mattis scolded the commander of an Expeditionary Division group right on the bridge under fire from Iraqi troops.

However, in the memoirs of one of the participants in those events, Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick, these episodes are, to put it mildly, more ambiguous. The General does not look “the father of the Marines.” But the book and the film played a role — now the successful operations of the Marine Corps in Iraq is attributed to Mattis. Later, the PR effect was when a collection of the general’s quotes was released to the press.

But the official historiography of the Marine Corps published in the late 2000s indicated that the most important decisions and the most difficult actions in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were made by Lieutenant General James Conway, who was then commander of the expeditionary forces of the Commission in Iraq. Mattis obeyed him (at that time Conway was the commander of the 1st Marine Division), and not vice versa, as stated in some publications.

No less controversial were James Mattis's decisions during the fighting in Falluja. Traditionally, it is reported that the brigade from the 82nd Airborne Division failed to subdue the city. To prevent disturbances, the Pentagon rushed the Marine Division headed by Mattis to Fallujah and he completed the job.

After several works on the "Delta" operations in Iraq were published, the situation looked different again. Despite Mattis' best efforts, fighting broke out in Fallujah. "Delta" Special forces officers who were active in the city at the time claimed that the general was always late. Barricades were already being built and weapons were being brought in, but the Marines took down some of their posts, to, as Matthis said in his orders, normalize life. When clashes were expected to break out any minute, the general ordered them to conduct patrols without helmets and body armor, so as not to provoke the civilians and not to show the US Marines as occupiers.

This decision was widely repeated in the media, as well as in Mattis' daily briefings, where he often used his famous "military wisdom." However, the Marines themselves were somewhat disillusioned with the division commander. When fighting broke out in the city in full force, the Marine Division was not ready for it.

Interestingly enough, James Mattis is one of the few lieutenants-general (the highest military rank in the ILC) who was not made a commander of the Marine Corps, or at least a lieutenant commander.

Since 2005, Mattis has not actually directed led military units. In 2006, he headed up the development of the joint command responsible for introducing new weapons systems, and then the joint command of the forces and funding — in fact, managing military training.

And if under the Bush administration the general's career faded, under Barack Obama it blossomed. However, the attempt to appoint Mattis USMC commander failed because of tacit resistance from his potential subordinates. The ILC is one of the few positions in the US Armed Forces where the commander is appointed by the president, but only with the agreement of the corps itself. But with CENTCOM, with its commander General Petraeus having fallen out of favor, everything worked out.

James Mattis is a general with a fairly dubious reputation. In many respects, he did not score military achievements but rather ran a public relations campaign. And he has a pretty complicated relationship with his colleagues. Mattis frankly is not liked in the US Armed Forces, Special Operations Forces Joint Command and Special Operations Command. And the leadership of the latter group (it consists of "Delta" and DEVGRU) are considered "gray cardinals" not only the Pentagon but also in the national security system.