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[Home](#) > Obama shuffles national security team

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 [AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster](#) President Obama announced a reshuffling of his national security team Thursday, making the case for war-tested leaders well versed in the increasingly intertwined military and intelligence apparatus.

In nominating CIA director and Washington mainstay Leon Panetta to head the Defense Department and tapping widely popular Army Gen. David Petraeus to replace Panetta at the Central Intelligence Agency, Obama is arguing that a nation entangled in two wars can ill afford to hand over the security reins to players unfamiliar with the current crises - or potentially out of sync with Obama's foreign policy agenda.

"Given the pivotal period that we're entering, I felt that it was absolutely critical that we had this team in place so that we can stay focused on our missions, maintain our momentum, and keep our nation secure," said Obama, surrounded by Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

The choices are considered politically safe, and both nominees are expected to breeze through the Senate confirmation process because both enjoy a rare measure of bipartisan support on Capitol Hill.

And for the most cynical observers: The appointment of Petraeus eliminates the possibility that he could join, even dominate, the nascent lineup of Republican presidential candidates seeking to challenge Obama next year.

However, the moves are not without risks, according to some analysts, who question whether Petraeus will be candid about operations he spearheaded in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I think it signals continuity, which is good. There's not a steep learning curve. But it also shows an unwillingness to rethink U.S. foreign policy," said Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. "I'm also a little worried about the appointment of Petraeus to the CIA. The agency has questioned what's going on in Afghanistan. If those reports start to get rosier, it'll be strange."

Appointed by President George W. Bush, Gates developed a reputation as a sensible centrist able to wade through the political muck and showcase tangible results. He also lobbied strenuously for Panetta to replace him.

"Leon, I believe, is the best possible choice to succeed me," Gates said from the White House, adding that he maintains a "sense of guarded optimism about the trajectory of the mission" in Afghanistan.

Obama said he chose Panetta, in part, because the former White House chief of staff for President Clinton knows how to effectively manage a massive budget. Panetta's previous stints include House Budget Committee chairman and Office of Management and Budget director.

If confirmed by the Senate, Panetta said he would preside over the Defense Department at a time of "historic change" and "hard choices," adding that "it's also about being able to be strong and disciplined in applying our nation's limited resources."

On the heels of widespread cuts instituted by Gates, Obama is proposing \$400 billion more in defense reductions over the next 12 years -- a move that will require significant arm-twisting from Panetta to win over Republicans.

Obama also picked U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker for the same post in Afghanistan and Marine Lt. Gen. John Allen, the deputy commander of Central Command to follow Petraeus as U.S. commander in Afghanistan.

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