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Obama's New AfPak Envoy an Outspoken Hawk

By Jason Ditz

May 3, 2013

The White House announcement of James Dobbins as the new “Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan” has taken many by surprise, doubly so because Dobbins’ history is as a loudly enthusiastic hawk who has been loudly critical of the administration’s recent policies of reducing its military footprint in Afghanistan.

A very public supporter of the aggressive counterinsurgency strategy of Gen. David Petraeus, Dobbins argued loudly against Vice President Biden’s alternative plan as “inconsistent,” on the grounds that since Petraeus’ plan is called counterinsurgency and everyone agrees that the Taliban are insurgents, the only real disagreements should be on the scope of the plan.

Dobbins has been on board with the Afghan occupation as open-ended national building virtually from day one, conceding that it would take an enormous amount of time but likewise appearing entirely comfortable with that, while lamenting that the Iraq War got in the way of that process from the start.

Though Dobbins’ addition will likely be welcome to the military leadership, inasmuch as he appears to have openly endorsed literally every failed strategy they’ve had for Afghanistan, it is unclear what the Obama Administration hopes to accomplish by adding someone who is on a completely different page from the rest of the civilian leadership.