

# Obama's Favorite General Stripped of His Security Clearance

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The Defense Department has stripped Gen. James "Hoss" Cartwright of his security clearance, depriving the man once known as "**Obama's favorite general**" access to classified data as the investigation into leaks of national security secrets continues.

Multiple current and former administration sources told **FP** that Cartwright, the former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, lost his clearance earlier this year. It was an indicator that that government officials might, in some way, consider his ongoing access to secrets a national security risk while he was under investigation by the Department of Justice for possibly leaking sensitive information about the Stuxnet computer virus. And, it presents challenges for a man who has been working to shore up his image since retiring in 2011.

It was also a further indignity for Cartwright, who turned 64 this week, and who was once an Obama administration darling. Cartwright enjoyed privileged access "across the river" at the White House when he was the number two senior officer on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon from 2007 to 2011. He had adopted contrarian views on issues like the troop surge in Afghanistan, which alienated him from senior brass at the Pentagon but in many ways helped catapult his reputation within the White House.

He quickly fell from grace, however, after being linked to leaks about a highly classified cyberweapon created by the U.S. and Israelis called Stuxnet. The super-secret worm, designed to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, was widely believed to be a joint U.S.-Israeli operation. A report by the *New York Times'* David Sanger confirmed it, marking the first time a government had even unofficially taken credit for a weapon made entirely of code. The *Times* reported that Cartwright conceived and ran the cyber operation known as Olympic Games, which included Stuxnet and other highly-sophisticated pieces of malware aimed at the Iranian nuclear effort. The story provided details about the operation and referenced interviews with current officials in the administration. The charge from critics of the administration, including from Capitol Hill, was that the Obama administration authorized the leaks in order to increase the president's *bona fides* on national security. The Obama administration immediately denounced the leaks and launched the investigation.

In June, NBC first **reported** that Cartwright had been targeted in the Justice Department investigation. At the time, Greg Craig -- the former White House counsel under Obama who now serves as Cartwright's attorney -- called the targeting ridiculous. "General Jim Cartwright is an American hero who served his country with distinction for four decades. Any suggestion that he could have betrayed the company that he loved is preposterous," he said. (Cartwright himself did not respond to multiple requests to comment for this article.)

That Cartwright's security clearance has been revoked may come as little surprise for a high-profile investigation into leaks surrounding a highly classified program. It hasn't stopped him from serving on a number of boards and panels and participates in various studies around Washington; he is the Harold Brown **Chair** in Defense Policy Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, for example.

But Cartwright does serve on at least one panel that requires a security clearance.

Cartwright is a member of the National Defense Panel, an independent board reviewing the Pentagon's upcoming grand strategy report, known as the Quadrennial Defense Review. But Cartwright was unable to attend the panel's first Aug. 20 meeting, at the Pentagon, raising questions about the status of his security clearance. Asked about the matter, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said he would not comment on Cartwright's security clearance status.

The panel, which is required by Congress, will essentially check the homework of the QDR, the Defense Department's overall review of strategy and resources due out next year, once it's done. The National Defense Panel will assess the QDR's assumptions on strategy and risk and conduct an independent assessment of its findings; it will review resource and force structure requirements and then provide recommendations to Congress. The work of the panel is being facilitated by the United States Institute of Peace in Washington. Cartwright was appointed to the board by Sen. Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Levin's office had no comment on the matter of Cartwright's security clearance.

But it's not clear how effective Cartwright will be on the panel if his lack of a security clearance prevents him from attending those meetings which require access to secret information.

Cartwright serves on the panel with co-chairs Bill Perry and John Abizaid, both of who were appointed by the military, along with defense heavyweights like one-time Pentagon policy chiefs Eric Edelman and Michele Flournoy, former Sen. Jim Talent, retired Lt. Gen. Frank Kearney, and USIP's Jim Marshall. The other individuals were appointed by Congress. The panel will meet again this week, in Palo Alto, Calif., and again this fall in Washington, D.C., defense officials tell **FP**. The removal of his security clearance was a further indignity for a man once seen as a favorite military son at a White House that has very few of them. Cartwright, who served under Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen, developed a close relationship with the White House, sometimes irking some defense leaders inside the Pentagon. Not even Mullen, who was technically the president's top military advisor, seemed as close to Obama. This was a man with whom the president shared a great many secrets. For now at least, that sharing is over.

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