Obama calls for US attack on Pakistan in warmongering address

David Walsh
3 August 2007

In a transparent effort to bolster his reputation for toughness on national security issues and outflank his main rivals on the right for the 2008 Democratic Party presidential nomination, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois delivered a bellicose speech August 1 at a Washington think tank.

Speaking to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Obama called for more troops to be sent to Afghanistan, threatened unilateral attacks against Pakistan and pledged to strengthen the US military and intelligence apparatus.

His comments were no doubt in part a response to a squabble with Hillary Clinton over remarks Obama made at the recent Democratic candidates' debate in South Carolina. After Obama promised to meet in person with rulers the US considers to be hostile, Clinton said she would not guarantee to do that, calling such an approach in a subsequent interview "irresponsibly and frankly naïve." The Clinton camp pursued the theme that Obama lacked foreign policy experience. They trotted out former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who told the media that Clinton "showed a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of how this process works."

These immediate political concerns were certainly part of Obama's calculation on Wednesday. As the *Washington Post* noted, "The muscular speech appeared aimed at inoculating him from criticism that he lacks the toughness to lead the country in a post-9/11 world." However, the comments, while perhaps the Illinois senator's most belligerent, were in keeping with the general tenor of his campaign.

Obama has made clear, in his book *The Audacity of Hope* and elsewhere, his support for the "war on terror" and the use of American military force whenever the US claims to see "an imminent threat." In the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, after acknowledging the disastrous nature of the Iraq war, he wrote: "We must use this moment both to rebuild our military and to prepare it for the missions of the future. We must retain the capacity to swiftly defeat any conventional threat to our country and our vital interests. But we must also become better prepared to put boots on the ground in order to take on foes that fight asymmetrical and highly adaptive campaigns on a global scale." Obama urged adding 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 Marines to the standing military.

In Wednesday's speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Obama first sounded a common theme of the Democrats: the September 11 attacks represented a challenge to America, and an opportunity. "Americans were united," asserted Obama. "Friends around the world stood shoulder to shoulder with us. We had the might and moral-suasion that was the legacy of generations of Americans. The tide of history seemed poised to turn, once again, toward hope."

However, according to this argument, the Bush administration squandered the opportunity. "We did not finish the job against al Qaeda in Afghanistan," remarked Obama. "We did not develop new capabilities to defeat a new enemy, or launch a comprehensive strategy to dry up the terrorists' base of support. We did not reaffirm our basic values, or secure our homeland." Moreover, Bush and company "insisted that the 21st century's stateless terrorism could be defeated through the invasion and occupation of a state."

In short, the war has gone badly. In his speech, Obama called Iraq "the wrong battlefield." This of course provided him with the opportunity to get in some shots at rivals Hillary Clinton and John Edwards, who both voted to authorize the war in Iraq as members of the US Senate. On several occasions Obama took swipes at Congress, which he claimed, for example, "rubber-stamped the rush to war, giving the president the broad and open-ended authority he uses to this day. With that vote, Congress became co-author of a catastrophic war."

Despite tactical misgivings, however, Obama solidarized himself fully with the "war on terror," a phrase used to conceal the real motives of the American ruling elite in launching the Iraq war: control over Middle East oil reserves and world geopolitical dominance. "Just because the president misrepresents our enemies," he said, "does not mean we do not have them. The terrorists are at war with us. The threat is from violent extremists who are a small minority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, but the threat is real."

Obama proclaimed that as president, he would "wage the war that has to be won," which means "getting out of Iraq and on to the right battlefield in Afghanistan and Pakistan." He went on to explain that an Obama administration would deploy at least two additional brigades to Afghanistan "to re-enforce our counterterrorism operations and support NATO's efforts

© World Socialist Web Site

against the Taliban. As we step up our commitment, our European friends must do the same, and without the burdensome restrictions that have hampered NATO's efforts." Obama is urging a significant increase in violence in Afghanistan, which has already witnessed a sharp rise in the number of civilian deaths in recent months.

Obama then turned to Pakistan, promising that he would make the hundreds of millions of dollars in US military aid "conditional, and I would make our conditions clear: Pakistan must make substantial progress in closing down the training camps, evicting foreign fighters, and preventing the Taliban from using Pakistan as a staging area for attacks in Afghanistan."

In the most ominous portion of his speech, Obama continued: "I understand that President Musharraf has his own challenges. But let me make this clear. There are terrorists holed up in those mountains who murdered 3,000 Americans. They are plotting to strike again. It was a terrible mistake to fail to act when we had a chance to take out an al Qaeda leadership meeting in 2005. If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will." In other words, Obama promises to launch unilateral attacks against targets on Pakistani soil.

Having adopted this jingoistic and warmongering tone, the Illinois senator carried on along the same general lines: "I will not hesitate to use military force to take out terrorists who pose a direct threat to America.... I will ensure that our military becomes more stealthy, agile, and lethal in its ability to capture or kill terrorists. We need to recruit, train, and equip our armed forces to better target terrorists, and to help foreign militaries to do the same....

"I will also strengthen our intelligence. This is about more than an organizational chart ... we must also build our capacity to better collect and analyze information, and to carry out operations to disrupt terrorist plots and break up terrorist networks.... The United States cannot steal every secret, penetrate every cell, act on every tip, or track down every terrorist—nor should we have to do this alone."

Obama added comments about maintaining the moral "high ground" and pursuing the war on terror "without undermining our Constitution and our freedom." He urged the closing of the Guantánamo Bay internment camp and an end to torture and extreme rendition. This speaks to concerns within sections of the American ruling elite that the Bush administration's reckless and lawless policies, including the atrocities at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib and the gulag of secret CIA prisons, have seriously discredited American "democracy" and made the task of pursuing US interests that much more difficult.

Former Indiana Rep. Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group, introduced Obama at the Woodrow Wilson Center and, according to ABC News, the latter's 45-minute speech was written by Ben Rhodes, a longtime aide to Hamilton. The Iraq Study Group urged a change in course in US policy in Iraq as a means of ensuring that essential American goals, above all, the plunder of the country's oil supplies, were achieved.

Obama's Woodrow Wilson address Wednesday, which promised more war, more spying and more death, was intended to send a clear message to the only constituency in America that matters to the candidates of both major parties: the financial-corporate elite. The senator from Illinois was saying: 'I am as tough and ruthless as anyone you've got, you can entrust me with the job of safeguarding your interests.'

None of the leading Democratic candidates disagreed with the thrust of Obama's comments, although they questioned his approach. Each chimed in with menacing comments of his or her own.

Hillary Clinton told a radio interviewer that she would pursue terrorist leaders in Pakistan to ensure "that they were targeted and killed or captured" and that she had long favored sending more troops to Afghanistan. Former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson suggested, "we should address this issue with tough diplomacy first with [Pakistani dictator Pervez] Musharraf and then leave the military option as a last resort."

Connecticut's Senator Chris Dodd told the media he would make combating terrorism a top priority, "but I will not declare my intentions for specific military action to the media in the context of a political campaign." Former senator John Edward of North Carolina said before using military force he would first apply "maximum diplomatic and economic pressure." Delaware Democratic senator Joseph Biden made the most cynical comment of all, observing, "The way to deal with it [i.e., carry out a military strike] is not to announce it, but to do it. The last thing you want to do is telegraph to the folks in Pakistan that we are about to violate their sovereignty."

Of Obama's comments, Pakistan's Minister of State for Information Tariq Azeem said, "Such statements are being made out of sheer ignorance.... We have said before that we will not allow anyone to infringe our sovereignty." According to Agence France-Presse, the minister suggested that Obama's comments were prompted by Washington's failing policy in Afghanistan.

Obama has been promoted by various political forces in the US as the progressive, "antiwar" candidate. He is no such thing, as his Wilson Center address reveals. The Democrat who ultimately wins the party's nomination will be fully committed to wars of plunder in the interests of America's wealthy elite.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site