

Wesley Clark gives a glimpse of the future

## A Democratic general's prescription for winning "the next war"

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The front page of the "Outlook" section of Sunday's *Washington Post* is dominated by an essay bearing the chilling title "The Next War." It is at once a critique of the war tactics of the Bush administration and a defense of imperialist war, replete with a description of the massive and bloody scale of the military violence to be unleashed on the next likely target of American militarism—Iran.

The article notes, however, that "Iran is not the only country where the next war with the United States might erupt. Consider the emergence of a new superpower (or at least a close competitor with the United States). China's shoot-down of an old Chinese satellite in January was a wake-up call about the risks inherent in America's reliance on space. The next war could also come from somewhere unexpected. If you'd told most Americans in August 2001 that the United States would be invading Afghanistan within weeks, they'd have called you crazy."

The author is retired General Wesley Clark, who, as supreme allied commander Europe of NATO, oversaw the devastating US-led air war against Serbia in 1999. Clark is a prominent Democrat. He ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 and was for a time an unannounced candidate for the 2008 nomination.

Clark's ruminations on the wars to come, including tactical prescriptions for avoiding "fiascos" such as Iraq and Afghanistan, expose the militarist and imperialist reality behind the increasingly threadbare "antiwar" posturing of the Democratic Party. It should be read carefully. It should serve as an antidote for all those who continue to harbor illusions that the Democratic Party is anything but an instrument of the American ruling elite and its global imperialist aims.

Clark himself postured, when he was running for the 2004 presidential nomination, as an opponent of the war

in Iraq. But like all the rest of the Democratic hopefuls—from Howard Dean to Dennis Kucinich—he quickly lined up behind the party's nominee, John Kerry, when the latter ran a pro-war campaign.

It is worth noting that the day before his *Washington Post* commentary appeared, Clark backed Hillary Clinton in her bid to win the Democratic nomination for 2008.

Clark begins his piece by describing the appearance last week of Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of US forces in Iraq, before Congress. Petraeus, Clark writes, "embodied what the Iraq conflict has come to represent: an embattled, able, courageous military at war, struggling to maintain its authority and credibility after four-and-a-half years of a 'cakewalk' gone wrong."

The essential question, he asserts, is that "the next war is always looming, and so is the urgent question of whether the US military can adapt in time to win it."

To underscore the point, Clark proceeds to discuss the likely next war: "Today, the most likely next conflict will be with Iran, a radical state than America has tried to isolate for almost 30 years and that now threatens to further destabilize the Middle East through its expansionist aims, backing of terrorist proxies such as the Lebanese group Hezbollah and Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank, and far-reaching support for radical Shiite militias in Iraq. As Iran seems to draw closer to acquiring nuclear weapons, almost every US leader—and would-be president—has said that it simply won't be permitted to reach that goal."

Here Clark endorses all of the lies and pretexts assembled by the Bush administration to justify another war of aggression—this time against Iran. It is, of course, Iran that is destabilizing the Middle East, not the United States, which has invaded, occupied and virtually destroyed one of the nations in the region and killed

hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

Clark leaves no doubt that war against Iran is all but inevitable, regardless of which party controls Congress and the White House.

“Think another war can’t happen?” he asks. “Think again. Unchastened by the Iraq fiasco, hawks in Vice President Cheney’s office have been pushing the use of force. It isn’t hard to foresee the range of military options that policymakers face.”

There follows a description of the likely war plan: “The next war would begin with an intense air and naval campaign. Let’s say you’re planning the conflict as part of the staff of the Joint Chiefs. Your list of targets isn’t that long—only a few dozen nuclear sites—but you can’t risk retaliation from Tehran. So you allow 21 days for the bombardment, to be safe: you’d aim to strike every command-and-control facility, radar site, missile site, storage site, airfield, ship and base in Iran. To prevent world oil prices from soaring, you’d have to try to protect every oil and gas rig, and the big ports and load points. You’d need to use B-52s and lots of missiles up front, plus many small amphibious task forces to take out particularly tough targets along the coast, with named and unmanned air reconnaissance. And don’t forget the Special Forces, to penetrate deep inside Iran, call in airstrikes and drag the evidence of Tehran’s nuclear ambitions out into the open for a world that’s understandably skeptical of US assertions that yet another Gulf rogue is on the brink of getting the bomb.”

This describes yet another lethal exercise in “shock and awe” that would undoubtedly devastate the civilian infrastructure of the country and kill tens of thousands of its inhabitants.

Clark does not attempt to seriously estimate the immense social, economic and political implications of such an attack for the Middle East and the entire world, including the United States itself. He does, however, raise questions about the efficacy of such an action for US interests in the region.

He writes, “But if it’s clear how a war with Iran would start, it’s far less clear how it would end.... And what would we do with Iran after the bombs stopped falling? We certainly could not occupy the nation with the limited ground forces we have left. So what would it be: Iran as a chastened, more tractable government? As a chaotic failed state? Or as a hardened and embittered foe?”

His conclusion, however, is anything but a rejection of imperialist war. Rather, he proceeds to review what he considers to be the lessons of Vietnam, Afghanistan and

Iraq to make the argument for a smarter, and bigger—to the tune of 100,000 more active troops—military.

Clark wants less emphasis on hi-tech weaponry and more emphasis on counterinsurgency. And he wants better-trained and educated commanders, capable of standing up to incompetent civilian officials, e.g., Donald Rumsfeld. Thus he faults Gen. Tommy Franks, who led the US invasion of Afghanistan, for supposedly caving in to Rumsfeld and letting Osama bin Laden slip away. “[T]he United States’ top generals must understand,” he declares, “that their duty is to win, not just to go along.”

“Above all else,” he writes, “we Americans must understand that the goal of war is to achieve a specific purpose for the nation. In this respect, the military is simply a tool of statecraft...”

Such is the shared vision of both capitalist parties: a future dominated by war. In whose interests? At the cost of whose children, parents, brothers and sisters? At the cost of how many trillions of dollars? And leading to what end?

The eruption of American militarism is an expression of the insoluble crisis of American and world capitalism. That is why the war in Iraq and the future wars already in preparation will not be stopped by appeals to Congress or the Democratic Party—themselves instruments of the imperialist policy of the US corporate elite. Only the international mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective can disarm the war-makers and put an end to imperialist war.



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