

Hillary Clinton threatens to “obliterate” Iran

Joe Kay
24 April 2008

Democratic Party presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s pledge to “obliterate” Iran if it attacks Israel marks a sharp escalation of threats against that country and its entire population.

Clinton made her comments on Tuesday, the day of the Pennsylvania primaries. She was asked during an interview on ABC’s program “Good Morning America” about her previous comments that she would respond with “massive retaliation” if Iran attacked Israel. She responded by adopting an even more militarist tone.

Rephrasing the question to address a potential Iranian nuclear strike on Israel, Clinton said, “I want the Iranians to know, if I am the president, we will attack Iran. And I want them to understand that, because it does mean that they have to look very carefully at their society, because at whatever stage of development they might be with their nuclear weapons program in the next 10 years, during which they might foolishly consider launching an attack on Israel, we would be able to totally obliterate them.”

The scenario proposed by Clinton to phrase her comments—an Iranian strike on Israel—is simply a pretext for her to assert her willingness to use overwhelming military force, including nuclear weapons, to guarantee US domination of the Middle East.

Clinton’s choice of words is significant. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “obliterate” as “to remove utterly from recognition or memory” and “to remove from existence: destroy utterly all trace, indication, or significance of.”

Moreover, she said that it is “Iran” and “the Iranians” who would face total obliteration. If one were to take her words literally, what she is saying is that she would respond to an attack by the Iranian government on Israel by completely wiping out all trace of the people and history of Iran—that is, to commit genocide against

a population of some 71 million people.

It should be pointed out that Clinton’s comment comes less than two weeks after an Israeli official, National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, made a similar warning. He declared, “An Iranian attack will lead to a harsh retaliation by Israel, which will lead to the destruction of the Iranian nation.” While Israel has never publicly confirmed the existence of a stockpile of nuclear weapons, now believed to number several hundred, Ben-Eliezer was tacitly threatening to unleash this arsenal in the event of an Iranian clash with Israel.

Clinton’s remark has received little criticism from the American media, and the most that Obama could bring himself to say was that it was unnecessary “saber rattling,” while pledging to respond “forcefully and swiftly” to any Iranian attack.

On Wednesday, Clinton was asked to clarify her remarks on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” program. NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell noted that last year Clinton had refused to answer questions about Iran’s potential acquisition of nuclear weapons, saying that the questions were “hypothetical.” Mitchell asked Clinton what had changed between then and now.

“The facts on the ground have changed,” Clinton replied. While pledging to engage in diplomacy, Clinton insisted, “Clearly [the Iranians] continue to try to throw their weight around in the world. There is no doubt that they will pursue if they can figure out how to obtain a nuclear weapon.... They have to know from the beginning that that would be a grave, grave error.” She did not amend her previous threat of total obliteration.

Clinton’s comments continued upon threats made by both her and Senator Barack Obama during the Democratic Party debate last week. Asked if the US should treat an Iranian attack on Israel as an attack on the United States, Obama pledged direct negotiations with Iran but insisted, “I will take no options off the

table when it comes to preventing them from using nuclear weapons or obtaining nuclear weapons.”

“I think it is very important that Iran understands that an attack on Israel is an attack on our strongest ally in the region, one whose security we consider ... paramount,” Obama said. He added that the US would “take appropriate action” in response to any attack.

Clinton took the opportunity to try to outflank her opponent from the right. She pledged “massive retaliation” against Iran. She said that she would also adopt the same policy with regard to other countries in the region, not just Israel. “We will let the Iranians know, that, yes, an attack on Israel ... would trigger massive retaliation. But so would an attack on those countries [she mentioned by name the monarchies of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait] that are willing to go under the security umbrella and forswear their own nuclear ambitions.”

In effect, Clinton was declaring her desire to create a military pact between the US and several of the semi-feudal oil sheikdoms. This would be a major commitment to increased US military involvement in the area. She went on to criticize the Bush administration from the right, saying that it “has failed in our efforts to convince the rest of the world that that is a danger, not only to us, and not just to Israel but to the region and beyond.”

There are no substantial differences between Clinton and Obama on policy. They both support the continued US occupation of Iraq. They both defend the interests of American imperialism in the Middle East and globally. There are, however, tactical differences over US policy in the Middle East, with sections of the Democratic Party establishment critical of unconditional support for Israel.

Clinton’s comments are clearly aimed at appealing to those who are concerned that Obama will be too hesitant to use military force or defend Israel. She is also attempting to make a case before that ruling elite that her campaign will more faithfully assert US military dominance.

In making this argument, Clinton is developing themes that have been introduced earlier: her assertion that both she and John McCain are experienced enough to be “commander-in-chief,” while Obama is not; her advertisements depicting phone calls at 3 a.m.—calls that would presumably demand of her a quick decision

to launch military strikes in some or another part of the world.

Shortly before the Pennsylvania primary, Clinton unveiled a new advertisement depicting Pearl Harbor, Osama Bin Laden, and a quote from Democratic President Harry Truman, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

The fact that Truman was the one world leader to have ever ordered the use of a nuclear weapon in a war situation was perhaps not lost on those sections of the military and political establishment to whom the ad was ultimately directed.

Clinton’s comments are revealing not only in what they say about her own campaign, but what they say about the Democratic Party as a whole, including Obama. No one in the Democratic Party establishment challenges the basic premise underlying the threats by Clinton against Iran: that US policy in the Middle East is aimed at countering Iranian aggression. Neither of the candidates will point out that the policy of unprovoked aggression has been practiced not by Iran, but by the United States, which has killed over 1 million Iraqis, and turned 4 million into refugees, in its determination to gain control of the country and the region.

The danger of war against Iran—or against China, Russia, or some other country—does not come just from the Republican Party. While the Democrats seek to posture as critics of the Iraq war, they are just as committed as the Republicans to the aims the war was meant to secure, and they will just as surely use military force in the future to achieve these aims.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact