

Obama continues lurch to the right on Iraq war and militarism

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The embrace of key elements of the Republican agenda and jettisoning of positions that he advanced during his “Change you can believe in” primary campaign have become a daily routine, as the Democratic Party’s presumptive presidential candidate Barack Obama carries out a dizzying turn to the right.

In speeches and press appearances on Wednesday and Thursday, Obama continued to identify his campaign with support for American militarism, while backing away from his primary-campaign pledge to withdraw US combat forces from Iraq based on a definite timetable.

Appearing Wednesday in Colorado Springs, Obama delivered a speech on national service, which hailed the US military and vowed to swell its ranks.

While proposing the expansion of Americorps, the Peace Corps and other civilian entities, Obama made it clear that the main service to which he intended to call young Americans was the military.

He began by invoking the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington and lamenting the failure of the Bush administration to issue “a call to service” and “a call for shared sacrifice.”

“There is no challenge greater than the defense of our nation and our values,” he continued, praising the actions of US troops “fighting a resurgent Taliban” and “persevering in the deserts and cities of Iraq.”

What “values” are embodied in the systematic destruction of the Afghan and Iraqi societies and the killing and maiming of millions of civilians in the attempt to impose US hegemony over oil-rich regions of the planet, the Democratic candidate did not spell out.

Instead, he insisted on the “need to ease the burden on our troops, while meeting the challenges of the 21st century.” That these “challenges” entail the continuation of these wars and the launching of new ones is clear. As president, he said, he would “call on a new generation of Americans to join our military,” while vowing to increase US ground forces by 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 Marines.

With the military struggling to meet current recruitment quotas, this proposal raises the real question of whether the national service envisioned by Obama will involve the reactivation of the military draft.

Speaking at a press conference in Fargo, North Dakota Thursday before addressing a group of veterans, Obama allowed that he expected to “refine” his positions on Iraq during an upcoming trip

to the US occupied country this summer.

Backing away from his earlier pledge to carry out a 16-month withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq, the candidate said, “I have always said I would listen to the commanders on the ground. I have always said that the pace of withdrawal would be dictated by the safety and security of our troops and the need to maintain stability.” Meanwhile, he couched his opposition to the continued occupation of Iraq at current levels in terms of what he posed as the more urgent necessity for sending troops to Afghanistan.

Obama’s advisors have been more explicit. His top foreign policy advisor, Anthony Lake, a former Clinton administration national security advisor, told the press that an incoming Democratic administration was committed to maintaining “a residual force for clearly defined missions” in Iraq, as well as “preparedness to go back in,” if needed. “That is not a ‘cut and run’ and let’s just see what happens,” said Lake, one of the architects of the Clinton administration’s “humanitarian” interventions in Somalia, Haiti and the Balkans.

Meanwhile, there is growing speculation that Obama is prepared to keep current US Defense Secretary Robert Gates at his post and the campaign has agreed to participate in a series of transition teams being set up in military, intelligence and police agencies to assure the seamless continuation of the “global war on terrorism.”

Having won the Democratic primaries in no small part by posturing as an opponent of the Iraq war and indicting his opponent, Hillary Clinton, for voting to authorize it, Obama is now presenting himself as another “wartime president.”

The lurch to the right by the Obama campaign is so blatant that it has aroused substantial commentary in the bourgeois press, some of it gloating and some of it reflecting concerns that this maneuver is so naked that it may alienate substantial layers of the population from the electoral process and expose the fraud of the entire two-party system.

The *Christian Science Monitor*, for example, cited concerns Thursday that Obama’s lurch to the right posed “a particular risk among young voters, who have turned out and volunteered in droves for Obama and may be disillusioned by his display of old-style politics.”

In the gloating category was an editorial published Wednesday in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled “Bush’s Third Term.” The *Journal*, whose editorial board has generally reflected the views within the right-wing sections of the Republican Party that dominate the Bush administration, pointed to Obama’s continuous

warnings against McCain's victory resulting in "George Bush's third term."

"Maybe he's worried that someone will notice that he's the candidate running for it," the editorial affirmed.

It went on to note Obama's announcement two weeks ago that he will vote for legislation legalizing the Bush administration's sweeping domestic wiretapping program, while granting retroactive immunity to the telecom companies that helped it carry out this unlawful spying operation. It pointed to the pullback from campaign promises of a timetable for withdrawing US combat troops from Iraq. And it cited his embrace of government funding for "faith-based" social programs, as well as a series of calculated statements on so-called hot button issues of the political right, ranging from guns to the death penalty.

Another demagogic appeal that the Obama campaign has jettisoned is the previous pretense that he opposed NAFTA and sympathized with the protectionist outlook of the trade union bureaucracy. In a recent interview with *Fortune* magazine, the candidate declared, "I've always been a proponent of free trade," and allowed that some of the primary rhetoric on the subject had been "overheated."

"Now that he is in a general election," the *Journal* commented, "he can't scare the business community too much." It would appear that the stock exchange is not at all frightened. According to figures compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, Obama has netted nearly \$8 million in contributions from the securities and investment houses, almost double the amount received by his Republican rival, McCain.

The *Journal* editorial concludes cynically, though justifiably, that "the next President, whether Democrat or Republican, is going to embrace much of Mr. Bush's foreign and antiterror policy whether he admits it or not."

In the end, this right-wing voice of Wall Street criticizes Obama not for his policies, but rather for what it terms his questionable "political character," meaning doubts about whether he can be trusted to carry through the wars abroad and attacks on the working class at home that the ruling elite requires.

Obama's turn to the right is the manifestation of a system in which the policies of both major parties are determined by a small wealthy layer of the population, which holds the will and sentiments of the American population in contempt.

The right-wing agenda being spelled out by the Obama campaign sets the stage for yet another election in which the masses of working people in the US will find themselves politically disenfranchised, with no viable means to express their immense hostility to the policies of war, destruction of living standards, and political reaction identified with the Bush administration.

Obama's rapid evolution in the wake of the primaries demonstrates the politics of deception and manipulation of public opinion that his campaign has embodied from the outset. It has never represented an insurgency from below, but rather a bid by elements of the ruling elite to effect certain definite but limited changes in policy, while using Obama to supply a fresh face for American imperialism under conditions in which it is discredited at home and abroad.

The attempt to use the Obama campaign to delude broad layers of the population seeking change enjoys the active and crucial support of most of what passes for the American "left." They seek to cover up or apologize for the right-wing trajectory of the Democrats. Some put forward the cynical argument that Obama is merely doing what it takes to get elected—the American people, they would argue, are backward and right-wing. Others maintain that he is reacting to pressure from the establishment and must be pushed back on course through pressure from the left.

Typical of this second school is the left liberal journalist Arianna Huffington, who posted on her web site advice to Obama, warning him that "tacking to the center is a losing strategy."

Instead, she called upon him to "appeal to the 82 million people who did not vote in 2004." She continued, "Isn't galvanizing the electorate to demand fundamental change the raison d'être of the Obama campaign in the first place?"

In reality, Obama is now running on his real program, that of a corrupt and reactionary big business politician. He will leave it to figures like Huffington, the *Nation*, and others on the so-called left to continue promoting illusions in his candidacy, while he makes his pitch to his key constituencies, the financial aristocracy and the forces of the state.

The Democrats have no interest in coming into office with a mandate for "fundamental change," because they have no desire or intention of carrying out such transformations. In fact, Obama's latest campaign swing is aimed in no small part at creating a new and decidedly conservative base for politics that will in key respects represent continuity with those of the Bush administration.

In the end, the promotion of illusions in Obama and the Democrats serves only to block the emergence of a genuine alternative based upon the independent political mobilization of the broad mass of working people.

One thing is certain. The policies of an incoming Obama administration will not be determined by the erstwhile populist posturing of the candidate or by the pressure exerted by the left liberals. Rather, they will be dictated by the enormity of the economic and political crisis confronting American capitalism and what is required under these conditions to defend the class interests of the ruling elite. The turn to the right on the campaign trail is preparation for this essential task.



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