

Obama promotes wider war in Afghanistan: Another presidential race between pro-war candidates

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It is clear that the presidential campaign of Barack Obama has become the political vehicle for a significant shift in the focus of US military aggression from Iraq to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Obama, who won the Democratic presidential primary by tapping into popular antiwar sentiment and exploiting his chief rival's vote to authorize the Iraq war, has become the leading spokesman for an escalation of the war in Afghanistan and its possible extension into Pakistan, a policy which is gathering growing support within the political and military establishment.

Once again, a US presidential election will take place in which the broad antiwar sentiment of the population is ignored and the majority of American people who oppose wars of aggression are disenfranchised. Instead, voters will be confronted with two candidates—Barack Obama and his Republican opponent John McCain—whose discernable foreign policy differences reflect tactical disputes over US imperialist policy, centering on where American military violence should be focused.

Obama's antiwar posturing during the primary campaign was a cynical ploy to delude those looking to end the war in Iraq. It was a calculated effort to conflate and subordinate principled opposition to the war to those sections of the political and military establishment whose opposition to Bush's war policy had nothing in common with opposition to US militarism or the neo-colonial designs of American imperialism.

Obama was selected and promoted by such figures as Jimmy Carter's national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who considered the invasion of Iraq a strategic blunder that had undermined US influence and weakened its strategic international position. The Bush administration's fixation on Iraq, they argued, diverted military and financial resources from more important

tasks, including consolidating US power in oil-rich Central Asia.

At the same time, their candidate, Obama, made clear—and demonstratively reiterated in his recent trip to Iraq—that he supported the US stooge regime and as president would maintain an indefinite presence of tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq to secure American interests in that country, which holds the second largest proven oil reserves in the world.

The 2008 presidential election is only the latest example of how the Democratic Party and its candidates have subverted and undermined antiwar opposition. In the 2002 congressional elections, the Democratic Party kept the issue of the drive to war against Iraq out of the election campaign while it promoted Bush's lies about weapons of mass destruction and supplied the necessary votes in Congress to authorize the invasion.

In 2004, Vermont Governor Howard Dean's campaign for the presidential nomination—initially utilized to channel growing antiwar sentiment behind the Democratic Party—was derailed and shut down by the party leadership and the media. Senator John Kerry, who ran in the primaries as a critic of the war, sidelined the issue once he had secured the nomination. Toward the end of the general election race, with his campaign floundering, Kerry presented himself as a Vietnam War hero who would wage the war in Iraq more effectively than Bush.

In the run-up to the 2006 congressional elections the Democrats again did their best to keep the contest from becoming a referendum on the war. Widespread antiwar sentiment, however, made this impossible. A mass turnout of antiwar voters defeated dozens of incumbent Republican congressmen and senators and put the Democratic Party in control of both houses of Congress

for the first time since 1994.

The Democratic Congress then proceeded to vote for every war appropriation requested by Bush, including the funding required to escalate the mass killing in the form of Bush's troop "surge." The Democrats also voted to confirm every top military official nominated by Bush, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Iraq commander Gen. David Petraeus and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen.

By such means, the Democrats succeeded in confusing, demoralizing and dissipating any significant organized expression of antiwar sentiment, even as the opposition of the American people to the war continued to grow.

Now the liberal establishment is lining up behind Obama to promote the "right war" in Afghanistan. As *Washington Post* op-ed columnist Eugene Robinson wrote Tuesday: "Events have conspired to make the strategy advocated by Barack Obama and other leading Democrats—set a timetable for shutting down the sideshow in Iraq; focus attention and resources on the main event in Afghanistan—the only sane way to proceed...."

On Sunday, *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich chastised McCain for being a year behind Obama in "recognizing Afghanistan as the central front in the war against Al Qaeda." He added, "Mr. McCain still doesn't understand that we can't send troops to Afghanistan unless they're shifted from Iraq."

How was this accomplished?

The Democratic Party successfully exploited the political vulnerabilities of a population subjected to decades of right-wing propaganda, media disinformation and the absence of any genuine opposition to political reaction within either of the two parties.

In this cynical and reactionary operation, it was rendered indispensable assistance by the milieu of middle-class protest groups, ex-radicals and left liberals who single-mindedly worked to channel the antiwar movement behind the Democratic Party, insisting that no struggle against the war was permissible or legitimate outside the orbit of the two-party system.

Outfits such as United for Peace and Justice and the *Nation* magazine opposed any struggle that sought to mobilize mass antiwar sentiment independently of the capitalist parties and link it to a socialist program to unite the working class against attacks on social conditions and democratic rights. By virtue of their boundless political ignorance and opportunism, they undermined the very movement they purported to lead.

Now, many of these "left" groups are wringing their

hands and expressing dismay over the Democratic candidate's war-mongering statements. Katrina Vanden Heuvel, the editor of the *Nation* writes, "it is troubling that as he shows sound thinking on Iraq, Obama also continues to talk about escalating the US military presence in Afghanistan." She pleads with the Democratic candidate to "think long and hard" about "extricating the US from one disastrous war and heading into another."

This statement combines self-delusion with deceit and outright reaction. As Obama himself has insisted, he has been calling for military escalation in Afghanistan for more than a year. Moreover, commending Obama's policy in Iraq as "sound" constitutes support for an ongoing US military presence and the permanent reduction of the country to the status of a US protectorate.

Such appeals to the Democratic candidate only serve to encourage illusions that he can be shifted by pressure from below to adopt a less militaristic course, and that the Democratic Party or a section of it can serve as a vehicle for peace.

Hostile to Marxism, these elements are incapable of making a class analysis of the Democratic Party, one of the oldest capitalist parties in the world.

It is necessary to draw the lessons of these critical experiences. The Democratic Party has long been the burial ground of movements of popular protest and opposition, from the Populist movement of the 1890s, to the industrial union movement of the 1930s, to the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be ended, and future wars prevented, only through a decisive and irreparable break with the Democratic Party and the independent mobilization of the American and international working class in a struggle against war and the capitalist system that is its root cause.



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