

Democratic National Convention outlines policy of wider war

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After going through the formality of a roll call vote ending in the preordained nomination of Barack Obama as its presidential candidate, the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday turned to the question of “national security,” portraying itself as more competent than the Bush administration in defending the interests of US imperialism abroad, while making it clear that it is prepared to launch new and even bloodier wars than those carried out over the past eight years.

Among the most ominous notes sounded repeatedly from the podium in Denver was the prospect that the coming period will see growing confrontations between America and emerging global rivals, including Russia and China.

This found its sharpest expression in an attack on the Bush administration from the right over the conflict between Russia and Georgia. Coming as it did amid the ratcheting up of the conflict between Moscow and Washington, with Russian and US warships sailing towards confrontation in the Black Sea, the rhetoric was the equivalent of throwing gasoline onto a fire.

The evening’s proceedings, organized under the slogan of “Securing America’s Future,” underscored the drive to the right by the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party as a whole following the party’s primary contests, in which popular hostility to the Iraq war played a decisive role in swinging the nomination to Obama and sinking the candidacy of Senator Hillary Clinton.

Not only did the speeches make it abundantly clear that any differences on the Iraq war are of a purely tactical character, they also delivered a resounding message that an incoming Democratic administration will oversee an expansion of US military aggression.

Since the Democratic primaries, in which Obama capitalized on Clinton’s October 2002 vote to authorize the US war against Iraq, he has clarified that his own plan would pull “combat troops” out of the country only 16 months after he took office—in mid-2010—while leaving tens of thousands of soldiers and Marines behind as a “residual” occupation force. Even this timetable may be scrapped if there is opposition from American military commanders.

In any case, the practical differences separating the Democrats and the Republicans on this issue have grown ever narrower. A general consensus is emerging within the ruling establishment that military resources that have been tied down in the colonialist occupation of Iraq should be freed up for use elsewhere.

In the first instance, this would be to quell popular resistance to foreign occupation in Afghanistan, universally portrayed by the Democratic speakers as “the real front against terrorism.” But as speech after speech suggested, existing troops, as well as additional forces that an Obama administration aims to add to the US military,

are to be used on a far wider global stage.

What emerges from the proceedings in Denver is that the fundamental framework of American policy—the growth of militarism and the justification of aggression in the name of a “war on terror”—will continue, no matter whether the Republican candidate, Senator John McCain, or Obama enters the White House next January.

The Republicans and McCain have mounted a campaign to cast Obama as unfit to serve as “commander-in-chief.” An ad aired Tuesday makes use of Hillary Clinton’s statement during the primaries suggesting that while she and McCain were both qualified to serve as commander-in-chief, Obama was not.

As throughout the convention, the proceedings on Wednesday evinced the Democrats’ fearful response to such attacks. The party leadership has no intention of waging the general election campaign by appealing to the anger and hostility of the American people to the war in Iraq. Rather, it is determined to demonstrate to the ruling elite its own militarist credentials.

This was a significant motivation in the selection of Senator Joseph Biden, the principal speaker before the convention Wednesday night, to be Obama’s vice presidential running mate. Both as ranking Democrat and then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the 65-year-old, six-term senator has been a key Washington proponent of US aggression in the Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. There has been much talk in Democratic circles of him playing a major policy-making role in an Obama administration, with comparisons to the role played by Dick Cheney in fashioning the policies of the Bush White House.

In his speech Wednesday night, Biden accused the Bush administration of being weak on “national security.” He charged that it “has failed to face the biggest forces shaping this century: the emergence of Russia, China and India as great powers; the spread of lethal weapons; the shortage of secure supplies of energy, food and water; the challenge of climate change; and the resurgence of fundamentalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the real central front against terrorism.”

He drew particular attention to the confrontation with Russia over the autonomous regions in Georgia, accusing the Bush administration of “neglect” in relation to this conflict and suggesting that a Democratic administration would adopt an even more confrontational stance. “We will hold Russia accountable for its actions, and we’ll help the people of Georgia rebuild,” he declared.

Former President Bill Clinton also took the stage Wednesday night to tout the Democrats’ foreign policy prowess. Like a number of other speakers, Clinton made fleeting reference to the reactionary policies carried out by the Bush administration over the past eight years,

referring to torture, the Hurricane Katrina debacle, social inequality and the assault on science—all in two sentences. He did not dwell on this laundry list of offenses, for to do so would inevitably raise questions about the Democrats' own role in facilitating them.

The heart of Clinton's message, however, was the affirmation that Obama is "ready to be president," meaning that he is prepared to use military force. While claiming that Obama would go to war only "as a last resort," Clinton added, "In a world troubled by terror... by other threats to our security, our interests, and our values, when he cannot convert adversaries into partners, he will stand up to them."

He was speaking from experience, having carried out more US military interventions—in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Colombia—than any previous president.

One element in Clinton's speech deserves special consideration. Praising Obama, he said that the candidate had "shown a clear grasp of our foreign policy and national security challenges, and a firm commitment to repair our badly strained military." This same theme was echoed in the lead editorial of the *New York Times* Thursday, which called upon Obama to show that he has a plan for "rebuilding a broken military."

As to how this job of repairing and rebuilding is to be accomplished, neither Clinton nor the *Times* provided any concrete proposals. Obama has included in his platform the call for swelling the ranks of US combat forces by an additional 100,000 soldiers and Marines.

Under conditions of a continuing crisis in armed forces recruitment and mounting indications that Washington—and both its major parties—is preparing for even bigger wars, there is a clear threat that fixing a "strained" and "broken" military will take the form of dragooning a new generation into serving as cannon fodder by reviving the draft.

Among the other speakers brought to the convention podium was the party's 2004 presidential candidate Senator John Kerry. Having voted in favor of granting the Bush administration blanket authorization to invade Iraq, in Denver he accused the administration of having "delivered the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time." As a result, he asserted, "it's Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban and dictators everywhere that are on the march."

Also speaking was Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. In that capacity, Rockefeller has been a key accomplice in the crimes carried out by the Bush administration in the name of the "global war on terror."

"I have seen the intelligence up close and I can tell you that the threats that we face are real and they are growing," Rockefeller told the convention. In 2002-2003, Rockefeller was briefed by the administration on its torture of detainees, including the use of waterboarding, keeping this criminal abuse secret from the American people. He was the principal architect of the legislation approved by Congress last month—with Obama's vote—granting the White House sweeping new domestic spying powers and giving the telecommunications companies a blanket retroactive amnesty for their collaboration in the illegal wiretapping operation mounted by the Bush administration.

A recurrent theme in speech after speech was that of economic nationalism, laced with talk of achieving "energy independence" in order to end the need for the US to borrow money from China to buy oil from Arab countries, both of which were portrayed as hostile forces. The unstated logic of this approach is the necessity to prepare for war against such adversaries, including both China and Russia.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid began his remarks with the

observation that the history of the last century was dominated by "a toxic mix of oil and war." To substantiate this point, he cited Pearl Harbor, the Nazi invasion of Russia, and Iraq's move into Kuwait in 1990. He then denounced the actions of "dictators and authoritarians from Venezuela to Russia, from Sudan to North Korea."

This screed was even more brazen than most in turning reality on its head. As leader of the US Senate, Reid coordinated repeated votes to authorize and fund wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both waged by the US to establish hegemony over key oil reserves and supply routes. These actions, however, were omitted from his potted history.

Instead, he portrayed America as the innocent victim. "Attacked at home by oil-funded terrorists, at war abroad with oil-funded insurgents, threatened in global markets and faced with acquisition of our industrial base by oil-funded multinationals, we must defend America or face her utter destruction," said Reid. This is classic war propaganda, in which one's own aggression is portrayed as an act of self defense.

The previous day, Obama himself provided an example of the Democrats' efforts to outdo the Republicans in saber-rattling. He beat the Bush White House in issuing a bellicose statement denouncing Moscow for recognizing the independence of the breakaway Georgian republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

"I condemn Russia's decision," he declared, "and call upon all countries of the world not to accord any legitimacy to this action." He advocated a policy of working to "further isolate Russia internationally because of its actions." He went on to support Georgia's integration into NATO.

The Democratic candidate concluded on an ominous note. While affirming that "no one wants to see another Cold War with Russia," he warned, "peace and security in Europe cannot be taken for granted." The implication was clear: War in Europe, pitting two nuclear-armed nations, the US and Russia, against each other, cannot be ruled out.

Whatever illusions were generated by Obama's primary campaign rhetoric, the positions enunciated by the candidate and his supporters in Denver constitute a stark warning that far greater wars are being prepared, and that no genuine struggle can be waged against American militarism outside of a decisive political break with the Democratic Party and the building of a mass independent political movement of the working class.



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