

Democrats and Obama prepare platform of war and reaction

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With the Democratic National Convention set to convene in Denver, Colorado next week for the formal nomination of Senator Barack Obama, the party and its presidential candidate have made it clear that they will present no genuine alternative to the politics of aggressive war and social reaction that have prevailed in America over the whole past period.

Having won the Democratic primaries through an amorphous appeal to the desire for change and a disingenuous attempt to cast himself as an antiwar candidate, Obama has over the past few months voted in favor of police-state spying, fully embraced militarism, and given assurances to Wall Street that its profits will remain sacrosanct, no matter how severe the crisis confronting millions of working people.

The Democratic convention itself—a carefully scripted and corporate-funded media extravaganza—is to be the culmination of a systematic shift to the right by the Obama campaign.

The convention will include an entire day on Wednesday devoted to “national security,” under the slogan of “Securing America’s Future.” According to the party, this segment of the convention is to highlight Obama’s “tough foreign policy that is neither Republican nor Democratic, but is a strong, smart American foreign policy to make our country more secure and advance our interests in the world.”

In the course of his campaign, Obama has pledged his fealty to the US Zionist lobby, while echoing the Bush administration’s threats to launch military strikes against Iran. He has called for US military strikes in Pakistan.

He has spelled out the real significance of his primary campaign rhetoric about an end to the war in Iraq, making it clear that his call for withdrawing “combat troops”—16 months after taking office—envisioned leaving a “residual force” consisting of tens of thousands of US military personnel and mercenaries to continue the colonial-style occupation.

Moreover, those troops that are “redeployed” from Iraq, under Obama’s plan, are to be dispatched to Afghanistan in order to escalate the brutal campaign to suppress the resistance of the Afghan people to foreign occupation.

He has likewise called for the augmenting of America’s bloated war machine with an additional 100,000 soldiers and Marines, as well as for increased military spending.

Finally, over the past two weeks, Obama has thrown himself fully into the aggressive US campaign against Russia, competing with his Republican rival Senator John McCain in belligerent denunciations of Moscow and demands for retribution over the events in Georgia.

This is a calculated policy. As the *Washington Post* reported earlier this week, a substantial section of the Democratic Party had urged Obama to oppose McCain on Georgia and cast him as a trigger-happy

militarist bent on plunging the US into yet another war. Obama rejected this advice, choosing instead to solidarize himself with the aggressive campaign against Russia.

This last development is the most ominous. Those who have managed to delude themselves into believing that Obama represents some means of countering the policy of aggressive war implemented by the Bush administration should consider it carefully.

What is unfolding in the confrontation over Georgia and its extension in the form of the agreement signed Wednesday to deploy a new US missile system in Poland is the bipartisan buildup to a potential third world war, posing the threat of nuclear annihilation.

As in every election since George W. Bush took control of the White House, the Democratic Party has facilitated the war drive and systematically defused and suppressed the mass opposition to war among the American people.

In 2002, on the eve of the mid-term election, the Democrats voted to grant Bush authorization to launch the unprovoked war on Iraq, thereby getting the issue “off the table” before the vote was held. Its cowardly attempt to contest the election solely on domestic issues failed badly, ensuring Republican control of both houses of Congress.

In 2004, mass antiwar sentiment was diverted into the Democratic Party via the primary campaign of Howard Dean, only to have Dean’s candidacy aborted and the party nominate Senator John Kerry, who had voted for the war and who vowed to escalate it.

Finally, in 2006, the overwhelming hostility to the war yielded a Democratic victory in the mid-term election, securing the party’s control over both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Nonetheless, the Democratic leadership ensured that funding for the war and its escalation in the so-called “surge” continued unabated, while it categorically ruled out any attempt to impeach Bush or Cheney for dragging the American people into a criminal war based on lies.

In this election, once again, the vast majority of the American people who oppose the war in Iraq and the global escalation of American militarism are to be politically disenfranchised.

This was a central purpose of the Obama campaign from the outset. While Obama secured his primary victory largely thanks to criticism of the vote cast in 2002 by his principal rival, Senator Hillary Clinton, to authorize the Iraq war, his campaign never represented an anti-war insurgency from below. Indeed, given his record of voting repeatedly to fund the slaughter in Iraq, there is every reason to believe that Obama would have joined in issuing Bush the blank check for war, had he been a member of the US Senate at the time.

Rather, the Obama campaign is the creation and instrument of a definite layer within the American political and foreign policy

establishment that has viewed the policies of the Bush administration, particularly in the Middle East, as increasingly detrimental to US global interests.

These layers saw Obama's candidacy as an ideal means of giving a new face to an internationally discredited American imperialism, while effecting definite changes—albeit of a tactical character—in US foreign policy.

Those closest to the campaign include such figures as Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Carter administration national security advisor who played a key role in organizing the CIA-backed war in Afghanistan, and his successor under Bill Clinton, Anthony Lake, who played a similar role in relation to the US interventions in the former Yugoslavia.

These elements are by no means opponents of war—Brzezinski has been among the most bellicose in denouncing Russia over the Georgian events, comparing Vladimir Putin to Hitler and Stalin. Rather, they see the Iraq war and occupation as a debacle that has “distracted” Washington and made it impossible to carry out other more strategically important interventions elsewhere, including the regions in the Caucasus and Central Asia that were formerly part of the Soviet sphere of influence.

One of the reasons Obama has rejected calls to disassociate himself from the saber-rattling of Bush and McCain over Georgia is the fear that he would lose the support of backers such as Brzezinski. In the current issue of *Time* magazine, Brzezinski attacks Democrats who have criticized McCain's anti-Russian agitation. “Presidential candidates Barack Obama (whom I support),” he writes, “and John McCain should endorse President Bush's efforts to oppose Russia's actions and form a bipartisan stand on this issue. It is unfortunate that some of the candidates' supporters are engaging in pointless criticism of each other's public statements on the Georgia crisis.”

Obama's call for a partial drawdown of US troops from Iraq and their redeployment to Afghanistan has emerged as a consensus policy within the predominant layers of the American foreign policy establishment. Indeed, the Bush administration itself is in the midst of negotiating a withdrawal schedule with the Iraqi regime, while announcing its intention to send another 15,000 American troops to Afghanistan.

While promising only continued US wars of aggression abroad, Obama and the Democrats are incapable of advancing any policy to ameliorate the deepening crisis confronting millions of working class Americans as a result of spiraling prices, growing unemployment and continuing home foreclosures.

Nothing could make it clearer that the Democratic Party is a political instrument of the corporations and banks that run America than the Denver convention itself. The event is being funded to the tune of tens, if not hundreds of millions of dollars by corporate sponsors ranging from the ConocoPhillips oil company to Lockheed, Motorola, the EDS Corporation and Coca-Cola.

Delegates will be given bags carrying the logo of AT&T, one of the major corporate benefactors of the convention, as well as a key beneficiary of Obama's vote in the Senate providing blanket retroactive immunity for telecommunications companies that collaborated in the Bush administration's massive domestic wiretapping operations.

Obama has reciprocated Wall Street's support for his campaign by putting forward a tax policy that is far more favorable towards multi-millionaire and billionaire investors than had been anticipated.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on August 14, Obama's principal

economic advisors presented a plan that would hike capital gains and dividend taxes for those making more than \$200,000 a year to only 20 percent, from the current 15 percent. The Democratic candidate had been expected to nearly double the capital gains tax—returning it to the rate that existed under Reagan and Bush as well as during the first term of the Clinton administration—and increase the tax on dividends to 40 percent.

By ruling out any materially significant increase in taxes on finance capital, Obama and the Democrats have effectively precluded any measures to improve living standards, increase public spending or boost employment. A Democratic administration in 2009 will spell a continuation and deepening of the attacks on living standards as American capitalism continues to confront its deepest crisis since the great depression of the 1930s.

Obama has repeatedly made it clear that the real thrust of his domestic policy will be the demand for fiscal responsibility. Under conditions in which the budget deficit will be approaching \$500 billion by next year and with continued massive military spending, this can only mean stepped up attacks on working people.

As for democratic rights, Obama's vote last month to vastly expand government power to conduct warrantless wiretapping and electronic surveillance represents a pledge that the buildup of a police state apparatus under the Bush administration will continue.

It is worth noting the extraordinary security preparations surrounding the Democratic convention. These have included the leasing of warehouses on Denver's northeast side to facilitate the mass jailing of demonstrators. The warehouses have been fitted with dozens of metal cages crowned by concertina wire. Nothing could more clearly sum up the Democratic Party's real attitude towards democratic rights.

There is little expectation that Denver will be the scene of massive demonstrations. The leaderships of the main protest organizations have largely lined up behind Obama and have helped curtail demonstrations against the war in the run-up to the November election.

Rather, the resort to police state measures is a reflection of the gulf separating the Democratic Party and its interests from the vast majority of the American people. This is a party that represents, no less than the Republicans, the financial oligarchy that rules America. The politics of repression and fear have become the norm for the entire two-party system in a society torn by intense class divisions and vast social inequality.

The political trajectory of the Obama campaign and the preparations for the reactionary media spectacle to be staged in Denver underscore the impossibility of carrying out any struggle against war, political reaction and the destruction of the living standards and basic rights outside of the independent political mobilization of the working class based on a socialist program.



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