

Obama's "seamless transition" to endless war

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President-elect Barack Obama appeared Sunday on the CBS program "60 Minutes" for his first televised interview since his November 4 election victory.

He covered a wide range of subjects with a lack of specificity and a placid tone that suggested someone who had read through stacks of briefing books, but had few defined positions of his own and was above all anxious to offend no one.

When asked what he had been "concentrating on" in the past week, however, his answer was unhesitating: "Number one, I think it's important to get a national security team in place because transition periods are potentially times of vulnerability to a terrorist attack. We want to make sure that there is as seamless a transition on national security as possible."

A "seamless transition on national security"; the phrase is well worth pondering, given the strategy and policy pursued by the administration that will be handing over power to an incoming Obama administration.

The Bush administration enunciated a clear national security policy that became known as the Bush Doctrine. Essentially, it proclaimed the "right" of the US government to attack preemptively any country it believes might pose a military threat to the United States. Underlying this formally stated policy of aggressive war lay the determination of the US ruling elite to advance its monopolization of wealth and power through war abroad and repression at home.

The Bush doctrine was the political expression of an explosion of American militarism, leading to the continuing wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a series of military strikes against a number of other countries, including Pakistan, Syria, Somalia and Yemen.

"National security" and the "global war on terrorism" were likewise invoked as the justification for criminal policies that have included kidnapping, extraordinary rendition, torture and imprisonment without trial.

Obama's determination to effect a "seamless transition"

in this area would appear to fly in the face of the fact that his electoral victory is owed in large measure to the popular revulsion aroused by these policies. If there were anywhere that the electorate might expect to see "seams"—i.e., disparities, interruptions and discontinuity—it would be here.

Yet, even in the run-up to the election, Obama repeatedly made clear that his differences with Bush were of a tactical rather than a strategic or principled character. He tacitly embraced the policy of preventative war, implying that he would employ it both to strike at targets inside Pakistan and to preempt Iran's alleged quest for nuclear weapons.

And as the transition process advances, it is becoming increasingly clear that—tactical differences over US foreign policy notwithstanding—the pursuit of the global strategic aims of America's financial oligarchy by means of military aggression and international criminality is not about to come to end when Obama enters the White House in January.

Rather, the change in administrations is seen within the ruling establishment as a means of bringing about changes that will make American militarism more effective while providing, in the person of Obama, a better political cover for the pursuit of American capitalism's worldwide interests.

In his interview Sunday, Obama reiterated his determination to "draw down" troops in Iraq, but only in order to "shore up" the US war in Afghanistan. He declared that his "top priority" is to "stamp out Al Qaeda once and for all," making it clear that the "global war on terrorism" will not only continue, but may well be escalated.

The real shape of the military agenda that will likely be pursued under Obama was spelled out in some detail Sunday in a lead editorial published in the *New York Times*, a paper whose views reflect close association with the Democratic Party establishment figures setting policy for the incoming administration.

Titled "A military for a dangerous new world," the

editorial presents a chilling blueprint for the building up of US armed forces in preparation for multiple wars on a scale that will dwarf anything seen in Iraq or Afghanistan.

It begins by lamenting the fact that the protracted war and occupation in Iraq have left US “troops and equipment ... so overtaxed” that they are not prepared to confront the supposedly necessary escalation in Afghanistan or the “next threats.”

In addition to fighting to “defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan” and “pursuing Al Qaeda forces around the world,” the *Times* argues, the US military must prepare to confront “Iran’s nuclear ambitions, an erratic North Korea, a rising China, an assertive Russia and a raft of unstable countries like Somalia and nuclear-armed Pakistan.”

The paper repeats Obama’s own call for adding nearly 100,000 more soldiers and marines to American ground forces—bringing the total to 759,000 active duty forces. It goes on to assert, however, that, while this “sounds like a lot,” it really remains inadequate.

Declaring that the military has been “badly stretched” by the Iraq war, the *Times* concludes, “The most responsible prescription for overcoming these problems is a significantly larger ground force.”

Where and how is an Obama administration to procure these “significantly larger” numbers of troops? The *Times* does not say. One logical conclusion, however, is that if such a significant change in the size of the US military is to be effected it will likely mean the reinstitution of conscription—bringing back the draft. Obama’s repeated invocation of “national service” and “sacrifice” in his campaign for the presidency has laid the ideological foundations for once again rounding up tens of thousands of American youth to serve as cannon fodder in US imperialism’s militarist adventures.

Not only does the *Times* believe that the US military must be substantially bigger, it also calls for it to develop “new skills,” particularly honing its ability to suppress “guerrilla insurgencies” and conduct “irregular warfare.” In other words, the continuing “wars of the 21st century,” to borrow a phrase from George W. Bush, will include more dirty colonial-style occupations and subjugations of oppressed countries in order to secure raw materials, markets and pools of cheap labor for American capitalism.

At the same time, the paper advocates beefing up the American military’s “lift capacity,” i.e., the ability “to move enormous quantities of men and materiel quickly around the world and to supply them when necessary by

sea.”

It also warns against China’s building up of its navy and vows that Washington cannot “allow any country to interfere with vital maritime lanes.” The editorial urges major new investments in Maritime Prepositioning Force ships, which carry supplies needed for rapid interventions by marines, and in Littoral Combat Ships, smaller vessels capable of carrying out attacks on targeted countries’ coastlines.

“What we are calling for will be expensive,” the *Times* admits, acknowledging that the current plan to add 92,000 ground troops will cost \$100 billion over the next six years. The substantially greater buildup the paper advocates will entail far greater spending, as will the beefing up of naval forces and purchasing other military hardware.

“Much of the savings from withdrawing troops from Iraq will have to be devoted to repairing and rebuilding the force,” the editorial states. So much for Obama’s campaign promise to stop spending \$10 billion a month in Iraq and invest it instead in “rebuilding America.” Rather, that money will go to preparing still more death and destruction.

Under conditions in which the bailout’s pouring of trillions of dollars into the Wall Street banks has occasioned continuous warnings that promises of increased social spending must be shelved, it is significant that there is no questioning here of the need to pour hundreds of billions of additional funds into the US war machine.

The *Times* editorial and the evolution of the Obama transition serve as stark warnings that the desperate economic crisis of American capitalism will produce an even more explosive development of US militarism in the months and years ahead.

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