

Obama's national security team and the failure of American democracy

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The formal introduction of the incoming Obama administration's national security team at a Chicago hotel on Monday provided a definitive exposure not merely of the fraudulent character of the "change you can believe in" mantra of the Democratic presidential campaign, but more importantly of the failure of American democracy itself.

There on the platform with the president-elect was Senator Hillary Clinton, his nominee for secretary of state, and Robert Gates, whom Obama has asked to remain at the post of secretary of defense to which George W. Bush appointed him. Rounding out the nominees for the key national security positions was retired Marine Gen. James Jones, tapped to serve as national security adviser.

The significance of these choices is unmistakable. They represent an open and contemptuous repudiation of the will of the voters expressed just last month. While millions turned out at the polls in November with the aim of putting an end to eight years of war and repression under the Bush administration, Monday's announcement signaled there will be no such change.

Rather, there was a distinct tone of militarism and aggression to the press conference, with vows to use "all elements of American power" and "strengthen our military and increase our ground forces to defeat the threats of the 21st century." Among these "threats," Obama cited "newly assertive powers [who] have put strains on the international system."

The message was unmistakable: US imperialism will continue and intensify its use of military violence to assert its global interests and offset its economic decline—albeit with slight tactical adjustments and with Obama providing rhetorical flourishes about "American values" and "our moral example."

To even utter these words in light of Washington's record of torture, extraordinary rendition and aggressive war is an obscenity. Rather than repudiate these practices, Obama declared amiably that there was "no monopoly of power or wisdom in either party."

The retention of Gates—a champion of the "surge" and long-

time advocate of regime change in Iraq—assures unbroken continuity with the war policies of the Bush administration.

In Jones, Obama has selected someone who, like Gates, has explicitly rejected any timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. The former Marine Corps commandant is also a director at the oil giant Chevron and an advocate of "energy security." During the election campaign he appeared in support of Republican candidate John McCain.

Then there is Hillary Clinton. Obama owed his victory in the Democratic primary contest largely to his posturing as an antiwar candidate, repeatedly raising the October 2002 vote cast by Clinton, his principal rival, to authorize the US invasion of Iraq.

Obama, who insisted that Clinton's foreign policy views made her unfit to be president, has now nominated her as his chief foreign policy official. Asked by a reporter Monday about the blatant contradiction between the position he had enunciated in the course of the election campaign and his nomination of Clinton as secretary of state, Obama responded jokingly, "This is fun for the press to stir up whatever quotes were generated during the course of the campaign."

What cynicism! Mass opposition to the Iraq war was clearly the decisive foreign policy issue not only in the 2008 election, but in the two national elections that preceded it. It played a determining role in Obama's own victory. Yet now that he has been elected, differences over the war amount merely to campaign rhetoric, of no significance whatsoever. Instead, Obama appoints a cabinet dominated by the war's supporters, emphasizing their agreement on escalating the other war, in Afghanistan, and preparing for new and even bloodier conflicts.

Sections of Obama's "left" cheerleaders have expressed shock and dismay over the cabinet appointments—while others have tried to craft justifications for his choices.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is neither shocked nor surprised. The shape of the incoming Obama administration was entirely predictable and wholly in line with the policy pursued by the Democratic Party since the midterm elections of 2002, when it made the deliberate decision in October of

that year to provide the votes in Congress needed to authorize Bush's invasion of Iraq in order to get the issue of war "off the table" before the voters went to the polls the following month.

Two years later, in the presidential election of 2004, the party chose as its candidate Senator John Kerry, who had voted to authorize the war and who, in the course of the campaign, vowed to carry out his own escalation if elected president.

Finally, after winning control of both the House and Senate in 2006—largely due to overwhelming popular hostility to the war—the Democratic leadership did nothing to bring the war to an end, and instead voted repeatedly to provide more funding for its escalation.

We said—the enthusiasm whipped up over Obama's candidacy notwithstanding—that this election would be no different. In article after article, the WSWS warned that once again the substantial majority of the American electorate opposed to the war would be politically disenfranchised.

This was summed up on the eve of the election. We wrote in the Perspective column of November 3, 2008:

"Tens of millions of people are going to vote for Obama in the hope that this will lead to a rapid end to the war in Iraq and to domestic policies that promote jobs and decent living standards, as opposed to the unrestrained profiteering by big business and the wealthy fostered by the Bush administration.

"The policy of the incoming administration will not be guided by these popular illusions, however, but by the reality of a worldwide financial crisis, a deepening slump in the United States, and the ongoing resistance to imperialist military occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan...

"Despite large increases in voter turnout and widespread involvement by new layers of the population, particularly youth and students, the American people will end up serving as little more than extras in a conflict within the ruling elite. Once Election Day is past, Obama will put 'hope' and 'change' back in his briefcase and go about his real business: defending the interests of corporate America.

"The Democrats responded with alacrity to the danger of a meltdown in the financial markets, turning over trillions in public funds to bail out the banks and speculators. The same political figures will turn to working people after the election and tell them that there is no money to provide health care, jobs, education and other social benefits, especially given the need to spend even more for wars in the Middle East and Central Asia."

These warnings are now being completely confirmed.

What does this political experience—coming on top of the maneuvers and deceptions aimed at disenfranchising the millions of voters opposed to war in the previous national

elections—say about the entire electoral process in America?

The bourgeois democratic setup in the United States is rotten down to its foundations. The two-party system, owned and controlled by the ruling financial and corporate interests, provides no means for the vast majority of the population to express its will or assert its interests. Under conditions of unprecedented social polarization between the financial elite and masses of working people, and a systemic economic crisis that is destroying the jobs and living standards of millions, the political reality of a dictatorship of the banks and big business becomes ever more difficult to hide.

The impossibility of changing the policies of the American government by means of elections—demonstrated once again in the evolution of the incoming Obama administration—has profoundly revolutionary implications.

The fight against war, for social equality and in defense of the interests of working people against the impact of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression requires the building of a new and independent mass political party of working people. Only such a party, based on a socialist and internationalist program, can end the root cause of war, inequality and political repression—the profit system itself.

We are fighting to build that party. Given the pace of developments, just one month after the election, political conclusions have to be drawn, and the sooner the better. We urge all those who agree with the socialist perspective which we advance to act upon it and join the Socialist Equality Party.

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