

Praise from Cheney for Obama's national security team

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As President-elect Barack Obama met with his national security team in Chicago Monday, his appointments drew enthusiastic praise from a most revealing source: the outgoing vice president, Dick Cheney.

"I must say, I think it's a pretty good team," Cheney told ABC News. "I'm not close to Barack Obama, obviously, nor do I identify with him politically. He's a liberal. I'm a conservative. But I think the idea of keeping Gates at Defense is excellent. I think Jim Jones will be very, very effective as the national security adviser."

He went on to offer qualified praise for Obama's pick for secretary of state, Hillary Clinton. "I think she's tough. She's smart, she works very hard and she may turn out to be just what President Obama needs."

The comments of the vice president called attention to the most salient characteristic of the five-hour meeting convened by Obama on Monday. The national security group assembled by the candidate of "change" is dominated by very same individuals who are directing national security for the administration of George W. Bush and are responsible for policies that were overwhelming repudiated by the electorate in November.

Robert Gates, responsible for prosecuting the "surge" in Iraq, was there, along with Gen. Jones, who backed Republican John McCain in the presidential election. Also present was Bush's director of national intelligence, Mike McConnell, and Admiral Mike Mullen, selected by Bush and Gates as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It appears that both are also likely to remain at their posts.

Why shouldn't Cheney think it's a "pretty good team"? It's largely the one he played on.

As for Clinton, she lost the Democratic primary contest in large measure because of her support for the war in Iraq. During the campaign, Obama flayed her for having been wrong on this "most important foreign policy decision of our generation." Now he has made her his chief foreign policy aide.

Cheney's kind words for Obama's selections came in a wide-ranging interview with ABC News broadcast on

Monday and Tuesday in which the vice president defended torture in general and waterboarding in particular.

He acknowledged that he had been "involved in helping get the process cleared." While a vast understatement of his intimate involvement in this grisly facet of US policy over the past seven years, this admission nonetheless provides one more piece of evidence that the vice president is guilty of war crimes.

He insisted that the US prison camp at Guantánamo should be kept open as long as Washington continued its "global war on terrorism," whose end, he allowed, was unforeseeable.

He defended the Bush administration's illegal domestic spying program. "It's worked. It's been successful. It's now embodied in the FISA statute that we passed last year, and that Barack Obama voted for," he added.

He likewise defended the war in Iraq, insisting that the world is "better off" because of it and declaring that "we made the right decision," despite the subsequent exposure of the administration's false pretext for the war—weapons of mass destruction.

After summing up and justifying all of the crimes carried out by the Bush administration during its two terms in office, Cheney called upon the incoming Obama presidency to continue them.

It should, he said, "retain the tools that have been so essential in defending the nation for the last seven-and-a-half years" and eschew any inclination to "fall back on campaign rhetoric to make these very fundamental decisions" about national security.

The composition of the Obama national security meeting in Chicago—together with the statements made by the president-elect stressing his intention to leave a "residual force" of tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq and embracing the overall framework of a never-ending "war on terrorism"—give every indication that Cheney's advice will be heeded.

There were further indications along these lines in an article on the meeting published Tuesday by the *New York Times*. It noted that in addition to those assembled in

Chicago, Obama has “sought the counsel of an old Republican realist—Brent Scowcroft” and also consulted “former Secretary of State George P. Shultz, a Reagan administration official who is known in some foreign policy circles as the father of the Bush doctrine because of his advocacy of preventive war.”

Others whose advice Obama has solicited, according to the *Times*, include former deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, the veteran of the CIA’s Operation Phoenix assassination program in Vietnam who went on to become a member of the Project for a New American Century and the “Vulcans,” the right-wing foreign policy advisers to George W. Bush’s 2000 campaign. Armitage also served as a chief foreign policy adviser to McCain in 2008.

Rounding out the list are Gen. Tommy Franks—“we don’t do body counts”—and Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, rejected by his own state’s Democrats because of his vociferous support for the Iraq war.

The latest poll released Tuesday by the *Washington Post* and ABC News shows that 70 percent of the US population believes that Obama should carry out his campaign pledge to withdraw all US troops from Iraq within 16 months of taking office. Fully 43 percent expressed the view that he should not wait that long, but pull them out immediately upon taking office.

This sentiment had everything to do with Obama’s victory in both the Democratic primaries and the general election. Yet, the will of the people expressed at the polls is to be repudiated and the policies of militarism, aggression and repression continued. This is what Cheney really meant in his remarks about ditching the “campaign rhetoric” and “retaining the tools” employed over the past seven years. He has ample grounds for his confidence in the incoming administration.

The continuity expressed in those Obama has tapped for his national security team is not just with the Bush administration, but with his own Democratic Party as well. In election after election—2002, 2004, 2006—the Democrats have acted politically to disenfranchise the millions of Americans who demanded an end to war, diverting their opposition into the safe confines of the two-party system while continuing support for and funding of US military aggression.

This, in the final analysis, was the purpose of the Obama campaign as well. The likes of Gates, Jones, Armitage, Scowcroft and Shultz are not merely Obama’s advisers. They are leading figures in a ruling establishment for which Obama is to serve as a political front man, providing a new face for US imperialism.

The evolution of Obama’s policies in the transition period and the way in which his administration is taking shape

represent the most damning exposure of the failure of American democracy. Controlled and run by two parties that serve as political instruments of the major banks and corporations and a narrow financial elite, it is utterly impervious to the will of the people and incapable of enacting policies that uphold the interests of the vast majority of the population, those who work for a living.

Many on the so-called “left”—from the editors of the *Nation* to groups like the International Socialist Organization—are now putting forward the conception that the Obama administration portends great progressive changes that will be realized so long as sufficient popular pressure is exerted upon it. Such claims serve only to obscure the hard political realities that have already emerged in the transition period and reflect the rightward movement of the political tendencies that make them.

The policies of the Obama administration will not be determined by the popular illusions of those who voted for him, or by a bit of “left” pressure. Rather, they will be driven by the needs of American imperialism under conditions of a desperate worldwide financial crisis that makes the eruption of militarism an even greater danger than before.

With barely a month to go before the change in administrations, it is necessary to draw the appropriate political conclusions. The struggle to put an end to war and settle accounts with the criminal policies pursued by Washington over the last eight years can be advanced only through a movement independent of the Democratic Party and against the Obama administration. It requires above all the emergence of a mass party of working people fighting for a socialist policy aimed at putting an end to capitalism, which is the source of war. This means building the Socialist Equality Party.

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