

US militarism and Obama's State of the Union address

Alex Lantier**27 January 2012**

US President Barack Obama made a calculated gesture to the US military in Wednesday's State of the Union address, opening and closing his speech with fawning references to the armed forces and to the American flag.

He began with a "final, proud salute to the colors" of a military unit returning from the US occupation of Iraq, and ended by holding up the Navy SEAL unit that assassinated Osama bin Laden last May as a model of dedication and unity. He informed the American people that "one of my proudest possessions is the flag that the SEAL team took with them on the mission to get bin Laden."

Before his speech, Obama went out of his way, when walking through the crowd on the floor of the House of Representatives to give his speech, to thank US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta for a "good job tonight." Media commentators noted that this was a reference to a raid by US Navy SEALs into Somalia which freed two hostages, American Jessica Buchanan and Dane Poul Hagen Thisted. The SEALs killed all nine of their Somali captors, taking no prisoners.

Such comments indicate the contempt with which the president and his speechwriters view the sentiments of millions in the United States and around the world who despise the Iraq war—launched in violation of international law, on the basis of lies about non-existent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—and the policy of extrajudicial killing exemplified by bin Laden's murder.

They also speak to the immense influence of the military apparatus in American society. American politicians as a matter of course are obliged to give homage to the institution.

The drive to war and the destruction of democratic procedures are closely connected to the deep attacks on

the American working class that Obama intends to carry out, under cover of plans to "bring manufacturing back" to the United States.

Thus Obama boasted that "tonight, the American auto industry is back. What's happening in Detroit can happen in other industries." As the World Socialist Web Site noted, it is both grotesque and sinister to make Detroit—a shattered city facing a 50 percent real unemployment rate, where starting wages for auto workers went from \$28 to \$14 after the 2009 auto bailout—a model of economic revival.

In a further move to cut the resources available to working people, Obama announced "more reforms that rein in the long term costs of Medicare and Medicaid"—two crucial health programs on which hundreds of millions of working people depend.

This makes one thing crystal clear, however: the American financial aristocracy will bring manufacturing back to America only if it can make more money than ever, by massively impoverishing the workers.

At the same time, the US is responding to the economic crisis by intensifying its attack on its principal rivals, embodied in Obama's attack on China. Proudly noting that he had brought trade complaints against China at twice the rate of the Bush administration, Obama announced the creation of a new "Trade Enforcement Unit." This would allow the United States to raise even more complaints against goods made "in countries like China."

There is a common feature of Obama's plans for American manufacturing and for US conduct of its international relations: they will provoke such resistance that US imperialism can attempt to impose them only through coercion and violence. Employers in North America are already resorting to a wave of

lockouts to push through concessions contracts; on the global arena, Washington openly uses state murder, economic strangulation, and war to achieve its objectives.

In his address Obama reveled in the ability to murder opponents of US policy throughout the world at short notice and without judicial review: “From Pakistan to Yemen, the Al Qaeda operatives who remain are scrambling, knowing that they can’t escape the reach of the United States of America.”

Obama enthusiastically cited the example of the late Colonial Muammar Gaddafi, the former Libyan ruler and US ally. He was tortured and killed at the end of the siege of Sirte last October, after the US responded to the mass struggles against US-backed dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt by going to war with Libya.

Turning to Iran, which has developed close economic ties to China, Obama threatened the country with a devastating oil embargo and war to prevent it from building a nuclear weapon: “Its leaders are faced with crippling sanctions. And as long as they shirk their responsibilities, this pressure will not relent. Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve this goal.”

As Obama’s comments on economic policy make clear, threats against Iran are part of a broader confrontation with China, a nuclear power which is also the United States’ largest trading partner and a critical supplier of cheap consumer goods for US working people. The Pentagon is also stoking a military confrontation with China, having placed it at the center of US war planning in this year’s strategic review, which shifts the emphasis of US military planning from the Middle East to the Asian-Pacific.

Amid US foreign policy’s descent into gangsterism, workers must measure the full significance of Obama’s praise of the American military and his comments that US officials at home should “learn a thing or two” from it.

In a comment on rising social discontent in the United States, George Soros, the multibillionaire and donor to the Democratic Party, told *Newsweek*: “The situation is about as serious and difficult as I’ve experienced in my career.” Citing the likelihood of riots in the US, he added: “It will be an excuse for cracking down and using strong-arm tactics to maintain

law and order, which, carried to an extreme, will bring about a repressive political system, a society where individual liberty is much more constrained, which would be a break with the tradition of the United States.”

In fact, the emergence of serious social conflict will inevitably bring to the fore plans for police-state rule in the United States that are very well advanced. This recently took the clearest form in the Obama administration’s passage of this year’s National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA not only allocated \$662 billion to the US military, but authorized the US military to seize individuals (both American citizens and foreign nationals) anywhere in the world, and to hold them indefinitely in military detention facilities without recourse to trial.

The coming year will not bring a new golden age of industrial prosperity, but of the deepest social conflict, rooted in the contradictions tearing at the world market. Sensing that the outbreak of mass social conflict in the United States is not far away, the ruling class is preparing itself for an epoch of class battles of unprecedented intensity, in which it will seek to use the most ruthless methods that it has perfected in imperialist wars abroad.



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