

In bellicose speech, Romney outlines bipartisan drive to war

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In a bellicose foreign policy speech Monday, Republican Party presidential candidate Mitt Romney threatened war with Iran, expanded military intervention in Syria, an unending occupation of Afghanistan, and the reintroduction of US troops into Iraq.

While framed as a criticism of the policy of the Obama administration, the main contours of Romney's speech were in line with the agenda proposed by the current president. Romney's remarks highlighted the bipartisan conspiracy against the American people, as both candidates plan an aggressive expansion of US militarism abroad, behind the backs of the public.

Romney delivered his speech at the Virginia Military Institute, continuing a tradition, shared by the current president, in which foreign policy speeches are delivered before a military audience. The military is treated as—and indeed is in fact—an independent and overriding power in the American political establishment.

After his speech, Romney held a closed-door meeting with retired generals, in which the war plans of a potential Romney administration were no doubt discussed with even greater candor.

Romney declared that the US needed to “change course in the Middle East” and said that “our words” must be “backed up by deeds.”

On Iran, Romney said that the country “has never been closer to a nuclear weapons capability.... I will put the leaders of Iran on notice that the United States and our friends and allies will prevent them from acquiring nuclear weapons capability,” he said. “I will not hesitate to impose new sanctions on Iran, and will tighten the sanctions we currently have.”

Romney's position closely paralleled remarks made by Obama before the United Nations last month, when

the president insisted that “the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.” Without presenting any evidence that Iran is actually pursuing a nuclear weapon, the US and its allies have imposed devastating economic sanctions on the country, as part of their preparations for war. (See: Obama uses UN speech to threaten war against Iran)

There are certain tactical differences within the American ruling class, and between the US and the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, over the timing of any US strikes on Iran. Romney sought to exploit these differences to stake out a position slightly to the right of Obama, stating that “the world must never see any daylight between” the US and Israel.

However, in his own speech before the UN last month, Netanyahu suggested that his differences with the Obama administration had been at least temporarily resolved. The Israeli prime minister appeared to accept postponing military action until the spring or summer of next year, while also acceding to Obama's call for tighter economic sanctions.

On Syria, Romney said he favored giving more supplies and heavy weapons to the Syrian opposition. “I will work with our partners to identify and organize those members of the opposition who share our values and ensure they obtain the arms they need to defeat Assad's tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets.”

The CIA under the Obama administration is currently directing arms to the anti-Assad forces in Syria, coordinating this with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states. The administration has as yet refrained from sending certain weapons, in part over concern about the implications of the fact that in its campaign for regime change in Syria, the US is relying on Islamic fundamentalist elements. Any weapons could end up directed back at the US, as in the attack in Libya last

month that killed the US ambassador.

The recent clashes between Syria and NATO member Turkey underscore that the proxy civil war stoked by the Obama administration could easily and rapidly explode into a war throughout the Middle East, bringing in the all the major powers, including the United States, Russia and China.

In his speech, Romney added barbs directed at both these countries—saying that “Putin’s Russia casts a long shadow over young democracies” in Europe and that “China’s recent assertiveness is sending chills through the region.”

Romney added that he would “roll back President Obama’s deep and arbitrary cuts to our national defense that would devastate our military,” a reference to the automatic military cuts included in an agreement between the Democrats and Republicans in 2011. Both parties are determined to prevent these cuts by slashing hundreds of billions more in social programs—to be implemented after the November elections.

On Afghanistan, Romney followed Obama in calling for a “transition to Afghan security forces by the end of 2014.” At the same time, he made clear, as current US generals have, that the US occupation would continue indefinitely if “conditions on the ground” and “the best advice of our military commanders” deems this necessary.

As for Iraq, Romney criticized Obama for carrying out an “abrupt troop withdrawal,” suggesting that the departure of US troops may be reversed. “The president tried—and failed—to secure a responsible and gradual drawdown that would have better secured our gains,” he said.

The general response of left-liberal circles to Romney’s remarks was to proclaim its “centrist” character, in which Romney supposedly has abandoned his more bellicose positions. The *Nation*’s Ben Adler, for example, headlines his comment posted Monday, “Romney’s Flip-Flop to Center Continues With Foreign Policy.”

In fact, if *The Nation* feels that the political distance separating it from Romney is shrinking, it is not because Romney’s calls for massive military spending and war are left-wing. It is because *The Nation* and the social layer for which it speaks are moving very quickly to the right and have embraced the imperialist policies proposed by both major parties.

The Obama administration has become the vehicle for the supposedly “left” layers of the upper middle class to fall entirely behind the basic strategy of American imperialism, particularly through support for the war in Libya and the US-backed civil war in Syria.

Indeed, it is notable that one of the main criticisms Romney sought to level at the Obama administration—that it is not supplying sufficiently advanced weaponry to the anti-Assad forces in Syria—is entirely in line with similar criticisms advanced by pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization.

In military policy, as in domestic policy, there is a vast and unbridgeable gulf between this entire political establishment and the sentiments of the majority of the American population.

Romney is running on a platform of “more war”—bucking a tradition in which even the most reactionary politicians seek to make an appeal to the overriding anti-war sentiment of the American people. Nixon, for example, famously campaigned in 1968 on the basis of a “secret plan” to end the war in Vietnam, and then expanded the war enormously after taking office.

The Obama administration cannot mobilize popular opposition to war against Romney, however, because its policies are barely distinguishable from those proposed by the Republican candidate.

Regardless of who is elected in November, Romney or Obama, the American ruling class is set on a course that is leading to new wars in the Middle East—a policy of criminal aggression that is leading the world into a new world war, with incalculable consequences.



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