

Rice abandons bid for secretary of state nomination

Bill Van Auken
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US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice formally withdrew her name Thursday from consideration for nomination as the Obama administration's secretary of state, replacing the departing Hillary Clinton.

In a letter to President Barack Obama, Rice wrote, "If nominated, I am now convinced that the confirmation process would be lengthy, disruptive and costly—to you and to our most pressing national and international priorities."

Accepting the letter, Obama described Republican attacks on Rice as "unfair and misleading," while praising her for her "commitment to rise above the politics of the moment to put our national interest first."

While administration officials have claimed that the decision was Rice's, it is clear that the scrapping of the nomination bid arose out of definite political calculations within the Democratic administration as a whole.

In the first instance, the White House has no desire to see nomination hearings turned into a protracted public debate over the policies that led up to the slaying of the US ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, and three other Americans in Benghazi last September.

The administration likewise has no stomach for a partisan brawl with the Republicans in the Senate under conditions in which Obama is engaged in negotiations with the Republican congressional leadership to fashion a deficit reduction program that will combine sweeping cuts to essential entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid with token tax increases for the rich.

The White House did not want a contested Rice nomination to become a distraction from the steady drumbeat about the "fiscal cliff" that is being used to push these cuts through.

Rice came under intense fire at the height of the 2012 presidential election campaign when she was sent onto five separate Sunday television talk shows September 16 to discuss the attacks that had taken place just five days earlier in Benghazi on both the US consulate and a secret CIA annex.

In her remarks, Rice insisted that the deadly assault had

stemmed from a protest over an anti-Muslim film made in the US and posted on the Internet and had been a "copycat" action stemming from a similar demonstration at the US Embassy in Cairo.

As it subsequently emerged that the attack was an organized military action carried out by an Islamist militia, Republican lawmakers, led by Senators John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, accused Rice of deliberately misleading them and the American people for partisan political reasons.

The Republicans, amplified by Fox News and other sections of the media, suggested that the Democrats, who were attempting to use the assassination of Osama bin Laden to boost Obama's status as "commander-in-chief" in his bid for re-election, wanted to downplay the indications from the Benghazi attack that Al Qaeda had only been strengthened.

In fact, it emerged that the Director of National Intelligence, the CIA and the FBI had all edited "talking points" on the Benghazi attack provided to Rice and other top officials, removing references to "Al Qaeda" and "terrorism."

The virulent Republican campaign over the issue was able to take advantage of the Obama administration's inability to explain to the American people the real background to the incident in Benghazi: that the US war for regime-change had armed and substantially strengthened Al Qaeda-linked militias in the country that served as proxy forces for the US and NATO in overthrowing the secular regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

The Benghazi affair pointed to "blowback" from the de facto alliance established in Libya between US imperialism and Al Qaeda, which for over a decade has been utilized as a bogey man to justify aggressive war abroad and relentless attacks on democratic rights at home.

Given that a large amount of the weapons shipped to "rebels" fighting in the US-backed war for regime-change in Syria—as well as a significant number of the jihadist foreign fighters in the country—have come from Libya, there is good reason to suspect that the secret CIA operation in Benghazi

was involved in coordinating this shipment of men and arms. Another CIA station near the Turkish border with Syria has coordinated the distribution of weapons to the Syrian militias fighting to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad. According to multiple media accounts, the best-armed forces in Syria are Islamist militias linked to Al Qaeda.

The threat that these explosive issues would be aired publicly in the course of a nomination process was enough to kill Rice's bid to become secretary of state.

There also emerged, however, indications of substantial opposition to the nomination from within the Democratic Party foreign policy establishment and the "liberal imperialist" faction of which Rice was a part.

Criticisms of her aggressively rude and undiplomatic manner as being inappropriate for the top US diplomat emerged from within State Department circles. In recent months, Rice has dismissed French proposals for an African intervention force in Mali as "crap," referred to the position of her Chinese counterpart at the UN on North Korea as "ridiculous" and branded the refusal of Moscow and Beijing to support a US-backed resolution in the Security Council paving the way to direct Western intervention in Syria as "shameful and disgusting."

While often touted as the first African-American woman to serve as US ambassador to the UN, in reality Rice's role was in direct continuity with figures such as John Bolton and John Negroponte, appointed by the George W. Bush administration with the aim of bullying other nations into acquiescing to US demands.

Other questions were raised about Rice's ties with a number of despotic rulers in Africa charged with human rights abuses and war crimes. These were forged when she held the post of assistant secretary of state for African affairs and served on the National Security Council under Bill Clinton.

She was accused of botching the mediation of a 1998 peace settlement between Ethiopia and Eritrea because of her open alignment with the Ethiopian regime of the late Meles Zenawi, resulting in the resumption of war, costing some 70,000 lives. Last September, Rice traveled to Addis Ababa to give a lengthy and effusive eulogy at the funeral of Meles, whose regime was infamous for torture, illegal detentions and the massacre of unarmed demonstrators.

Similarly, she gave her unstinting support to the regimes of Paul Kagame in Rwanda and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, dismissing their human rights abuses as well as their bloody interventions in the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose victims number in the millions.

Rice was among the closest advisers to Obama, dating

back to when he was a US senator, and was one of the first prominent members of the Democratic Party foreign policy establishment to join his 2008 presidential campaign. The affinity between the two gave the lie to Obama's pretense then of representing some kind of antiwar alternative to the Bush administration.

In the years before Obama's election, Rice was part of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) a right-wing Democratic think tank that advocated the continued occupation of Iraq, a military "surge" in Afghanistan and a more aggressive military posture toward China. She publicly supported the US war of aggression against Iraq as well as the "weapons of mass destruction" pretext provided by Bush.

Within the Obama administration, she became one of the leading advocates for imperialist intervention in Libya and Syria on the pretext of pursuing "humanitarian" and "democratic" aims.

Rice was also identified as one of the strongest supporters of Israel's Zionist regime, denouncing any action at the UN in defense of the Palestinians as "anti-Israeli crap." Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League, told *The Forward* that he viewed Rice as a "gladiator" in fighting for Israeli interests.

There is growing speculation that Obama will now name John Kerry, senator from Massachusetts and former Democratic presidential candidate, to succeed Hillary Clinton at the State Department.

In his statement, Obama said that Rice would "continue to serve as our ambassador at the United Nations and a key member of my cabinet and national security team." According to media reports, Rice is being considered for the post of national security advisor in Obama's second term.



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