

The Mideast war and the US election

Patrick Martin
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With less than a month to go before the US congressional election, which will select all 435 members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate, the Democratic and Republican parties are engaged in a concerted effort to deny the American people any say on the launching of a major new US-led war in the Middle East.

The House and Senate adjourned last month after voting their support for President Obama's request to authorize US arms and military training for Syrian "rebels" fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad, with the claim that these groups would now turn their weapons against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), their ally for the last three years in the civil war against Assad.

Congressional leaders of both parties rejected calls by a handful of members that there should be a full-scale debate and vote on the broader question of US military action in both Syria and Iraq. The Obama administration began bombing ISIS targets in Iraq in early August—shortly after Congress went into a five-week recess—and extended the bombing to targets in Syria in late September. There has been no declaration of war or other congressional vote to authorize these military operations, making Obama's new Mideast war entirely unconstitutional.

Few candidates for either the House or Senate have raised the issue of the Middle East. Those that, for the most part, are Democrats and who ran as "antiwar" candidates in 2006 or 2008, are now running as vehement supporters of the bombing of Iraq and Syria. A report on *Politico.com*, headlined, "Liberal doves run as war hawks," profiled three such Democrats: Senator Kay Hagan of North Carolina, Senator Jeanne Shaheen in New Hampshire, and Congressman Bruce Braley, running for a Senate seat in Iowa.

House Speaker John Boehner, the top congressional Republican, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the top Democrat, have both indicated they would support congressional authorization for the use of military force in Iraq and Syria if the Obama administration formally

requested it. The vote would be held in the lame duck session of Congress set to begin in December. In other words, any vote on war would be conducted after the congressional elections November 4, with the American people deprived of any influence on the decision.

The bipartisan effort to block any discussion of the new Mideast war comes amid mounting signs that an explosive escalation of the level of violence and the scope of the conflict is imminent. In just the past week:

- * Four more countries joined the war, with Canada, Australia and Denmark committing war planes and airmen to bombing ISIS targets in Iraq, while Turkey's parliament voted to authorize military operations in Syria and Iraq, including ground troops.

- * The NATO secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, warned that any spillover of the conflict now raging on the border between Syria and Turkey, with ISIS forces battling Kurdish militia, would justify NATO intervention to defend Turkey, under Clause 5 of the NATO charter.

- * The Pentagon announced that US Apache attack helicopters had joined the fighting against ISIS in Anbar province, providing close air support to Iraqi Army troops. This makes a mockery of Obama's claim that there would be no US "boots on the ground" in Iraq.

- * A leading congressional Republican, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, backed the use of ground troops in both Iraq and Syria, and an extension of the airstrikes to target the Syrian military as well as ISIS, declaring, "if that's what the generals say, then we need to do it."

In an extraordinary interview with *USA Today*, published Monday, former Obama defense secretary Leon Panetta blasted Obama for being insufficiently belligerent in Iraq and Syria, declaring that the president had "lost his way" and was only now finding it again. Underscoring the embrace of militarism by the US ruling elite, Panetta said that US intervention in the predominantly Muslim countries of northern Africa and the Middle East would go on for decades. "I think we're looking at kind of a 30-year war," he said, adding that fighting could spread to Yemen, Libya, Somalia and Nigeria, the most populous

country in Africa.

No one has asked the American people whether they support decades of imperialist war across two continents, at an astronomical cost in terms of human lives and squandered resources. These decisions are being made behind closed doors, by the military and intelligence chiefs, then handed off to Obama and Congress to rubber-stamp.

As McCarthy's statement suggests—"if that's what the generals say, then we need to do it"—the drive to imperialist war means the collapse of democratic and constitutional forms in the United States, and the emergence of a scarcely disguised military dictatorship. Even if the American people are allowed to vote, as on November 4, 2014, the election has been deprived of any genuine democratic content, because the decisions on the most important issues, above all war and peace, have already been made.

The struggle against imperialist war means a fight to mobilize the working class, in the United States and internationally, as an independent political force, opposed to all the political parties of big business. The fight against war requires a fight against the capitalist system that is the root cause of war.

The Socialist Equality Party and our co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International call for the revolutionary mobilization of the working class to take political power and carry out a socialist program: the rational and democratic planning of production to meet social need, not private profit. We urge workers and young people to study our program for the fight against war and capitalism, and make the decision now to join and build the SEP.



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