

Following terror attacks in Brussels

US presidential candidates call for stepped-up war and police measures

Patrick Martin
24 March 2016

Both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates have seized on Tuesday's terrorist attacks in Brussels to declare their support for militarism and attacks on democratic rights. While the candidates voiced different proposals, these lay entirely along a spectrum of violence and repression, from drone missile attacks and bombing in the Middle East, to torture of prisoners, to mass detentions of Muslims within the United States.

The loudest shouting came predictably from Donald Trump, the billionaire blowhard who leads the contest for the Republican nomination, although the most sweeping new proposal for attacking democratic rights came from his closest Republican rival, Texas Senator Ted Cruz.

Trump reiterated his proposals to ban Muslims from entering the United States and authorize the torture of prisoners seized in the course of terrorism investigations. He told CNN that the Belgian authorities should have tortured Salah Abdelslam, the alleged terror conspirator arrested last week on charges related to the November 2015 Paris attacks. "I would be willing to bet that he knew about this bombing that took place today," Trump said Tuesday.

Cruz sought to attack Trump from the right, calling his criticism of NATO, made in an interview with the *Washington Post* editorial board Monday, an endorsement of "isolationism." The Texas Senator argued that NATO should formally join the US-led war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Last fall, Cruz criticized Trump's call to ban Muslims from entering the United States, but Tuesday he offered an even more radical and sweeping proposal in a written statement. "We need to immediately halt

the flow of refugees from countries with a significant Al Qaeda or ISIS presence," Cruz said. This would effectively bar refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and most other Middle Eastern states, and conceivably could be applied to the whole of Europe as well.

The statement continued, "We need to empower law enforcement to patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized." How such neighborhoods would be defined and what would be done to "secure" them, Cruz did not spell out. However, he told reporters the proposal was similar to operations mounted by the New York Police Department, which infiltrated mosques and sent spies into stores, restaurants and other locations patronized by Muslim-Americans in order to conduct surveillance.

"You would continue the proactive policing that we saw here in New York," Cruz said. "You would reinstate the program." This spying was illegal, unconstitutional and totally ineffective as an "antiterrorism" program. It was ultimately abandoned after a series of lawsuits, but Cruz claimed that Mayor Bill de Blasio dropped the policy only out of "political correctness."

This police state proposal did nothing to slow the movement of Republican politicians into Cruz's camp in the presidential race, in a last-ditch effort to block Trump. The most prominent recruit to the Cruz camp was former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who shut down his own presidential effort last month. Bush gave Cruz his endorsement Wednesday, the day after Cruz's call to "patrol and secure" Muslim neighborhoods in the US.

"For the sake of our party and country, we must move

to overcome the divisiveness and vulgarity Donald Trump has brought into the political arena,” Bush said in a written statement, underscoring that the objections of the Republican establishment to Trump have more to do with his provocative style than with his fascistic politics.

While the Democrats disavowed the measures proposed by Cruz and Trump, they both endorsed the methods of the Obama administration, including stepped-up drone warfare and bombing of ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton cited the Brussels attacks as an argument for choosing “leadership that is strong, smart and above all steady,” and declared, “Today’s attacks will only strengthen our resolve to stand together as allies and defeat terrorism and radical jihadism around the world.”

She also called for stepped-up state spying, saying, “We have to toughen our surveillance, our interception of communication.”

Her campaign immediately scheduled a speech on counterterrorism which she delivered Wednesday morning at the Bechtel Conference Center at Stanford University—a venue named after the company that provided the Reagan administration with its two leading national security figures, Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.

In the speech, Clinton criticized her Republican opponents for their anti-Muslim rhetoric, saying, “We need to rely on what actually works, not bluster that alienates our partners.”

Citing Trump’s plans to seal off the Mexican border and Cruz’s plan to surround Muslim neighborhoods with police, she continued, “Walls will not protect us from this threat. We cannot contain ISIS—we must defeat ISIS.”

She promised to continue the policies of the Obama administration “in solidarity with our European allies,” both in terms of stepped-up security in monitoring visas and air travel, and in the war against ISIS in the Middle East.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders criticized the Cruz plan as unconstitutional. “We are fighting a terrorist organization,” he said, “a barbaric organization that is killing innocent people. We are not fighting a religion.”

Sanders emphasized the war against ISIS in the

Middle East. “We are making progress in Iraq,” he said. “ISIS is losing 20 percent of the territory it held last year, but clearly we’ve got to do more. We need to forge a coalition of the Muslim countries in the region, including some that have not been as active as they should be, with the support of the United States and other major powers to finally destroy this barbaric organization.”

The comments on the Brussels attacks came as the candidates campaigned in the March 22 contests in three states in the Mountain West: primaries for both parties in Arizona, caucuses for both parties in Utah, and caucuses for the Democrats in Idaho.

The results went as predicted, with Clinton and Trump easily winning the primary elections in Arizona, the largest state voting, with relatively heavy turnout, and Sanders and Cruz winning the Utah caucuses. Sanders also won the caucuses in Idaho. Cruz had won the Republican caucuses in that state on March 8.

On the Republican side, both Arizona and Utah were winner-take-all contests, with 58 delegates awarded in Arizona to Trump, while Cruz won all 40 delegates in Utah, with the combined result increasing Trump’s delegate lead by 18. The remaining Republican, Ohio Governor John Kasich, won no delegates in either state. There is only one Republican contest for the next month, in Wisconsin April 5, before a series of primaries in the mid-Atlantic states April 19 and 26.

On the Democratic side, Sanders has dominated the caucus states, where enthusiastic support and willingness to turn out are major factors. Clinton did not even bother to run campaign ads in Utah and Idaho, despite endorsements from virtually the entire Democratic Party hierarchy in both states. As a result, Sanders gained a narrow edge in delegates for the day, winning 57 to 51, a margin far too small to significantly cut into Clinton’s 300-delegate lead.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact