The national security state and the US elections

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Three months before the US presidential election, the military-intelligence apparatus is engaged in an unprecedented public campaign on behalf of Democrat Hillary Clinton, denouncing her Republican opponent Donald Trump and declaring him unfit and unacceptable for the position of "commander-in-chief."

Former acting CIA Director Michael Morell fired the first shot against Trump last Friday, in an op-ed column in the *New York Times*. Fifty former national security officials of Republican administrations followed Monday with an open letter denouncing Trump, also published by the *Times* on its web site.

The language of the open letter is caustic and unequivocal: Trump "would be a dangerous President;" he "has little understanding of America's vital national interests;" he "persistently compliments our adversaries and threatens our allies and friends."

The 50 signatories declare that some will vote for Clinton, others will not, but none will vote for Trump because they "are convinced that in the Oval Office, he would be the most reckless President in American history."

The letter describes Trump's character in the harshest terms: "He is unable or unwilling to separate truth from falsehood. He does not encourage conflicting views. He lacks self-control and acts impetuously. He cannot tolerate personal criticism. He has alarmed our closest allies with his erratic behavior. All of these are dangerous qualities in an individual who aspires to be President and Commander-in-Chief, with command of the U.S. nuclear arsenal."

The list of signatories includes officials of Republican administrations going back to Richard Nixon, with a heavy representation of former top-level officials of the George W. Bush administration. These include former CIA and NSA director Michael Hayden, former director of National Intelligence John Negroponte, former secretaries of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and Tom Ridge, and former deputy secretary of state Robert Zoellick.

Joining them are a large number of officials responsible for some of the worst crimes of American imperialism, particularly the 2003 invasion of Iraq (supported by Clinton) and the subsequent US occupation: Robert Blackwill, Eliot Cohen, Eric Edelman, Peter Feaver, James Jeffrey, Meghan O'Sullivan, Kori Schake, Kristen Silverberg, William H. Taft IV, Dov Zakheim, and Philip Zelikow, among others.

These gentlemen and ladies have much blood on their hands. They held high positions in the Bush administration, which routinely trampled over democratic and constitutional principles, as well as international law, launched the war in Iraq based upon lies, built up the framework of a police-state, and embraced kidnapping, torture and a network of secret prison camps, as well as beginning the drone-missile assassination campaign that has become a major focus of the Obama administration.

This background renders absurd the letter's claim that those signing it believe that Trump should be disqualified because he "appears to lack basic knowledge about and belief in the U.S. Constitution, U.S. laws, and U.S. institutions, including religious tolerance, freedom of the press, and an independent judiciary."

It is not democratic scruples that cause them to attack Trump. They may view his fascistic politics as an undue risk at this time, potentially provoking upheavals that could destabilize the US political system. But they are not opposed to such methods on principle, since they backed military dictatorships and fascist death squads overseas when it served the interests of American imperialism.

There are, however, significant differences with Trump on foreign policy. In his op-ed last week, Morell denounced Trump as an "unwitting agent" of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The open letter published Monday makes no mention of any country or world leader, confining itself to a blistering critique of Trump's character and personality. But the subtext is the same.

Morell, Hayden, Negroponte & Co. speak for the "deep state" of unelected military and intelligence officials whose influence and control continues regardless of which party controls the presidency and Congress. They recognize Clinton as a reliable political advocate for their

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interests—following in the footsteps of Bush and Obama—while Trump is seen as erratic and inflammatory, and out of step with the drive by the US ruling elite towards military confrontation with either Russia or China, or both.

Morell followed up his op-ed column with an appearance on CBS News Monday night, where he called for more aggressive action by US-backed rebels in Syria against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which is backed by Iran and Russia. “We need to make the Iranians pay a price in Syria,” he said. “We need to make the Russians pay a price. I want to go after things that Assad sees as his personal power base. I want to scare Assad. I want him to think, ‘This is not going to end well for me.’”

In other words, Assad should contemplate the fate of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, both lynched after the US-backed overthrow of their regimes. So much for the professed concern for democracy and human rights!

The intervention of Morell and of the 50 Republicans, in and of itself, constitutes an unprecedented public effort by the military-intelligence apparatus to influence the outcome of a presidential election. This has enormous historical significance, demonstrating the deep crisis of the US political system, in which the tensions generated by extreme social inequality, prolonged economic slump and endless war abroad are short-circuiting “normal” democratic processes.

Donald Trump is one manifestation of this tendency. The billionaire demagogue is not an aberration, but the product of the promotion and cultivation of ultra-right, racist and fascist elements within the Republican Party over many decades. The Republican establishment was happy to encourage such tendencies and make them its electoral base, only having second thoughts when the most politically-deranged faction began to take over.

Clinton is another manifestation of this historical crisis of American democracy. Following the capitulation of Bernie Sanders, whose self-proclaimed “political revolution” has found its culmination in support for a Wall Street bagwoman, Clinton has turned sharply to the right, appealing to billionaires, Republican reactionaries, and “retired” generals and spies to unite behind her campaign, while letting it be known that she will accelerate the drive to war in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Far East.

The breakdown of basic bourgeois-democratic norms is evident in every aspect of the two-party presidential campaign. The two camps speak the language of civil war, denouncing each other in terms which effectively deny the legitimacy of the other party.

Trump and his top aides have begun denouncing the election as “rigged,” 90 days before votes are cast, while threatening a “bloodbath” on a Clinton inauguration day. At the same time, former national security officials warn of a “crisis in civil-military relations” in the event of a Trump victory. In other words, they are preparing in advance the justification for a preventive military coup.

The savage infighting within the ruling elite is the hallmark of an historic political crisis, in which the working class must not align itself with either of the right-wing factions. Neither the fascistic Trump nor the militarist Clinton offers a way forward to defend the interests of working people: jobs, decent living standards, democratic rights and an end to imperialist wars.

The central issue in the 2016 campaign is the struggle for the political independence of the working class from the reactionary filth of capitalist politics. This requires a break from the two-party system and a political struggle against capitalism. This is the focus of the presidential campaign of the Socialist Equality Party and our candidates, Jerry White for President and Niles Niemuth for Vice President.

Whatever the outcome of the 2016 elections, whether President Hillary Clinton, as now seems more likely, or President Trump, or some unexpected alternative representative of the US ruling class, the next government in Washington will be the most reactionary in US history.

The decisive question is the preparation of a political movement of workers and youth, which clearly understands the need to oppose the new administration from the very beginning, to intensify the class struggle against corporate America and its political defenders, both the two major parties, Democrats and Republicans, and political satellites like the Libertarians and Greens.

Everything depends on the building of the independent, revolutionary socialist party of the working class: the Socialist Equality Party. We call on all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to support and build this campaign and to join the SEP.

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