Clinton's "American exceptionalism" speech: A bipartisan policy of militarism and war

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Hillary Clinton's speech to the American Legion convention Wednesday was a full-throated declaration of the right and responsibility of the United States to control the world by military force. Clinton pledged to keep the US the dominant global military power, to uphold the military alliances through which US imperialism controls Europe and the Far East, and to wage war unilaterally if deemed necessary, regardless of world opinion.

Clinton repeatedly singled out Russia and China as potential targets for US military action, although such a conflict would pose the danger of nuclear war. After listing out the various unsubstantiated allegations of Russian hacking and cyberattacks, including against the Democratic National Committee, Clinton declared, "As president, I will make clear that the United States will treat cyberattacks just like any other attack. We will be ready with serious political, economic and military responses."

Ominously, she said one of her first actions upon taking office would be to conduct a full review of the US nuclear forces "to make sure America's arsenal is prepared to meet future threats," i.e., to wage nuclear war.

Throughout the speech, Clinton targeted her Republican opponent Donald Trump, invariably attacking him from the right, accusing him of abandoning the longstanding bipartisan commitment of both Democrats and Republicans to maintaining the United States as the world's leading power, and being unwilling to take military action when it was required to defend US interests.

Clinton set a tone of American messianism at the beginning, declaring that, during her political career, "If there's one core belief that has guided and inspired me every step of the way, it is this: The United States is an exceptional nation. I believe we are still Lincoln's last, best hope of Earth. We're still Reagan's shining city on a hill. We're still Robert Kennedy's great, unselfish, compassionate country."

Lincoln and Robert Kennedy are just window-dressing. The real message was conveyed in the invoking of "American exceptionalism" and Ronald Reagan, and her repeated declarations that "America must lead." Clinton was making an argument to the Republican Party establishment, including the neo-conservatives who instigated the US war on Iraq, that she is closer to them on foreign policy than is Trump, whom she described as erratic, inexperienced and tied politically to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Clinton did not deal in any foreign policy specifics in the speech. There was no mention of Syria, Libya, Ukraine, the Baltic States or the South China Sea—all areas where the Obama administration has come into conflict with Russia or China, and where a Clinton administration would take an even more aggressive stance. She referred to Iraq and Afghanistan only as countries where the US role was winding down—a brazen lie.

The purpose of the speech was to present Clinton's general approach to military policy in the most aggressive terms. She called for increased military readiness, modernization of weapons systems and advanced preparations for all types of conflict. "We cannot lose our military edge, and that means giving the Pentagon the stable, predictable funding it needs to make smart investments," she said, denouncing the "sequester" caps on military spending imposed as part of a bipartisan budget-cutting deal. The US military had to be able to "operate on short notice across every domain, not just land, sea, air and space, but also cyberspace."

Referring to Obama's drawdown of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, Clinton said, "We have redeployed well over 100,000 troops from Iraq and Afghanistan so they can go home, rest, and train for future contingencies." Those "contingencies" she listed later: "We need to

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respond to evolving threats from states like Russia, China, Iran and North Korea…" In other words, far from marking an end to 25 years of nearly nonstop American wars, the Obama administration has prepared the ground for wars of even greater consequence, including confrontations with China and Russia, both nuclear-armed powers.

Clinton ended her speech with an open appeal for Republican support, noting that 50 Republican national security experts had recently declared they would not support Trump. "This election shouldn't be about ideology," she argued. "It's not just about differences over policy. It truly is about who has the experience and the temperament to serve as president and Commander-in-Chief."

Inadvertently, Clinton is admitting a basic truth of American politics. The two-party system deprives the voters, i.e., the great majority of American working people, of any choice on the issue of war and peace, just as it does on all fundamental political questions. The Democrats and the Republicans are united when it comes to defending the profit interests of American banks and corporations, and the global domination of American imperialism.

Wednesday's speech in Cincinnati was a carefully prepared declaration of policy, one of only two public appearances that Clinton has made in the second half of August, which has been largely devoted to private fundraising meetings with well-heeled financial backers.

The audience itself was carefully chosen. The American Legion has long been the most reactionary of the veterans' organizations. It organized anti-communist violence during the McCarthyite witchhunts, making it most receptive to Clinton's neo-McCarthyite attacks on Trump's alleged ties to Russia.

Clinton's speech was accompanied by a continuing rollout of support from the military-intelligence apparatus. Two retired four-star Army generals, Robert Sennewald and David Maddox, issued a joint statement Thursday endorsing Clinton. This followed a statement Wednesday by James Clad, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia under President George W. Bush, who praised Clinton for "helping other Asian countries counter Chinese bullying in the western Pacific."

The corporate media recognized the significance of Clinton's address. The *Washington Post* wrote in its news account: "The speech, while repeating Clinton's frequent criticisms that Trump's populist foreign policy ideas are dangerous and unworkable, went further in establishing her own position as an internationalist who is to his political right on the issue of overseas engagement."

The newspaper added that during the primary contest with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Clinton had sought to downplay her foreign policy record, including her 2002 vote for the Iraq war and her hawkish positions on US intervention in Libya and Syria. This changed in the general election, however, where Clinton was using "support for traditional national security tenets … [to] attract Republican support."

Sanders played a politically criminal role in excluding questions of war and foreign policy from the 2016 campaign. The self-described "democratic socialist" attracted support from millions of youth and working people through his denunciations of economic inequality and the control of US politics by "millionaires and billionaires." But he was totally uncritical of the foreign policy of the Obama administration, and, by extension, of Clinton as Obama's first secretary of state.

Clinton's speech underscores the immense dangers facing the working class of the United States and around the world. Regardless of what happens in November, American imperialism is preparing a vast escalation of military violence. Untold millions, even billions, of lives are at stake.

In the 2016 election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates for president and vice president, Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, are building a socialist leadership to prepare for the struggles to come. At the very center of our campaign is the fight against war, which is inextricably tied to the fight of the international working class against the capitalist system. Everything depends upon this.

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