

The US presidential debate and the war plans of the ruling class

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Monday night's debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump plumbed new depths in the degradation of American politics. A billionaire and a multi-millionaire, both widely hated, traded false promises, platitudes, attack lines and reactionary bromides without seriously addressing any of the pressing issues facing the American people.

On social policy, Trump combined calls for trade war with a program of sweeping corporate tax cuts and the elimination of all regulations on business, at one point boasting of his own evasion of federal income taxes. Responding to Clinton's criticism that he benefited personally from the housing market collapse, he declared, "That's called business."

Clinton, who has the closest ties to Wall Street, said the financial crisis of 2008 was the product of "tax policies that slashed taxes on the wealthy, failed to invest in the middle class, took their eyes off Wall Street." She evidently hoped that no one would pick up on the fact that her husband's administration and the Democratic Party as a whole played a central role in this process.

But the heart of the debate, as far as the ruling class is concerned, lay in foreign and military policy, where Clinton has focused the majority of her attacks on Trump, presenting herself as a more ruthless and militaristic future commander-in-chief.

Clinton continued the war-mongering diatribes against Russia that have dominated her campaign since the run-up to the Democratic National Convention in July, along with her attacks on Trump from the right, branding him a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin. She repeated the claim, never substantiated, that Putin was responsible for hacking the email of the Democratic National Committee.

In response to alleged cyber attacks by "Russia,

China, Iran or anybody else," she declared, "We are not going to sit idly by... and we're going to have to make it clear that we don't want to use the kinds of tools that we have. We don't want to engage in a different kind of warfare. But we will defend the citizens of this country. And the Russians need to understand that."

This language echoes her remark at a September 7 forum on national security policy in New York City, where she declared that a Clinton administration would treat cyber attacks as acts of war and respond with military force.

Besides suggesting war with Russia—possessor of the world's second largest stockpile of nuclear weapons—Clinton called for stepped-up US military operations in the Middle East, including intensified air strikes on ISIS and the wider use of drone missile assassinations, targeting, in particular, ISIS leader Abu Baker al-Baghdadi. Such state killings should become "one of our organizing principles," Clinton concluded.

Trump was typically bombastic in his threats of military action in the Middle East, but less explicit about war against more formidable targets such as Russia and China. But the logic of his "Fortress America" appeals to economic nationalism and trade war, and his identification of Mexico, China and other countries as US enemies, leads inexorably to the same program of global military aggression.

Moderator Lester Holt of NBC News did not ask Clinton how many millions of lives she was prepared to sacrifice in a potential war with Russia. However, indicative of discussions going on behind the scenes, he did ask the candidates' opinions on reports that Obama "considered changing the nation's longstanding policy on first use" of nuclear weapons. This was a reference to articles revealing that Obama had considered adopting an explicit no-first-use nuclear policy, a

proposal he ultimately discarded after it came under attack from within his own administration.

Trump first said that he would “not do first strike,” before adding, “I can’t take anything off the table.” Clinton pointedly did not reply to the question.

In the aftermath of the debate, the media and most of the political establishment declared Clinton the “winner.” This is because she is seen as the more reliable instrument of US imperialism’s aggressive global policy, involving a vast escalation of military violence after the election.

Clinton is seeking to mobilize behind this policy privileged, pro-war sections of the upper-middle class who support the Democratic Party on the basis of identity politics. This was the essential significance of her pointed reference (in relation to police violence) to “systemic racism” in the United States.

The 2016 election campaign was dominated for many months by explosive popular disaffection with the whole political and corporate establishment. But it has concluded in a contest between two candidates who personify that establishment—one a billionaire from the criminal world of real-estate swindling, the other the consensus choice of the military-intelligence apparatus and Wall Street.

This outcome has an objective character. The two-party system is a political monopoly of the capitalist class. Both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are political instruments of big business. The claims of Bernie Sanders and his pseudo-left apologists that it is possible to reform or pressure the Democrats—and even carry out a “political revolution” through it—have proven to be lies.

With six weeks to go until Election Day, it is more clear than ever that whoever wins, the people of the United States and the entire world confront immense dangers, including the threat of a military conflict involving nuclear powers such as Russia and China. The greatest danger, however, is the gulf that exists between the advanced state of the war plans of the ruling class and the level of popular consciousness. Everything must be done to alert workers and young people to what is being planned and build a political leadership to oppose war and the capitalist system that produces it.

The working class must prepare itself politically for the struggles to come. This is the essential significance

of the Socialist Equality Party’s election campaign and its candidates, Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president. We urge workers and young people to support our campaign and attend the November 5th conference on “Socialism vs. Capitalism and War,” being held in Detroit.



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