

The mass protests against Trump and the role of the Democratic Party

Bill Van Auken
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On Tuesday, protests continued for a fourth day against the Trump administration's cruel and extralegal executive order banning entry to the US for citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries ravaged by the US military and barring refugees from around the world.

Hundreds of thousands of people have demonstrated in airports and city centers in the United States and around the world in opposition to this draconian measure and in defense of basic democratic and social rights. These protests are part of a political radicalization that is emerging in response to the coming to power of the most right-wing government in American history. After 16 years of the unending "war on terror," waged under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the protests demonstrate that masses of people have rejected the anti-Muslim chauvinism and militarism that have been promoted to justify imperialist aggression and war crimes.

Millions are outraged by the brutality inflicted on men, women and children who suddenly find themselves forcibly barred from returning to their homes, families and jobs.

Democratic politicians such as Barack Obama and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer are associating themselves with the protests in an effort to keep them within politically harmless channels. There is, however, a vast gulf separating the humane and democratic sentiments animating the protests and the fundamentally reactionary aims underlying the Democratic Party's response to the Trump administration.

During the election campaign, the Democrats and their presidential candidate Hillary Clinton ran as the party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence complex, concentrating their criticism of Trump on his supposed "softness" toward Russia. They launched a neo-McCarthyite campaign claiming, without ever providing substantiation, that the government of President Vladimir Putin had manipulated the US election to support Trump.

It was this reactionary theme, combined with the promotion of identity politics and indifference to the interests and concerns of the working class, which enabled Trump to demagogically pose as an opponent of the establishment.

While the first 10 days of the Trump presidency have aroused popular anger and revulsion over the threat of a mass anti-immigrant dragnet, the Muslim ban, bellicose threats of war and Trump's open promotion of torture, the Democrats have by no means abandoned the reactionary themes of their election campaign.

Thus Paul Krugman, the economist and *New York Times* columnist who unconditionally backed Clinton, begins his latest column: "We're just over a week into the Trump-Putin regime, and it's already getting hard to keep track of the disasters."

The differences between the Democrats and Trump do not reflect divergent class interests—both represent the same ruling oligarchy—nor are they about democratic principles. Rather, they center on the implementation of policies to advance the strategic interests of American imperialism. The overriding issue for them is how the Muslim ban and other policies pursued by Trump will affect the preparations for confrontation with Russia and China as well as the ongoing US military operations in the Middle East.

This is exemplified by a piece published Tuesday in the *New York Times* by columnist David Leonhardt entitled "Make China Great Again." The tone for the entire column is set by its opening sentence: "America's rivals and enemies have enjoyed a very good 10 days."

Writing unabashedly as a partisan of US imperialism, Leonhardt goes on to warn that while ISIS will undoubtedly exploit the Muslim ban, "it is not a serious rival to the United States. The ultimate beneficiary is instead likely to be America's biggest global rival, China."

Among those brought forward to challenge the Trump administration's executive order is the most unlikely champion for refugees and Muslim immigrants, Michael Morell, the former acting director of the CIA. A Clinton supporter, he was among the most vehement in denouncing alleged Russian interference in the US election and casting Trump as Putin's agent.

Morell, who has publicly defended the torture and drone assassinations he oversaw, played no small role in turning millions into refugees and taking the lives of hundreds of thousands of others through the CIA-orchestrated wars for regime change in Libya and Syria. Interviewed on CBS News' early morning program on Monday, he denounced Trump's ban not for trampling on democratic rights, but for "playing right into the ISIS narrative," i.e., disrupting US efforts to secure hegemony, by means of military violence, over the oil-rich Middle East.

Among Morell's principal concerns was the inclusion of Iraqis who collaborated with the US military in the travel ban, saying that this would create "a disincentive for people to work closely with the US military."

Morell also expressed sharp opposition to Trump's executive order naming his "chief strategist," the former Breitbart News boss Stephen Bannon, to the Principals Committee of the National Security Council (NSC), while limiting the participation of the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and the director of national intelligence.

In its Tuesday editorial, the *Times* sounds this same theme. Entitled "President Bannon" and published together with a sinister-looking graphic imposing half of Bannon's face on top of Trump's, the editorial objects not so much to the fascistic politics of Trump's White House strategist as to the danger that his appointment to the NSC will "politicize" national security and diminish the power of the military and the intelligence apparatus.

"Imagine tomorrow," the editorial concludes, "if Mr. Trump is faced with a crisis involving China in the South China Sea or Russia in Ukraine. Will he look to his chief political provocateur, Mr. Bannon, with his penchant for blowing things up, or will he turn at last for counsel to the few more thoughtful experienced hands in his administration, like Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and General Dunford?"

The concern here is that the escalation of military threats to both Russia and China initiated under the Obama administration may be disrupted. These matters, the *Times* argues, must remain in the "experienced hands" of the Pentagon and the CIA.

Among the most revealing statements along these lines

is a commentary posted Tuesday by the *Atlantic* magazine under the headline "Are Trump's Generals Mounting a Defense of Democratic Institutions?" It states that when Trump nominated ex-military commanders as the secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security as well as to the post of national security adviser, "some progressives worried that...the heavy presence of brass would undermine the cherished civilian control that is a hallmark of the United States government."

Instead, the article suggests, "the generals could serve to constrain Trump," adding that military officers are "well-versed in the law and their own obligations" and "care deeply about following rules and procedures, and for instilling a sense of order."

The article goes on to note approvingly that it is "not unheard of for generals, usually active-duty ones, to play the role of a check on elected leaders, in various forms. In Turkey, the military has tended to view itself as the guardian of secular norms, and has repeatedly stepped in to topple civilian governments that generals feel have strayed from national principles."

Apparently catching himself, the author adds, "Even if one thinks Trump is acting lawlessly, a de facto coup is also lawless. There's no good option."

Such is the logic of the policies of the Democratic Party and the breakdown of American democracy, under the weight of decades of war and ever-widening social inequality, that the rule of the military is posed as an alternative to the rule of Trump.

The crisis of US and global capitalism confronts the working class with grave dangers of war and dictatorship. It can defend its basic social and democratic rights solely by means of an irrevocable break with the Democratic Party and the mobilization of its independent strength in a political struggle to put an end to the capitalist system.



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