The CIA takeover of the Democratic Party

Patrick Martin
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In a three-part series published last week, the *World Socialist Web Site* documented an unprecedented influx of intelligence and military operatives into the Democratic Party. More than 50 such military-intelligence candidates are seeking the Democratic nomination in the 102 districts identified by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee as its targets for 2018. These include both vacant seats and those with Republican incumbents considered vulnerable in the event of a significant swing to the Democrats.

If on November 6 the Democratic Party makes the net gain of 24 seats needed to win control of the House of Representatives, former CIA agents, military commanders, and State Department officials will provide the margin of victory and hold the balance of power in Congress. The presence of so many representatives of the military-intelligence apparatus in the legislature is a situation without precedent in the history of the United States.

Since its establishment in 1947—under the administration of Democratic President Harry Truman—the CIA has been legally barred from carrying out within the United States the activities which were its mission overseas: spying, infiltration, political provocation, assassination. These prohibitions were given official lip service but ignored in practice.

In the wake of the Watergate crisis and the forced resignation of President Richard Nixon, reporter Seymour Hersh published the first devastating exposure of the CIA domestic spying, in an investigative report for the *New York Times* on December 22, 1974. This report triggered the establishment of the Rockefeller Commission, a White House effort at damage control, and Senate and House select committees, named after their chairmen, Senator Frank Church and Representative Otis Pike, which conducted hearings and made serious attempts to investigate and expose the crimes of the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

The Church Committee in particular featured the exposure of CIA assassination plots against foreign leaders like Fidel Castro, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, General Rene Schneider in Chile, and many others. More horrors were uncovered: MK-Ultra, in which the CIA secretly subjected unwitting victims to experimentation with drugs like LSD; Operation Mockingbird, in which the CIA recruited journalists to plant stories and smear opponents; Operation Chaos, an effort to spy on the antiwar movement and sow disruption; Operation Shamrock, under which the telecommunications companies shared traffic with the NSA for more than a quarter century.

The Church and Pike committee exposures, despite their limitations, had a devastating political effect. The CIA and its allied intelligence organizations in the Pentagon and NSA became political lepers, reviled as the enemies of democratic rights. The CIA in particular was widely viewed as “Murder Incorporated.”

In that period, it would have been unthinkable either for dozens of “former” military-intelligence operatives to participate openly in electoral politics, or for them to be welcomed and even recruited by the two corporate-controlled parties. The Democrats and Republicans sought to distance themselves, at least for public relations purposes, from the spy apparatus, while the CIA publicly declared that it would no longer recruit or pay American journalists to publish material originating in Langley, Virginia. Even in the 1980s, the Iran-Contra scandal involved the exposure of the illegal operations of the Reagan administration’s CIA director, William Casey.

How times have changed. One of the main functions of the “war on terror,” launched in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, has been to rehabilitate the US spy apparatus and give it a public relations makeover as the supposed protector of the American people against terrorism.

This meant disregarding the well-known connections between Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders and the CIA, which recruited them for the anti-Soviet guerrilla war in Afghanistan, waged from 1979 to 1989, as well as the still unexplained role of the US intelligence agencies in facilitating the 9/11 attacks themselves.

The last 15 years have seen a massive expansion of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, backed by an avalanche of media propaganda, with endless television programs and

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movies glorifying American spies and assassins (*24*, *Homeland*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, etc.)

The American media has been directly recruited to this effort. Judith Miller of the *New York Times*, with her reports on “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, is only the most notorious of the stable of “plugged-in” intelligence-connected journalists at the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the major television networks. More recently, the *Times* has installed as its editorial page editor James Bennet, brother of a Democratic senator and son of the former administrator of the Agency for International Development, which has been accused of working as a front for the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The media campaign alleging Russian intervention in the 2016 US elections has been based entirely on handouts from the CIA, NSA and FBI, transmitted by reporters who are either unwitting stooges or conscious agents of the military-intelligence apparatus. This has been accompanied by the recruitment of a cadre of top CIA and military officials to serve as highly paid “experts” and “analysts” for the television networks.

In centering its opposition to Trump on the bogus allegations of Russian interference, while essentially ignoring Trump’s attacks on immigrants and democratic rights, his alignment with ultra-right and white supremacist groups, his attacks on social programs like Medicaid and food stamps, and his militarism and threats of nuclear war, the Democratic Party has embraced the agenda of the military-intelligence apparatus and sought to become its main political voice.

This process was well under way in the administration of Barack Obama, which endorsed and expanded the various operations of the intelligence agencies abroad and within the United States. Obama’s endorsed successor, Hillary Clinton, ran openly as the chosen candidate of the Pentagon and CIA, touting her toughness as a future commander-in-chief and pledging to escalate the confrontation with Russia, both in Syria and Ukraine.

The CIA has spearheaded the anti-Russia campaign against Trump in large part because of resentment over the disruption of its operations in Syria, and it has successfully used the campaign to force a shift in the policy of the Trump administration on that score. A chorus of media backers—Nicholas Kristof and Roger Cohen of the *New York Times*, the entire editorial board of the *Washington Post*, most of the television networks—are part of the campaign to pollute public opinion and whip up support on alleged “human rights” grounds for an expansion of the US war in Syria.

The 2018 election campaign marks a new stage: for the first time, military-intelligence operatives are moving in large numbers to take over a political party and seize a major role in Congress. The dozens of CIA and military veterans running in the Democratic Party primaries are “former” agents of the military-intelligence apparatus. This “retired” status is, however, purely nominal. Joining the CIA or the Army Rangers or the Navy SEALs is like joining the Mafia: no one ever actually leaves; they just move on to new assignments.

The CIA operation in 2018 is unlike its overseas activities in one major respect: it is not covert. On the contrary, the military-intelligence operatives running in the Democratic primaries boast of their careers as spies and special ops warriors. Those with combat experience invariably feature photographs of themselves in desert fatigues or other uniforms on their websites. And they are welcomed and given preferred positions, with Democratic Party officials frequently clearing the field for their candidacies.

The working class is confronted with an extraordinary political situation. On the one hand, the Republican Trump administration has more military generals in top posts than any other previous government. On the other hand, the Democratic Party has opened its doors to a "friendly takeover" by the intelligence agencies.

The incredible power of the military-intelligence agencies over the entire government is an expression of the breakdown of American democracy. The central cause of this breakdown is the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny elite, whose interests the state apparatus and its “bodies of armed men” serve. Confronted by an angry and hostile working class, the ruling class is resorting to ever more overt forms of authoritarian rule.

Millions of working people want to fight the Trump administration and its ultra-right policies. But it is impossible to carry out this fight through the “axis of evil” that connects the Democratic Party, the bulk of the corporate media, and the CIA. The influx of military-intelligence candidates puts paid to the longstanding myth, peddled by the trade unions and pseudo-left groups, that the Democrats represent a “lesser evil.” On the contrary, working people must confront the fact that within the framework of the corporate-controlled two-party system, they face two equally reactionary evils.

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