

Line-up of reaction and militarism at McCain memorial

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Saturday's memorial service for Senator John McCain, held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and broadcast on a half dozen television and cable networks, was an officially sanctioned tribute to militarism and war.

Honoring the arch-war monger McCain, a fervent supporter of US aggression from Vietnam to Syria and Yemen, were presidents, vice presidents, senators, congressmen and national security officials of the two parties of American imperialism. They sat side by side in the pews of the National Cathedral, Democrats with Republicans, Clintons and Obamas with Bushes, giving a living demonstration of the unity of the American ruling elite.

There was a "who's who" of war criminals with a bloody record stretching back more than half a century. It would be difficult to accurately calculate how many millions of people have died because of the wars, interventions, civil wars and military coups instigated or ordered by the people sitting in that cathedral. Just listing the countries tormented or laid waste at their direction suggests the scale of their crimes: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Haiti, Grenada, Serbia, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Niger, Somalia ...

Seated in the audience were such repugnant figures as former vice president Richard Cheney, defense secretary during the first war in Iraq, political architect of the second war in Iraq and advocate of torture; former president Bill Clinton, commander-in-chief during US military operations in Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq and Kosovo; Hillary Clinton, advocate of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, only deprived of the opportunity to carry out the last-mentioned by the debacle of her 2016 presidential campaign. Joining them were those auditioning for leadership roles in future war crimes:

potential 2020 Democratic presidential candidates like Senator Elizabeth Warren and former vice president Joe Biden.

Despite the claims that the ceremony was a repudiation of the policies of the Trump administration, because President Trump was personally disinvited, there was a robust turnout of current officials, including those directly responsible for the ongoing crimes of American imperialism in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and elsewhere. These included retired generals James Mattis and John Kelly as well as former UN ambassador John Bolton, who now serve US imperialism as the instruments of President Trump's foreign policy as his secretary of defense, chief of staff and national security advisor, respectively. Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner also attended, one day after the US government, under a policy Kushner oversees, cut off all funding for Palestinian refugees on the West Bank and Gaza.

The 95-year-old Henry Kissinger, the senior imperialist gangster in attendance—he was national security adviser and then secretary of state during much of the Vietnam War, as well as directing the 1973 CIA-backed military coup in Chile—gave one of the eulogies for McCain. He seemed to admit the dramatic decline in the world position of American imperialism over many decades, saying, "Like most people of my age, I feel a longing for what is lost and cannot be restored."

Former senator Joseph Lieberman also gave a eulogy, perhaps the most vacuous of the lot, making the claim, "The name John McCain was a source of hope and inspiration for oppressed people around the world." Actually, the name John McCain meant little or nothing outside the domain of the American corporate media, which lionized the Republican senator beyond all reason. While his death produced a week-long outpouring of mythmaking in the United States, elsewhere humanity collectively yawned and went about its business.

As for oppressed people around the world, many of them are engaged in struggle against regimes armed and funded by the US government. Their only encounter with John McCain will be when bombs and missiles provided under the 2018 John McCain National Defense Authorization Act, the Pentagon budget bill named in his honor, come smashing down on their homes.

The two main eulogies for McCain were delivered by the two former presidents who defeated him in presidential election contests: George W. Bush, who prevailed in the 2000 contest for the Republican presidential nomination, and Barack Obama, who won the 2008 presidential election. McCain reportedly selected and recruited his two eulogists before his death, in part to snub the current president, with whom McCain repeatedly clashed, primarily over foreign policy, but mainly to demonstrate the bipartisan unity behind the defense of American imperialism, his *raison d'être*.

Bush's eulogy included the usual tributes to McCain's supposed defense of freedom and the downtrodden, which he described as "this combination of courage and decency that defined John's calling." Bush then continued, "It is this combination of courage and decency that makes the American military something new in history—an unrivaled power for good."

More is involved here than just the usual glorification of American imperialist barbarism around the world, carried to such a demented extreme that black is white, and the military force that has killed more innocent people than any since Nazi Germany is declared "an unrivaled power for good."

Bush was giving his stamp of approval, and that of his audience, in advance, for any action which the American military should undertake *within the United States itself*, whether through intervening against Trump, as the culmination of the ongoing anti-Russia campaign by the military-intelligence apparatus, or through intervening, with or without Trump, in the event of mass struggles by the American working class that challenge American capitalism from within.

The closing eulogy, and (naturally) the wordiest and most interminable tribute to McCain, came from former president Obama, who praised McCain as "an extraordinary man—a warrior, a statesman, a patriot who embodied so much that is best in America." So much for Obama's campaign rhetoric of 2008, when he declared that the defeat of McCain was absolutely necessary to bring about "hope" and "change."

As Obama said later in his remarks, "while John and I

disagreed on all kinds of foreign policy issues, we stood together on America's role as the one indispensable nation, believing that with great power and great blessings comes great responsibility ... when all was said and done, we were on the same team. We never doubted we were on the same team."

It is worth pointing out that Obama made virtually the same statement about Donald Trump in November 2016, after his election victory over Clinton. The election contest between Democrats and Republicans was just an "intramural scrimmage," Obama said after meeting with Trump in the White House. In reality, the two parties were "on the same team."

It is this bipartisan unity, not the anti-Trump posturing, that is the most important feature of the McCain funeral. This unity is not directed against Trump, as media commentators claimed incessantly during the five days of official mourning ceremonies. On the contrary, no sooner is McCain buried than the US Senate will take up and rubber-stamp Trump's nomination of the ultra-right judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. Democrats will protest and profess outrage, but every Republican and just enough Democrats will back Kavanaugh to ensure his confirmation—and McCain would have voted to confirm as well, if he had lived long enough.

The differences between the Democrats and Trump revolve around conflicts within the national security establishment over foreign policy, particularly in relation to intervention into the Syrian civil war and whether to target Russia or China as the primary antagonist of US imperialist policy globally. But both capitalist parties, and the entire political and national-security establishment, are in agreement on the larger goal of maintaining the worldwide domination of American capitalism, both against its foreign rivals, and above all against the working class at home.



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