Colin Powell at the Democratic National Convention: Democrats prepare administration of militarism and war

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In the second day of its national convention, the Democratic Party officially nominated Joe Biden as its candidate for president in the 2020 election. Overall, the four-day event has been a highly scripted act of political theater, full of trite clichés and empty rhetoric.

The most notable element of yesterday's proceedings was the decision to feature remarks from former general Colin Powell and a video highlighting the "unlikely friendship" between Biden and former Republican presidential candidate and Senator John McCain.

A Biden/Harris administration, the Democrats emphasized, would be prepared to wage war.

In his remarks, Powell, who served as Secretary of State under the administration of George W. Bush, declared that Biden, as "commander-in-chief," will "trust our intelligence agencies" and "stand up to our adversaries with strength and experience. They will know we mean business."

Powell will forever be associated with the lies manufactured by the Bush administration to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. On February 5, 2003, Powell appeared before the United Nations to claim that the Iraqi government was stockpiling "weapons of mass destruction"—a claim that was false and he knew was false. It was the climax of the Bush administration's campaign to justify an unprovoked invasion of Iraq, a horrific war crime that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed one of the most advanced societies in the Middle East.

The war in Iraq is associated with some of the most horrific atrocities, including the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the destruction of Fallujah and the massacre of civilians at Haditha in 2005. American society itself suffered terrible consequences, including the death of nearly 4,500 soldiers and the maiming of tens of thousands more.

Powell's remarks were preceded by a speech from John Kerry, Secretary of State under Obama, who helped oversee the 2014 regime-change operation in Ukraine, spearheaded by fascistic groups, and the US-backed civil war in Syria. Kerry denounced Trump's foreign policy, particularly focusing on what is seen within the military-intelligence agencies as the administration's insufficiently aggressive attitude to Russia. "Our interests," Kerry said, "can't afford four more years of Donald Trump."

Kerry referred to the strength of Biden's "moral compass," citing his support for war in Yugoslavia in the late 1990s, though avoiding reference to his vote to authorize the invasion of Iraq.

Kerry was followed with a video segment featuring Republican Chuck Hagel, along with career diplomats under both Republicans and Democrats, including Brett McGurk (the longest-serving civilian adviser overseeing the war in Iraq and Syria, going back to the Bush administration); Marie Yovanovitch (US ambassador to Ukraine under Trump and witness in last year's impeachment trial); Jack Weinstein (US Air Force general and high-ranking nuclear weapons officer); and Rose Gottemoeller (former deputy secretary general of NATO until 2019).

In the ad, the officials insisted that Biden had "made the tough calls" (Yovanovitch, referring to the Obama administration's operation in Ukraine) and there was "no one more qualified … to be sitting at the head of the table in the Situation Room" (Hagel). They criticized Trump for having "a love fest with dictators"

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(Gottemoeller, referring to Russia) and being "a danger to national security" (McGurk).

After Powell spoke, the Democrats aired the ad on the "unlikely friendship" with McCain, one of the most ferocious warmongers in the US Senate, who consistently advocated for aggression against Iran, Russia and China, before his death in 2018. Even though they were members of different parties, McCain's widow Cindy explained, the two enjoyed backyard dinner parties together.

One has the distinct impression that if the Democrats could get George W. Bush or John Bolton to speak at the convention, they would jump at the chance. Perhaps this is still to come.

Yesterday's events underscore the character of the Democratic Party campaign and the entire framework of its opposition to Trump. In all of the calls at the convention for "unity" against Trump, the real appeal is to the military, Wall Street, and sections of the Republican Party to support the Democrats on the basis that Trump has proven to be a poor defender of the interests of the ruling class abroad.

As the WSWS has repeatedly stressed, the conflict within the state is a conflict within the ruling class, centered on issues of foreign policy. Over the past nearly four years, the Democrats have worked to suppress all popular opposition to the Trump administration and direct it behind the reactionary campaign for a more aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East and against Russia.

At every point, the Democrats ceded all opposition to Trump to the military and the generals, including when Trump staged his coup attempt on June 1, threatening to invoke the Insurrection Act and branding protests over police violence as "terrorist." This is their most important constituency, along with Wall Street and the intelligence agencies.

When it came to basic elements of class policy—the expansion of military spending, tax cuts for the rich, attacks on immigrants—the Democrats facilitated and collaborated with Trump every step of the way. In the process, they continually downplayed and covered up the far-reaching danger that the Trump administration posed to the working class.

The concerns within the ruling class are expressed in the most recent edition of *Foreign Affairs*, a leading publication of US geopolitics, which worries that historians will not judge Trump's handling of foreign policy "kindly." It writes: "After nearly four years of turbulence, the country's enemies are stronger, its friends are weaker, and the United States is increasingly isolated and prostrate."

The Democrats' effort to divert opposition to Trump behind the military and intelligence agencies is entirely compatible with the other element that will dominate the campaign and has been the focus of the convention: the politics of racial and gender identity. The "historic" character of the Democratic Party ticket is premised entirely on the background of Harris, an ex-prosecutor who had the enthusiastic support of Wall Street, who, if she were to become president, could become the first African American woman to be "commander-in-chief."

In the 2020 elections, the contest between Trump and the Democrats is a contest between two reactionary factions of the ruling class.

In its election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party is oriented to the development of the class struggle. The pandemic is already producing an immense growth of social anger—among workers who have been forced to return to work, teachers who are being sent back to schools, tens of millions who are unemployed, thrown into poverty and facing eviction.

The coming weeks and months must be dedicated not to the election of Biden and Harris, but to the organization and unification of these struggles into a mass social and political movement against the entire ruling class and the capitalist system.

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