

The Biden campaign and the attempt to “rescue” American hegemony

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Over the past week, the American public was subjected to an eight-hour infomercial, officially termed by the Democratic Party a “convention,” in which the long-time political reactionary Joe Biden was packaged simultaneously as the great American everyman and a miracle cure for America’s problems.

Amid celebrity cameos, empty platitudes, and unconvincing “personal” anecdotes, the vast majority of this week’s telethon was devoid of any actual discussion of program and policies. Behind the media spectacle, however, there are significant conflicts within the ruling class, centered primarily on issues of foreign policy.

These conflicts were partially revealed on Tuesday night, when the convention aired a pre-recorded segment featuring a group of seven military, intelligence and diplomatic officials who claimed that the Trump administration was not fighting the US wars in the Middle East and pursuing its conflicts with Russia and China aggressively enough.

Commenting on Trump’s Middle East policy, Brett McGurk, in charge of the US operations in the Middle East under Obama, said, “Our military had a policy to maintain our presence in Syria,” which Trump went on to “abandon.” He concluded, “It’s shameful.”

Rose Gottemoeller, former Deputy Secretary General of NATO, concluded that Trump “hasn’t been standing up” to Russia and China “at all.” Another State Department official added, “Thanks to Donald Trump, our adversaries are stronger, and bolder.”

Following the segment, General Colin Powell added that Biden “will make it his job to know when anyone dares to threaten us, he will stand up to our adversaries with strength and experience. They will know he means business.” The “business” for which Powell is best known is the destruction of Iraq and the death of one million of its inhabitants, based on false claims about “weapons of mass destruction.”

These themes were expanded upon in a letter published Friday by a group of 72 high-level intelligence and military officials—and war criminals—headed by former CIA and NSA director Michael Hayden, declaring their support for Biden.

The first of the letter’s ten bullet points states that Trump “has called NATO ‘obsolete,’ branded Europe a ‘foe,’ mocked the leaders of America’s closest friends, and threatened to terminate longstanding US alliances.” As a result, the letter concludes, “Donald Trump has gravely damaged America’s role as a world leader.”

In other words, the present administration has undermined the fundamental geostrategic aims that have led the United States into three decades of war: The effort to control the Eurasian landmass, including the Middle East.

In the four years since Trump became the Republican nominee, a ferocious conflict has been raging within the ruling class, centered on differences over foreign policy, and in particular the “hot war” being waged between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian forces in its Eastern regions after the US-backed coup in 2014.

Instead of focusing on the conflict with Russia that has been the preeminent concern of much of the foreign policy establishment, the Trump administration has been preoccupied with stunting the economic growth of China while building up US military capabilities to fight a war in the Pacific.

But here, too, the military and intelligence figures aligned with the Biden campaign feel that the White House has been ineffective. As two of the letter’s signatories wrote in an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, “Trump has confronted China by starting trade wars with everyone else” rather than involving other imperialist states. “Major democratic powers including Japan, France, and Canada are desperate to work with the United States to blunt China’s predatory technology policies.”

From the standpoint of the ruling class, it is primarily these differences over foreign policy, not domestic policy, that are being fought out in the election. Facing the greatest social and economic crisis since the Great Depression, domestic policy has been conducted on a largely bipartisan basis. The CARES Act, which sanctioned the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street while starving testing and contact tracing, passed unanimously in the Senate and by an

unrecorded voice vote in the House.

The latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, one of the main journals of US geopolitics, lays out some of the concerns of the dominant factions of the state. “After nearly four years of turbulence,” the lead editorial states, “the country’s enemies are stronger, its friends are weaker, and the United States itself is increasingly isolated and prostrate.”

Its concern is that Trump has proven an unreliable steward of the interests of the ruling class abroad. “Dragging his party and the executive branch along, the president has reshaped national policy in his own image: focused on short-term advantage, obsessed with money, and uninterested in everything else.”

The magazine’s lead story declares that Trump’s unstable and erratic foreign policy has resulted in a situation in which “China is wealthier and stronger, North Korea has more nuclear weapons and better missiles... and Nicolás Maduro is more entrenched in Venezuela, as is Bashar al-Assad in Syria.”

From the standpoint of the Biden campaign, the solution to all of these crises is to reassert American dominance and “leadership” over its traditional allies in Europe and Japan in order to pursue a more aggressive US policy against Russia and China. The United States must again be the world hegemon.

The central focus of the new administration will be “reclaiming America’s place in the world” through the reassertion of “American exceptionalism,” stated Joe Biden adviser Jake Sullivan in the *Atlantic*.

Earlier this year, Biden published an article entitled “Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump” in the March/April issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In that article, he declares, that “to counter Russian aggression, we must keep the alliance’s military capabilities sharp.” At the same time, the United States needs to “get tough with China.” The “most effective way to meet that challenge is to build a united front of U.S. allies and partners to confront China.”

But while the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* may be titled “The World Trump Made,” the geopolitical debacle facing the United States did not spring from Trump’s head. Trump did not make the “world.” Rather, the “world”—and, specifically, the crisis of American imperialism—made Trump.

The decline in the hegemonic position of the United States extends over a period of decades and was already evident prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-91. The dissolution of American imperialism’s Cold War adversary was seized on by the strategists of the American ruling class to declare a “unipolar moment.” The United States could utilize its unrivaled military power to counter its declining economic position through force.

The endless series of wars launched by the United States over the past three decades have destroyed entire societies—in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, among others. But they have failed to reverse US imperialism’s fortunes. Moreover, they have profoundly distorted and brutalized American society itself: a process of which the fascistic Trump administration is an expression.

Even prior to Trump’s inauguration, there were growing tensions between the US and its erstwhile allies in Europe. The coronavirus pandemic and the disastrous response of the ruling class to it—a policy that has been bipartisan—has further eroded the global position of American capitalism.

American imperialism confronts intractable problems, and first among them is the growth of social opposition within the United States itself. Among the considerations motivating support for the Biden campaign within the ruling class is the hope that it can somehow establish a broader base for imperialist aggression abroad. The promotion of identity politics is aimed at further integrating privileged sections of the upper middle class behind the project of global domination. This is what Kamala Harris represents.

A Biden/Harris administration will not inaugurate a new dawn of American hegemony. Rather, the attempt to assert this hegemony will be through unprecedented violence. If it is brought to power—with the support of the assemblage of reactionaries responsible for the worst crimes of the 21st century—it will be committed to a vast expansion of war. Trump and Pompeo are barreling headlong toward a conflict with China. Biden’s critique of this disastrous course is that the United States needs to get “tough,” whether against Russia, China, Afghanistan, Syria, or everywhere in between.

The American ruling class, moreover, confronts in the growth of the class struggle the most serious threat to its geopolitical ambitions.

Whichever course is ultimately determined by the election, US imperialism has, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in the run-up to the Iraq war, a “rendezvous with disaster.” All factions of the US state are united on a course of action that will lead to the deaths of countless millions. The struggle against war will not go forward through the selection of either Trump or Biden, but through the independent struggle of the working class.



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