

Biden names pro-war think tank and former Pentagon officials to transition team

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Last week, President-elect Joe Biden named key members of his Department of Defense transition team. Eight of Biden's 23 team members are from pro-military think tanks. Kathleen Hicks, senior vice-president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington D.C. think tank with close ties to the US military and intelligence agencies, will head Biden's Pentagon transition team. Hicks is also "Henry A. Kissinger chair" and director of the International Security Program at the CSIS.

The CSIS gets significant funding from war contractors such as General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. According to Hicks' profile on the CSIS website, her areas of specialization include Asia, climate change, counterterrorism and homeland security, the defense industry, defense strategy and capabilities, NATO and weapons of mass destruction proliferation.

She is a member of the board of trustees of the Aerospace Corporation and sits on the board of directors of the US Naval Institute. She has received distinguished service awards from three secretaries of defense and a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Hicks was a high-ranking Pentagon official in the administration of President Barack Obama during the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. She served as principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy in the Defense Department. She also held the post of deputy undersecretary of defense for strategy, plans and forces.

The CSIS has supplied several other individuals chosen for Biden's Pentagon transition team. Melissa Dalton was a Pentagon official from 2007 to 2014, a period that spanned the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Her focus is the Middle East.

Another member of Biden's defense transition team is Andrew Hunter, who served in the Pentagon from 2011 to 2014.

"The DC think tank scene is well represented" on Biden's military transition team, states *Defense News*.

According to a 2016 *New York Times* investigative piece ("How Think Tanks Amplify Corporate America's

Influence"), the CSIS functions as a de facto lobbying arm of the defense industry, using its connections with corporations and the government to promote the sale of weapons of war.

"Think tanks," states the *Times*, "have power in government policy debates because they are seen as researchers independent of moneyed interests. But in the chase for funds, think tanks are pushing agendas important to corporate donors, at times blurring the line between researchers and lobbyists."

The CSIS also has extremely close ties to the government of Saudi Arabia, which has waged war on the population of Yemen for the past five years while receiving weapons from the same military contractors that fund CSIS.

Other members of the team, Ely Ratner and Susanna Blume, were most recently employed by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), a think tank that is likewise heavily funded by military contractors, as well as oil conglomerates. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris's foreign policy team during the presidential campaign was also drawn from this think tank.

The CNAS was co-founded by Michèle Flournoy, who served as the Obama administration's undersecretary of defense for policy from 2009 until 2012. Flournoy is widely expected to be chosen by Biden for the post of secretary of defense.

Despite its ties to the Democratic Party, the CNAS also includes prominent Republicans such as Richard Armitage on its board of directors. Armitage, a longtime Republican Party Pentagon strategist, is closely tied to the oil industry and served in both Bush administrations as they carried out the criminal wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003.

The Rand Corporation has also contributed personnel to Biden's transition team. One of its officials, Christine Wormuth, served in the Department of Defense under Obama. Other Rand officials recruited to the Biden team include Stacie Pettyjohn and Terri Tanielian. Pettyjohn's areas of expertise include the internet, military affairs, military facilities, terrorism and war-gaming, while

Tanielian's specialty is military health and medicine.

In a sign of continuity between the foreign policy of the Trump administration and that of the incoming Biden team, *Politico* reported Thursday that Biden had reached out to officials associated with former Defense Secretary James Mattis for consultation, including over possible cabinet positions.

According to *Politico*, such talks were "in the early stages" and secretive. Mattis served as Trump's Pentagon chief from 2017 until late 2018, when he resigned in protest over Trump's announced plans to draw down the US troop presence in Syria. Prior to serving in Trump's cabinet, Mattis directed Marines in the murderous 2004 leveling of Fallujah in Iraq, a war crime. In early 2018, Mattis released the new National Defense Strategy, which announced that the focus of US military operations had shifted from the "war on terror" to "great power competition," directed centrally against Russia and China.

Biden's plans to continue and deepen the US war drive around the world have caused defense industry stocks to soar. Shares in companies such as Raytheon, Boeing and Northrop Grumman shot up once the media called the presidential race for Biden on Saturday, Nov. 7. On the next trading day, Monday, Nov. 9, many defense industry stocks jumped in anticipation of a pro-war Biden White House and continued Republican control of the Senate.

During the week of Nov. 4–10, Raytheon shares vaulted 19 percent, Boeing shot up 22 percent and General Dynamics rose nine percent. Shares of the iShares US Aerospace and Defense exchange traded fund, which contains a basket of defense stocks such as Lockheed Martin, Teledyne Technologies, Northrop Grumman and Huntington Ingalls, rose almost 12 percent that week.

"This is a growth industry, unfortunately, and it continues to be so," stated analyst Lou Whitehead on Nasdaq.com's "Industry Focus" show last week.

Defense consultant and former Democratic Senate staffer Arnold Punaro told the *Washington Post*: "Our industry knows Joe Biden really well, and he knows our industry really well. I think the industry will have, when it comes to national security, a very positive view" of the incoming administration.

Under the Trump administration, the Pentagon budget increased from \$663 billion in fiscal year 2017 to \$738 billion in the 2020 fiscal year. Despite the tens of billions of additional dollars spent on the military under Trump, total defense spending actually peaked in fiscal year 2010, during the Obama administration, at \$850 billion.

During the Democratic primary campaign, Biden claimed that if he were elected president he would "end the Forever Wars, which have cost us untold blood and treasure." As is

clear from his transition team, this was a sham.

Biden will also continue the nation's nuclear modernization program, which, according to the Arms Control Association, will cost \$1.2 trillion over a three-decade period. This program was recommended in the final years of the Obama administration and is aimed primarily at preparing for conflicts with Washington's main military competitors, China and Russia.

Northrop Grumman is the primary contractor for the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent program, which entails the construction of new intercontinental ballistic missiles. CEO Kathy Warden gleefully informed investors during the company's most recent earnings call in October that this program alone could be worth \$85 billion or more over the life of the contract. Northrop Grumman also has the contract for developing and building the B-21 Raider nuclear-armed stealth bomber.

"We're confident that a new administration would recognize that value and continue to support the modernization efforts that are well underway for both GBSD and B-21," she said.

Trump or Biden, the defense contractors are assured massive profits. While billions will be spent to rearm and prepare the US for nuclear war while funneling more profits to the war profiteers, the population will once again be told that "there is no money" for health care or social programs amid the pandemic.

Throughout the election campaign, Biden and running mate Kamala Harris avoided addressing the acute socioeconomic issues facing working people. Instead, the campaign promoted racial and identity politics, touting the supposedly "historic" nomination of Harris, an African American and Asian American woman, as vice president.

In keeping with the Democratic Party's race and gender fixation, Biden has selected members of minority groups to serve on his Pentagon transition team. According to Military.com, Biden has chosen retired Adm. Michelle Howard, who "was the first-ever African American woman to command a Navy ship" as well as "the Navy's first female four-star admiral." Overall, 15 of Biden's 23 total Defense Department transition team members are women.

Such symbolic choices will be cold comfort for the millions of men, women and children in the US and around the world who are threatened by the war plans of a Biden administration.



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