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## Obama and Romney: War Is Peace

By Anthony Gregory

Tuesday October 23, 2012

In last night's presidential debate, both candidates claimed to run on a promise of peace and against the policies of George W. Bush. Obama criticized the Republicans for going to war in Iraq and took Romney to task for his bellicose rhetoric. A bit more surprisingly, Romney congratulated Obama on executing bin Laden but then said, "we can't kill our way out of this mess." The ultimate goal, said Romney, is peace: "We want a peaceful planet. We want people to be able to enjoy their lives and know they're going to have a bright and prosperous future, not be at war." Most brazenly of all, Romney declared, "We don't want another Iraq, we don't want another Afghanistan. That's not the right course for us."

Yet throughout the night, while both candidates tried to appeal to those who wanted peace, they both promised nothing but more belligerence and war. The two were on almost total agreement on every major foreign policy issue. Romney praised Obama's escalation of drone attacks in Pakistan—attacks that have killed hundreds of totally innocent people, including over a hundred children. Romney correctly chided Obama for waffling on the Iraq time table—both of them, in truth, had wanted to extend the U.S. military presence in Iraq beyond the deadline set by President Bush in 2008. The centerpiece of Obama's foreign policy, the escalation of the Afghanistan war, met with Romney's wholehearted approval. The candidates competed with one another to sound more pro-Israel than the other, committing American blood and treasure to Israel's side in any future conflict.

Obama thundered with the Democrats' favorite chillingly jingoistic line: "America remains the one indispensable nation." Needless to say, if any other national ruler with a nuclear stockpile said that, the world would find it more than disconcerting. Obama bragged about expanding the military, tightening sanctions on Iran (ignoring how hard these have been on the civilian population), and overthrowing Libya's government. He invoked the specter of 9/11 like he was running for the Republican nomination in 2008. He even criticized Romney for suggesting that the U.S. ask Pakistan for permission before killing bin Laden.

Romney had trouble sounding tougher than the president, who came off a more confident emperor than in the past. Yet he did manage to sound slightly more belligerent on Iran, decrying its nuclear program without making any distinction between energy and bombs, and favoring considerable expansions of the defense budget. He also took issue with Obama for being insufficiently active in Egypt, Mali, and Syria.

Since they agree on most foreign policy questions, they both tried to change the subject to the economy, where both disingenuously cast their domestic policies as good for national security. Romney tried to explain how a few tiny domestic spending cuts would offset the huge aggrandizement of the military he advocates. Obama tried to take credit for economic successes that even many on his side find dubious.

Neither one has any clue about the relationship between free trade and peace. Obama repeatedly mentioned the free market, but it did not seem very sincere, to say the least. They both advocated protectionist measures against China, Obama mostly in the name of stopping outsourcing, Romney in the name of enforcing America's intellectual property worldwide. Romney also said the United States needs to trade with Latin America more, which sounded more like the opinion of an arrogant mercantilist central planner, rather than the prescription of a true free trader.

Both Obama and Romney want to continue America's perpetual war on terror. Obama sounded more bellicose than ever and yet Romney still managed to criticize him for being inadequately hawkish. The good news is both felt they had to promise peace at the end of the rainbow—a sure sign that voters are tired of unending wars. The very bad news is that on warmongering, deadly sanctions, reckless drone attacks, and the wide range of unremarked presidential power and civil liberties questions, both parties promise much more of the same.

The way I see it, war is the most important issue, if anything is. It endangers American lives, destroys foreign lives by the thousands and millions, wrecks nations, fosters resentment, costs trillions of dollars, unleashes unspeakable property damage, and has historically served as cover for more attacks on economic and civil liberty than all other factors combined. So long as the U.S. is at perpetual war, domestic liberty is an impossible dream. What both candidates said last night was: America, you might as well give up on freedom for another four years at least.