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War, the Democratic Party and the 2016 elections

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In the aftermath of the New York primaries held earlier this week, the Democratic Party establishment is moving to draw to a close a nomination process that has exposed the widespread hostility toward its front-runner, Hillary Clinton. In doing so, the Democrats are preparing to select as their candidate an individual who personifies the corrupt political nexus between the military-intelligence complex and the financial aristocracy.

An extraordinary article appearing on the web site of the *New York Times* on Friday provides further documentation of what has been a defining element of Clinton's long political career: her close relationship with the military brass and avid support for imperialist war. This relationship goes back to the training she received from her Republican, anticommunist father, Hugh Rodham. As first lady, Clinton actively supported the war policy of her husband Bill (including the bombing of Yugoslavia). As senator, she developed her ties with the Pentagon while serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The *Times* article, "How Hillary Clinton became a Hawk," written by White House correspondent Mark Landler, is not an exposé, but rather a sympathetic account of Clinton's war credentials from a newspaper that has endorsed her and done everything in its power to ensure her nomination.

The timing of the article's publication was clearly coordinated with the Clinton campaign itself. The *Times* held off publication of the lengthy article, evidently long in preparation, until after the New York Democratic primary, so as to preclude the piece stoking the widespread anti-war sentiment in that state and negatively impacting Clinton's vote. It comes, moreover, as Clinton, shifting from the primaries to the general election contest, is eager to assert her right-wing credentials and win over sections of the military and corporate elite that are wary of the campaign of Republican front-runner Donald Trump.

The *Times* article presents Clinton as the consistent war hawk within the Obama administration, often butting heads with the president himself. She "backed Gen. Stanley McChrystal's recommendation to send 40,000 more troops to Afghanistan [in 2009] before endorsing a fallback proposal of 30,000"; she "supported the Pentagon's plan to leave behind a residual force of 10,000 to 20,000 American troops in Iraq"; and she "pressed for the United States to funnel arms to the rebels in Syria's civil war," later calling for a no-fly zone to be imposed against the Syrian government.

Whether it involved US military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia, or provocations against China and Russia, Clinton invariably adopted the most right-wing positions. Clinton's willingness to go to war, the *Times* writes, "will likely set her apart from the Republican candidates she meets in the general election." The article continues, "For all their bluster about bombing the Islamic State into oblivion, neither Donald J. Trump nor Senator Ted Cruz of Texas have demonstrated anywhere near the appetite for military engagement abroad that Clinton has." She is, Landler adds, the "last true hawk left in the race."

Clinton, according to Landler, has worked for decades to develop close relationships with the military, seeking out ties with "not just civilian leaders like Gates, but also its high-ranking commanders, the men with medals."

Among those Clinton cultivated as a senator from New York (between 2001 and 2008) was now-retired General Jack Keane. ("Sometimes he dropped by her Senate office; other times they met for dinner or drinks"). Keane is currently chairman of the board of the Institute for the Study of War and played a major role in developing the Bush administration's 2007 "surge" in Iraq.

This connection highlights the politically incestuous character of the cabal that decides policy behind the backs of the American people. Keane's "institute" is funded by large defense contractors, including Raytheon, General Dynamics (where Keane serves on the board of directors) and DynCorp. Its president is Kimberly Kagan, wife of Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute and sister-in-law of Robert Kagan, the right-wing geostrategist who founded the Project for the New American Century. Robert Kagan's wife is Victoria Nuland, Obama's assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, who oversaw the 2014 coup in Ukraine that toppled a pro-Russian government.

Other individuals courted by Clinton include Gen. David Petraeus and Gen. Stanley McChrystal, both of whom headed US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan at different times during the Bush and Obama years.

Reading about the way Clinton and her advisors discuss war policy, one gets the sense that the German general staff in World War II operated with greater deliberation. The *Times* cites one conversation from 2010 involving Gates, Obama and Clinton over plans to send an aircraft carrier into the Yellow Sea to threaten North Korea and intimidate China. Landler writes that Clinton, supporting Gates' aggressive proposal, declared, "We've got to run it up the gut!"—a "Vince Lombardi imitation [that] drew giggles from her staff."

It is not difficult to visualize how this combination of recklessness, stupidity and worship of military force could lead in almost any part of the world to a war that quickly spiraled out of control.

The *Times* article paints a portrait of an individual who operates with an incredible level of recklessness, driven by the narrowest and most cynical calculations as to what will benefit her political career. There is more than a whiff of Claire Underwood, the wife of the president in the fictional *House of Cards* series—though, if anything, Underwood is more discriminate in her conspiracies. Behind these political considerations, however, lies a commitment to use the military to assert US domination in every corner of the globe.

Clinton's warmongering is an expression not only of her own particular political persona, but of the nature of the party to which she belongs. The Democratic Party is the political mouthpiece of sections of the military-intelligence bureaucracy and finance capital, employing the "left" gloss of identity politics to secure a base among sections of the complacent and pro-war upper middle class.

Clinton's Democratic rival, Bernie Sanders, has, for his part, worked very deliberately to prevent the issue of war from becoming a significant factor in the nomination contest. He has referred to American foreign policy as little as possible, and then only to criticize Clinton for what he invariably calls her "foreign policy blunder" of backing the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Sanders is now preparing to carry out his oft-repeated pledge to support Clinton in the event that she wins the Democratic nomination.

Extreme dangers confront the working class. The relentless escalation of military violence by the Obama administration—increasingly directed at Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers—will be followed after the elections by new and more provocative operations. The deeply felt hostility to war that exists among broad sections of the population can find no expression within the framework of the two-party system.

In announcing its candidates in the US presidential elections on Friday, the Socialist Equality Party placed the fight against war at the center of its campaign. We warned that "the ongoing preparations for global warfare, which could lead to the deaths of billions of people, are cloaked in lies and secrecy." Our campaign will "alert workers and youth to the immense dangers they face and build the foundation for a powerful new anti-war movement."

Over the next six-and-a-half months leading up to the November election, the SEP's candidates, Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, will expose the war conspiracy of the ruling elite and work for

the building of a political movement of the working class against war and the capitalist system that breeds it. We urge all our readers to support and help build this campaign .