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Obama and Romney concur on war, assassination and reaction

By Bill Van Auken
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In their debate on foreign policy Monday night, President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney voiced nearly identical positions in support of war, illegal killings and imperialist intervention across the globe.

With just two weeks until the election, this third and final presidential debate made it clear that the US political establishment is laying the groundwork for new military interventions in the aftermath of November 6, and that the American people will have no means of expressing at the ballot box their opposition to an escalation of global militarism.

While both Obama and Romney threw in empty rhetoric about “nation-building at home” and bringing back “good jobs and rising take-home pay,” the overwhelming theme of this third debate was US imperialism’s determination to utilize its military superiority to counter the decline of American capitalism’s position in the world economy and offset the deepening crisis that began with the Wall Street meltdown of 2008.

In what can only be described as a degrading and filthy political spectacle, both the questions posed by the moderator and the answers provided by the candidates of the two major capitalist parties began with the premise that US imperialism has the unassailable right to defend its interests by inflicting death and destruction on anyone or any country that is deemed an obstacle.

No attempt was made to probe the broader interests of American capitalism underlying the wars, occupations and assassination campaigns that have dominated world affairs over the past decade. The impression was promoted that opposing these policies is beyond the pale of American politics, at once forbidden and futile.

At times, both men sounded more like Mafia dons than candidates for high office. In his first statement in the debate, Romney offered his congratulations to Obama for “taking out Osama bin Laden,” while lamenting that “we can’t kill our way out of this mess.”

For his part, Obama boasted that his policy in Libya had included “taking out” the country’s former leader, Col. Muammar Gaddafi, in order to achieve the goal of regime-change. Chiding Romney for questioning this policy, Obama insisted that he was determined to “make sure that Gaddafi didn’t stay there... we were going to make sure that we finished the job.” The result was the savage lynching of Gaddafi a year ago.

Among the most chilling parts of the debate were those related to Iran, with both candidates once again putting forward nearly identical policies of aggression and unconditional support for Israel in the event it launches an unprovoked war.

Obama boasted that his administration’s unilateral sanctions were “crippling their economy.” He noted approvingly: “Their currency has dropped 80 percent. Their oil production has plunged to the lowest level since they were fighting a war with Iraq 20 years ago. So their economy is in a shambles.”

That such policies mean suffering and deprivation for tens of millions of Iranian working people was clearly of no concern to anyone on the platform. Neither was there any questioning of the legality of this deliberate economic strangulation of another country, which represents an act of war and a gross violation of international law.

Obama stressed his readiness to order direct US military intervention, repeating the threat that his administration would not “take any options off the table” in dealing with Iran, and that “the clock is ticking” down to another US war of aggression.

Romney had nothing to add, outside of his insistence that he would have introduced even more punishing economic sanctions, and sooner than Obama had.

In the segment of the debate dealing with Syria, what emerged most clearly from the responses of both candidates is that, behind the pretense of concern over human rights and democracy, Washington is engaged in a campaign for regime-change, stoking a bloody sectarian civil war in order to advance its strategic interests in the region.

Romney stated this clearly, declaring the bloody conflict in Syria “an opportunity for us because Syria plays an important role in the Middle East, particularly right now.” He continued, “Syria is Iran’s only ally in the Arab world... And so seeing Syria remove Assad is a very high priority for us.”

For his part, Obama insisted that Washington is playing “the leadership role” in the Syrian events and that “we’re doing exactly what we should be doing to try to promote a moderate Syrian leadership and an effective transition so that we get Assad out.”

Needless to say, neither candidate was asked to clarify how Washington could be allied with Al Qaeda and other Islamist militias in the wars for regime-change in both Libya and Syria, while simultaneously claiming that these same forces represent the greatest threat to national security. Probing this contradiction is impermissible, as it would explode both the “war on terror” pretext for US global aggression over the past decade and the current pretense of promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East wars for regime-change.

Both candidates were once again in agreement on the question of drone assassinations, which are now being carried out on a regular basis in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere, and have been used to carry out the extra-judicial murders of American citizens, such as the New Mexico-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his son.

“I believe that we should use any and all means necessary to take out people who pose a threat to us and our friends around the world,” declared Romney, effectively threatening millions with preemptive assassination. “I support that entirely and feel the president was right to up the usage of that technology,” he added.

Among the unasked questions in Monday night’s debate was how Obama, who was swept into office on a wave of popular anger over the militarist aggression and attacks on democratic rights under his predecessor, George W. Bush, had come to head an administration that has continued and deepened these policies.

Posing such a question would have only underscored the inescapable conclusion flowing from the entire debate: the impossibility of opposing war and imperialist reaction within the framework of the capitalist two-party system.